

M. Slaying 471

Chapter 471: I'll Go Call Him Back for You

Lackey B left with pride.

...

After being poisoned by the Blood Puffer, he was given the best emergency treatment. Thanks to their thorough preparations and the fact that the poison was relatively mild, he was able to clear the toxins from his body swiftly.

In fact, if the ingredient had contained obvious toxins, the Whale Gang would never have brought it up on the table. It must have gone through basic inspections before being sent over.

The Blood Puffer of Mount Yue was a strange creature. Its flesh was not poisonous while it was alive, but after it died, it slowly became toxic. That was how Lackey B got poisoned.

When Lackey B woke up after being treated, the first thing he said was, "I think it's still safe to eat... it just needs to be prepared right."

"Let's not think about eating just yet..." the group said, looking at him with concern. "Are you feeling okay?"

"I'm fine," Lackey B said, shaking his head calmly. "We can continue."

"Continue?" The others were surprised.

"It's just a Blood Puffer. It's nothing worth mentioning," Lackey B said, flicking his hair with the confidence of a master.

Even Chu Liang couldn't help but give him a thumbs-up.

Nice, you're really cut out for this task.

That day, Lackey B tested nearly thirty different ingredients. He eliminated thirteen of them and found seventeen that were good for the menu. With some basic ingredients, the hotpot restaurant was ready to open.

Even though these spirit plants and spirit beast meats were rare, their large sizes were a big advantage. A single spirit beast could be several zhang tall, and some were even as big as a small mountain.

As long as they were safe to eat, they could keep the restaurant running for quite a while.

This also gave them another benefit: the ingredients at Red Moon Pavilion could change regularly or even daily, giving customers a fresh experience. When premium ingredients were available, they could be promoted heavily.

For ingredients with great flavor, the Whale Gang could focus on buying them and restocking them regularly for the menu.

The next morning, Red Moon Pavilion officially opened its doors to customers.

Jiang Yuebai didn't want to use her influence to attract customers, so the new shop's opening was rather low-key. She didn't even show her face, quietly observing from a private room on the second floor with a few others.

But in this world, there was no such thing as a secret.

During the store's preparation days, word had already spread around Mount Shu that Fairy Jiang was about to open a shop on Red Cotton Peak.

Additionally, Xu Hongqiu had been very high-profile in her actions. All the people handling the deliveries were members of the Whale Gang. And so, the reputation of the Young Lady of the Whale Gang helped boost the business.

Thus, many people showed up on opening day to show their support.

While many came just for the social occasion, they were pleasantly surprised by the service as soon as they entered.

To the left, a dozen burly Whale Gang men stood, all smiling enthusiastically in their rolled-up aprons, loudly shouting, "Welcome to Red Moon Pavilion! Three gentlemen here!"

On the right stood a dozen elegant women in flowing red robes. As soon as they noticed female guests arriving, they sprang into action, stepping forward with warm smiles. "Welcome! How many are in your party?" they asked, guiding the guests to their seats. "As for our menu, in addition to the basic ingredients, we have something special today: Yellow-Scaled Tiger and Spirit-Spotted Deer. What would you like to try?"

The shop had only two floors, yet both upstairs and downstairs were packed with people.

The slow opening day that they had worried about never happened.

However, most of the guests came because they had some connection to the owners. Therefore, if the experience wasn't good, there was no chance they would keep returning just for fun.

But once the first group of diners finished their meals and left, word of mouth started to spread like wildfire.

"A hotpot restaurant just opened on Red Cotton Peak! I heard it's co-owned by Fairy Jiang and the Whale Gang's eldest daughter, so I had to check it out," one person excitedly told their friends. "It's absolutely authentic—truly top-notch!"

"Unbeatable!" another friend chimed in.

"..."

Chu Liang watched the bustling scene from the second floor and turned to say, "As long as we keep up this level of service, I believe Red Moon Pavilion's reputation will spread quickly. It might even become another signature spot on Mount Shu before long."

"It's not that simple," Jiang Yuebai replied calmly. "If we become popular, other shops around here will definitely try to copy us, and they might even offer lower prices. This excitement won't last forever."

"Who dares to copy us?" Xu Hongqiu boasted confidently. "I'll make sure they can't stay on the Red Cotton Peak!"

Given the Whale Gang's history and status, she certainly had the right to be arrogant, but...

"What if it's a sect from the Divine Nine or the Terrestrial Ten?" Chu Liang said with a helpless smile. "What if they open a shop in Taotie City or the capital of Yu? We can't always rely on brute force to solve our problems."

"Then what do you suggest we do?" Xu Hongqiu asked, sensing he had an idea.

"I think..." Chu Liang began, "we could summarize our ingredients, recipes, and business methods into a business model and promote it. If someone wants to open a similar store, they can franchise with us, and we'll support them as much as we can."

"Franchise?" The women exchanged puzzled looks, clearly hearing the term for the first time. "Isn't that just helping our competitors?"

"Yes," Chu Liang continued with a smile. "As long as they pay a franchise fee, they can use the name, experience, and resources of Red Moon Pavilion. We can't avoid competition, but I believe more shops would prefer this arrangement than a cutthroat rivalry. After all, it's all about making money."

"Imagine our name spreading across the nine provinces! The main store here on Mount Shu will thrive even more. And even if our main store's business slows down, we'll still earn from the franchise fees."

"Isn't that wonderful?"

...

While Chu Liang was busy at Red Cotton Peak, unexpected visitors arrived at Silver Sword Peak.

A whirlwind touched down, revealing over a dozen figures clad in the official uniforms of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau. Leading them was a man with a graceful presence, dressed in flowing white robes—none other than Li Chengfeng, the chief of the Four Celestial Officials.

As they arrived at Silver Sword Peak, Li Chengfeng glanced around while his subordinates dispersed to search the area.

Li Chengfeng approached the pavilion where Di Nufeng resided.

Di Nufeng obviously sensed the intruders immediately, but she remained seated with her arms crossed, her expression hostile as she watched them enter her pavilion.

"What's this about?" Di Nufeng narrowed her eyes slightly. "You didn't even give a heads-up before barging into my Silver Sword Peak. What are you here for?"

"Big Sister Feng..." Li Chengfeng looked a bit troubled as he slowly explained, "The Imperial Supervisory Commissioner has already sent a letter to Venerable Wen Yuan. There's indeed a case that requires Silver Sword Peak's cooperation."

Di Nufeng fell silent for a long moment.

Her mind raced, thoughts buzzing as she tried to remember. After almost half a day, she finally asked, "Which case?"

"Huh?" Li Chengfeng was surprised by her tone.

"No matter what the case is, I won't say anything until our Discipline Master arrives," Di Nufeng replied firmly.

"It's not about you," Li Chengfeng quickly said upon noticing her reaction.

"You should've said that sooner!" Di Nufeng exclaimed, finally breaking into a smile.

Earlier, she went through all the crimes she'd committed in her mind, wondering which might show she was guilty. She hadn't even made it through ten percent of them, and it had already taken nearly half a day.

There were just too many.

Since it wasn't her own case, she felt relieved and chuckled as she asked, "Who else at Silver Sword Peak could have committed a crime? That big dumb Hou or the little silly fish?"

"Neither," Li Chengfeng replied. "It's your one and only disciple, Chu Liang."

"Chu Liang?" Di Nufeng was genuinely surprised.

After all, her disciple was arguably the most dependable person at Silver Sword Peak. She had thought of everyone else, but Chu Liang hadn't even crossed her mind.

It wasn't that he couldn't commit a crime, but if he did, it was unlikely he would leave any evidence behind...

"What crime did he commit that makes it necessary for you, a celestial official, to come personally and arrest him?" Di Nufeng's smile faded, replaced by a serious expression.

"Well..." Li Chengfeng began explaining the situation.

"I see." After listening to the explanation, Di Nufeng nodded casually. "Then have a seat... I'll go call him back for you."

Boom—

With that, Di Nufeng suddenly transformed into a blaze of fire, shooting through the air with a loud whoosh.

"Huh?!"

Seeing this, Li Chengfeng realized something was wrong and turned into a whirlwind to chase after her.

A peculiar scene unfolded on Mount Shu.

Di Nufeng's fiery trail shot across half of the mountain, closely pursued by a swirling wind, faint shouts echoing in the distance.

"Big Sister Feng...

"The law is like a vast net that doesn't miss! You shouldn't try to challenge the law!"

Chapter 472: I Trust You (I)

At this moment, Chu Liang was about to reward himself.

Everyone was in the private room on the second floor, observing the situation below. After discussing the idea of franchising, the conversation quickly shifted, and soon the young ladies were chatting and joking among themselves. Chu Liang's presence eventually became almost unnoticeable.

At that moment, he even missed Lackey B. If Lackey B had not left, there would have at least been one more male in the room. Even if they were awkward with each other, it would have felt a bit better than being alone.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang did not sit idly. He split off part of his divine sense and sank it into the White Pagoda to have his reward session.

The massive Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python had transformed into a small golden phantom, floating in an iron cell. Chu Liang stepped forward and activated the refinement process.

Boom.

There was a flash of red light, and a long, thick white beam of light floated out. Chu Liang grabbed it.

[Poison-Expulsion Whip: If a person's corporeal body is poisoned, lash them with this whip, and the toxins will be expelled in the form of mist. It is effective against most poisons.

Note: This whip is only for detoxifying purposes and is not recommended for use in other scenarios.]

This item gave Chu Liang quite the surprise.

This is pretty much a legendary artifact for detoxification!

Most poisons were paired with a unique antidote made specifically for each type of poison. So, no matter how prepared you are, you could still fall victim to unexpected poisons.

Chu Liang recalled how he had acquired the Hundred-Flower Antidote on his first trip to the Southern Bastion Mountain. The antidote was supposed to be able to detoxify a hundred types of poisons, so it was extremely useful. Unfortunately, it was a consumable; once it was used, that was the end of it. He had not encountered such a useful antidote since.

The Poison-Expulsion Whip was not an antidote, but it was effective against most poisons, making it clearly superior to the Hundred-Flower Antidote. Moreover, it could be used repeatedly for a long time. It was such a great item that it could even be considered a legendary artifact.

As for the warning about other scenarios... It's probably referring to combat situations, right?

The whip was long and dense and looked much like a huge black python, but it probably was not suited for combat. After all, it already had such a miraculous function; it could not possibly do everything.

Who would be willing to use such a precious item in battle anyway? If it got damaged and could not be repaired, they would be too stunned to even cry.

Right now, he could not wait to test out the Poison-Expulsion Whip. It was unfortunate that Lackey B had already been treated. Otherwise, Chu Liang could have whipped out the Poison-Expulsion Whip and given Lackey B a good lashing to detoxify him.

While he was thinking about that, a burst of fire suddenly crashed through the window, landing with a boom!

Everyone was startled.

A flash of red filled Chu Liang's vision, and he found his teacher standing before him.

She exclaimed, "Your crime has been discovered!"

"Huh?" Chu Liang was stunned by her sudden appearance. "What did I do?"

"Argh!" Di Nufeng groaned. She said urgently, "There's no time to explain. Just go to the islands of the South Sea and lie low. That's outside the Yu Dynasty's territory, so the Imperial Supervisory Bureau won't make a big fuss looking for you. Just hide for three to five years. When things have calmed down, you can come back under a new name.

"If you get bored, I can arrange for you to go to Fuyao Kingdom in the East Sea. I've got a few friends in Canglang City from the criminal world. They specialize in helping out esteemed heroes who have broken the law."

Question marks filled Chu Liang's mind.

What on earth is going on?

Why does it sound like I committed some massive crime? And... why do you seem so familiar with all this?

This is the escape plan you've always arranged for yourself, isn't it?

Whenever it came to anything illegal, his teacher's mind seemed to work at lightning speed—so fast that even Chu Liang could not keep up with her.

However, Chu Liang did not have time to ask about that. His mind raced, going over everything he had done recently.

Could it be related to taking in the young emperor from the previous dynasty?

Chu Liang was not sure how the Yu Dynasty viewed the previous dynasty, but it would be understandable if they regarded him as part of the rebel faction because he took in Chu Yi. After all, matters related to the previous dynasty were always a sore spot for every dynasty.

He had no idea how the Yu Dynasty had found out, but fleeing now seemed like the safest move.

As Chu Liang prepared to leave with his teacher, a whirlwind swept in, and Li Chengfeng landed with a shout.

"Chu Liang, do not persist in your foolishness! Killing to seize a treasure may not land you a death sentence, but if you keep resisting, there will be no room for negotiation!"

"Huh?" Chu Liang uttered and stopped in his tracks, no longer flustered. He turned back and said, "Oh, it's about killing someone? You should've said that earlier."

Naturally, Chu Liang was calm because he had not committed the grave crime of murder.

However, it looked completely different to those watching him.

What's that supposed to mean? Did you commit an even bigger crime?

You're truly worthy of being Di Nufeng's disciple.

...

On Mount Shu's Heaven-Reaching Peak...

Inside the Hall of Discipline, Li Chengfeng sat stiffly, feeling a heavy pressure weighing down on him.

It was always like this when he had to handle cases involving the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. If the involved party was unwilling to cooperate, the case became extremely difficult to handle, especially when the case involved elite disciples. This case, in particular, involved Chu Liang, who far surpassed the typical elite disciple. So, the chance of the Mount Shu Sect willingly cooperating with the Imperial Supervisory Bureau was close to none.

Nevertheless, dealing with difficult cases was precisely what the work of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau entailed.

The Discipline Master, Di Nufeng, and Jiang Yuebai had all come to the Hall of Discipline, filled with concern about what crime Chu Liang had committed. Xu Hongqiu wanted to go over as well, but since she was not a Mount Shu disciple, she was asked to wait for the news.

Li Changfeng said, "The wife of the Red River Sect's leader, a sect elder, and a disciple of the sect died two days ago in a remote valley near Myriad Poison Mountain in the Southern Regions. Their bodies were just discovered yesterday.

"Also yesterday, the son of the Red River Sect's leader and two of his fellow disciples were found dead in Demon Spider Forest, which is in Myriad Poison Mountain."

Li Chengfeng slowly explained, "Regarding the first case, someone testified that they witnessed Chu Liang at the scene of the crime that day. As for the second case, several eyewitnesses testified that they saw the killer and described his appearance. We used the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's divine technique to acquire a visual of the culprit, and the culprit was revealed to be... Chu Liang."

When Li Chengfeng was done talking, the room fell into a tense silence.

Chu Liang, on the other hand, actually relaxed a little. He had been ready to run earlier, but once he heard that the crime was unrelated to him having taken in the young emperor, he felt relieved.

However, the cases that Li Chengfeng had presented were truly quite bizarre.

Regarding that first case, Chu Liang had seen the Red River Sect's feuding family express love and the desire to kill each other before leaving together that day. Chu Liang had, of course, left as well. He did not remember seeing anyone else on his way out, so there should not have been anyone who could have seen him there that day. Where exactly did these supposed eyewitnesses come from?

As for the second case, it was even more absurd. Those Red River Sect disciples that Chu Liang had encountered the day before had been seen fleeing Demon Spider Forest in panic. According to the eyewitnesses' accounts, Chu Liang had chased after the three Red River Sect disciples, striking one down with his sword, punching the second, and then using his sword again to slash the third one.

After he killed the three Red River Sect disciples brutally and mercilessly, he searched their corpses, stealing away a spirit plant.

Chapter 473: I Trust You (II)

The second case had occurred at the entrance to Demon Spider Forest, where more than a dozen people from small sects had witnessed it. It was impossible for all the witnesses to have colluded to frame him.

The Imperial Supervisory Bureau acquired a visual of the culprit by using Shadow of Radiance to make a recording of the culprit directly from the witnesses' souls, so there was no way it could be falsified.

Could someone have disguised themselves as me to commit the crime? Chu Liang wondered inwardly. But if it was just a simple illusion trick, it could not have escaped the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's detection.

In the world of immortality cultivators, it was not uncommon for there to be disputes over the ownership of valuable items. In fact, the disputes sometimes got so bad that people ended up dead. However, when the Yu Dynasty's reign began, the Yu Dynasty strictly forbade people from killing others to seize treasures. They could fight, but they could not use malicious methods to induce harm.

Chu Liang's cultivation level was clearly far above that of the three Red River Sect disciples. So, in a situation like this where it was claimed that Chu Liang had mercilessly killed three righteous sect disciples in front of witnesses, there was no doubt that he would be punished severely.

In the end, it all came down to one word—justice.

The immortal sects encouraged competition among their disciples. Nevertheless, they did not wish for their disciples to resort to unscrupulous methods and ruthless killings, plunging the world of immortality cultivators into the darkness that was the law of the jungle.

Therefore, the immortal sects had always supported the Yu Dynasty's policies and punished those whose actions were brutal and showed a blatant disregard for humanity. If it had not been for the pressure from the Yu Dynasty, how could the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals have so easily expelled a disciple as talented as Huo Tianya?

Six of the Red River Sect's members were dead, including the sect leader's wife and son, and the killer was suspected to be the same person. Naturally, the Red River Sect's leader found it hard to bear. However, he could not personally take revenge on a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, so he had rushed to the Imperial Supervisory Bureau last night, crying for justice to be served.

The Red River Sect was one of the many sects that guarded the Myriad Poison Mountain from the outskirts of the mountain. Guarding the mountain was a laborious task that was of great merit to society, so both the Yu Dynasty and the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had always treated these smaller sects with care and consideration. That meant these serious cases, which involved multiple murders, could be easily brushed aside.

"Furthermore, in the first case, one of the three victims was punched to death and the other two were killed using sword qi, specifically the sword qi of the Heaven-Raising Sword. These are combat tactics that Chu Liang uses regularly," Li Chengfeng said. Then he turned to Chu Liang and stated, "All the evidence points to you, so I must take you to stand on trial for these cases."

"No way!" Di Nufeng glared. "I know how you people are. You'll do whatever it takes to get a confession. My disciple is so well-behaved. What if you torture him and force him to confess? If you want to hold a trial, do it here at Mount Shu!"

"..." Li Chengfeng gave Di Nufeng a deep look before saying, "Big Sister Feng, he's your disciple. Who would even dare lay a hand on him, hmm?"

The Discipline Master spoke slowly. "There is no doubt he has been framed for the murders. As for how it was done, that requires some investigating to uncover. Our venerable sect leader is of the same opinion. Chu Liang... must not be harmed."

Those last four words carried a great weight.

After all, Chu Liang was far too important to the Mount Shu Sect. If he were simply a prodigy of the sect like Huo Tianya had been for his, a long-established immortal sect like the Mount Shu Sect might be willing to give him up for the sake of justice and maintaining appearances.

However, Chu Liang was connected to two major parts of the Mount Shu Sect, the Violet and Azure Twin Swords and the flourishing Red Cotton Peak—both of which were crucial to the Mount Shu Sect's future. The sect's higher-ups were convinced that it would not be long before Chu Liang became one of the pillars of the sect.

Yet, it was at this time that the Imperial Supervisory Bureau wanted Chu Liang to pay for his crimes of murder with his life. How could the Mount Shu Sect possibly accept this death sentence? Even if Chu Liang had indeed committed those crimes, they could not let him be harmed.

Chu Liang, who had been silent this whole time, suddenly spoke up. "It's fine."

Everyone's gaze immediately turned to him.

He stated calmly, "I definitely did not kill those people. That much I know for certain. But there are many suspicious points in these cases that I can't make sense of yet. I need to investigate them further before I can understand what exactly happened. However, Mount Shu stands for justice and righteousness, so I will go with you to the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to stand on trial. But I will only do it on two conditions."

"Name them," Li Chengfeng replied.

The young man before Li Chengfeng was merely a junior disciple, but his words carried remarkable weight, far heavier than that of the typical disciple of an immortal sect.

Chu Liang began, "Firstly, my esteemed teacher must be allowed to visit me at any time of the day to ensure my safety."

He was not familiar with how the Imperial Supervisory Bureau handled cases and what methods they used to resolve them. Nevertheless, they were still a government office of the imperial courts, which worked differently from immortal sects, so it was naturally difficult for him to place his trust in them.

Laws could technically be a pure representation of justice and righteousness because they were not living things, which in turn meant they were free from influence and bias. However, that was not the case for people, as they were alive.

In this era, government offices did not have sophisticated investigation methods. The normal process began with the detained getting thrown into a cell, after which they were given a severe beating. Even if a person claimed they were innocent, who would believe them unless they persisted with their claim even on the brink of death? The officers thought it was better to wrongfully convict a thousand people than to risk letting a criminal go and losing their job.

Luckily, Chu Liang had some backing; he was not an ordinary criminal. With his teacher and the Mount Shu Sect supporting him, his personal safety should be guaranteed.

Chu Liang continued, "Secondly, I hope my sect can participate in the investigation. Any evidence or clues should be shared with each other."

Li Chengfeng furrowed his brows slightly.

This was practically an insult to the Imperial Supervisory Bureau. It seemed that Chu Liang had no faith in the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's abilities or reputation.

Chu Liang quickly added, "I have complete trust in the Bureau's abilities and reputation. But since this concerns my life and death, I hope you will understand, Celestial Official Li."

The Discipline Master sneered, while Di Nufeng stared Li Chengfeng down with a scowl. If he did not agree now, it would seem like he was being unreasonable.

"Haaa..." Li Chengfeng sighed. "Fine. However, you can't have many people take part in the investigation. Just one person can come to the Bureau as a temporary officer. Is that acceptable?"

If he were to allow the entire Mount Shu Sect to go over and criticize and meddle in the affairs of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, it would be utterly humiliating.

"Good!" Di Nufeng stepped forward boldly. "I'll go. My cultivation level is high, and I'm quick-witted."

Chu Liang immediately looked alarmed, and he hurriedly said, "Esteemed Teacher, you should just visit me regularly. Let's leave this task to someone else."

My esteemed teacher, let's not trouble you with taking part in the investigation. When it comes time to break me out, I'll let you know, okay? You're more suited to committing crimes than solving them.

At that moment, Jiang Yuebai stepped forward with a determined gaze. "I'll go."

Chu Liang turned to look at her, and Jiang Yuebai met his eyes.

She said, "I trust you... so I will get to the bottom of these cases and clear your name."

The two gazed at each other, and the air seemed to grow still, with only the faint rustling of the breeze.

Chu Liang's lips slowly spread wide into a smile. "I trust you too."

Chapter 474: Trust

Chu Liang had never expected that his first time visiting the capital of Yu would be under these circumstances.

He had always thought he would come here during the Assembly of Immortal Sects, carrying the glory of Mount Shu. Who would have guessed he'd arrive earlier than expected, at the risk of tarnishing Mount Shu's reputation?

As he followed Li Chengfeng straight to the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, Chu Liang didn't even get a chance to marvel at the splendor and vastness of the greatest city in the nine provinces.

Despite bearing the responsibility of overseeing the entire empire, the headquarters of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau in the capital was surprisingly modest. It consisted of a simple courtyard with black eaves and weathered tiles. As one ventured further inside, they would find there wasn't much more to it.

Perhaps, given the high cost of land in the capital and the relatively small number of cultivators stationed here, such extravagance simply wasn't necessary.

This was Chu Liang's first time meeting the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner.

Just a few days ago, the Commissioner had intervened in the Southern Regions, but by the time he arrived, Chu Liang had already left, with the use of Shattering the Void. And so, they never met.

The first sight that greeted him was an old man basking in the sunlight of the back courtyard. His appearance was refined and serene, yet he exuded an air of mystical power. The plants and spirit flora around him thrived with unusual vibrance, as if their vitality was drawn toward him, flourishing in his presence.

There was no doubt about the identity of this man.

He was Qi Yingxuan, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner.

"Back already?" Qi Yingxuan greeted them with a smile as he saw Li Chengfeng leading Chu Liang over. Without a visible gesture, two chairs drifted out from within the house. "Sit."

Li Chengfeng and Chu Liang each took their seat.

Chu Liang felt a slight sense of relief. The attitude of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau was, surprisingly, quite welcoming.

"It went smoothly, but I agreed to let Mount Shu's disciple, Jiang Yuebai, assist in the investigation," Li Chengfeng reported.

"That's good to hear," Qi Yingxuan said cheerfully, his gaze shifting to Chu Liang. "I too refuse to believe that you killed those people."

"Sir, you trust me?" Chu Liang asked, a hint of surprise in his voice.

"Of course," Qi Yingxuan replied. "I know quite a bit about you. I'm aware of the great deeds you've accomplished, including saving countless lives in the Southern Regions just a few days ago. Nothing in your actions suggests you're a ruthless killer."

"I am honored," Chu Liang replied respectfully.

He had heard rumors that the Imperial Supervisory Bureau investigated all exceptional disciples from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. All these findings were presented directly to the Commissioner.

After all, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau needed to select some of them for official positions.

Oftentimes, the Mount Shu Sect would send its disciples to serve at the Imperial Supervisory Bureau. As a matter of fact, some would even stay for a long period of time. Chu Liang had never imagined he'd find himself here so soon—especially under such unexpected circumstances.

However, despite the Commissioner having read his profile and record, Chu Liang knew it wouldn't matter much. After all, it was still rare for a young disciple to leave a lasting impression on someone like Qi Yingxuan, who had reviewed the records of countless disciples throughout his lifetime.

"Still, no matter how much I trust you, I cannot allow personal judgment to sway the course of this case," Qi Yingxuan said solemnly. "We will work with the Mount Shu Sect to uncover the truth, but if all the evidence continues to point to you, I cannot let you walk free. That is our duty."

"I understand," Chu Liang replied calmly. "I believe that as the investigation unfolds, the truth will reveal itself."

"Well, since you're here, let's not waste the opportunity," Qi Yingxuan said with a smile as he stood up. "Come with me."

With that, the old man turned and strode back into the house.

Chu Liang cast a glance at Li Chengfeng, who smiled and said, "When the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner calls for you, you should go. Not everyone is allowed entry into that quiet room."

Chu Liang, feeling puzzled, followed the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner inside.

This appeared to be where the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner handled official matters. Stacks of documents were piled high on the desk, resembling a small mountain of paperwork.

Qi Yingxuan sat down at the desk, his gaze sweeping over the scrolls before him.

"In the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, there are 268 cultivators at the sixth realm, 19 at the seventh realm, and only 2 at the eighth realm," he began. "Yet, every day, thousands of letters pour in from across the land of the nine provinces, each one requesting aid."

Though the Imperial Supervisory Bureau was huge, it was always short-staffed; otherwise, they wouldn't have to continually request that the immortal sects dispatch personnel.

"My subordinates must assess each case, determine how to allocate manpower, or request assistance from nearby sects," Qi Yingxuan explained. "The cases that come to me are the most challenging. They dare not make any judgments on their own, so the final decision ultimately rests with me."

Qi Yingxuan looked up at Chu Liang, his gaze tinged with a hint of expectation.

"Your records indicate that you're a highly intelligent individual. Since you'll be here for a few days, would you like to take a look?"

...

Chu Liang was indeed a highly intelligent person.

Even if he truly intended to seize a treasure, he would never do so by killing in broad daylight. Not only did the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner believe this, but so did the people of Mount Shu, which included Jiang Yuebai.

Their belief in his intellect was one thing, but their trust in his status was another.

After these days of business dealings, the disciples of his generation had no idea of how much wealth Chu Liang had amassed. Yet, one thing was certain: he was the richest person on Mount Shu.

The disciples of Mount Shu were renowned for their frugality among the sects in the Divine Nine. Aside from expenses related to cultivation and enchanted tools, even the Guardian Elders found it difficult to save any extra wealth.

But Chu Liang was different. After bringing about such significant changes on Mount Shu, he had transcended the traditional means of earning sword coins through tasks. He could lounge about all day, and still, piles of spirit stones would roll into his pockets.

While the Jade Pot Celestial Plant was undoubtedly valuable, for Chu Liang, the effort required to make a trip to Myriad Poison Mountain was nearly equivalent to what he could automatically earn in that time.

It wasn't that wealthy individuals wouldn't kill for treasures; rather, there was simply no need for someone like him to resort to such drastic and risky measures.

Of course, beyond his wealth and intelligence, the most important factor was their trust in his character.

Though he sometimes seemed sly, like a cunning little fox, he always stood firm on matters of principle.

That was why Jiang Yuebai trusted him.

Dressed in white and appearing like the radiant light of the full moon, Jiang Yuebai's presence illuminated the shadowy gloom of Myriad Poison Mountain.

Jiang Yuebai gracefully landed on the ground.

Her trust in Chu Liang, while unwavering, was of little use. She needed to find the evidence to prove his innocence as quickly as possible.

Before Chu Liang left, he took the time to explain his thoughts and insights from the past two days, sharing the key points and uncertainties surrounding the case.

Chu Liang suspected that his involvement in the case was purely coincidental.

On the day of the first incident, Chu Liang had been randomly teleported near Myriad Poison Mountain. Even he had no idea where he would end up, making it unlikely that the killer had specifically targeted him.

His encounter with the "loving" family of three from the Red River Sect had been pure coincidence. They were then killed that day, and the killer employed methods that mimicked Chu Liang's.

The sect leader's wife had been killed with a single punch, while Elder Bai and a male disciple were cleaved in half by the sword qi of the Heaven-Raising Sword...

The odds of such a coincidence were incredibly small.

This suggested that the killer was intentionally imitating Chu Liang.

If it had been just this one case, Chu Liang would not have been accused of murder. However, in the second case, the framing was executed with even greater meticulousness.

In the second case, the killer had taken on the appearance of Chu Liang.

However, Chu Liang's trip to Myriad Poison Mountain was known to no one, meaning his presence in Demon Spider Forest was purely coincidental.

The similarity between the two cases lay in the fact that he happened to encounter members of the Red River Sect by chance both times.

That was likely the reason the killer chose to frame him.

Since he had actually been to those locations and met those individuals, there was no alibi to prove his innocence.

After a quick analysis, Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai concluded that both cases had targeted the Red River Sect, and the framing of Chu Liang was likely incidental—simply a consequence of his presence at both scenes.

Perhaps the killer had a personal grudge against Chu Liang or Mount Shu.

However, those matters could be addressed later. There was a straightforward way to prove Chu Liang's innocence.

The witnesses in the second case claimed to have seen Chu Liang kill the victims and then take the Jade Pot Celestial Plant he had scavenged from their bodies. Given that the plant was indeed in his possession, it was difficult to refute their statements.

In truth, however, Chu Liang had harvested the Jade Pot Celestial Plant himself from behind the waterfall.

The Imperial Supervisory Bureau employed the Shadow of Radiance technique on the divine souls of the witnesses, recreating the scene of what had happened during the crime. However, since several days had passed, the members of the Bureau were unable to recreate the moment when Chu Liang plucked part of the Jade Pot Celestial Plant from the cave behind the waterfall.

But there was another witness present at the time.

The little butterfly Chu Liang had saved.

Without it, Chu Liang wouldn't have even known the location of the Jade Pot Immortal Plant. The butterfly had witnessed him picking the plant firsthand.

If they could prove that Chu Liang had indeed picked the Jade Pot Immortal Plant himself, it would reveal that the scene described by the witnesses was fake, thereby establishing his innocence.

When Chu Liang spoke with the butterfly, he asked where it was from. It had replied that its home was on the outskirts of Myriad Poison Mountain, several dozen li away from Demon Spider Forest, in a place known as Butterfly Fairy Valley.

Now, Jiang Yuebai has arrived at Butterfly Fairy Valley, searching for the little butterfly.

Chapter 475: Breaking Out from the Cocoon

The accommodations at the Imperial Supervisory Bureau were not great.

It was just a small, seldom-used guest room in the courtyard, with bedding that carried a faint scent of dust.

Still, it was better than a prison cell.

By the time Chu Liang returned, it was late at night, and he was very exhausted.

He had always believed in making the best use of both people and resources, ensuring that no one on Silver Sword Peak remained idle.

But he hadn't expected the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to take this principle to a whole new level.

The Imperial Supervisory Commissioner had dragged Chu Liang along to review bizarre cases reported from different provinces, tasking him with analyzing each one, identifying the key issues, and determining the best course of action.

At first, it seemed like the commissioner was trying to mentor him, guiding Chu Liang's thought process. But after half a day, when the commissioner realized how quickly Chu Liang was picking things up, the old man started slacking off.

He left everything for Chu Liang to analyze. He asked Chu Liang to propose solutions and would only step in at the end to approve the final decisions.

This made things easier for the commissioner, but Chu Liang's stress kept building. These were important matters for the nine provinces, and he knew he had to be careful. After all, this likely concerned the lives of many others.

The more carefully Chu Liang handled things, the more satisfied the commissioner seemed. By the end of the day, Chu Liang had been used as free labor, completely worked to the bone by the old man.

However, it wasn't without its benefits. Chu Liang realized that strange and evil events were constantly happening across the land of the nine provinces. Even in what seemed like peaceful times, these cases were as common as cow hair.

The Imperial Supervisory Bureau and the City Supervisory Division formed the first line of defense, while the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten made up the second, working together to maintain the current peace.

The demonic creatures and evil entities had never stopped in their desire to bring chaos and destruction to the world.

According to the commissioner, things had never been this chaotic before. Ever since rumors of the Demon God's return started to spread, demons and villains across the land of the nine provinces had grown more active, plunging the Yu Dynasty into turmoil unlike anything seen in hundreds of years, leaving the bureau overwhelmed.

Chu Liang realized that the demonic race's divine envoys hadn't spread these rumors without a purpose. There had to be a larger, more sinister plan behind it all.

Even before the rumors of the Demon God's return, the chaos within the Yu Dynasty had already started to unfold.

Just as this thought crossed his mind, Chu Liang felt a sudden, strange movement within the White Pagoda.

He focused his divine sense inward and saw the golden cocoon, formed earlier by the little golden butterfly, beginning to crack. Thin beams of golden light seeped through the cracks, and the cocoon trembled, as though something inside was fighting to break free.

It seemed that breaking out of the cocoon this time was much more difficult than before.

As Chu Liang pondered this, he suddenly heard a series of cracking sounds, and then a small hole appeared in the cocoon.

As expected. It's easier to use teeth, Chu Liang thought.

Moments later, a tiny head poked through the hole in the cocoon, its two bright black eyes locking onto Chu Liang's.

Chu Liang blinked.

She blinked back.

"Huh?" Chu Liang's brows furrowed slightly.

According to the ancient book Jiang Yuebai had found before, the Heaven-Devouring Bug evolved through several stages: maggot, silkworm, butterfly, snake, dragon... ultimately reaching the ninth realm, in which it would transform into a fearsome nine-headed demonic insect, said to be the form of the Demon God in the past.

But the small head poking out now clearly belonged to a chubby little human girl.

She appeared to be no more than one or two years old, with smooth, tender skin that looked as soft as a freshly peeled boiled egg, both in texture and size.

After exchanging glances with Chu Liang, the little one suddenly broke into a smile, her eyes squinting with joy as she babbled, "Ah ba... ah ba..."

She couldn't speak yet, and her eyes were filled with the pure innocence of a newborn.

But...

What's going on here?

While Chu Liang was still trying to make sense of it all, the little girl wriggled her chubby neck and stretched out her pudgy arms, attempting to push the golden cocoon off herself.

It was only then that Chu Liang understood why breaking out of the cocoon had been so difficult.

In her previous forms, she had always bitten her way through the cocoon. But now, in this tiny human form, she didn't know how to use her hands properly, and they were clumsy and uncoordinated.

"Umm..." After struggling for a bit, the little one seemed to grow frustrated. Her chubby face scrunched up, and then she let out a soft, babyish cry, "Wahhh—"

Then, the crackling sounds started up again.

Soon, the little one had eaten through half of the golden cocoon. Only then did she finally crawl out, fully revealing herself to Chu Liang.

The large golden butterfly wings hadn't disappeared; instead, they had become whiter and more translucent. Her body was now the size of a small palm, with tender white skin and a chubby little face. She wore a dress-like garment woven from golden threads, draping around her like a delicate, gauzy skirt.

At a glance, she looked like a finely crafted porcelain doll.

"Ah ba, ah ba..." she babbled, awkwardly freeing herself from the cocoon. With clumsy arms stretched wide, she toddled toward Chu Liang as if she was trying to hug him.

But since she couldn't walk properly yet, she immediately tripped and tumbled to the ground.

"Ouch..." The little girl didn't cry or fuss after falling. Instead, she simply picked herself up and began crawling toward Chu Liang on all fours.

Chu Liang gently lifted her into his palm, and the little girl instantly broke into a wide, joyful grin and started giggling.

Upon seeing her behavior, Chu Liang couldn't help but recall something he had once heard—that newborn animals often regard the first thing they see after hatching as their mother.

This little one had seen him first every time she emerged from her cocoon. Could it be that she thought of him as her mommy?

As Chu Liang watched her dance around adorably in his palm, his confusion deepened. This wasn't at all what the ancient texts had described.

Could it be that the Heaven-Devouring Bug's evolution involved some kind of mimicry, transforming into the form of whatever species it lived with?

If it could evolve into a human form, could it also be taught like a human and become a true member of the human race?

Chu Liang's thoughts were all over the place. It was too difficult to settle on any definitive answer based on the current situation.

For now, Chu Liang decided it was best to give the little one a name.

"Since you have such a big appetite..." Chu Liang thought for a moment and said, "I'll call you Tuntun[1]."

...

The moonlight bathed Butterfly Fairy Valley, wrapping the entire place in a tranquil silence.

Every creature that called Myriad Poison Mountain home carried some form of poison or venom. The further one ventured into the heart of the mountain, the more potent and lethal the toxins became. In such a place, a being without poison wouldn't last a day.

Yet, there was one exception: the butterflies in Butterfly Fairy Valley.

They were non-toxic and harmless, yet had somehow managed to thrive for ages within the deadly environment of Myriad Poison Mountain.

The butterflies in the valley, though non-toxic, thrived in the presence of countless poisonous plants. Over time, as they pollinated these dangerous plants, they absorbed the toxins little by little, eventually building a strong resistance that allowed them to live in this valley for a very long time.

Unlike the other areas with vicious and bloodthirsty creatures, Butterfly Fairy Valley was a rather peaceful place.

When Jiang Yuebai arrived, she immediately caused quite a buzz.

Some butterflies immediately sensed the outsider's presence and fluttered into the air in a flurry.

Meanwhile, certain sentient plants became wary, swaying nervously even though there was no wind.

Jiang Yuebai quickly released her qi in the air.

With the constitution of a Transcendent Spirit, she shared an exceptional bond with the things in the world around her. Greedy demonic beasts perceived her blood and qi as a valuable spirit herb, while gentle spirit beasts would take an instant liking to her.

Such was the wondrous nature of the Transcendent Spirit constitution.

As her aura spread, the spiritual qi in the surrounding area grew incredibly vibrant. The plants and spirit herbs thrived, stretching upward, while large swarms of white butterflies fluttered around her, swirling in a joyful dance.

Her robes were like the bright moon, and the butterflies danced like falling snow, making the valley resemble a paradise on earth. And she, of course, was the sole fairy in this scene.

As Jiang Yuebai approached the heart of the valley, beneath a towering ancient vine tree, a beautiful woman clad in a gauzy white gown descended. The large, white wings on her back revealed her true identity.

"Are you the leader here?" Jiang Yuebai asked.

"I am the largest butterfly demon in Butterfly Fairy Valley," the woman said softly as she gazed at Jiang Yuebai. "Beautiful cultivator, is there something I can help you with?"

"I'm looking for a butterfly," Jiang Yuebai replied. "It's gained some sentience and can speak. There shouldn't be many like it here."

As she spoke, she took out a painting.

It was a painting of the butterfly, drawn by Chu Liang from memory.

But the butterfly demon glanced at the painting in Jiang Yuebai's hand and immediately shook her head. "Beautiful cultivator, this butterfly is not from here."

"Hmm?" Jiang Yuebai frowned slightly.

"We, the butterflies of Butterfly Fairy Valley, are all white. When exposed to a poison we cannot neutralize, black spots appear on our wings—that's how we know a member of our clan needs healing," the butterfly demon explained. "But the one you're searching for..."

She examined the painting once more and then said, "It appears to be a butterfly from the East Sea."

Chapter 476: I Am Grieving on Behalf of the Sect Leader

"Madaaaaam!

"How could you leave like this! Leaving me... and the sect leader all alone in this world..."

"A lonely grave thousands of miles away, with no place to speak of sorrow—[1]"

At the Red River Sect estate just outside Myriad Poison Mountain, white funeral banners fluttered in the air as everyone dressed in mourning clothes attended a funeral.

An elder with a long beard knelt before the coffin, his wails of grief filling the air, his heart clearly shattered. Those around him couldn't help but glance his way, sighing with sympathy.

"Elder Chen and the sect leader's wife... they must have shared an unbreakable bond."

Seated quietly in the place of honor for the bereaved family was Zhao Duanyang, the leader of the Red River Sect. He was a quiet person who appeared to be in his forties or fifties with a very dark complexion. Anyone who could lead a sect in the dangerous Myriad Poison Mountain had to be ruthless and cold.

Watching Elder Chen's display of grief, Zhao Duanyang held back for a while before finally letting out a cold "hmph."

There was nothing wrong with mourning for the sect leader's wife, but six people had died in total, and the fact that Elder Chen was only crying for the sect leader's wife seemed a bit odd...

It was as if Elder Chen had heard him, for he then wailed, "And my pitiful... young sect leader! You were only in your twenties, never even had the chance to see the world, and now you've fallen to such a cruel fate..."

"Why must the heavens make the old bury the young...?"

Someone nearby, unable to watch any longer, quietly approached and whispered, "Elder Chen, the sect leader is watching right there."

"Ah—" Elder Chen suddenly snapped out of it, hurriedly shouting, "I am grieving on behalf of the sect leader!"

"Hmph!" Zhao Duanyang flicked his sleeve. He wanted to stand up and leave.

He had always suspected that something was going on between his wife and Elder Chen, but he couldn't prove it. Just as he started digging for answers, the unthinkable happened, and now, there was no one left to confirm the clues he'd found.

But judging by Elder Chen's behavior, anyone would be suspicious.

One might have thought it was Elder Chen's own wife and child who had died.

Just as he was about to stand up, someone rushed in and announced, "Sect Leader, Jiang Yuebai from Mount Shu is at the gate, requesting to see you."

"Someone from Mount Shu?" Zhao Duanyang's eyes flashed with anger at the mention of the name, and he instinctively wanted to refuse her entry. But after a moment of thought, he said, "Let her in."

The Mount Shu Sect was, after all, one of the sects in the Divine Nine. Even if they relied on the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to punish the culprit, the Red River Sect would still have to coexist with the rest of the cultivation world in the future.

It would always be difficult for small sects to stand firm in the cultivation world.

Upon being announced, Jiang Yuebai gracefully approached the funeral chamber, offering a respectful bow to the row of coffins.

Elder Chen, upon seeing her enter, angrily stood up and shouted, "How dare someone from the Mount Shu Sect set foot in the Red River Sect! The murderer of our sect leader's wife and the other five come from your sect! You—"

"Old Chen!" Zhao Duanyang scolded sharply before stepping forward. His gaze locked on Jiang Yuebai as he continued, "I wonder what brings Fairy Jiang here today. I've heard that the criminal Chu Liang has already been captured by the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, yet he has not been punished. Until justice is served, we have no interest in any dealings with Mount Shu."

"I am here today precisely for this matter," Jiang Yuebai responded. "The Red River Sect tragedy has caused outrage throughout Mount Shu as well. If Chu Liang truly is the culprit, Mount Shu will not protect him. But we want to thoroughly investigate the situation to determine who the real murderer is."

"What's there to investigate!" Elder Chen wailed. "So many people saw it, the evidence is irrefutable! Who else could the murderer be but Chu Liang? You talk about investigation, but you're clearly here to cover for him! Don't think we don't know—everyone's heard about your

relationship with that boy! He should pay with his life! You should feel the pain of losing a loved one too!"

As he spoke, his lips trembled, his beard quivered, and he clutched his chest, looking as though he might faint at any moment.

It seemed he was truly overwhelmed with grief.

"Are you really in that much pain?" Zhao Duanyang asked coldly from behind.

"I...", Elder Chen gritted his teeth, tears in his eyes, "I'm grieving on your behalf, Sect Leader!"

"In that case, take a rest." Zhao Duanyang rolled his eyes and instructed the people around him, "Take Elder Chen away to rest!"

Several disciples obeyed and led Elder Chen away, and as he left, he continued shouting, "Sect leader! Don't give in to Mount Shu's threats and bribes! Madam and our young leader must not have died in vain—"

...

Watching Elder Chen grumble as he walked away, Jiang Yuebai sighed and remarked, "It seems Elder Chen shares a deep bond with your family, Sect Leader Zhao."

"..." Zhao Duanyang was silent for a moment before nodding. "Old Chen has been with Red River Sect for many years. Our two families have always been close."

After the small talk, Jiang Yuebai returned to the matter at hand.

"Sect Leader Zhao, I believe you don't wish to become enemies with Mount Shu but rather want true justice for your family and disciples. If Chu Liang is being framed, surely you wouldn't want the real murderer to roam free, right?"

"But right now, all evidence points to Chu Liang as the killer. That seems undeniable." Zhao Duanyang frowned. "So many unrelated witnesses saw it with their own eyes—surely they couldn't all be conspiring to frame him."

Jiang Yuebai shook her head. "Sect Leader Zhao, you don't really know him. Anyone familiar with Chu Liang knows he wouldn't commit such acts. Besides, there are still doubts about this case."

"From Red River Sect's perspective, haven't you considered? Chu Liang had no past grievances with your sect, no recent conflicts either, so why would he strike twice? If the second killing was for treasure, then what was the reason for the first?"

Zhao Duanyang's expression darkened. "Why should I care what the killer was thinking?"

To him, Jiang Yuebai was simply trying to find excuses for Chu Liang.

"My guess is that this is a vendetta against the Red River Sect," Jiang Yuebai said. "Chu Liang just happened to be there and was made the scapegoat. If we don't uncover the truth, the real enemy of the Red River Sect will continue to exist. Even to eliminate future threats, shouldn't you give us a chance to investigate?"

Zhao Duanyang was silent for a moment before responding, "As long as you aren't trying to protect him. After all, what can my small sect do against Mount Shu? But with so many witnesses, how can I not believe them?"

"Sect Leader Zhao, you should understand that what one sees with their own eyes isn't always the truth," Jiang Yuebai said, suddenly turning. "Just as I stand before you now—am I really here?"

"Hmm?" Zhao Duanyang was slightly startled.

He saw Jiang Yuebai's form shimmer and disappear, leaving only a white butterfly fluttering in place, circling a few times before drifting away.

Then Jiang Yuebai reappeared from the side, saying, "What you saw earlier was an illusion. None of your people noticed. Similarly, the Chu Liang who committed the murders could also be a false image—perhaps the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's methods failed to see through it. It's difficult, yes, but not impossible."

Zhao Duanyang could only sigh inwardly as he looked at the young woman before him.

As the sect leader of Red River Sect, he had reached the beginning stage of the sixth realm in cultivation. Yet before this junior, he was utterly outclassed.

The strength of these immortal sect prodigies was truly astonishing.

Although Jiang Yuebai was only in the fifth realm, if it came to a fight, he wasn't sure he'd be a match for her.

"Chu Liang's cultivation is certainly no weaker than mine. If he had truly wanted to kill the sect leader's son and his companions, he wouldn't have let them escape so far from the Jade Pot Celestial Plant. And as for treasure, his wealth far exceeds what you might imagine; he has no reason to kill for it," Jiang Yuebai continued. "These may not be solid proof, but they are points worth questioning. That's why I hope Sect Leader Zhao can help me—and help yourself—find the real culprit."

"What can I help you with?" Zhao Duanyang asked in a deep voice.

"I came here to ask—does Red River Sect have any enemies?" Jiang Yuebai asked.

Since they believed that Red River Sect was the murderer's target, they naturally had to start by investigating the sect's enemies.

"We make our living around Myriad Poison Mountain, and daily disputes are inevitable, but none should escalate to such murderous intent..." Zhao Duanyang thought for a moment. "If I had to name a mortal enemy of Red River Sect, it would be Black Pine Ridge."

Jiang Yuebai listened quietly, her gaze firm and determined.

As she thought about Chu Liang suffering in the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, Jiang Yuebai's heart clenched with worry. No matter the obstacles or dangers ahead, she knew she had to uncover the truth as soon as possible.

Chapter 477: Madder

"Please, let me go..." Chu Liang looked troubled, appearing to be in pain as he waved his hands repeatedly.

"That's not possible. Here at the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, we have rules to follow," replied a group of burly men opposite him, all wearing mischievous smiles. "Hurry up, hurry up."

Burp. Chu Liang let out a small hiccup and said, "I really can't drink anymore. I really can't handle how strong the liquor is."

They were in one of the guest halls within the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's courtyard, and those present were trusted aides of the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner. The most prominent among them sat directly across from Chu Liang.

This man appeared youthful, tall and broad-shouldered, with sharp and chiseled features. His eyes sparkled like stars, exuding a fierce energy that seemed to burn with intensity.

The most striking feature was his pupils, which were a deep shade of dark purple.

This was Ji Zidian, one of the Four Great Celestial Officials under the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner.

The others sitting around were all officials, the lowest rank being that of a seal-holding official, each wielding significant power outside. But within the Imperial Supervisory Bureau in Yu Capital, such figures were commonplace.

"Hey," Ji Zidian said, "It's tradition for newcomers to go through a process. If you can't even handle a bit of liquor, how are we supposed to accept you?"

Who asked for your acceptance?! I'm a criminal suspect, for heaven's sake, Chu Liang screamed inwardly.

Chu Liang's mind was racing—he had never imagined the absurdity of what was happening since entering the Imperial Supervisory Bureau.

First, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner had pulled him in to do some work. Chu Liang had thought of it as labor reform, which made some sense. Then, after another full day of work, the Commissioner suggested he get closer to his subordinates.

After the day's work, Ji Zidian and a bunch of the Bureau staff dragged him along to join a banquet and insisted on round after round of toasts.

What is this? Do you guys even throw welcome banquets for criminals now?

"Brother Chu, do you find the plain wine lacking flavor?" one of the seal-holding officials chuckled. "How's this? I will host tomorrow, and we'll go to the east of the city to enjoy some flower wine. Since you haven't been to the Capital of Yu before, you should experience its charms."

"No, no, no..." Chu Liang waved his hands in alarm.

Goodness. How can I do that when Senior Sister Jiang is still out there, working hard on my case. The Imperial Supervisory Bureau sure is... accommodating.

He quickly added, "I'm still a suspect. It's not appropriate to act too recklessly."

"Don't restrain yourself," Ji Zidian laughed as he said. "To be honest, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner has taken a liking to you over the past few days and doesn't think you are someone who would commit such crimes. Once the case is resolved, you'll be free again. After you participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects next year, I'm sure he'll send a request to the Mount Shu Sect to have you work for the Imperial Supervisory Bureau temporarily."

After he said that, another round of drinks and toasts followed.

With Chu Liang's current physical strength, his alcohol tolerance wasn't low. However, everyone around him had cultivation levels far surpassing his, and the spirit wine they drank was no ordinary brew. If he let loose, he'd likely be overwhelmed, and getting too drunk might lead to him accidentally saying something he shouldn't.

When it came to the murder case, he had done nothing wrong. However, there were plenty of other matters he couldn't discuss.

So, his strategy was simple: when sober, he would pretend to be tipsy; when tipsy, he would act as though he were very drunk; and when moderately drunk, he would act as if he had drunk so much that he blacked out.

After a few rounds, everyone was feeling a bit tipsy, and Chu Liang started changing the topic of conversation to be about someone else.

"Brother Ji, you must be from the Ji Family, right?" Chu Liang asked. "Do the children of noble families also serve at the Imperial Supervisory Bureau?"

The Jiang family had already fallen, and the Xia family was the imperial family, so the Ji family was one of the last remaining noble cultivation clans in the martial world. But the Ji family had always been reclusive, rarely allowing its members to leave, which was why Chu Liang asked.

To his surprise, Ji Zidian scoffed with disdain. "The Ji Family?"

Hearing his tone, Chu Liang instantly recognized the sentiment. "So, you're a runaway too?"

"Heh," Ji Zidian sneered again. "The Ji family? Even dogs won't go back there."

Yep, that's exactly it. Chu Liang nodded to himself, thinking, That's the vibe. This is basically a legacy of the Ji Family.

Afterward, with more explanations from others, Chu Liang finally understood.

It turned out that Ji Zidian was a collateral branch member in the Ji family and held a very low status.

In the Ji family, children born with the Xuan Yuan Eyes would either have them from birth or, at the latest, awaken them by the age of three to five.

Typically, the stronger the mystical ability, the earlier the awakening.

But Ji Zidian was different. His Xuan Yuan Eyes was not awakened until he was eight. Before that, because of his low status and unawakened mystical ability, he and his parents endured much humiliation and relocated to the Capital of Yu.

Although the Ji family was strict and rigid, they didn't really care about such struggling collateral members of the family.

Who could have expected that at the age of eight, hints of purple started flickering in Ji Zidian's eyes, and he awakened the power to command lightning after a night of sleep?

Among the many colors of Xuan Yuan Eyes, there were also varying degrees of power.

For instance, the golden and blue eyes Chu Liang had seen before were fairly common, but purple eyes were the rarest—and by far the most powerful. Those who possessed them, even at the same cultivation level, were significantly stronger.

With his purple eyes, Ji Zidian had the potential to rise to the top within the family.

At the time, his father wanted to bring him back to the Main Residence of the Ji Family, but both Ji Zidian and his mother refused. Later, as he grew older, Ji Zidian was discovered by the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner, who brought him into the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, where he grew into the person he was today.

One could say that he had long since severed all ties with the Ji family.

Chu Liang shook his head as he listened, thinking that after thousands of years of development, the Ji family still clung to its old ways—a system that now felt somewhat outdated.

...

The banquet ended, and by the time he returned to his residence, it was already late at night.

As Chu Liang thought about how he never had to drink to socialize during business deals, but had to in the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, he realized that dealing with bureaucracy was harder than doing business.

Chu Liang seemed drunk, but once he returned to his residence and did a sauna with the Divine Dragon Fire, the alcohol vapors quickly dissipated.

This unique skill was one he had learned from his esteemed teacher.

Afterward, he eagerly unleashed a streak of golden light from the White Pagoda.

Whoosh—

The golden light landed on the table and quickly transformed into a tiny figure, no bigger than a palm. She rubbed her eyes, pouted, and after babbling for a moment, finally said, "Mad..."

The good news was that the child had learned to speak in just one day; the bad news was that her first word was, "Maddddddddd."

Chu Liang naturally knew what she was upset about.

During the day, when he was busy and couldn't bring her along, he had to lock her back inside the White Pagoda to sleep. If he left her to play in the room alone, who knew what kind of chaos she might cause before dinner. There was a chance that not a single tile would remain intact in the Imperial Supervisory Bureau.

Having been locked up in the pagoda all day, the little one woke up suddenly and remembered that she was mad.

But Chu Liang had a solution.

He chuckled, pulling out a food package wrapped in oiled paper. As he carefully unwrapped it, he teased, "Look here! Do you know what this is?"

Tuntun's nose twitched, her eyes blinking with curiosity. She caught the scent of something rich and savory, though it was entirely new to her.

"Come on, give it a try," Chu Liang said, spreading the paper wide across the table. "Delicious braised pork knuckle..."

This was one of the solutions he had come up with.

When Tuntun was still in her various spirit beast forms, fasting wasn't a problem—she could go without food for as long as needed. But now that she could cry, fuss, and talk, denying her food was a whole different challenge.

But if he continued giving her food that contained spiritual energy, she might end up becoming an existence that he could not control. And so, Chu Liang came up with a clever workaround.

He would just give her plenty of tasty food that contained zero spiritual energy. With no nourishment in the food, she could eat to her heart's content without gaining any cultivation power.

In other words, it was like feeding a child junk food during their years of growth.

The only concern was whether she'd actually enjoy it. After all, she used to crave food rich in spiritual energy. Now that she had taken on a human form, would her taste buds follow suit?

With Chu Liang feeling a bit anxious, Tuntun picked up a piece of braised pork knuckle and took a cautious bite.

Her first reaction was to frown, as if the food tasted bad. But as she chewed, her expression gradually softened, as though it tasted better than expected. Then, a look of confusion crossed her face, as if she couldn't quite decide whether it was good or not...

So she took another bite.

And another...

Before long, the little one had devoured an entire piece of braised pork knuckle, and her eyes began to sparkle.

She decided that it was delicious.

"Yay..." She happily spread her arms and dove into the package, landing in a sea of braised pork knuckle.

"Hehe." Chu Liang chuckled, finally feeling satisfied. "Go ahead, eat up. Tomorrow, I'll get you some stinky tofu."

Chapter 478: Why Are You Here?

The Black Pine Ridge was a once-vast forest located seventy li west of Myriad Poison Mountain. It was a place where tigers prowled and wolves howled beneath the moon, a haven for vicious beasts. It was a wild, untamed land teeming with life—until the arrival of the first poison specialist.

Drawn by the abundance of materials, this poison specialist made Black Pine Ridge his home. He had moved here so that it could be easier for him to catch poisonous and venomous creatures to concoct poison and hunt wild animals as living subjects to test the potency of his deadly creations.

In just a few short years, the wild animals that once roamed the mountain vanished, driven to extinction by his ruthless hunts. The once-lush vegetation withered away, leaving only a type of black pine that could withstand extreme poison. Over time, it turned into this eerie and terrifying Black Pine Ridge.

These days, Black Pine Ridge has become home to far more than just one poison specialist. In fact, over a hundred of such poison specialists had moved here, each belonging to different lineages and legacies.

Poison specialists had long been a despised lineage in the world of immortality cultivation. Though they were weak in direct combat, they were sinister and unpredictable. It was nearly impossible to know when one might fall victim to their invisible traps or deadly schemes. As they were shunned and ostracized wherever they went, they would usually stuck together to survive and protect each other.

Black Pine Forest was just such a place.

The surrounding sects near Myriad Poison Mountain grew increasingly wary of such a large congregation of poison specialists. However, they mostly just kept their distance and avoided interacting with them.

The Red River Sect was likely the only sect that had a deep, mortal grudge against Black Pine Ridge.

The conflict started as small arguments over the natural treasures in Myriad Poison Mountain. The poison specialists, determined to protect their treasures, would set deadly traps of poison around these rare items, killing several Red River Sect disciples. In response, the Red River Sect struck

back, sending groups of disciples into the mountain to hunt down the poison specialists from the Black Pine Ridge.

Poison specialists themselves were not strong in direct combat. When faced with well-prepared cultivators, they would often find themselves at a disadvantage. After suffering several losses, those poison specialists from the Black Pine Ridge started placing deadly poisons at various entrances to Myriad Poison Mountain, creating problems not just for the Red River Sect but for other sects as well.

Eventually, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had to step in and mediate the conflict. They punished the disciples from both sides who were responsible for the most deaths, finally bringing an end to the fighting. However, the grudge between them had already formed, and small clashes continued.

If the members had died from methods commonly used by poison specialists, the Red River Sect would have immediately suspected Black Pine Ridge.

That night, a thin mist clung to the ridge, casting an eerie veil over the landscape.

A figure in white descended gracefully.

After hearing Zhao Duanyang explain what had happened at the Red River Sect, Jiang Yuebai decided to investigate the Black Pine Ridge while it was night time, searching for any clues that might link this place to the case.

But the moment her feet touched the ground, a chill ran through her. Something was off.

The air was thick with the stench of blood, hanging heavy in the mist.

Her expression grew grim. As she stepped into the moonlight, she seemed to vanish, becoming one with the shadows. Silently, she made her way toward the heart of Black Pine Ridge, where the poison specialists would typically gather.

The ground was stained crimson, large pools of blood seeping into the earth. Severed limbs lay scattered across the buildings and open spaces. The blood was still fresh, warm to the touch, suggesting that the slaughter had only just taken place.

She closed her eyes slightly, extending her divine sense to encompass the entire hillside. Every scene she sensed was filled with horror and violence. At least a hundred lives had been lost here, but there were no intact bodies, only dismembered limbs and scattered remains. The earth was marred by massive claw marks, as if a vicious beast had torn through the area in a savage rampage.

What kind of vicious beast could have single-handedly killed so many poison specialists?

Jiang Yuebai glanced around. She knew she should use Shadow of Radiance to recreate the scene, but even though she understood the divine technique, it was still difficult to perform as it required a great deal of cultivation energy.

But for Chu Liang, she had to give it a shot.

She swiftly crushed the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's tracking jade talisman, summoning the powerful members of the department. Then, with a quick twist of her wrists, she performed the hand seal.

Whoosh—

As the divine technique activated, her body suddenly radiated a brilliant white light, causing the surrounding spiritual energy to tremble violently!

What she had unleashed wasn't Shadow of Radiance, but an even greater immortal art—One with the Heavens!

Once One with the Heavens was activated, the practitioner's body would become connected with the Great Dao of Heaven and Earth, making their Sea of Qi limitless in this state. At the same time, their understanding of the Dao deepened significantly.

However, this state only lasted for a very short time. Jiang Yuebai could use it, but she could only maintain it for two or three breaths at most.

After activating One with the Heavens, she quickly began to activate the Shadow of Radiance.

Boom—

She had no choice. A higher level of cultivation than what she currently possessed was needed for her to activate the Shadow of Radiance. Though it had seemed effortless when Daoist Yan used it earlier, Jiang Yuebai knew she couldn't achieve the same without first enhancing her cultivation power.

In an instant, a brilliant white beam, like a shimmering mirage, enveloped half of the hillside. Scenes of light and shadow started flickering rapidly before her eyes.

Though the images were somewhat blurred, she could still make out a massive beast—tiger-like in form, with two horns on its head and wings on its back. It rampaged through Black Pine Ridge, its claws and fangs tearing through people with terrifying ease, killing them instantly.

The time of three breaths passed quickly. The state of being One with the Heavens vanished, and the light screen created by Shadow of Radiance collapsed in an instant.

Jiang Yuebai withdrew her hand, her face appearing slightly paler.

After a brief moment of rest, she returned to normal. Reflecting on the scene she had just witnessed, the beast resembled the legendary Qiongqi, a vicious creature of myth...

As she waited for the powerful members of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to arrive, a rustling sound suddenly broke the stillness nearby. Her gaze snapped toward the source, sharp as a blade.

Swish—

Without hesitation, she activated Dimension Compression and instantly flashed toward the sound. As expected, a shadowy figure had been startled and quickly turned to flee, moving with astonishing speed.

Jiang Yuebai surged forward, closing in on the fleeing figure, but just as she was about to catch up, the shadow slipped into the Myriad Poison Mountain. As she continued her pursuit, countless screeching noises suddenly echoed, and a horde of venomous bats erupted, swarming toward her like a living storm, blocking her path with their venomous wings.

Jiang Yuebai activated the Ten Thousand Swords Seal, sending a thousand swordlights slashing through the horde of bats, cutting them down in a storm of light. The creatures fell to the ground in pieces, but in the blink of an eye, the shadowy figure had already disappeared into the depths of the mountain, leaving her no choice but to stop.

By the time she returned, a member of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had arrived.

"You must be Jiang Yuebai from Mount Shu? I've heard of you."

The person who arrived was a young woman, seemingly in her early twenties, dressed in light blue robes. Her complexion was as fair as white jade, and her eyes, clear as a tranquil pool, radiated a quiet beauty. She wasn't breathtaking at first glance, but the longer one looked, the more captivating her presence became.

The woman raised her celestial official's token toward Jiang Yuebai.

In response, Jiang Yuebai gave a slight bow and greeted her respectfully, "This junior greets Celestial Official Xue."

Although Jiang Yuebai had never met Celestial Official Xue before, the woman's identity was easy to deduce. The Imperial Supervisory Bureau had four celestial officials: Li Chengfeng, Xue Muyu, Fang Donglei, and Ji Zidian. Among them, only Xue Muyu was a woman, making it obvious that this was Celestial Official Xue.

She was also Li Chengfeng's wife^[1], and someone a certain peak master of the Mount Shu Sect had repeatedly tried to befriend—though it seemed this friendship was mostly one-sided.

After exchanging greetings, Jiang Yuebai briefly explained the situation, though Xue Muyu could already see what had happened.

After Jiang Yuebai described what she had seen through Shadow of Radiance, Xue Muyu activated a divine technique of her own, and like Jiang Yuebai, she also used the Shadow of Radiance.

With a powerful roar, the light screen of heaven and earth materialized once again.

Compared to the Shadow of Radiance Jiang Yuebai had activated earlier, Xue Muyu's version was far more refined and complete. Not only could they clearly see the vicious beast's destructive rampage, but the appearances of the poison specialists were also vividly revealed.

The murdered poison specialists appeared very sluggish, as if they had been poisoned before their deaths.

As the light and shadows faded, Xue Muyu's expression grew serious. "There's more to this case than we first thought. I'll report this to the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner. You should come back with me."

"Alright," Jiang Yuebai said as she nodded lightly.

It was the perfect opportunity for her to visit Chu Liang.

I wonder how he's doing after two days of imprisonment? Jiang Yuebai thought.

...

"I can't do this anymore, really," Chu Liang said, waving his hands in exasperation. Before him lay a grand feast spread across the table.

Not only was Ji Zidian present, but Li Chengfeng had also joined. He chuckled as he said, "The Imperial Supervisory Commissioner said you should feel right at home. We can't let it seem like the Imperial Supervisory Bureau is treating you poorly."

"My brothers, I don't ever do this at home," Chu Liang replied with a bitter smile. "Maybe next time my esteemed teacher comes, she will drink with you all?"

As soon as he said that, everyone's expressions changed.

"No need to trouble your esteemed teacher with that," Ji Zidian said awkwardly, forcing a smile.

Their attitudes conveyed a clear message: drinking and cheering were acceptable at this table, but mentioning Di Nufeng was a definite no-no.

Chu Liang paused, quickly realizing that these people were peers of his teacher and likely knew each other well. They had probably endured a lot together over the years.

It seemed especially true for Li Chengfeng. After all, his teacher seemed to have a particular fondness for his wife.

Who would dare invite a wolf into their home?

As they laughed and chatted, a woman's voice rang out from outside, "I'm back!"

In an instant, two beautiful figures stepped into the guest hall.

Chu Liang and Li Chengfeng both jumped to their feet, exclaiming in unison, "Why are you here?"

Chapter 479: I Am a Criminal

Upon seeing Li Chengfeng appear in such a state, Xue Muyu's face immediately darkened. "Oh, isn't this lovely? I'm on duty tonight, and you sneak out here for a drink?"

"I only drank a bit..." Li Chengfeng quickly explained, rushing forward to grab Xue Muyu's hand and gesturing toward Chu Liang. "Look, we've got a new member! It's a tradition to welcome him, isn't it?"

"What about our house rules? Have I not told you before—no drinking allowed!" Xue Muyu scolded, sounding very unhappy.

"Let's discuss this outside, shall we?" Li Chengfeng grinned awkwardly, attempting to usher her out.

The citizens of Yu's capital would never have imagined that the elegant, dashing White-Robed Sword-Wielding Immortal was, in fact, a wife-fearing man who'd be scolded for sneaking a mouthful of wine.

Beside them, Jiang Yuebai cast a stern look at Chu Liang. "So, this is how you've been spending your time here? Drinking and making merry?"

"Just a few drinks..." Chu Liang scrambled forward, whispering hurriedly, "I didn't want to, but the others insisted it's tradition here..."

"Hmph." Jiang Yuebai furrowed her brows.

She had been worried that Chu Liang wasn't doing well here, but now it seemed he was living a little too comfortably.

For some reason, anger welled up inside her.

Here she was, running back and forth, worrying for his sake, while he was sitting here eating, drinking, and having fun. The more she thought about it, the more wronged she felt...

"Let's talk outside, let's talk outside," Chu Liang muttered, quickly pushing Jiang Yuebai toward the door, doing exactly what Li Chengfeng had done.

Now, only Ji Zidian and a few of the seal officers were left at the table, chuckling as they watched the two men being dragged off by their women.

"No authority at home, huh?" Ji Zidian teased. "Can't even drink in peace."

"We're the lucky ones," another seal officer grinned. "No wives to scold us for drinking; we're free men."

The moment those words left his mouth, the laughter around the table faded.

"Yeah, really great..."

"Mm..."

"Right?"

For some reason, the wine in their cups suddenly didn't taste quite as sweet.

...

Chu Liang led Jiang Yuebai along the narrow path behind the main courtyard of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, away from the bustling guest hall. Here, the night was quiet and still, the air filled with a serene calmness.

"You've had a rough time these days," Chu Liang began softly, his voice tinged with concern. "Running back and forth because of me."

"Fortunately, it wasn't all in vain," Jiang Yuebai replied.

When she had managed to calm herself down, she then started sharing with Chu Liang what had happened at the Red River Sect and the Black Pine Ridge, detailing every encounter and discovery.

"The Black Pine Ridge got annihilated?" Chu Liang muttered, furrowing his brows in deep thought.

This was far more serious than the issue with the Red River Sect.

Although there was no concrete evidence linking this to the Red River Sect's case, the timing was too suspicious to ignore. It was hard not to draw connections between the two incidents.

And that little butterfly he had saved... could it have been deceiving him all along?

A butterfly species native to the East Sea, claiming it came from Butterfly Fairy Valley—it was all a ploy to gain his trust and lead him straight to the Jade Pot Celestial Plant.

If so, this seemed more like a premeditated framing.

"Celestial Official Xue mentioned that the vicious beast Qiongqi has been on Wugen Island in the East Sea for years now, closely monitored by Penglai. It shouldn't have had the chance to cause chaos in the land of the nine provinces," Jiang Yuebai explained. "They plan to investigate the East Sea tomorrow. Even if we can't directly link this to the Red River Sect's case, it points to other hidden factors at play. Just wait a few more days, and the truth will surely surface."

Chu Liang looked at Jiang Yuebai. "It's all thanks to you..."

He was clearly touched by her effort and dedication. A great deal of effort must have been invested to uncover so much in such a short time.

He was about to say something when a sudden uproar broke out outside. A large group of people rushed in chaotically, clad in armor and wielding sabers. If it weren't for the guards from the residence of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau accompanying them, he would have thought they had come to raid the bureau.

"Where are the celestial officials?" the leading armored soldier bellowed, his voice urgent and strained. "Please, you must help save my brother!"

Chu Liang's gaze shifted to the group, where they were carrying another armored soldier. His entire body had turned an ominous shade of black. He was trembling violently and had lost consciousness.

As the chaos unfolded, a flash of lightning cut through the air, and Ji Zidian appeared beside the injured man in an instant.

He grasped the injured man's wrist as he asked, "What happened? Where are you soldiers from?"

"I am Banner Hoister Zhou Li of the city patrol guards," the soldier replied hurriedly. "We were out patrolling the area when my brothers and I spotted a strange shadow. We went after the shadowy figure, but to our shock, it—though human-like—fought with the ferocity of a wild beast. That shadowy figure bit my brother, and he ended up like this! In our panic, we rushed here for help. Celestial Official, please help us!"

After he finished speaking, Ji Zidian's expression darkened further, a deep frown creasing his brow.

"This doesn't seem like an injury from an evil entity. He has been poisoned," Ji Zidian remarked. "I can suppress his meridians to keep the poison from spreading for now, but Celestial Official Fang, the one most skilled in detoxification, isn't here. We'll need to find another physician capable of clearing the toxins."

Before he could finish speaking, the injured man suddenly convulsed violently. His eyes turned blood-red, and he let out a guttural howl, thrashing about as if desperately searching for something to sink his teeth into.

However, Ji Zidian was there. With a swift jab of his finger, something resembling a golden dragon seemed to swirl within the man's body. As it did, the man could no longer move. Yet, despite this, the toxins in his body had yet to be cleared.

"Poisoned?" The leading armored soldier blurted out in panic. "Considering his appearance and behavior, the poison has likely reached his heart. How can he possibly hold on until the physician arrives?"

Even if a physician arrived, they would first have to recognize the poison. If not, they would still need time to analyze it. In this situation, could this man even survive that long? But every trade has its specialty, and poison treatment was not within the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's expertise.

At that moment, Xue Muyu rushed over. With a swift motion, she cast a spell, and a divine light enveloped the injured man, seeping into his body. Instantly, his condition seemed to stabilize temporarily.

Still, Xue Muyu's face remained tense. "I can only sustain his life for a short while," she said gravely. "The poison has infiltrated deep within his body. If the toxins aren't cleared soon, he will not survive."

Her divine technique could heal injuries, but detoxifying was an entirely different matter from healing wounds.

In the midst of the chaos, a young man in brocade suddenly spoke up, "How about I give it a try?"

Everyone turned to look, only to find it was none other than Chu Liang, who had been silently observing the commotion from the sidelines.

...

Originally, if the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had the means to save the man, he would have preferred not to intervene. But seeing that no one present was proficient in detoxification, he realized he had no choice but to step forward and give it a try.

After all, time meant everything for the injured; every passing second could mean the difference between life and death.

"You can detoxify?" Ji Zidian asked.

"I can try; there's always a chance," Chu Liang replied, gesturing for the others to lay the injured man down. Then, he pulled out the Poison-Expulsion Whip. Since acquiring this treasure, he hadn't had the opportunity to use it in practice, so he was not very confident. Whether it would work or not now depended on the injured man's fate.

Snap—

Though a flicker of hesitation crossed his mind, his hands moved with practiced skill, lashing the whip onto the injured man.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—" The poisoned armored soldier let out a gut-wrenching howl of pain

"You—!" The leading banner hoister cried out in panic.

Weren't you supposed to save him? Why are you punishing him instead? he thought frantically.

But he had only managed to utter that single word when he suddenly froze.

Because, in the very next second, a wisp of black mist spewed out of the injured man's mouth!

"Spread out!" Ji Zidian commanded, prompting the crowd to dodge out of the way.

Seeing that it was effective, Chu Liang wasted no time. With a flick of his wrist, he lashed out with the whip a second time, striking like lightning!

Snap! Snap, snap, snap!

In an instant, five lightning-fast whips struck the poisoned man consecutively and black mist billowed around him. Yet, as the mist dissipated, the blackness on his skin had been completely cleared.

By the time the sixth whip landed, no more black mist emerged—only the soldier's agonized cries filled the air. Seeing this, Chu Liang stopped his movement.

The poisoned man on the ground, after enduring the beating, began to show signs of recovery. His once darkened complexion had returned to normal, and his breathing grew steady and smooth.

"Is he really cured?" The banner hoister of the city patrol exclaimed with joy as he stepped forward. "Your detoxification technique is truly remarkable! Brother, what is your rank and name? When my brother wakes up, I'll have him personally come to the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to thank you for saving his life! We might even have to craft a silk banner and report your merits to our superiors!"

"No need for a silk banner; it was hardly any trouble," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "I don't hold any official rank."

"You're not a member of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau?" The Banner Hoister asked in surprise.

From the banner hoister's point of view, Chu Liang was both young and remarkably skilled, possessing a high cultivation level and extraordinary divine abilities. Naturally, he assumed Chu Liang was a rising young talent of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, currently at the stage of his career where building fame and achievements was needed.

"For now, you could say I'm part of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau," Chu Liang replied with a faint smile, "but... I am a criminal."

Chapter 480: Presenting the Captives

The next morning, as the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner entered the bureau, he greeted Chu Liang with a smile. "I heard you saved a poisoned city patrol guard last night?"

"To be honest, I wasn't entirely confident," Chu Liang replied modestly. "It just happened that I was there, so I had to give it a try."

"You did well," the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner praised, nodding in approval. "If someone had died within the walls of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, our reputation would have taken a hit."

When did it become "our" reputation... Chu Liang silently grumbled to himself. I haven't even seen a single penny from you as payment for the work I've done.

Standing beside Chu Liang was Jiang Yuebai, her expression composed. She had just returned from investigating the situation at Black Pine Ridge and now had to report her findings to the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner since she was still officially handling the case on behalf of the bureau.

"This matter..." the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner muttered, his expression darkening as he listened to Jiang Yuebai's account.

The annihilation of a major sect was not a small matter. Incidents of such a heinous nature hadn't been seen in the nine provinces for quite some time.

The last time something like this occurred was over a decade ago, during the Jiang Family's annihilation. When the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner thought about this, he glanced briefly at Jiang Yuebai and chose not to bring it up.

Instead, he said, "This matter is indeed perplexing, and there are still hidden truths that need to be uncovered. Miss Jiang, your swift capture of the key points shows remarkable talent. How would you feel about working with the Imperial Supervisory Bureau for a period in the future?"

Chu Liang smiled upon hearing this. This old man truly never misses a chance to recruit people.

"Let's wait until Chu Liang's matter is resolved first," Jiang Yuebai replied calmly.

"It should be soon," the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner said. "After this incident, the Red River Sect should realize that this case is far from simple. They probably won't hold him responsible anymore. In a few days, even if there are no further developments, he can leave."

That would be great, Chu Liang thought, a flicker of delight crossing his face as he heard the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner's words.

He said, "Sir, having received your teachings these few days, I'm almost reluctant to leave."

"After you've represented Mount Shu in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, you're welcome to stay as long as you wish," the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner replied. "The capital of Yu is far more vibrant than those secluded immortal sects of yours; it's the perfect place for young people to mingle and thrive."

"Indeed," Chu Liang said as he glanced out the window. "I heard quite a commotion early this morning. It's not a festival, so what could they be bustling about?"

"Tomorrow is the day when the East Sea General presents captives in the capital of Yu. The citizens have been preparing to line the streets for the welcome," the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner explained. "After that, there will be a grand court assembly in the palace, which I will attend. For today, handle the documents from various places. When you are done with them, place them here, and I will review them when I am back."

"..." Chu Liang was inwardly shouting a string of curses, but he still managed to keep a warm smile on his face. He replied calmly, "Alright."

"Don't worry." The Imperial Supervisory Commissioner smiled as well. "I won't let your efforts these past days go unrewarded. Here, these are for you."

As he spoke, he raised his hand, casting out two beams of light.

Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai each caught one, revealing two identical pieces of jade in their palms. The jade was smooth and lustrous, warm to the touch, and brimming with spiritual energy—enchanted tools, without a doubt.

"What is this?" Chu Liang asked.

"These two pieces of jade are called the United Hearts Jade," the Commissioner explained. "With these, two people can communicate their thoughts across thousands of li through the domain within the jade. I thought they would make the perfect gift for you two."

"United Hearts Jade..." Jiang Yuebai murmured, her gaze lowering slightly.

Chu Liang, however, casually slipped the jade into his chest pocket and flashed a warm, innocent smile. "This is truly too much... I feel so embarrassed to accept the gift."

...

Once everything was settled, Jiang Yuebai set off to return.

After seeing her off, Chu Liang went back to the office of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to continue his tasks. Now that he had received some benefits, his attitude toward the work assigned to him had completely changed.

Previously, Imperial Supervisory Commissioner Qi Yingxuan had been more than satisfied with Chu Liang's work efficiency. But now, he was stunned to realize that Chu Liang had only been using half of his potential before. With his current speed, even the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner—who was no stranger to witnessing genius—was left in awe.

"Haha," the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner chuckled. "If you keep honing yourself like this for a while longer, I might as well hand over the position of Imperial Supervisory Commissioner to you."

Chu Liang simply replied with a calm smile, "That would come at a different price."

The reason he was working at full throttle was simple—he wanted to finish his tasks quickly so he could finally use the United Hearts Jade.

As his divine sense delved into the jade, a lush green space unfolded before him, shimmering like emerald waves.

This object worked on a principle similar to the Soul Subjugator Token he had confiscated earlier, though it was much more advanced. Naturally, he used it with ease. With just a thought, words began to form within the space.

[Chu Liang]: "Have you arrived? Rest for a bit after landing, no need to rush. Take care of your health."

[Jiang Yuebai]: "Arrived, busy now, will talk later."

[Chu Liang]: "..."

Since Senior Sister Jiang was busy, Chu Liang chose not to disturb her further. He wandered around the headquarters of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau for a while. Though stepping outside the gates

was inconvenient, no one here kept a close watch on him, so he was free to take in the scenery from where he stood.

The headquarters of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau was located near the imperial city, a place seldom visited by ordinary folk. The broad street out front usually lay empty, save for the occasional official carriages and horses passing through during court assemblies.

But today was different.

Outside, countless passersby bustled back and forth, busy setting up something. It seemed preparations were in full swing, likely in anticipation of the East Sea General's arrival to present the captives, just as the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner had mentioned earlier.

This was no small affair for the Yu Dynasty; it was a significant event. Chu Liang had already heard whispers about it during the banquets over the past few days.

The situation in the East Sea had always been complex, and the captives to be presented this time were from the Roupu Kingdom of the East Sea.

Although the nine provinces fell under the rule of the Yu Dynasty, it was not the only nation in existence. The Western Regions alone had thirty-six nations, and after centuries of conflict and war, their numbers had only grown. The seas in all directions—east, south, west, and north—were dotted with countless islands ruled by different kingdoms, some of them as vast as an entire province.

Yet, as long as they were ruled by humans, they were required to revere the Yu Dynasty as the imperial power, paying tribute and allegiance year after year. In times of natural disasters or calamities, the Yu Dynasty would also extend its protection to its vassal states..

Things would have remained peaceful. Yet, turmoil had begun brewing in the East Sea, and at the root of this chaos was the rise of the Fuyao Kingdom.

The Fuyao Kingdom was originally home to local natives who, two thousand years ago, still lived a primitive lifestyle. However, this was a region with a mild climate, fertile land, and an abundance of spiritual qi. Whenever war and chaos erupted in the land of the nine provinces, countless people would cross the sea to seek refuge there.

Over time, these migrants integrated with the local natives, forming a unique society of their own. More than a thousand years ago, the people of sixteen islands united and established a kingdom, naturally preparing to pay tribute and allegiance to the dynasty of that era.

This happened before the rise of the Yu Dynasty. During the era of the former dynasty, the united sixteen islands had become the largest nation outside its borders. The largest of these islands in the Fuyao Kingdom was as big as an entire province. At the time, the former dynasty grew wary of their unification and refused to recognize the islands as a single kingdom, insisting that they establish themselves as separate entities instead.

This clashed with the islands' ambitions at the time. After decades of effort, they finally secured the most powerful backing they could find—Penglai.

Although the immortal sects maintained close ties with the dynasty of the nine provinces, their allegiance lay with humanity as a whole, not just the ruling dynasty. In fact, to prevent imperial authority from growing too powerful, the sects with sufficient influence would often lend their support to smaller nations.

For instance, the Celestial King Sect, Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, and Endless Sword Sect among the Divine Nine Sects, as well as the Night Saber Sect of the Terrestrial Ten, all secretly shared a deep connection with certain nations.

After all, the allegiance and tribute these smaller countries could offer were things the mighty dynasty could never provide.

The islands of Fuyao pledged to recognize the Penglai Supreme Sect as their nation's guiding religious authority, offering all their resources and talent to Penglai whenever needed. In other words, they fully embraced Penglai's rules as their own.

And just as they had hoped, this devout allegiance earned them the strong support of Penglai, ultimately leading to the successful establishment of the Fuyao Kingdom.

For the next thousand years, the two sides maintained a relationship of mutual support and loyalty, much like that of a kind father and an obedient son.

Back then, Penglai had yet to attain the status of the foremost immortal sect it holds today, and the Fuyao Kingdom was merely an emerging power. Yet, over time, both grew stronger, complementing one another.

Today, the Penglai Supreme Sect stood as the foremost immortal sect, and the Fuyao Kingdom reigned over the East Sea, its dominance in the region firmly established. Yet, it continued to pay tribute and allegiance to the Yu Dynasty. This had never changed.

But just because the Fuyao Kingdom showed no signs of rebellion on the surface did not mean it wasn't quietly scheming in the shadows.

Just over a decade ago, the Roupu Kingdom of the East Sea declared that it would no longer pay tribute to the Yu Dynasty, instead choosing to acknowledge the Fuyao Kingdom as its ruling authority.

As a small island in the East Sea, calling the Roupu Kingdom's territory a "tiny speck" would be an understatement, if not an outright insult to tiny specks.

The few fish it offered in tribute each year were hardly worth the Yu Dynasty's attention. However, if such an unfavorable precedent went unaddressed, what would happen if other neighboring vassal states decided to follow suit in the future?

Thus, the court dispatched a seventh-realm Eminent One as an envoy to confront and rebuke them. Given how small the Roupu Kingdom was, this so-called "envoy" could strip off his outer robe to reveal the insignia of "General of the Eastern Expedition" beneath if the questioning did not go as the Yu Dynasty hoped. The envoy would become the general leading the army to punish the rebellious Roupu Kingdom.

It wouldn't be difficult for a seventh-realm envoy to destroy this small kingdom.

However, when he arrived, the Roupu Kingdom received him with utmost sincerity and respect.

The Roupu Kingdom subtly pointed out that they were separated from the land of the nine provinces by a vast ocean, yet only a short boat ride away from the Fuyao Kingdom. They hinted that they lived entirely at Fuyao's mercy, with no choice but to obey its commands. Between the lines, it was more than clear that everything was dictated by the will of the Fuyao Kingdom.

The Yu Dynasty had expected this, but dealing with the Fuyao Kingdom was not as simple as handling the Roupu Kingdom. After all, the Fuyao Kingdom had a formidable military and had the support of Penglai. It was much more challenging to subdue the Fuyao Kingdom.

As for the Roupu Kingdom...

Even if they wiped it out and sent troops to occupy the land, the annual yield of two fish wouldn't be enough to cover the military expenses.

And so, the matter of the Roupu Kingdom was temporarily shelved.

Naturally, the tension between the Yu Dynasty and the Fuyao Kingdom in the East Sea only escalated from that point onward, and it has persisted ever since.

But recently, news of the Demon God's return began to spread like wildfire across the nine provinces and the four seas.

People that lived near the borders of the Western Regions started migrating inland, and countless citizens of the small kingdoms there fled to the Yu Dynasty in search of refuge.

Amid this, chaos erupted within the Yu Dynasty itself. Strange incidents occurred one after another, and the air grew heavy with resentment.

In such troubled times, nothing could divert this brewing discontent and boost the people's morale quite like a war against an external enemy.

At this moment, the small island of Roupu, the sole kingdom among the four seas that was no longer paying tribute to the Yu Dynasty, naturally caught the attention of the imperial court.

The officials within the court exchanged sinister, hee-hee-hee laughter as their eyes turned toward Roupu Kingdom.

When the Roupu Kingdom stopped paying tribute over a decade ago, hardly any of the Yu Dynasty's citizens took notice. After all, the effect on their daily lives was nothing more than a noble's dining table missing a single fish. Who would care about such a trivial matter?

However, with the court's deliberate propaganda, the matter spread like wildfire within days, as though it had only just occurred. The situation with the Roupu Kingdom was elevated to a direct challenge against the dignity of the Yu Dynasty.

How dare such a tiny speck of a nation act so audaciously?

Amidst public outrage, His Majesty the Emperor made a sweeping decision. With a wave of his hand, he appointed General Wu Anmin as the East Sea General.

With thirty thousand elite soldiers, ten towering ships, and several Eminent Ones under his command, Wu Anmin charged straight toward Roupu Kingdom.

Though the Roupu Kingdom was small, its people responded with surprising tenacity.

Their first move? A swift and decisive wave of surrender. What could the Yu Dynasty possibly do now?

In fact, they had already surrendered long before Wu Anmin and his troops even set foot on their shores.

As the East Sea General approached the borders with his vast army, he was met with an unexpected sight.

There, on the beach, a large crowd of Roupu citizens knelt, led by their king. Each had already packed up their belongings, with a small bundle strapped to their back.

They had even laid out the few pieces of gold, silver, and other valuables on the side, offering them up as travel expenses for the army.

It was as if they were saying, "No need to lift a finger. All the valuables are right here."

They were so well-behaved that it made one's heart ache for them.

Wu Anmin couldn't even bring himself to accept these funds.

You toil under the scorching sun year-round just to sell a few fish. How much could you possibly earn? Just keep it for yourselves, he thought. But you all still have to come with me, he added. The Yu Dynasty needs a grand ceremony of presenting captives to lift public morale. I am sorry for the trouble.