

M. Slaying 761

Chapter 761: A True Hero Recognizes the Situation and Acts Accordingly

"A demon?"

The moment the Dragon Dancer was taken, Chu Liang reacted instantly. As the strongest cultivator present, he became a gust of wind, darting after the fleeing figure.

The shadowy figure moved swiftly, gliding through the alleys of the City of Azure Waves like a wisp of black smoke. In mere moments, it had already escaped beyond the city walls, leaving behind a faint trail of demonic qi.

However, Chu Liang had already closed the distance. Seeing the shadowy figure right in front, he raised his Demon-Slaying Sword high!

As he was scared that he might accidentally hurt the Dragon Dancer, Chu Liang slashed with only twenty percent of his true strength.

This strike might not kill the Dragon Dancer, but it would be fatal for the black demonic entity ahead!

A brilliant arc of sword light tore through the night sky, striking the target in an instant. A burst of blood erupted from within the swirling black mist, and the figure plummeted from the air, crashing into the dense forest below.

By now, they had left the city far behind. The wilderness stretched endlessly beneath them, shrouded in darkness. Chu Liang descended swiftly, following the lingering trail of demonic qi. Within moments, he caught up to the culprit again. However, there was no sign of the figure and only a blood-stained demon core lying on the ground.

Chu Liang immediately understood the situation.

No wonder his Demon-Slaying Sword hadn't reacted as it would against a demon. The target turned out to not be an actual demonic creature but a human.

This person had killed a demon beforehand and carried the demon core in their mouth while kidnapping the Dragon Dancer, creating the illusion of a demon abducting a human. If needed, they could discard the core mid-flight, throwing off any pursuers.

However, unfortunately for the culprit, he didn't expect Chu Liang to catch up so quickly and strike with such fierceness and decisiveness.

If Chu Liang hadn't been here today, the kidnapper would have gotten away with it. By the time the cultivators of the City of Azure Waves arrived, they would have found nothing but the demon core, while the real culprit would have long escaped an unknown distance away.

Chu Liang spread his divine sense, scanning the surroundings. However, he couldn't find any traces of the culprit. Chu Liang was certain that the kidnapper hadn't gone far so where could he be?

Even if he was human, he would have needed to use his foundational qi to activate a divine skill and flee. If he hadn't, then he simply wouldn't have had enough time to escape beyond reach.

After a brief moment of thought, Chu Liang retrieved a bright red helmet, shaped like the oversized head of a shrimp.

This was the Crimson Devil Helmet. Although its design was rather embarrassing, its power was undeniable.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang wore the Crimson Devil Helmet, transforming into a shrimp-headed man.

The divine sense of a seventh-realm cultivator, now greatly amplified by the helmet, surged outward once more. Instantly, his perception expanded, sweeping across the entire mountain. He could sense everything—even the gaps between tree roots.

Boom!

Like a tidal wave, his divine sense flooded every crevice, probing deeper and deeper until at last, he detected faint traces of a blood-stained aura beneath a nearby mountain fissure. The depths of the crack were shrouded in darkness, revealing what appeared to be an underground cavern.

It seemed the culprit had made thorough preparations.

As Chu Liang pursued the kidnapper, he couldn't help but wonder—why was it that every time he left home, trouble seemed to follow? No matter his destination or purpose, he always found himself wrapped up in some unexpected crisis.

Was he the unlucky one? Or were the bad guys simply too unfortunate to run into him?

Boom!

Slashing forward with the Demon-Slaying Sword, Chu Liang cut a clear path through the mountain fissure and into the underground cavern.

The passage stretched deep and long, yet it was dry and clean—signs that someone had been maintaining it. Apart from the lingering demonic qi, fresh droplets of blood had begun to appear on the ground—proof that the person ahead was seriously injured.

His swordlight illuminated the darkness as he pressed forward swiftly. Before long, he spotted them.

A shadowy figure strode ahead, side by side with the Dragon Dancer, whose vibrant robes stood out in stark contrast. The two were approaching a faint opening of light in the distance and were just a few steps from escaping. The moment they heard the approaching sword qi, both figures visibly tensed.

"Where do you think you're going?!" Chu Liang's voice rang out like thunder.

He raised his longsword, its sharp edge crackling with power.

This time, even if he held back and used only twenty percent of his strength, there was no way the injured kidnapper could escape again!

Yet, just as he was about to strike, something unexpected happened. The Dragon Dancer suddenly turned around and cried out, "Nooo!"

...

Just as Chu Liang was about to strike down the kidnapper and rescue the Dragon Dancer, she suddenly turned around.

She lashed out with her palm to intercept his attack, clearly blocking the sword for the kidnapper.

Chu Liang's sword froze mid-swing, stopping just before it could land the finishing blow.

Chu Liang barely reacted to her strike. With her cultivation level, likely in the fourth or fifth realm, and her focus on the Dao of Dancing, she posed no real threat to him. Even if he stood still and let her hit him as much as she wanted, she wouldn't leave a scratch.

However, to prevent his Jiuli Soul Armor and transcendent form from reflexively injuring her, he flicked his wrist and threw the Demon-Binding Rope.

Whoosh!

With a flash of light, the Demon-Binding Rope shot forward, wrapping around the Dragon Dancer in a tight tortoise-shell restraint before she collapsed to the ground.

Chu Liang turned back toward the crevice, but the culprit was already gone. Even as he extended his divine sense, searching for any lingering traces, he found nothing—the kidnapper had completely vanished.

Chu Liang glanced down at the Dragon Dancer, still bound on the ground, but made no move to go after the kidnapper.

What had seemed like a straightforward kidnapping was clearly far more complicated than he had assumed. With how she reacted to the attack, the situation was clearly not as simple as it seemed. Since he didn't yet understand the full situation, he chose not to act recklessly.

At the very least, he had managed to rescue the Dragon Dancer safely and that was enough.

And yet...the way she looked at Chu Liang was of fear and trepidation. She looked even more afraid than when she had been taken away by the kidnapper.

"There's no need to be afraid," Chu Liang reassured her. "The bad guy is gone."

However, the Dragon Dancer's pretty eyes remained fixed on his face, and her expression clearly conveyed her thoughts: I'm not sure who the real bad guy is here...

"I'm not a bad guy. I'm a disciple of Mount Shu... Chu Liang. You might have heard my name before," Chu Liang introduced himself, hoping that his reputation would put her at ease.

But the moment he said his name, the Dragon Dancer looked even more scared!

"You're the disciple of Di Nufeng, the Great Devil of Mount Shu? That little monster, Chu Liang?!" she stammered, her voice trembling. Her slurred words made it clear that the Demon-Binding Rope's toxins were beginning to take effect.

"Where did you hear such nonsense? Miss, don't worry. We disciples of Mount Shu are righteous and upstanding. How could we possibly be the bad guys?"

As Chu Liang spoke, he reached into his robe and pulled out the Poison-Expulsion Whip to remove the toxins from her body.

Seeing this, the Dragon Dancer's eyes welled with tears as she choked out, "And you still claim you're not!"

In the pitch-black cave, she lay bound in an embarrassingly awkward position, while the man before her—claiming to be a good person—pulled out a whip.

He's not a bad guy. He's a pervert!

Chu Liang quickly explained, "Miss, please don't misunderstand. This is to remove the poison from your body."

"You even poisoned me too?!"

As soon as the Dragon Dancer said this, her vision darkened, and she fainted.

"Haaaaa," Chu Liang sighed, just about to begin the detoxification process when sudden noises echoed from outside the crevice.

Multiple flashes of light descended, illuminating the surroundings as figures moved into position, encircling the area.

A familiar figure appeared at the entrance of the crevice, peering into the cave. It was a woman with neatly cut short hair. Her sharp gaze pierced through the darkness and her expression was utterly cold and indifferent.

She was none other than Han Lingshuang, a high-ranking official of the Royal Wave Bureau from the Fuyao Kingdom's royal family, who had previously appeared at the Assembly of Immortal Sects.

She yelled into the cave, "Demon inside! Listen up! We have you surrounded. Escape is impossible. If you know what's best for you, release the Dragon Dancer and surrender immediately!"

Seeing that it was someone familiar, Chu Liang shouted back, "Esteemed Senior Han, I am Chu Liang of Mount Shu! I am not some—"

"Chu Liang!"

Han Lingshuang's eyes swept across the cave and her gaze grew colder, her killing intent surging.

The scene before her was disgusting. A woman lay bound in an embarrassingly twisted position, while a man stood over her, holding a whip. It was an unbearable sight.

Even though it was hard to believe that a prodigy of an immortal sect would do something like this, if it was Di Nufeng's disciple from Mount Shu... it suddenly seemed very possible.

Without hesitation, she raised her voice again. "I urge you not to ruin your future! Release the Dragon Dancer immediately and surrender! This is not Mount Shu. You cannot do as you please here! Stop resisting pointlessly! And stop hoping for a lucky escape..."

She paused for a moment before adding, "You should know the old saying of the Yu Dynasty. 'A true hero recognizes the situation and acts accordingly!'"

Chapter 762: I Am Not Mad

Inside the Royal Wave Bureau, Chu Liang sat behind a desk, patiently explaining to several black-clad cultivators, "I've already explained the situation very clearly. I acted out of righteousness. You must investigate carefully. You can't let a good person feel disheartened.."

As a prodigy of the Mount Shu Sect, a seventh-realm Eminent One, and the Imperial Younger Brother of the Yu Dynasty, the Royal Wave Bureau naturally treated him with the utmost respect and caution. They had merely invited him back from outside the city for questioning.

Chu Liang cooperated without resistance, recounting the events once again. Seeing the hesitation in their expressions, he spread his hands and said, "Just think about it. Would I really abduct the Dragon Dancer in broad daylight? If she's awake now, you can confirm the details with the Flower Pavilion."

"We have already sent someone to inquire," the lead cultivator replied quietly. "The Dragon Dancer has regained consciousness, and Commander Han has gone to see her. We believe that a prodigy from an immortal sect would never do such a thing, but..."

The cultivator didn't dare to finish his sentence.

He wanted to say: After all, your teacher is Di Nufeng. If it were you, it wouldn't be that surprising.

The officers of the Royal Wave Bureau exchanged uneasy glances, a trace of fear flickering in their eyes.

They might have only heard about what Di Nufeng and others of her generation accomplished at the Assembly of Immortal Sects, but when it came to Chu Liang's generation? They had seen it with their own eyes.

Back then, Chu Liang had single-handedly launched a night raid on Misty Waters City, crushing the Fuyao Kingdom's dream in a way that defied all logic. From that day forward, his name became a lingering shadow in the hearts of the Fuyao Kingdom.

Bam!

The door suddenly swung open, and Han Lingshuang strode in, her expression as cold as ever.

"The Dragon Dancer has woken up. She confirmed that you weren't the first to abduct her," she stated.

Chu Liang let out a bitter laugh. "So what does that mean? That I was the second?"

Han Lingshuang crossed her arms. "To be fair, given how you acted in the cavern, it's hard not to misunderstand..."

She raised a hand, signaling that Chu Liang was free to go.

She continued, "Regardless, we believe you."

Chu Liang rose from his seat and stepped into the corridor of the Royal Wave Bureau. The black stone walls were lined with intricate carvings of cranes, turtles, hounds, and horses and looked rather eerie.

Just as he was about to leave, the rhythmic tap of footsteps echoed from the far end of the corridor.

A towering figure slowly approached.

The man was clad in heavy black iron armor, each step causing his armor to clatter softly. His presence was as imposing as a mountain. A pure black mask concealed his face, leaving only a pair of piercing, intimidating eyes visible.

Behind him followed the slender Dragon Dancer. She wrapped her arms around herself, appearing frail and helpless beside the towering armored figure.

Upon seeing the man, Han Lingshuang gave a slight nod and bowed. "General."

"Commander Han." The armored figure's voice was deep and resonant, like rolling thunder. His gaze shifted to Chu Liang. "This must be Young Hero Chu of Mount Shu? I had the honor of witnessing your prowess six years ago."

With the way Han Lingshuang addressed him, his identity wasn't hard to guess. Chu Liang returned the bow and greeted him respectfully. "General of the Royal Wave Bureau, greetings to you."

The General of the Royal Wave Bureau held the highest authority within the bureau. At times, his power was great enough to stand on equal footing with the ruler of the Fuyao Kingdom.

"Young Hero Chu, this must be your first visit to the Fuyao Kingdom," the black-armored general said in a muffled tone. "Take your time sightseeing. The scenery here is quite pleasant."

With that, he strode away, his iron boots clanking against the stone floor.

As the Dragon Dancer passed by Chu Liang, she leaned in slightly and whispered, "Thank you."

Then, without another word, she followed the general, disappearing into the depths of the corridor.

As Han Lingshuang led Chu Liang out of the bureau, he glanced back and asked curiously, "The Dragon Dancer's not leaving?"

"The Dragon Dancer's real name is Jing Yue. She is the adopted daughter of General Jing Wuya of the Royal Wave Bureau and lives within the bureau," Han Lingshuang said as she walked ahead. "The culprit behind her abduction has yet to be caught, so you should be careful—"

"Be careful of retaliation?" Chu Liang asked with a smile.

Han Lingshuang paused for a moment, glanced at Chu Liang, and then turned away. "I suppose you're not the type to worry about that."

"Oh, by the way, I haven't seen your disciples around. They must be among the elites of the Royal Wave Bureau by now, right? I remember... Hu Sanlang. He was really skilled with his saber."

Han Lingshuang suddenly stopped. Silence hung between them before she slammed open the door ahead and said coldly, "Be careful out there."

The door creaked as it swung open, allowing moonlight to spill into the corridor. Without another word, she turned and walked away.

...

When Chu Liang returned to the courtyard, both Xue Lingxue and Tie Chui looked at him in shock and asked, "We heard you got caught for kidnapping a dancer?"

"..." Chu Liang was momentarily speechless. "Who told you that?"

Both of them pointed at Lin Bei at the same time.

"Heheheh!" Lin Bei let out a hearty laugh. "Of course, I knew you wouldn't do something like that. But I just came back from the Royal Wave Bureau after asking around, and that's what they were saying, so I just passed it along."

Chu Liang shook his head. "It was just a misunderstanding. But there's something strange about the Royal Wave Bureau in the Fuyao Kingdom. I just saw their general..."

"Jing Wuya?" Lin Bei immediately said the name.

"Yeah," Chu Liang said with a nod. "Do you know anything about him?"

That brief encounter left Chu Liang with an odd feeling about the general. There was something about Jing Wuya's gaze—something unsettlingly familiar.

Lin Bei explained, "He's probably the most powerful general in the history of the Royal Wave Bureau, with real authority."

After hearing Lin Bei's explanation, Chu Liang gained a clearer understanding of the current state of affairs in the Fuyao Kingdom.

For many years, the Royal Wave Bureau had always been controlled by either a member of the royal family or a trusted subordinate of the king. In a small kingdom like the Fuyao Kingdom, consolidating power was far easier than in a vast empire like the Yu Dynasty.

As long as the ruler ensured that his most trusted officials occupied key positions, he could maintain absolute control over the entire kingdom. As a result, things had always been very peaceful.

However, several decades ago, Jing Wuya became the first non-royal to rise to the position of General of the Royal Wave Bureau. By being able to get this position, it would have meant that he was absolutely loyal. However, after seizing power, he led the bureau in a different direction. The Royal Wave Bureau, once firmly under the king's control, grew more assertive, gradually asserting its own authority and breaking free from the king's control.

Now, the struggle between the king and the general had escalated, both in the open and behind the scenes. One by one, members of the royal family within the Royal Wave Bureau were being eliminated, and those with keen perception could already sense a storm brewing over the kingdom.

However, the Fuyao Kingdom was backed by the Penglai Supreme Sect, which meant that the Penglai Supreme Sect would never allow chaos to break out in the kingdom. Therefore, if Jing Wuya really wanted to cause trouble, it was unknown as to what methods he could use.

"Three years ago, one of the king's guards attempted to assassinate him and came close to succeeding. Since then, the king of the Fuyao Kingdom has rarely dared to step outside the palace," Lin Bei said.

Lowering his voice slightly, he added, "Rumor has it that Jing Wuya was the one orchestrating the attack."

He paused for a moment before continuing, "Oh, and the assassin? He's someone you know. Do you remember Hu Sanlang from the Assembly of Immortal Sects?"

Chu Liang was quite surprised. "Hu Sanlang?"

The youth that unleashed the Wave-Cleaving Saber Strike... held great respect for Han Lingshuang. With Han Lingshuang being a member of the royal family, shouldn't he be part of the king's faction?

Chu Liang didn't have all the details nor could he be bothered to spend his time thinking about this. To a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, the Fuyao Kingdom's internal strife was nothing more than a dog-eat-dog struggle. No matter who ended up ruling, they would still bow to the Penglai Supreme Sect. In the grand scheme of things, the outcome was unlikely to benefit the Mount Shu Sect or the Yu Dynasty in any way.

He glanced at Lin Bei and said, "You're quite well-informed."

Lin Bei grinned, waving the token in his hand. "It's all thanks to your Circle of Immortal Friends. This kind of news isn't exactly a secret and I just did a little digging. Nowadays, we exchange information in the Circle of Immortal Friends all the time. It's really convenient."

Chu Liang had launched the Circle of Immortal Friends, but he rarely had the time to check in on what was going on inside it.

"Heh..." He was about to chuckle when a sudden thought crossed his mind. His expression shifted, and he looked up sharply. "You didn't already spread the news about me being arrested for abducting a dancer, did you?"

"Uh..." Lin Bei's smile stiffened. He hesitated before mumbling, "I might have... mentioned it once or twice."

Chu Liang hurriedly tapped into the Circle of Immortal Friends Token and saw a flood of messages on his screen.

[Passerby A]: "I believe Young Hero Chu would never do something like that!"

[Passerby B]: "Hard to say. You never truly know a person. Some people may look refined on the surface but be complete perverts behind closed doors."

[Passerby C]: "But he and Jiangjiang are a couple! I can't accept this!"

[Passerby D]: "Huh? If that's the case... does that mean I still have a chance with Jiangjiang?"

"..." Chu Liang felt so speechless.

He didn't rush to explain himself in the Circle of Immortal Friends. Instead, he dragged Lin Bei out and said through gritted teeth, "You were the one who spread the rumor, so you're going to clear my name. Right now."

He then took out the United Hearts Jade, hesitated for a moment, and sent a message.

[Chu] : "There were some rumors circulating in the Circle of Immortal Friends just now. Did you see them?"

[Jiang]: "I saw."

[Chu]: "They're all lies. I just happened to witness the abduction and stepped in to save her."

[Jiang]: "So it's true that you went to watch a dancer perform?"

[Chu]: "I was only there because Lin Bei dragged me along to meet a business partner. It was just a bit of socializing. I happened to be in the Fuyao Kingdom because I'm helping Miss Xue with something."

[Jiang]: "Helping Miss Xue with something?"

[Jiang]: "..."

[Chu]: "Please don't be mad. Let me explain everything properly."

[Jiang]: "I am not mad."

Chapter 763: Hu Sanlang

The moon hung high in the sky.

Chu Liang had finally managed to explain everything clearly. Thankfully, Senior Sister Jiang was not the kind of girl who would make a fuss over unreasonable things. If not, this would have dragged on for three to five days with the chance that this might be brought up at every New Year's festival in the years to come.

After everything calmed down, Chu Liang took out the Demon-Binding Rope and frowned.

The Demon-Binding Rope was a very effective movement-restricting enchanted tool. However, the tortoise-shell bondage method had caused him endless trouble. Over the years, he had lost count of how many times people had mistaken him for a pervert because of it.

A sudden thought struck him—if he were to awaken a spirit within the rope today, could it gain self-awareness and no longer be limited to just the tortoise-shell bondage method?

The only problem was that he wasn't sure if it would work. After all, when he had awakened the Demon-Revealing Brick, its intelligence seemed far from sharp. Just last night, he had spoken to it, and it only responded this morning. He had no idea what was causing such a severe delay, but it made normal communication impossible.

Would the Demon-Binding Rope end up the same way? Well, there was only one way to find out.

With that thought in mind, Chu Liang channeled his cultivation energy and activated the Talisman of Life Restoration.

Whoosh!

A flash of golden light burst forth, and in an instant, the Demon-Binding Rope floated midair, its surface shimmering with spiritual energy. Moments later, the radiance faded, leaving behind a flickering trace of divine light.

"It worked?" Chu Liang's eyes lit up with excitement.

Just then, a sinister laugh echoed through the room. "Hee-hee-hee..."

The voice came from the Demon-Binding Rope.

"Darling, you in the mood for something thrilling?"

"..."

Chu Liang felt speechless. As he watched the Demon-Binding Rope flying in mid-air, he had an ominous feeling.

He quickly spoke up, "Hold on, don't get too excited. Let me explain first."

The Demon-Binding Rope seemed to have figured out the situation and he called out loudly, "Master! I know! You have given me life. I will make sure to bind your enemies tightly! I'll make them tremble, fear, cry out, submit to you, and address you as master..."

"Stop! Stop! Stop!"

Chu Liang frantically waved his hands to cut it off. This was getting way out of hand.

Why does this Demon-Binding Rope sound like some old pervert? It's almost as though it has been possessed by Lin Bei. Does it have something to do with the land it was born in?

"I awakened a spirit in you because I wanted to discuss something," Chu Liang said, trying to reason with it. "Can we not use the tortoise-shell bondage method when tying people up from now on?"

The Demon-Binding Rope did a spin in mid-air while responding, "Of course! How could I ever disobey my master's command?"

Chu Liang finally let out a breath of relief. "Good."

It looks like this perverted artifact spirit can be reasoned with. At least it's better than the Demon-Revealing Brick.

The Demon-Binding Rope let out a mischievous chuckle. "Heheh, I get it!"

Hm? Get what exactly?

Chu Liang frowned and was about to explain clearly when a faint fluctuation of spiritual energy rippled through the courtyard. If his cultivation level had been any lower, he would not have noticed the energy fluctuations at all.

A glint flashed in his eyes as he asked, "Who's there?"

In the next instant, he used Dimension Compression and appeared in the courtyard.

Beneath the corridor's pillars, a shadowy figure lurked, hidden so seamlessly in the darkness that it was nearly undetectable. It was clear they were using some kind of advanced stealth technique.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang drew his sword!

"Nooo!" the shadowy figure shouted as he dashed out with his hands raised.

He then spoke with such a deep and firm voice, "Chu Liang, I have something to tell you!"

The man was clad in black, his face half-covered in grotesque scars. Wounds ran jaggedly across one side of his features, leaving him almost unrecognizable. But Chu Liang recognized the other half of his face.

With just a glance, he knew that this was someone he had fought before.

"Hu Sanlang?"

Chu Liang couldn't help but wonder, It has been six years since they last met. How did Hu Sanlang end up like this?

Just as the two locked eyes, a golden streak of light suddenly shot out from the room along with a yell, "Oh, darling~ Surrender at once!"

Whoosh!

With that golden streak of light, Hu Sanlang was completely bound.

...

Back in the room, Chu Liang's expression darkened as he stood over the tightly bound Hu Sanlang. He lowered his voice and commanded, "Let him go."

The Demon-Binding Rope, sensing Chu Liang's displeasure, asked, "What's wrong? I did as you said and used a different binding method."

"I told you not to use that perverted tortoise-shell bondage method..." Chu Liang said while he yanked on one end of the rope. "But I didn't tell you to replace it with something even more perverted!"

At this moment, Hu Sanlang lay sprawled on the ground. His arms were stretched straight out and bound with his legs in an X-shape posture. Confusion filled his eyes. He had expected that he would suffer when he came to see Chu Liang tonight, but he really didn't expect this kind of hardship... His brain almost couldn't process what was happening.

"Master, you don't like this one either?" the Demon-Binding Rope asked. "Should I try another?"

"That won't be necessary."

Chu Liang quickly stuffed it into the White Pagoda, saving himself from further embarrassment.

Then, he helped Hu Sanlang to his feet and said seriously, "That was an accident."

"Ah..." Hu Sanlang let out a long breath of relief and nodded. "Good."

The awkward silence in the room stretched on.

Finally, Chu Liang was the first to break the silence. "You were the one who kidnapped the Dragon Dancer while having that demon core in your mouth, right?"

"Yes," Hu Sanlang answered with a bitter chuckle. "I knew I wouldn't be able to hide it from you."

"I had only just noticed that your aura was very similar to that kidnapper," Chu Liang explained. He then asked, "Why did you come looking for me tonight?"

"I..." Hu Sanlang hesitated for a moment. Then he gnashed his teeth and suddenly fell to his knees with a thud. "I came to ask you for help!"

"Get up first!"

Chu Liang quickly pulled Hu Sanlang to his feet while thinking, What is going on? Why is everyone suddenly coming to me for help at the same time?

Once he helped Hu Sanlang up, Hu Sanlang looked at him and said at a slow pace, "The Dragon Dancer... is my lover."

Chu Liang listened as Hu Sanlang recounted the past few years of his life.

After the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the Fuyao Kingdom's team, despite not achieving a high ranking, did not get much of a scolding. After all, they had been defeated by the Mount Shu Sect, who ultimately emerged as the champions of the assembly, so their loss was hardly a disgrace.

After the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the Fuyao Kingdom's team took up positions at the Royal Wave Bureau. Because of their relationship with Han Lingshuang, they were considered members of the royal family and soon became the king's personal guards.

It was during this time that Hu Sanlang met a beautiful girl who grew up in the Royal Wave Bureau and had a mysterious background. She was always seen dancing on the other side of the courtyard walls.

It didn't take long for the two to fall in love and become a couple.

Her name was Jing Yue.

Then, one fateful day, Jing Yue asked Hu Sanlang to meet her outside the city, deep within the mountains, and Hu Sanlang eagerly agreed. However, the one waiting for him there was not his lover, but a group of powerful cultivators. It was an ambush and Hu Sanlang was severely injured with his face disfigured. In the end, he suffered a fatal strike and tumbled into the ravine below.

"If it had been anyone else, they would have died. However, they had no idea that I was raised in a tiger's den deep in the mountains!"

Even as Hu Sanlang recounted what had happened, his eyes burned with rage.

As he lay on the brink of death, a tiger demon from the mountains saved him and brought him back to its lair. He remained there, slowly recovering for more than a year until his wounds were mostly healed and he was able to leave the mountainous area.

When Hu Sanlang returned to Canglang City, he discovered that he had been framed as a criminal that had tried to assassinate the king. As for the woman he loved, she had become the City of Azure Waves' dazzling Dragon Dancer.

As Hu Sanlang hid in the shadows, he realized that he had been deceived. Seeing as she had not gone to meet him that day, it was quite possible she had been working with the group of people who had ambushed him.

However, he couldn't bother to dwell on his pain. He had to find his esteemed teacher, Han Lingshuang, and tell her the truth. Yet, before he could even approach the Royal Wave Bureau, he heard light, familiar footsteps behind him. The Dragon Dancer had followed him.

Hu Sanlang was shocked. His face was disfigured and he had covered his face with a veil. Even so, she had been able to recognize him.

To this, the Dragon Dancer had simply said, "The way you look at me is different from anyone else. Even if you became a beast, I would still recognize you at a glance."

After a long and complicated exchange of emotions, they finally opened their hearts to each other.

It turned out that the Dragon Dancer was the adopted daughter of Jing Wuya, the General of the Royal Wave Bureau. From a young age, she had been raised and trained under his watchful eye to be a pawn in his schemes. One of her tasks had been to frame Hu Sanlang.

Jing Wuya possessed a powerful enchanted mirror known as the Mirror of Captured Light. When the mirror reflected someone's image, it could store their reflection. If another person with a similar physique was found, the reflection stored in the mirror could then be used to make that person indistinguishable from the original.

The Dragon Dancer had once secretly used the Mirror of Captured Light to capture Hu Sanlang's reflection. However, when the time came to kill him, she hesitated because she had truly fallen in love with this young man with such passion and enthusiasm during this time.

However, Jing Wuya didn't care about her feelings for Hu Sanlang. He sent Hu Sanlang a message in her name and tricked him to the outskirts of the city, where the ambush happened.

He had also located an assassin whose physique was similar to Hu Sanlang and had the assassin infiltrate close to the king.

The assassin failed in the end and was killed with all traces of his existence erased. Jing Wuya even used this opportunity to diminish those that did not stand with him and greatly weakened Han Lingshuang's influence in the Royal Wave Bureau.

The reason the Dragon Dancer had stopped Hu Sanlang from returning to the bureau and seeing his teacher was that everyone in the bureau was monitored by Jing Wuya. If he showed up in the bureau, he would never be able to escape again.

Hearing this, Chu Liang recalled the strange expression he had seen on Han Lingshuang's face earlier today. Perhaps Han Lingshuang had already sensed that something was wrong.

The Dragon Dancer urged Hu Sanlang to leave Canglang City. "With your talent, as long as you go far away, you can make a name for yourself anywhere. Don't stay in this dangerous place."

However, Hu Sanlang wanted to take her with him. Still, she shook her head and expressed that she couldn't leave.

After a long internal struggle, Hu Sanlang ultimately decided that he would stay in the Fuyao Kingdom. He would investigate Jing Wuya from the shadows and find the chance to bring him down.

Yet, the deeper he dug, the more terrified he became.

Jing Wuya's influence had seeped into every corner of the Fuyao Kingdom. Jing Wuya had even established connections within the Penglai Supreme Sect, ensuring they ignored the turmoil within Fuyao Kingdom.

If not for the unwavering loyalty of the Fuyao citizens to the royal family, Jing Wuya would have had enough power to overthrow the monarch of the Fuyao Kingdom.

And now, the moment had come—Jing Wuya was finally revealing his fangs, and Hu Sanlang could no longer sit still.

"If you wanted to stop his schemes from succeeding, why did you abduct the Dragon Dancer?" Chu Liang asked curiously.

He now understood why the Dragon Dancer had turned against Jing Wuya. After all, she and Hu Sanlang were truly in love. In the end, his intervention had almost caused the couple to break up. But he still couldn't grasp why Hu Sanlang had taken such a reckless action now, after years of careful planning.

He had endured years of hiding in the shadows, only to come dangerously close to losing it all in a moment of impulse.

Hu Sanlang frowned and said, "The king has rarely left the palace since the last incident, and security around him is tighter than ever. But..."

He hesitated before continuing. "There's one little-known secret. He is utterly obsessed with guqin and is a devoted admirer of Xue Lingxue. During the South Melody Conservatory's last selection for their head disciple, the king even disguised himself and secretly traveled to the Yu Dynasty just to see her.

"I suspect the general's next scheme revolves around this obsession. He is likely planning to have Jing Yue impersonate Xue Lingxue... and assassinate the king."

Chapter 764: Charge to the Next Building

The biggest event in the City of Azure Waves today was, without a doubt, Miss Xue's concert.

It was what people called a citywide sensation.

As the Kingdom of the Wind, Flower, Snow, and Moon, this nation had an unparalleled passion for dance and music, a love that extended from the highest nobles to the common folk. The South Melody Conservatory, revered as the holy land of music across the nine provinces, was held in especially high regard here. Though disciples of the South Melody Conservatory had never traveled eastward to this land before, every year during the grand selection of the head disciple of the South Melody Conservatory, thousands from the Fuyao Kingdom would journey across the seas to the Yu Dynasty, just to cheer for their favorites.

Now, with Xue Lingxue making her first-ever appearance in the Fuyao Kingdom, the Flower Pavilion, which hosted the event, had gone to great lengths to accommodate the audience. They tore down the surrounding walls, leaving only support pillars. They even purchased and demolished more than a dozen nearby buildings to ensure that the performance could be seen by more people.

Such a massive event was rare in the entire history of the Fuyao Kingdom.

"Didn't expect to be this popular here, did you?" Chu Liang said as he looked at Xue Lingxue with a smile while being seated on a balcony on a rooftop.

As cultivators, their keen senses far surpassed those of ordinary people, so there was no need for them to squeeze into the dense crowd. They could easily see the performance in the Flower Pavilion from the surrounding buildings.

Meanwhile, across from them, a towering building was already surrounded by over a hundred saber-wielding and armored guards. In a short while, the King of the Fuyao Kingdom would arrive there to watch the performance. For the past few years, the king had remained in seclusion, rarely appearing in public. The fact that he showed up for this event was proof of his deep admiration for Xue Lingxue.

With her face veiled in white cloth, Xue Lingxue spoke softly, "I never knew the Fuyao Kingdom held such a refined appreciation for music. I should speak with the Conservatory Master about arranging more performances here in the future."

"That would be wonderful," replied Hu Sanlang, his face concealed beneath a black hood. "The people of Fuyao Kingdom have long admired the music and dance of the South Melody Conservatory."

"The same goes for Mount Shu," Lin Bei added, nodding in agreement.

"Oh, please." Tie Chui rolled her eyes. "Is it really the music you're admiring? I'm even embarrassed to expose you."

As Chu Liang gazed toward the distant royal palace, he said, "They're here."

A procession of carriages and horses emerged from the palace gates, moving in a steady, orderly fashion. The lead carriage, drawn by an exotic beast, passed through the streets and alleys before coming to a stop beneath the towering building. Dozens of royal guards immediately formed a human barricade, escorting the person in the carriage inside.

Every window of the towering building was tightly sealed, blocking the view inside. No one dared probe with their divine sense, fearing they might alert someone inside.

As Lin Bei watched from afar, he remarked, "The King of the Fuyao Kingdom is heavily guarded. How could an assassination even be possible?"

Chu Liang responded, "The Dragon Dancer's cultivation level isn't high. Even if she manages to get close to the king as Xue Lingxue, the chances of a successful assassination are slim."

He had felt doubtful about this ever since he heard Hu Sanlang mention it the day before.

The current king of the Fuyao Kingdom, Han Lingshou, was over thirty years old. Though he had yet to reach the Dao Attainment Realm, he had managed to cultivate to the sixth realm thanks to the abundant resources at his disposal. With the Dragon Dancer's cultivation level, even if she could catch the king by surprise, it seemed highly unlikely that she would succeed in killing him.

However, since Jing Wuya had gone through the trouble of having someone impersonate Xue Lingxue, there was undoubtedly a deeper scheme at play. For now, they had no choice but to observe the situation. Whether it was to expose the fake Xue Lingxue or thwart the General of the Royal Wave Bureau's plans, they had to get involved.

Meanwhile, inside the towering building across from them, in a place beyond their sight...

Han Lingshou, the king of the Fuyao Kingdom, ascended the stairs with an expression of cold indifference. With his high cheekbones, slim-shaped face, and narrow eyes, he looked like someone capable of exerting authority without showing any anger. Two elderly palace attendants, dressed in

black brocade, followed closely behind him. As they climbed, guards were stationed at each level, ensuring tight security throughout the building.

By the time Han Lingshou reached the top floor, only the two white-haired, black-robed attendants remained by his side. As he stepped onto the top floor, his composed demeanor crumbled in an instant.

"Miss Xue! Miss Xue!" Han Lingshou eagerly rubbed his hands together as he rushed toward the balcony. "A tune kissed by frost, Jiangnan lost beneath falling snow!"[1]

The palace attendant behind him coughed and reminded, "Your Majesty, please keep calm and be serious."

"..." Han Lingshou's expression froze for a moment before he reluctantly slumped into his seat and mumbled, "There's no one else here anyway."

The two palace attendants then stepped forward, drawing back the curtains and removing the dust covers draped over the screen and desk. As the fabric fluttered down with a rustling sound, a large, bright mirror was revealed at the side of the screen, showing the reflection of the figures inside the room.

...

"Xue Lingxue! Xue Lingxue!"

As a figure holding a guqin appeared on the high platform, thunderous cheers erupted from all directions. The woman on stage had radiant, porcelain-white skin, and her eyes were as soft and hazy as mist drifting through the clouds. If it wasn't Xue Lingxue, who else could it be?

Upon seeing the woman on stage, Lin Bei gasped. He stared at the performer and then turned to Xue Lingxue beside him. "She looks exactly like Xue Lingxue!"

Indeed, the woman's appearance and figure were a mirror image of Xue Lingxue's.

"If she weren't identical, how could I have mistaken her for Xue Lingxue?" Tie Chui responded. "And not only does she look the same, but she plays the guqin just like Lingxue. That's what really confuses me."

This was exactly what puzzled Chu Liang.

Even if one could mimic appearances, how could they copy someone's instrument-playing skills? This could not be achieved through any divine skill or spell.

Zing!

With a single pluck of the strings, the performance began.

As the melody flowed gently through the air, the surrounding crowd gradually became entranced by its beauty. The woman on stage, resembling Xue Lingxue, played a piece titled "The Melody of the Night Wind Over Ping River." With its soft and soothing notes, the piece had the power to calm the heart, even lulling listeners into a peaceful slumber.

By the time the melody reached its midpoint, even the birds flying overhead had paused and perched on tree branches, completely captivated by the tune.

"This piece..." Even Xue Lingxue was slightly shocked. "It's clearly better than my own playing! Her mastery of the Dao of Music is incredibly profound!"

"No, something's wrong." Chu Liang suddenly spoke up. "This can't be the Dragon Dancer. She doesn't even need to get close to the King of Fuyao Kingdom to assassinate him. The goal has already been achieved with this piece!"

As he spoke, he shot forward like a gust of wind, heading toward the towering building across from them.

The Dao essence of "The Melody of the Night Wind Over Ping River" had enveloped the building, affecting those inside more intensely than the audience outside. At this moment, the royal guards were likely trapped in an illusion.

The assassination had begun!

By using the fake Xue Lingxue's performance, they had lured the king out of the palace. Then, they entranced the guards with the melody. Meanwhile, someone inside the building must have been cooperating with them.

Bam!

Chu Liang crashed into the top floor, finding himself in a spacious, silent chamber. In front of him was a wide-open balcony, and the only object in the room was a chair.

Suddenly, he heard a noise behind him. The moment he turned around, he saw a mirror along with his own reflection staring back at him!

"Go!"

With a flick of his wrist, Chu Liang sent out a streak of multicolored light, which instantly dispersed into a mist of seven hues, shrouding the mirror.

Rumble!

The mirror flipped, and two assassins, dressed in black armor with light plating, sprang out. Armed with strange double-bladed weapons, they spun around and lunged at Chu Liang.

However, Chu Liang could not be bothered to waste his time here. With a single motion, his wings spread open, unleashing a thunderous boom.

Ever since he proved his understanding of the Great Dao of Severing the Void, his once-mighty Transcendent Dragon Form had become noticeably weaker compared to his skills rooted in the Dao of the Sword. As a result, he rarely engaged in physical combat anymore.

However, these two assassins had far weaker cultivation, making it a waste to use his Sword Strike of Severing the Void on them. It was better to conserve his foundational qi for the true enemies that would appear later.

Boom!

With a loud boom, the two assassins' attacks struck Chu Liang's dragon wings, but the force was immediately redirected back at them. They were sent flying backward, crashing into the walls before collapsing to the ground and appearing completely motionless. Their bones and tendons had been completely shattered, leaving no doubt that they wouldn't survive.

Chu Liang's Transcendent Dragon Form was only weaker in comparison to his sword cultivation. Against these assassins, even the recoil from his wings unleashed enough power to kill them.

He transformed into a gust of wind again and charged downward. Upon reaching the third floor, he was met with a gruesome sight.

The floor was drenched in blood, with the bodies of palace attendants and royal guards scattered in utter chaos. At the center of it all stood a tall figure in iron armor, like a devil incarnate. With one hand, he crushed the head of an elderly palace attendant, one of the two dressed in black cloaks.

Bam!

The figure in iron armor was the General of the Royal Wave Bureau, Jing Wuya!

He had taken action himself.

The palace attendant was at the seventh realm and he was likely the king's most important personal guard. Yet, he was no match for Jing Wuya and was gruesomely killed right there.

Another palace attendant, slightly weaker in cultivation, lay slain in a pool of blood. Meanwhile, Han Lingshou, the king, was shaken to his core and desperately tried to break through the walls to escape.

However, the moment he collided with the wall, a barrier of light rebounded him.

The entire building had been sealed with an enchanted formation; otherwise, a massacre of this scale would have surely alerted those outside.

With his armor drenched in blood, Jing Wuya glanced at Chu Liang and spoke in a voice as deep as rolling thunder, "Disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, why bother meddling in this..."

While he was talking, he raised his fist and punched.

Boom!

In the blink of an eye, his iron-clad fist struck the spot where Chu Liang had just been.

But Chu Liang had already moved ten zhang away using Dimension Compression. With his back against the wall, he drew the Demon-Slaying Sword, flipping it into his palm.

Shing!

A surge of swordlight erupted, engulfing Jing Wuya in a fierce tide of sword qi. Yet, when the energy receded, his heavy armor only bore surface scratches, without a single deep mark.

Jing Wuya had blocked the sword strike.

"Hah..." Jing Wuya exhaled sharply. He had successfully protected himself from injury, but it hadn't been easy.

When he raised his eyes once more, he realized that the room was empty. On the far side, a crack had appeared in the wall of the building—it was clear now that Chu Liang's true intent was not to fight but to shatter the formation.

Not only had Chu Liang escaped, but Han Lingshou had also vanished.

Jing Wuya slowly murmured a name under his breath. "Chu Liang..."

Chapter 765: An Extra Me Won't Make a Difference

When Chu Liang went back to the courtyard, he told the others what had happened after he entered the building. He couldn't help but remark, "Such a tough armor."

Earlier, he had sensed that something was wrong and crashed into the tall building. He arrived just in time to see Jing Wuya, the General of the Royal Wave Bureau, murdering someone.

Initially, he had intended to fight. However, when he struck with his sword, he realized that even the Sword Strike of Severing the Void could not break through the heavy armor protecting Jing Wuya. If that was the case, it would be hard for him to win.

Moreover, the internal strife in the Fuyao Kingdom had nothing to do with him, and there was no point in fighting recklessly here. Even though he had gone there as a clone, the death of the clone would result in him losing a lot of valuable items, so he didn't think there was a need for him to take such a risk.

However, due to his promise to Hu Sanlang, he still took advantage of the chaos to rescue Han Lingshou, the king of the Fuyao Kingdom, and left with him.

Jing Wuya was powerful, but he would not be able to stop Chu Liang from leaving if that was what Chu Liang intended to do.

At this moment, Han Lingshou sat in the inner courtyard, appearing a bit confused. He stared at Chu Liang, Tie Chui, and Xue Lingxue...

His eyes lit up. "Eh? Miss Xue? You saved me?"

"I was the one who saved you..." Chu Liang said as he stepped forward, blocking Han Lingshou's line of sight. "I am Chu Liang of Mount Shu."

"Ah, many thanks, Young Hero Chu." Han Lingshou nodded in gratitude, but his head had already shifted past Chu Liang, refocusing on Xue Lingxue. "If it weren't for Miss Xue, I would have surely lost my life this time."

"If you hadn't left the palace to see Miss Xue, you might not have gotten into trouble in the first place," Chu Liang muttered, feeling quite speechless as he once again blocked the king's line of sight. Then he asked, "Your Majesty, you should start thinking about how to deal with the General of the Royal Wave Bureau, shouldn't you?"

If Jing Wuya had been the one who started this entire matter related to Xue Lingxue, it meant that they now had a common enemy. Taking him down would also resolve the issue with the fake Xue Lingxue.

Furthermore, Chu Liang had a feeling that even the matter concerning the Golden Toad had something to do with the mysterious enchanted artifact known as the Mirror of Captured Light. It was very likely that the Jing Wuya had some connection with the Celestial Charm Sect.

Fortunately, they had rescued the king of the Fuyao Kingdom, who still had a considerable amount of influence in the City of Azure Waves.

"Jing Wuya?" At the mention of this name, Han Lingshou's expression darkened. "Once I return to the palace and gather my forces, I will wipe out that treacherous villain and the entire Royal Wave Bureau!"

"You must not!" a stern voice interrupted him.

Hu Sanlang strode in from outside.

Earlier, while the others had rushed back with Chu Liang, Hu Sanlang had been out gathering intelligence. Now, he had returned in haste.

Han Lingshou shuddered at the sight of him. "You? Weren't you dead?"

Hu Sanlang stepped forward and bowed. "Your Majesty, I was framed by Jing Wuya and barely escaped with my life. He even had someone impersonate me to carry out an assassination..."

Chu Liang added, "I only arrived in time thanks to Hu Sanlang's warning."

"I see," Han Lingshou said and slammed the table with a heavy hand. "That old scoundrel..."

Then, as if suddenly struck by an amusing thought, he turned to Xue Lingxue and chuckled. "Miss Xue, your name has the character 'Ling' in it, and so does mine. Wouldn't you call that fate...?"

Lin Bei cut in without hesitation. "Coincidence. Pure coincidence."

Hearing this, Chu Liang pressed his temples and spoke up. "Your Majesty, can we focus on the important matters first?"

Seeing Chu Liang's displeasure, Han Lingshou quickly nodded. "Alright, alright."

Hu Sanlang frowned and said, "Jing Wuya has already spread the news that an assassin attempted an attack during the performance. He claims His Majesty had anticipated the threat and used a body double, who was killed in his place. According to him, the real king has already returned safely to the palace."

Upon hearing this, everyone realized the gravity of the situation.

It seemed Jing Wuya had successfully copied the king's appearance and seized the throne. Now, it would no longer be easy for the real king to return to the palace and reclaim his position.

When Han Lingshou heard that, he froze. Then, as the realization fully sank in, he slapped his thigh and exclaimed, "Oh, no! I've become the body double!"

...

"The Royal Wave Bureau has placed the entire city under lockdown," Hu Sanlang reported. "The palace and the outer city are heavily guarded. Leaving the city or entering the palace won't be easy. If His Majesty reveals himself recklessly, he'll be in grave danger."

Han Lingshou pondered for a moment before saying with a sigh, "So what do I do now? If I show myself, I'll be in danger. But if I don't, I won't be able to expose his scheme."

As he spoke, his gaze once again drifted toward Xue Lingxue. "Miss Xue, you're not married yet, are you? Would you mind someone a few years older?"

Lin Bei scoffed ruthlessly. "A few years? You're more than a full zodiac cycle ahead of her. If you had worked hard enough, you could have a daughter around her age. And besides, is this really the time for that?"

"..." Xue Lingxue was utterly speechless.

"To be honest, there's a simple solution," Chu Liang said. "Can't we just call for reinforcements using the Circle of Immortal Friends?"

With a single distress signal, thousands would come rushing in. No matter how strong Jing Wuya was, how many Di Nufengs could he possibly fend off?

The problem would be easily solved if his teacher arrived and unleashed a sweeping wave of fire, refining Jing Wuya's iron armor into molten slag.

Wanting to say something, Xue Lingxue uttered hesitantly, "But—"

Having already guessed her thoughts, Chu Liang interrupted, "Before anything else, we need to uncover the true identity of the fake Miss Xue."

By calling for reinforcement, they could easily overpower Jing Wuya. However, doing so would undoubtedly alert their real enemies, making it even harder to uncover the full truth.

After all, their primary goal in coming here was to investigate the imposter masquerading as Xue Lingxue.

Even with the Mirror of Captured Light, no one could perfectly replicate Xue Lingxue's guqin skills. Yet, this fake not only played with remarkable proficiency but also cultivated techniques from the South Melody Conservatory. That was very weird...

Could it be that someone within the South Melody Conservatory was a spy?

"How do we investigate?" Lin Bei asked in confusion. "At this point, we can't just go up to Jing Wuya and ask him directly, can we?"

"Why not?" Chu Liang suddenly countered.

"Huh?"

Everyone froze, caught off guard by his response.

Meanwhile, Han Lingshou glanced at Xue Lingxue and suddenly blurted out, "Miss Xue, your canine teeth resemble a tiger's fangs!"

"Oh, you! Shut up!" everyone shouted in unison. Even Hu Sanlang couldn't be bothered to show his king any respect.

Chu Liang, however, simply smiled. "If I investigate directly, I might find nothing. But what if His Majesty investigates? If the real king can't uncover the truth... what about the fake one?"

As he spoke, a misty swirl of energy formed in his palm, rapidly condensing into a brilliant, resplendent mirror.

This was one of the advantages of being a clone.

During his last journey, Chu Liang had discovered an intriguing phenomenon. Although his External Manifestation clone couldn't carry the same valuable artifacts as his real body, he could still access the White Pagoda. It was likely because the pagoda was linked to his soul, and since both his true form and clone shared the same soul, he could retrieve any enchanted tools stored within it, even as a clone.

Back inside the tower earlier, when the mysterious mirror had shone upon him, he had instinctively reacted, raising his hand and unleashing the Precious Phantom Spirit Embryo onto the mirror. The misty spiritual essence had not only blocked its reflection but also made direct contact with the artifact.

As he had suspected, it was none other than the legendary Mirror of Captured Light.

Now, as Chu Liang conjured the Mirror of Captured Light, he suddenly turned it toward Han Lingshou.

"Eh?" Han Lingshou flinched in surprise.

Then, to everyone's astonishment, when Chu Liang flipped the mirror around, Han Lingshou's reflection remained inside, lingering instead of vanishing.

Chu Liang reached out, pulling at the reflection, and merging the light with his body. As the radiant glow flickered around him, his facial features began to shift.

A moment later, an exact copy of Han Lingshou stood before them.

"And just like that..." Chu Liang said with a smirk. "It may be difficult for His Majesty to return to the palace, but it will be easy for me to sneak in. Since there are already two kings... one more won't make a difference."

Chapter 766: Three

Nightfall.

The City of Azure Waves was quiet, with the sea waves gently rocking the small boats.

The Fuyao Palace was located at the northeastern edge of the City of Azure Waves, built against the mountain with its back to the vast sea. This location was where the ancestor of the royal family left marks from cleaving waves and comprehended Dao.

If the city was under attack, this location made it easy to escape. After all, the enemies that could destroy the Fuyao Kingdom would more likely come from the nine provinces in the southwest.

This also provided Chu Liang with a convenient entry point. The front of the palace was heavily guarded, with layers of enchanted formations, making infiltration a laborious task. However, by using Wind Transformation as he advanced from the northern coast, he could bypass the first enchanted formation of the palace walls and enter the palace.

Han Lingshou, the true king, had drawn out the layout of the palace for Chu Liang, allowing him to move through the corridors as if he were strolling through his own home. With his current appearance, he truly was at home. After all, he looked exactly like Han Lingshou right now.

The Mirror of Captured Light, transformed from the Precious Phantom Spirit Embryo, would exist for fifteen minutes. However, any disguise cast during that time would remain intact. As long as Chu Liang didn't deliberately expose himself or get forced into revealing his true form, he could maintain this miserable facade indefinitely.

The king's bedchamber was heavily guarded, with nearly a hundred hidden and visible guards stationed around it, along with multiple layers of enchanted formations.

Whether this was due to the assassination attempt earlier in the day or if it was always this way, Chu Liang didn't care. To him, it wasn't a difficult obstacle. With his seventh-realm Wind Transformation, it wouldn't be difficult to bypass these guards whose cultivation level had yet to reach the Heavenly Gate.

If that seventh-realm palace attendant had been guarding here, things would have been trickier. However, Jing Wuya had already killed that palace attendant, and it would be nearly impossible to find a trusted Eminent One to replace them on such short notice.

Thus, Chu Liang made his way to the bedchamber easily.

The king's bedchamber was spacious, lavishly decorated in soft gold hues. A middle-aged man, identical in appearance to Han Lingshou, sat at the desk with a stern expression, seemingly engrossed in reviewing some documents.

The man Jing Wuya had found to impersonate the king had likely been chosen for his resemblance and had probably been briefed on a few mannerisms. Unfortunately, he had only studied how Han Lingshou acted in front of others. He had no idea how shameless the real king truly was. If he did, there was no way he'd still be sitting so properly while alone.

They had likely been aware of this risk, as all the close attendants had been dismissed from the bedchamber. They had left this lone impostor inside.

As a gust of wind swept through the room, Chu Liang suddenly showed up and pressed down on that fake king's head while demanding in a low voice, "Who are you?"

"Ah?" The false king shuddered and sternly declared, "I... I am the ruler of the Fuyao Kingdom! Who are you to dare trespass into my bedchamber?"

"You're the king of Fuyao Kingdom?" Chu Liang grabbed his shoulder and turned him around. "Then tell me—who do you think I am?"

The fake king turned around and saw that Chu Liang looked identical to the king. He immediately gasped and cried out, "Ahhhhhh!"

It was like a con artist running into the person he was impersonating—busted on the spot.

He immediately dropped to his knees. "Y-Your Majesty!"

"Enough nonsense. Answer my questions honestly, and you may be spared a harsher punishment." Chu Liang demanded, his voice cold. "If you dare lie, you should know what crime you're committing, don't you?"

"Forgive me, Your Majesty! Forgive me, Your Majesty!"

The fake king was clearly bewildered. He couldn't understand how the real king had suddenly gained such overwhelming power and he couldn't help but wonder, Has the king been hiding his strength all along?

There were things that this fake king could not understand, but one thing was crystal clear—his life was now in the hands of the man before him.

"Who sent you to impersonate me?" Chu Liang questioned.

"I-it was..."

The fake king hesitated to give the answer.

"It was Jing Wuya, wasn't it? And you still dare to cover for him!" Chu Liang growled. He seized the imposter by the throat, his fingers tightening slightly.

The fake king quickly pleaded, "Y-Your Majesty! Your Majesty! I was just stuttering! I was about to say it!"

"Let me make this clear. I already know everything about your scheme. Don't even think about deceiving me. The only reason I'm asking is to see how willing you are to confess," Chu Liang said coldly. "You should value this chance."

The fake king was utterly terrified. He frantically nodded while repeating, "I understand! I understand..."

"What method did Jing Wuya use to transform you into this form?" Chu Liang continued.

This time, the false king held nothing back and answered immediately. "The Mirror of Captured Light! Jing Wuya owns an enchanted tool by that name. The mirror can transform anyone's features into those of the person whose reflection it captures."

"Good. The answer this time is not bad," Chu Liang said, showing a face of satisfaction. He then asked again, "Is that fake Xue Lingxue working with you guys as well?"

"I don't know about that..." the fake king admitted. "I am just a low-ranking official in the Royal Wave Bureau and was suddenly chosen by Jing Wuya to impersonate the king. It's not like I had a choice! I didn't dare refuse, but beyond that, I wasn't involved in anything else..."

Chu Liang examined his expression and found no sign of deception. Just as he was about to ask other questions, a seductive voice suddenly called from outside the door.

"Your Majesty~"

...

Bang.

With a single tap of his finger on the fake king's forehead, Chu Liang knocked him unconscious. As the imposter collapsed limply to the floor, Chu Liang dragged the imposter under the bed and hid him well.

Only then did Chu Liang sit back down at the desk and call out, "Come in."

With a soft creak, the door opened, and a woman in a flowing gauze dress stepped inside. She moved with a seductive grace, her every glance exuding charm.

Shit.

Despite appearing calm, Chu Liang was really panicking. He realized that he had forgotten to ask Han Lingshou about the consorts that were closer to him.

"Your Majesty, I hear about the assassination attempt that happened today. I am sure you are deeply shaken," the girl said as she leaned closer. "I have just cooked a pot of soup for Your Majesty in hopes that it will calm your nerves."

"I wasn't really traumatized..." Chu Liang said as he nodded gently. When he saw that the woman was coming closer and was about to sit on his lap, he stood up in an abrupt manner. With his hands behind his back, he sighed. "It's just that many of the palace attendants and guards who accompanied me today have died. My heart is filled with sorrow."

"Haaaa," the woman sighed and stepped closer again. "Those two eunuchs, Guo and Yu, have always lectured Your Majesty, constantly reminding you to be dignified and proper, and even controlling what we do in bed. Haven't you told me long ago how fed up you were with them? From now on, we can finally..."

Her smile turned into an alluring smirk.

"How can you say that?" Chu Liang scolded as he flicked his hand. He then frowned and said, "They ultimately sacrificed their lives to save me. How could you talk ill of them like this?"

The woman was momentarily stunned. "There are no outsiders here. Why are you still speaking with such seriousness?"

Suddenly, her expression changed into one of shock. She questioned, "You... you're not an imposter, are you?"

Seeing her startled expression and the way she stepped back, seemingly ready to flee, Chu Liang felt speechless.

How improper is Han Lingshou normally that just a few words of decency were enough to expose me as an imposter?

With no other choice, Chu Liang flicked his hand, and the Demon-Binding Rope transformed into a streak of golden light, instantly wrapping around the woman in an intricate rear-binding technique, securing her arms firmly behind her back.

"Oh..." she gasped and fell to the ground.

Chu Liang restrained her first so that he could explain that he had been sent by the real Han Lingshou.

However, just as he was about to speak, heavy, iron-like footsteps echoed outside, accompanied by the synchronized voices of the guards calling, "General!"

Moments later, a report followed: "Your Majesty, the General of the Royal Wave Bureau requests to see you!"

Jing Wuya is here?

Jing Wuya is here? Why are they all coming so quickly?

Chu Liang's heart tightened. With no time to explain, he raised a finger and lightly tapped the woman's forehead, putting her into a deep sleep.

After a quick glance around, he pushed her under the bed and hid her there.

Only then did he sit back down at the desk and say, "Come in."

The grand doors of the bedchamber swung open once more, and the rhythmic clanking of heavy footsteps echoed as that towering, armored figure reappeared.

"Your Majesty..." Jing Wuya strode to the center of the chamber, his head held high. Then, as if sensing something amiss, his voice dropped into a deep, wary tone. "Consort Li was here?"

That woman is called Consort Li?

Chu Liang immediately responded, "Yes."

"Hmph." Jing Wuya let out a cold snort. "Do you remember what I strictly forbade you from doing?!"

Chu Liang's expression froze.

Oh, no. What was I... supposed to remember?

Chapter 767: Four

"Of course, I remember!" Chu Liang instinctively blurted out.

But the moment the words left his mouth, he froze. Countless thoughts flashed through his mind in an instant—like that dreaded moment in school when he hadn't finished his essay, yet the teacher still called on him to read it aloud.

He had to say something. But would speaking up be a blessing or a disaster?

His mind spun rapidly. He stood up and continued, "General, it seems you've misunderstood. I didn't do anything."

"Oh?" Jing Wuya's scrutinizing gaze bore into him. "That Concubine Li is known for her charm and was once a famous beauty in Canglang City. And you claim to have resisted her temptation?"

"She did approach me just now, but I turned her away on the spot," Chu Liang answered, carefully following the general's lead.

From this, it seemed that Jing Wuya's warning must have something to do with the consorts.

"Hmm..." Jing Wuya tilted his iron-clad head slightly. "I had you study the king's mannerisms and speech, but those are merely external traits. We will never know how he truly acts during many of the private occasions. If the king's close attendants or consorts sense anything amiss, it will only lead to unnecessary trouble."

"I understand," Chu Liang responded.

"Right now, the people of the Fuyao Kingdom still struggle to accept a regime change. You must continue playing this role a while longer. In time, once the entire court recognizes my rule, you may retire with merit. The new royal court of Fuyao Kingdom will have a place for you."

Wow. Painting a whole dream for me, huh? When you finally usurp the throne, who knows if you'll actually keep those who know your secret around? More likely, I'll die without even a full corpse to bury.

Even as Chu Liang sneered inwardly, he still said, "I understand. I will give my utmost effort."

Jing Wuya nodded again and was about to leave when Chu Liang suddenly lifted his gaze and asked, "General, may I see Xue Lingxue one more time?"

"Hm?" Jing Wuya suddenly turned back, his piercing gaze carrying a chilling murderous intent.

The gaze was so piercing that Chu Liang lowered his head.

Finally, Jing Wuya spoke. "You weren't this talkative before... You've only been king for a day, and you're already making requests? Do you really think you're Han Lingshou?"

"I wouldn't dare! General, please forgive me!" Chu Liang quickly apologized. He knew bringing this up was a gamble. It could easily make Jing Wuya suspicious, but if he didn't ask now, who knew when he'd get another chance?

Facing Jing Wuya's interrogation, he took two steps back, lowering his voice to a more timid tone. "I am but a lowly official. General, the fact that I'm able to help your grand cause is already the greatest honor I could have. How could I possibly have any demands?"

"It's just that I was thinking... If the real king were here, how could he possibly pass up such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have Miss Xue perform in the palace? No matter what, he would insist on inviting her for a meeting. This was merely my own speculation in an effort to better portray this role. General, if you disapprove, then I will no longer make such decisions on my own."

A long silence followed.

Jing Wuya studied Chu Liang's fearful expression, finding it utterly convincing. His suspicions gradually faded.

After a brief pause, Jing Wuya turned away. "You did well. I will consider this matter. While you remain in the palace, stay cautious."

"Understood, General." Chu Liang responded.

Only when Jing Wuya strode out of the king's bedchamber did Chu Liang's expression shift from timid and humble to composed. As a young performing artist with years of acting experience, such a minor scene was nothing to him.

Playing a person who was pretending to be the king? This level of character depth was something he could immerse himself in with just a blink of an eye. It was merely a matter of practice.

After successfully fooling Jing Wuya and getting him to leave, he first dragged out Consort Li, who was still bound by the Demon-Binding Rope. With a light tap of his finger on her forehead, he woke her up.

Chu Liang was about to explain. "Don't panic just yet, listen to me—"

But Consort Li's eyes were filled with charm as she suddenly chuckled and said, "I am not panicked... Haha, how amusing. When I heard what you said earlier, I thought you were an imposter..."

As she spoke, she glanced at the rope binding her and said, "No one else could possibly be as skilled as His Majesty."

...

Well, isn't that great. That old fella Han Lingshou turns out to be somewhat perverted.

However, as the king of the Fuyao Kingdom, nothing he did would really be surprising.

Since Consort Li had already convinced herself that he was the real deal for such an absurd reason, Chu Liang saw no need to correct her. Clarifying that he was an imposter would only complicate matters—and if word got out, it certainly wouldn't end well for him.

So, with a flick of his sleeve, he said, "I was simply too grief-stricken earlier to pay attention to anything else."

Consort Li's gaze softened. "Your Majesty, I never expected you to be someone who values relationships this deeply..."

Then, her expression shifted ever so slightly. She leaned in, her voice taking on a sultry tone. "Since you have some free time... let's continue. But please, do not hit my head again. I was knocked unconscious last time... If you must, then..."

Then what... Chu Liang felt so speechless.

"Then hit me with a whip," Consort Li murmured dreamily. "I like that."

Wow. It's always you royals who really know how to have fun, huh?

Seeing how she looked as if she had been poisoned, Chu Liang couldn't help but wonder, How did you know I have a whip? I really need to cleanse that poison out of you.

At this moment, a sudden knock on the door interrupted his thoughts.

Knock, knock, knock.

Chu Liang felt his blood surge. Is the bedchamber of the king a marketplace? Why is everyone just dropping by as if they are out for a casual stroll?

He then called out, "Who is it?"

A palace attendant's voice sounded from outside. "Your Majesty, the ox whip and goji berry oyster soup that Consort Li prepared is ready. I am here to deliver it."

Good lord. When Chu Liang heard the name of that soup, he nearly choked in shock. Is this consort a priestess of the Harmonious Pleasure Sect?

Meanwhile, Consort Li, still bound by the Demon-Binding Rope, had lost consciousness entirely due to the toxic qi of the Demon-Binding Rope.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang stuffed her back under the bed before calling out, "Come in."

A palace attendant, clad in simple robes and a small cap, shuffled in with their head lowered. With careful precision, they placed the tray on the table, their posture rigid with deference. They dared not look up, clearly afraid of seeing something they shouldn't.

It must be miserable working in this bedchamber. Chu Liang thought as he cast a glance of sympathy at the attendant before waving them off. "You may leave."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the palace attendant nodded before adding, "Consort Li instructed that this soup must be consumed while it's still hot."

With that, they carefully lifted the lid of the bowl. A rich, fragrant steam curled into the air.

The moment Chu Liang caught a whiff, he knew something was off.

With his current seventh-realm physique, combined with the Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form, ordinary poisons shouldn't have affected him in the slightest. And yet, the moment he inhaled the scent, a wave of dizziness washed over him.

It was quite a powerful toxin.

If the real Han Lingshou had been here, he probably wouldn't have been able to withstand it.

Is this palace attendant a spy?

Chu Liang hesitated for a moment before making a split-second decision and allowed himself to go limp, collapsing with a heavy thud onto the floor. He pretended to be unconscious. He wanted to see what this so-called palace attendant intended to do.

"Hmph!" the palace attendant let out a cold snort when he saw that Chu Liang had fainted.

He lifted his head and revealed his face. It turned out he looked just like Han Lingshou!

Another one?

Chu Liang was stunned but he was certain that this man was not the real Han Lingshou. His posture and demeanor were completely different, and the actual king couldn't possibly return to the palace.

This was now the fourth king in Canglang City!

While Chu Liang felt surprised, he also found this situation oddly amusing.

The Fuyao Kingdom was truly blessed. There was an old saying, "The sky cannot have two suns, and a kingdom cannot have two rulers." Yet, the number of these perverted kings had grown to the point where they could sit down and play mahjong together.

In fact, the ones in this very bedchamber alone could already start a game of Dou Dizhu.[1]

Without hesitation, the new imposter king swiftly removed the palace attendant attire, revealing a golden robe underneath. Clearly, he had come prepared. He pushed Chu Liang under the bed and took a seat at the table.

Moments later, he called out, "Guards!"

A flurry of footsteps echoed as a squad of royal guards rushed in, shouting in unison, "Your Majesty!"

With a wave of his sleeve, the imposter king declared, "Pass down my decree. Summon Miss Xue Lingxue to the palace at once!"

Chapter 768: Mother

After Chu Liang left, Xue Lingxue, Tie Chui, and the others did not simply sit around waiting in the courtyard.

They were top-tier disciples of prestigious immortal sects, each possessing formidable cultivation. If not for being compared to prodigies like Yang Shenlong, Chu Liang, and Xu Ziyang—who had stepped into the seventh realm ahead of their peers—they would still be considered powerful

cultivators in their own right. At its core, this matter was Xue Lingxue's problem. Chu Liang had only offered his help, and she had no intention of relying on him completely.

According to the information provided by Hu Sanlang, the fake Xue Lingxue was now staying at a temporary lodging that the Flower Pavilion had prepared for her.

They all planned to head over there and investigate.

The impostor had appeared twice before, vanishing without a trace both times. This time, however, she had a place to stay. Even if they couldn't capture her, they might at least uncover some clues.

Lin Bei hesitated slightly. "Chu Liang has already gone to the palace to investigate. I trust he'll get to the bottom of this. If we act recklessly and end up running into Jing Wuya, then what?"

He had absolute faith in Chu Liang. After working alongside him for so long, he knew one thing for certain. When faced with a crisis, the best course of action was often to sit tight and let Chu Liang handle everything.

Acting rashly could cause more harm than good.

Lin Bei's understanding of clinging to a powerful ally was ingrained deep in his bones.

"He could be in danger at any moment in the palace. If we can uncover the impostor's identity, we can call for reinforcements to suppress Jing Wuya," Xue Lingxue reasoned. "That way, he can get out of there sooner."

"You're right!" Tie Chui, never one to sit still, agreed enthusiastically. "Let's storm the place! Best case, we catch that fake Xue Lingxue red-handed!"

Hu Sanlang said, "I'll lead you guys there."

Having gathered the intelligence himself and being the most familiar with the City of Azure Waves, he was eager to contribute—especially after all the help Chu Liang had given him.

Seeing this, Han Lingshou quickly said, "If Miss Xue is going, then I'll go too."

Lin Bei shot him a look and rolled his eyes. "Go where? You can't even relieve yourself in a back alley without looking over your shoulder. Just stay put and behave."

The Royal Wave Bureau had locked down the entire city. While the others could still move around freely, Han Lingshou's face was far too recognizable. Without Chu Liang's level of cultivation, he wouldn't make it more than a few steps before getting arrested.

"In that case, Young Hero Lin Bei, you can stay here with His Majesty and wait for our return," Xue Lingxue said as she rose to her feet.

Tie Chui immediately stood up to accompany her, while Hu Sanlang gave Han Lingshou a respectful bow before leading the way.

"Miss Xue, please be careful!" Han Lingshou called out loudly. "If you run into danger, just call my name! In the City of Azure Waves, I still—"

Before he could finish his sentence, Xue Lingxue's indifferent silhouette had already vanished beyond the doorway.

"Haaaaaa..." Han Lingshou let out a long sigh and murmured, "I offered my heart, only for it to be washed away like water... Loving her is even sadder than never loving her at all..."

Lin Bei, watching from the side, said. "Your Majesty seems to have deep feelings for Miss Xue."

"Yes," Han Lingshou said with a nod. "I have over seven hundred concubines in my palace, yet not one of them can compare to even half of Miss Xue..."

Well, then. If this isn't true love, what could be considered true love?

Hearing this, Lin Bei's eyes lit up as if he had found a kindred spirit. "If you're also someone who knows the depths of devotion, then we'll have plenty to talk about."

...

The fake Xue Lingxue was staying in a garden residence arranged by the Flower Pavilion, nestled against the mountains. It was even more luxurious than the place where Chu Liang and his group were staying. The surroundings were tranquil, with lush greenery enveloping the courtyard.

Across the street, Tie Chui and the others hid in a corner, quietly observing the residence.

"We don't know if she's inside, but it's worth a try," Xue Lingxue said.

"The garden is huge. Sneaking in shouldn't be too difficult. Let me find the best entry point..." Tie Chui murmured, scanning the surroundings with her divine sense.

"No need for all that trouble."

Xue Lingxue shook her head, casually pulled off the white veil covering her face, and strode forward openly.

Tie Chui hurried after her, while Hu Sanlang pulled his hood tighter and followed closely behind.

Two muscular guards stood at the entrance of the courtyard. At the sight of Xue Lingxue, they froze in surprise. "Miss Xue?"

So the impostor hasn't left yet, Xue Lingxue thought. She gave a slight nod and replied, "Mm, thank you for your hard work."

With that, she stepped past them and entered the courtyard.

The two guards exchanged confused glances. "When did she leave?"

"Maybe she went out to meet a friend. Those two with her have been here before, haven't they?"

"..."

When Xue Lingxue entered the residence, she spread her divine sense out to the entire garden. Fortunately, she didn't take a wrong turn. The three of them continued smoothly and soon arrived in the room where the fake Xue Lingxue was staying.

The moment they pushed open the door, a faint yet unusual fragrance drifted toward them.

There was no one inside. The room was clean and tidy, with only the lingering scent left behind.

"It's Harmonic Fragrance," Xue Lingxue said.

Tie Chui added, "Indeed. This formula is exclusive to the South Melody Conservatory."

It seemed that the impostor was indeed an insider from the South Melody Conservatory, or at the very least, someone closely connected to it.

Harmonic Fragrance was a special incense crafted by the conservatory, designed to help musicians attune themselves to the Great Dao of Music. It was like the Fragrance of Enlightenment but exclusively used for musicians. Outsiders were unlikely to even know of its existence, let alone possess it.

Yet, aside from this, they found nothing else.

As with the previous two times, the fake Xue Lingxue had vanished without a trace the moment the performance ended. Had they arrived any later, even the lingering scent of the incense would have dissipated beyond detection.

The three of them sighed in frustration and were about to leave when hurried footsteps suddenly approached.

A voice called out from outside, "Miss Xue! A decree has arrived from the palace. His Majesty invites you to the palace!"

"Hmm?" The three exchanged glances and each of them pondered for a bit.

By their calculations, Chu Liang should have already infiltrated Fuyou Palace. Was this decree his doing? A ploy to lure the fake Xue Lingxue into the palace at this precise moment?

But the impostor had already fled. If the goal was to summon her, then what was the point now?

Unless... Chu Liang hadn't succeeded yet. If this decree came from the fake king, then there might be some secret connection between him and the fake Xue Lingxue. If both of them were disguises created by Jing Wuya using the Mirror of Captured Light, then there was a chance that both the fake Xue Lingxue and the fake king knew each other to a certain extent.

If that were the case, then this trip might be worth taking.

With this thought in mind, Xue Lingxue responded, "Coming."

When she stepped out of the courtyard, she found a carriage already waiting to take her to the palace. On their way over, the palace attendants had been worried that the disciple of the South Melody Conservatory might be indifferent and refuse the invitation. But now, it seemed she was not as cold and distant as rumored.

The three of them rode together in the carriage and soon arrived at Fuyou Palace.

Passing through layers of enchanted formations and guards, they eventually reached the area near the bedchamber, which felt noticeably more spacious. This was due to a prior decree from the fake king, forbidding the guards from staying too close to the courtyard.

At the entrance to the bedchamber, Hu Sanlang and Tie Chui were instructed to wait outside, while Xue Lingxue had to enter alone.

Right in front of the palace guards, Tie Chui raised her voice and declared, "Lingxue, if anything happens, just call out and I'll charge in and rescue you immediately!"

The surrounding guards tensed up. Given what they knew about their king, they couldn't be sure how likely it was that Tie Chui would actually need to storm in and save her.

Xue Lingxue knocked on the bedchamber doors. When they opened, she stepped inside and found a man seated at the desk. The man looked identical to Han Lingshou. Their gazes met, both filled with unspoken suspicion.

The impostor king gestured to the chair in front of him and said, "Take a seat."

Xue Lingxue sat down, carefully observing the man before her, trying to determine whether he was actually Chu Liang. She hesitated for a moment before deciding to test him.

She knew he was an impostor, but which one? If he was Chu Liang, she could reveal her true identity. But if he was the fake king, she needed to convince him that she was the fake Xue Lingxue.

After quickly working through the logic, she took the initiative and asked, "Your Majesty, why have you summoned me?"

"I simply wished for a chance to meet you," the fake Han Lingshou replied smoothly, not revealing a single clue of who he truly was.

At this point, Xue Lingxue decided to reveal something that only she and Chu Liang would know. That way, she could instantly confirm his identity.

So, she asked, "Your Majesty, you are known for your love of guqin. Have you ever heard my best performance piece, 'The Benevolent Melody of Restoration'?"

"The Benevolent Melody of Restoration" was a composition with a healing effect. Disciples of the South Melody Conservatory rarely performed it, but when Xue Lingxue first met Chu Liang in South Gate City, she had played it to save his life.

If he recognized it, he would understand the hidden message.

Sure enough, the fake Han Lingshou's lips curled into a knowing smile before he let out a soft chuckle.

"Haha, of course I've heard it... Mother."

Chapter 769: What the Fake Becomes Real and the Real Becomes Fake

When the word "mother" was uttered, both Chu Liang and Xue Lingxue were stunned.

...

Earlier...

Chu Liang lay motionless beneath the bed, feigning unconsciousness while secretly eavesdropping on what the third fake king planned to do. When he heard the imposter summon Xue Lingxue, he felt pleased. This fake imposter had done exactly what he had wanted to do.

If the fake Xue Lingxue was summoned here, it would spare him a great deal of trouble. So, he remained hidden beneath the bed, waiting patiently. With the other fake king and Consort Li nearby, at least he wasn't the only one in this predicament.

After waiting for a moment, Xue Lingxue arrived.

At first, Chu Liang assumed this was the fake Xue Lingxue and debated whether to take action. But the moment he heard the mention of the "Benevolent Melody of Restoration," he immediately sensed something was off. That was an odd question to ask.

However, if this was the real Xue Lingxue, her suspicion made sense. She might be testing whether the imposter king was actually him.

So is the person here the real Xue Lingxue?

At this moment, Chu Liang hesitated, considering whether he should reveal himself, trade honesty for the truth, and acknowledge his teammate.

However, before he could decide, the imposter king suddenly uttered one shocking word, "Mother."

Both Xue Lingxue and Chu Liang froze.

What crucial part of the plot had they missed?

Chu Liang felt a mix of emotions. On one hand, he felt nervous, hoping that if this Xue Lingxue was real, she wouldn't expose herself. On the other hand, he couldn't shake the suspicion. Could it be that these two were actually the impostors?

Thankfully, Xue Lingxue was quick-witted.

When she heard the word, "mother," she rose to her feet and went two steps back, pretending to be shocked. "It's you?"

There was no need to figure out who exactly it was. Saying "It's you?" would always be the right choice.

"It is I. You didn't expect it, did you?" the impostor king said as he stood up as well. With an excited expression, he continued, "Jing Wuya locked me up and wouldn't let me see you. However, he didn't expect that I would escape secretly and even steal his Mirror of Captured Light. Mother, we can't help the wicked anymore!"

Xue Lingxue was genuinely stunned this time. "You stole the Mirror of Captured Light?"

It seemed that this fake Han Lingshou was once someone close to Jing Wuya—someone who now sought to abandon the evil ways and follow the path of righteousness.

"That's right," the imposter king said. "Without this treasure, I wouldn't have been able to see you at all. Mother, stop clinging to the past at the South Melody Conservatory. Why don't we find a quiet place to live in seclusion and cultivate? Or we could go to the land of the Yu Dynasty, find a bustling city. In that city, you can play the guqin, and I can dance. We can still live a good life. Why must we live for revenge?"

Xue Lingxue's heart pounded as she processed the flood of information in his words. She felt as if she was finally drawing closer to the truth she had been seeking.

She locked eyes with the fake king and pretended to be angry. "My goal is within reach, and now you show up to ruin everything. You're clearly trying to oppose me. From this moment on, I no longer acknowledge you as my child, and you are not to call me 'Mother' again."

Hearing this, the fake king's expression darkened with anger. "Then what should I call you? Liao Yuexian? Wake up! Even if you help them seize the Fuyao Kingdom, you'll never reclaim the position of master of the South Melody Conservatory! I've heard plenty about the Celestial Charm Sect. They're nothing but a group of troublemakers who bring chaos to the world. How can you believe their promises?"

Upon hearing that name, Xue Lingxue's heart trembled, and in an instant, many things became clear.

Liao Yuexian... It's her...

Just as she was preparing to escape, a figure suddenly shot out from beneath the bed, and a voice called out, "Is it you, the Dragon Dancer?"

The figure that emerged was identical to Han Lingshou in appearance, yet the demeanor and aura were entirely different. The moment Xue Lingxue saw the figure, she instinctively called out, "Is it you, Chu Liang?"

...

A moment later, the three people inside the room settled back into their seats.

"So it's Young Hero Chu..." the third fake king sighed, offering a bitter smile as he looked at Chu Liang. "To think I was planning to knock you out with poison incense."

"The one you wanted to knock out has been lying there for a long time now," Chu Liang remarked, casually pointing under the bed.

In this cramped room, three figures shared the exact same face—Han Lingshou's face. By now, this face was no longer unique.

With a sigh, the third fake king admitted, "I am the Dragon Dancer, and I came here to find my mother."

"Liao Yuexian... She was a senior figure of the South Melody Conservatory," Xue Lingxue said slowly.

At this, Chu Liang glanced at Xue Lingxue, his curiosity piqued.

Xue Lingxue then explained that Liao Yuexian had been a rising star, slightly younger than the current master of the South Melody Conservatory.

Back when a new master was being chosen, both Liao Yuexian and the current master of the South Melody Conservatory were strong contenders. However, the current master had gained fame earlier and held more seniority, ultimately securing the position. Enraged by the outcome, Liao Yuexian left the South Melody Conservatory and was never seen again.

With her level of cultivation in the art of guqin, she could easily impersonate Xue Lingxue. In fact, many of the compositions that Xue Lingxue now played had originally been composed or modified by her.

The Dragon Dancer suddenly shook her head. "That's not true. My mother didn't lose because she was lacking—she was defeated by underhanded means."

According to her, Liao Yuexian had been the most gifted musician the South Melody Conservatory had seen in a hundred years. When she competed for the position of master, her chances of winning were extremely high.

However, at the critical moment, rumors began spreading that she had ties with a diabolical sect.

At the time, Liao Yuexian was at the height of her popularity. But because of this slander, she lost her chance to become the master. Filled with resentment, she became consumed by the desire for revenge.

Eventually, she wandered to the Fuyao Kingdom, where she crossed paths with members of the Celestial Charm Sect. They promised to help her reclaim the South Melody Conservatory, but in exchange, she had to assist them in overthrowing the Fuyao Kingdom's current king.

And the one working alongside her in this scheme was none other than Jing Wuya.

Liao Yuexian spent most of the year traveling, so she left her daughter at the Royal Wave Bureau, where she was taken in by Jing Wuya and worked under him. The Dragon Dancer, known as Jing Yue, was, in truth, Liao Jingyue.

It wasn't until she met Hu Sanlang that she began to long for freedom. She realized she couldn't spend her life shackled by her mother's regrets and hatred.

Hu Sanlang had believed Dragon Dancer was impersonating Xue Lingxue because of her striking resemblance to her mother. When he investigated, he hadn't been able to get close enough to confirm the details.

His attempt to abduct the Dragon Dancer ended up becoming the turning point in her decision. She no longer wanted to take part in these sinister schemes.

However, Jing Wuya had kept the Dragon Dancer by his side not merely to help Liao Yuexian care for her child, but to use the Dragon Dancer as leverage to threaten and control Liao Yuexian. The moment he sensed something was off, he locked her up and refused to give her any chances of meeting up with her mother.

Yet, the Dragon Dancer had long familiarized herself with the hidden passages of the Royal Wave Bureau. Using her knowledge, she not only managed to escape unnoticed but also stole Jing Wuya's most prized treasure—the Mirror of Captured Light.

After careful thought, she decided to enter the palace and summon Xue Lingxue under the king's authority. She believed this would give her the best chance of seeing her mother. With this identity, issuing commands and capturing Jing Wuya would be much easier.

However, she hadn't anticipated that, upon infiltrating the palace, the real Xue Lingxue would appear instead of the fake one.

Looking at Xue Lingxue, the Dragon Dancer gave a bitter smile. "I didn't expect you to be a fake."

Xue Lingxue corrected her softly, "I am the real one."

Chu Liang sighed and thought, When you expect the fake but the real one appears, in a way... the real becomes the fake.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "If you truly want to defeat Jing Wuya and restore peace to the Fuyao Kingdom, we can work together."

The Dragon Dancer hesitated, glancing between the two of them.

Xue Lingxue added, "Hu Sanlang is waiting outside. We can let him in so you can speak with him."

"There's no need for that. It's too dangerous here. I don't want him involved," the Dragon Dancer rejected outright. But after a brief pause, she added, "I do trust you both, and I'm willing to work with you."

Just as Chu Liang was about to discuss the plan in detail, a voice suddenly called from outside, "Your Majesty, the General of the Royal Wave Bureau requests for a meeting!"

That old rascal again? Had he somehow caught wind of our plan to eliminate him?

Chu Liang sighed helplessly and pointed under the bed. "You two, hide for now to avoid alarming him."

Thankfully, Han Lingshou was a pervert with an oversized bed that was more than spacious enough. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been able to accommodate so many people hiding beneath it.

...

In the courtyard, Han Lingshou let out a heavy sneeze. "Achoo!"

Lin Bei advised from the side, "Elder Brother Han, put on some clothes before you catch a cold."

"It's fine. You won't be able to understand the key of the Tortoise-Shell Bondage Method if I don't explain with my clothes off," Han Lingshou declared, baring his upper body while giving Lin Bei a very scholarly presentation.

Lin Bei sighed in admiration. "It is truly one of life's great blessings to receive such dedicated instruction from Elder Brother Han!"

Han Lingshou chuckled. "Hehe, I just felt an instant connection with you. We're kindred spirits!"

"Hehehe!" Lin Bei laughed heartily. "We're all brothers here!"

Chapter 770: Reel Them In!

When Jing Wuya stepped into the room, Chu Liang remained seated at the desk, looking just as he had before. The only difference was that the space beneath the bed had grown even more cramped.

Chu Liang immediately slipped into his role as the first fake king, rising to greet him. "General."

"Hmm." Jing Wuya cast him a brief glance before saying, "Earlier, you asked to meet Xue Lingxue. I sent word to her. She should be arriving soon."

Chu Liang's eyes lit up at the news. Suppressing the excitement surging within, he replied, "It is an honor that you've taken my suggestion into consideration, General."

"This decision was partially influenced by what you said, but not entirely," Jing Wuya said, his tone deep and furious.

He continued, "My adopted daughter, the Dragon Dancer, is the child of the woman impersonating Xue Lingxue. My adopted daughter stole something of great importance from me—the Mirror of Captured Light."

He paused before turning to Chu Liang. "I don't know if the Dragon Dancer has met up with her mother. If I had summoned the fake Xue Lingxue to the Royal Wave Bureau, there's a chance that the Dragon Dancer would be alerted. So instead, I followed your suggestion and arranged for the imposter to meet you here in the palace. If she still dares to come, it means she hasn't met up with her daughter yet.

"When she arrives later, I want you to probe her during your conversation. Find out if she has my Mirror of Captured Light."

"Understood," Chu Liang responded immediately.

They had been searching for Liao Yuexian to settle this matter, and if Jing Wuya could lure her here, it would be the perfect opportunity to capture everyone in one decisive move.

However, beneath the bed, the Dragon Dancer panicked when she heard this. If her mother arrived unaware of the situation, she could walk straight into danger and be harmed by Jing Wuya.

Before she could make a sound, Xue Lingxue pressed a gentle hand on her shoulder, sending a controlled surge of foundational qi through her body. The Dragon Dancer's vision blurred, and she lost consciousness.

"I will hide in the shadows so I can act at any moment," Jing Wuya declared, scanning the room before setting his gaze beneath the bed. Without hesitation, he strode forward.

Chu Liang hastily called out, "General..."

"Hmm?" Jing Wuya turned around and looked at him.

Good lord. There is already a full table of mahjong players crammed under the bed. If this hulking suit of armor squeezed in too, they might as well suffocate on the spot.

"The space under the bed is cramped and dusty. It would be unbecoming of your dignified status," Chu Liang said smoothly, gesturing toward the screen. "General, why not hide yourself behind the screen instead?"

"Alright."

Jing Wuya said no more. He simply shifted the screen further back and restrained his aura as he concealed himself behind it. With his heavy armor making it difficult to crouch, he found nothing unusual about the arrangement.

Chu Liang felt a headache coming on. This room...is running out of oxygen.

Fortunately, once Liao Yuexian appeared, they would move in and capture everyone in one decisive strike. Chu Liang had already contacted his esteemed teacher through the Circle of Immortal Friends, and both Di Nufeng and Daoist Yan had arrived near the City of Azure Waves, waiting for Chu Liang's signal to move in.

Since Jing Wuya was confident he could handle Liao Yuexian, it meant her cultivation was, at most, at the peak of the seventh realm. She definitely was not a master of the Heavenly Origin. With two skilled fighters from Mount Shu joining, handling both of them would be more than manageable.

They had barely waited when a guard outside suddenly reported, "Your Majesty, there... there's something strange."

"Oh?" Chu Liang responded. "What is it?"

The guard hesitated before saying, "Miss Xue Lingxue has arrived outside the bedchamber, claiming she was summoned by Your Majesty, but—"

"Quickly, let her in! Don't be a busybody!" Chu Liang interrupted urgently.

If Jing Wuya found out that two Miss Xues had arrived, he might start getting suspicious. Cutting the guard off before he could say anything more was the safest move.

The doors to the bedchamber swung open once again, and the familiar face of Xue Lingxue stepped inside.

At the same time, Chu Liang discreetly sent a message through the Circle of Immortal Friends.

[Chu Liang]: "Reel them in!"

...

Liao Yuexian, the fake Xue Lingxue, stepped in with a smile. "You wanted to see me?"

Noticing that only Han Lingshou was present, she raised an eyebrow. "Alone?"

Hmm... I alone am an army.

Chu Liang forced a bitter smile in his heart, but on the surface, he remained cautious and respectful as he replied, "Esteemed Senior, that's correct. I'm merely following the general's orders and thought it best to invite you here."

"Heh." Liao Yuexian chuckled. "You've done well. Since you've taken the king's place, you should also adopt his mindset to avoid any flaws in your disguise."

She certainly spoke from experience. Her impersonation of Xue Lingxue was so flawless that even Tie Chui, who had known the real one for years, hadn't noticed a thing.

Chu Liang nodded in acknowledgment before asking, "But when will I be able to return to my true form?"

Liao Yuexian cast him a mocking glance, as if she had already foreseen his fate—that he was nothing more than a disposable pawn, destined to be silenced forever by Jing Wuya sooner or later.

With a sigh, she replied, "Once we have full control of the kingdom."

"To restore my original form, would I still need the Mirror of Captured Light?" Chu Liang asked. "Do you know where that value artifact is now?"

At the mention of the artifact, Liao Yuexian furrowed her brows. "The Mirror of Captured Light? Isn't that Jing Wuya's treasure? Where else would it be?"

Behind the screen, Jing Wuya's eyes flickered as he processed her response. It confirmed that Liao Yuexian and her daughter had yet to see each other.

Just as he was about to step forward, a panicked voice rang out from outside the door.

"Your Majesty!" The guard's voice trembled, barely holding back tears. "A woman wreathed in flames has broken in! She says she's from Mount Shu and demands to see you immediately!"

"A woman wreathed in flames?" Liao Yuexian's expression changed instantly. "Could it be Di Nufeng of Mount Shu? What is she doing here?"

Chu Liang shook his head repeatedly. "I don't know."

"That woman is a lunatic. It's best not to provoke her. Let her in. I'll find a place to hide for now," Liao Yuexian said. Her eyes darted around the room before settling on the space beneath the bed.

"Uhhh." Chu Liang quickly stepped forward to stop her. "The space under the bed is cramped and dusty. I fear it might ruin your image."

"Hmm..." Liao Yuexian hesitated before shifting her gaze toward the screen behind them.

Chu Liang hurriedly added, "That area is cluttered with miscellaneous items. I'm afraid there's no room for you to stand."

"Hmph." Liao Yuexian snorted grumpily before leaping straight up, landing atop the ceiling beams. She restrained her aura and hid herself there.

Chu Liang then called out toward the palace gates, "Let her in! Do not block her way!"

Before Chu Liang could finish speaking, a pained scream rang out from the guard who had delivered the message. A split second later, the doors to the bedchamber burst open with a thunderous crash.

The figure that strode through the doorway was a tall and slim woman with fiery red lips and flowing hair. Behind her, a pair of divine phoenix fire wings blazed brilliantly. It was indeed Di Nufeng, the peak master of the Mount Shu Sect's Silver Sword Peak.

Di Nufeng stormed in, her sharp gaze sweeping across the room before locking onto the only person in sight. Without hesitation, she shouted, "Password!"

This was what Chu Liang had arranged with her. If not, with this extremely common-looking face he has right now, who knew what kind of misunderstandings might arise?

Without missing a beat, Chu Liang immediately shouted in response, "You owe, you pay!"

Without hesitation, Di Nufeng answered, "Fair and square!"

The moment Chu Liang and his teacher confirmed each other's identities, Di Nufeng raised her hand and unleashed a surging wave of Samadhi True Fire.

Boom!

Like a sentient, fire-wreathed bird, the divine flames spread and engulfed the entire bedchamber. Not even ashes were left behind.

The once-grand palace hall, along with its lavish furnishings, vanished into nothingness.

And with it, every hidden individual inside was fully exposed. Both Jing Wuya and Liao Yuexian looked stunned.

Jing Wuya, who had been hiding behind the screen, had narrowly avoided the divine fire's reach.

Meanwhile, Liao Yuexian, who had hidden near the ceiling beams, was nearly incinerated on the spot. At the last moment, a flicker of light flashed around her as she dropped to the ground.

The fire touched her face and instantly burned her illusionary disguise away, revealing her true form.

She turned out to be a beautiful woman in her early thirties, with sharp, elegant features and an air of cold allure.

Chu Liang, the only one who was aware of everything that had happened in this room, wasted no time. He pointed directly at the two figures and shouted, "Don't let them escape!"

With that single command, a wild phoenix was set free!

Boom!