

A Man Like None Other Novel Chapter 5996

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David withdrew his hand, a fleeting, chaotic gray light flashing in his palm.

He stood silently, his divine sense scanning the entire courtyard like the most sophisticated radar, confirming that no trace had been left behind, nor any residual warning mechanisms had been triggered.

The entire process, from appearing to killing, and then destroying the evidence, took only two breaths.

was fast, accurate, ruthless, and silent.

He walked to the window and listened intently to the sounds outside.

The courtyard remained quiet, with only the faint sounds of conversation coming from the watchman's quarters in the distance and the footsteps of patrolling guards further away.

The commotion had been completely contained within the small room, without any leakage.

David did not leave immediately.

His gaze fell on the futon where Tu Meng had been sitting cross-legged, where there was a small hidden compartment covered by an inconspicuous stone slab with simple enchantments.

He waved his hand, breaking the restriction and lifting the stone slab. Inside were several jade slips, some Yuan Crystals, and a jet-black token. The token had a ferocious " (punishment) character engraved on the front and " (Tu Meng) on the back.

David picked up the jade slips and probed them with his divine sense.

One of them was a jade slip recording execution missions. David quickly browsed through it, his gaze soon locking onto a record:

"Date: 9763rd year of the Xuan Yin calendar, 17th day of the Frost Moon."

“Location: Fallen Soul Slope. Executed persons: Mu Sha, Liu Qingyin. Crime: Departure from the Heavenly Palace, spying on taboos.”

“Supervisor: Fei Qing, Grand Steward of the Inner Palace. Executioners: Tu Gang, Tu Meng. Remarks: ‘Soul Refining Crystal’ (number: Jiaxu 73) activated. Soul collection completed, handed over to Grand Steward Fei.”

The format of the record was cold and concise, yet it was like a series of poisoned knives, stabbing deeply into David’s heart.

Senior Mu Sha, Senior Liu Qingyin... their names were recorded on the executioner’s mission list.

David’s fingers, gripping the jade slip, turned slightly white, but he forcibly controlled his emotions.

He continued examining the other jade slips, mostly containing rules and regulations of the Punishment Hall and fragments of body-refining techniques, of little value.

Finally, his gaze fell upon the token bearing the character ” (punishment).

This token was made of a special material, subtly connected to certain formations within the Punishment Hall of the Punishment Officials’ Abode and even the entire Jade Immortal Mansion’s Punishment Hall. Perhaps it served as identification, or perhaps it had other uses.

After a moment’s thought, David put away the token and the jade slip recording the executions, returning the other items to their original positions and restoring the hidden compartment to its original state.

Having done all this, he silently passed through the paralyzed security formation, just as he had arrived, and floated out of the courtyard wall.

Then, he found the energy conversion gap in the outer barrier again, easily escaping the Punishment Officials’ Abode’s area.

From beginning to end, the Jade Immortal Mansion’s layers of defense were rendered useless.

...

When David’s figure reappeared at the bamboo forest hermitage where Lian Xing and the others were, only half an hour had passed since he left.

Inside the hermitage, Lianxing, Mingli, Leopard Brother, and the anxiously waiting Monkey were all present.

The atmosphere was somewhat heavy, as everyone speculated about the outcome of David's journey.

Seeing David return unharmed, without even a trace of blood on him, and with his expression still calm, Lianxing and the others were first stunned, then filled with astonishment and doubt.

"Senior, you..." Lianxing hesitated before speaking.

David didn't say much, simply placing the black "Punishment" token and the jade slip containing the record on the bamboo table.

Upon seeing the token, Leopard Brother gasped: "This is... the exclusive identity token of an executioner in the Punishment Hall! Only senior executioners like Tu Gang and Tu Meng possess it!" Lian

Xing quickly picked up the jade slip and probed it with her divine sense.

A moment later, her expression changed, and she looked up at David, her eyes filled with shock: "This... this is Tu Meng's execution record? Senior, you..."

"Tu Gang is dead, in the alley outside the Drunken Immortal Pavilion."

David's voice was calm and even, as if he were discussing a trivial matter. "Tu Meng is also dead, in his residence in the Executioner's Quarters."

Boom!

Despite having a premonition, hearing David state these two pieces of information so casually sent chills down everyone's spine, including Ming Li, and their hearts pounded wildly!

Killed!

Really killed!

And in such a short time!

Outside the Drunken Immortal Pavilion was one thing, but the Executioner's Abode was inside the City Lord's Mansion!

Heavily guarded, with numerous arrays!

How did he get in?

How did he find the person?

How did he kill them?

And how did he get out?

Especially Lianxing, she knew the security level inside the Jade Immortal Mansion.

Even for her, using all her hidden agents and meticulously planning, to silently kill a seasoned executioner like Tu Meng inside the Executioner's Abode was almost an impossible task.

It would inevitably come at a huge cost, and it would be difficult to avoid alerting the guards.

Yet this Senior Chen before her, alone, made a round trip in less than an hour, not only killing two people but also bringing back crucial evidence, and... he seemed as relaxed as if he had just taken a stroll!

The monkey's legs went weak, his eyes looking at David as if gazing at a god, yet filled with boundless fear.

He finally realized just how terrifying a being he had brought.

Although Ming Li had some estimation of David's strength, he was also shaken to his core.

He realized that he might have underestimated his master.

This method of infiltrating enemy territory, precisely decapitating, and moving freely has transcended the realm of ordinary combat; it's more like an art, a composure displayed after mastering power to its utmost.

"Senior...Senior's divine might!"

Leopard Brother's voice was hoarse, filled with utmost reverence as he bowed.

Lianxing took a few deep breaths, forcibly suppressing the turmoil in her heart, and carefully placed the jade slip down.

Then, she solemnly said, "Senior's cultivation is profound, and your methods are unfathomable. Lianxing admires you wholeheartedly. With this as evidence, the injustice done to Senior Mu Sha and his wife is even more irrefutable. However..."

Her face showed worry, "The sudden death of the Tu brothers will not be easily forgiven by the Jade Immortal Mansion, especially Fei Qing, who, as the supervising officer and Yu Wuji's confidant, will certainly investigate thoroughly. We need to make plans as soon as possible."

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David nodded, his gaze falling on the token and jade slip on the bamboo table: "They couldn't find any trace. Next, the target is Fei Qing."

Lianxing's heart tightened: "Fei Qing?"

"Senior, Fei Qing is different from the Tu brothers. He holds the position of Grand Steward of the Inner Palace, residing year-round in the core area of the City Lord's Mansion, heavily guarded."

His own cultivation has reached the fifth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, and he is skilled in formations and restrictions. He is cunning and suspicious, extremely difficult to deal with. To replicate this approach, I'm afraid..."

"Precisely because he is skilled in formations, he may know more."

David interrupted her, his eyes deep, "He likely knows the cause of the deaths of Senior Mu Sha and his wife, and what secrets the Jade Immortal Mansion and the Divine Clan are hiding. Capturing him and getting the truth out of him is more important than killing him."

Capture?

Lianxing and the others were shocked again. Capturing the Grand Steward of the Inner Palace in the core area of the Jade Immortal Mansion?

This was more than ten times more difficult than assassinating an executioner!

"Mr. Chen, this matter is of utmost importance and requires careful consideration,"

Mingli advised. "We need to thoroughly investigate Fei Qing's whereabouts, habits, and the strength of his guards."

"Moreover, once we take action, regardless of success or failure, it will inevitably alarm Yu Wuji and the entire Jade Immortal Mansion, and may even attract the direct attention of the Divine Race."

David understood the risks involved.

However, his anger and obsession with uncovering the truth made him unwilling to wait any longer.

Every moment he waited meant another moment of torment for the souls of Senior Mu Sha and his wife within the Soul Refining Array, and the enemy might also realize that the deaths of the Tu brothers were not accidental.

“Fellow Daoist Lianxing, you have been operating here for many years and have the deepest understanding of the Jade Immortal Mansion.”

David looked at Lianxing. “I need to know the time and place where Fei Qing is most likely to leave the core area of the City Lord’s Mansion in the next three days, as well as the usual guard configuration around him. The more detailed the better.”

Seeing that David had made up his mind, Lianxing knew that persuasion was useless, and the strength David had shown gave her a glimmer of hope.

She pondered for a moment and said, “Fei Qing is an extremely cautious person. Except for necessary official business, he rarely leaves the inner mansion.”

“However, he has a habit: every five days, at midnight, he goes to the ‘Spirit Gathering Pool’ at the border between the inner and outer mansions to cultivate alone for an hour.”

“It is said that there is a cold spring at the bottom of the Spirit Gathering Pool, which is very beneficial to the cultivation of his ‘Profound Yin Ice Condensation Technique.’ This matter is extremely secretive, and we only discovered it by chance after sacrificing one of our brothers. The next cultivation session will be at midnight tomorrow.”

“Spirit Gathering Pool? Where is it? How is the guarded?” David’s eyes flashed.

“The Spirit Gathering Pool is located deep within the Hundred Gardens of the Inner Palace, in a secluded location, but it’s shrouded by an array.”

“Each time Fei Qing goes there, he only brings two personal guards, both trusted assassins of the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm.”

“When he cultivates, the guards stand watch outside the array at the pool’s edge

,” Lianxing quickly explained. “This is the only known opportunity for Fei Qing to regularly leave the core area. But even so, the Spirit Gathering Pool is still within the Inner Palace’s territory ; if something happens, the Inner

Palace’s experts will arrive instantly.” Tomorrow at midnight ... the Spirit Gathering Pool... David quickly weighed the options in his mind. This was indeed an opportunity, although extremely risky.

Making a move in an environment the opponent is familiar with and prepared for makes things too unpredictable.

“Besides this, does he have any other weaknesses? For example, family, hobbies, or... any conflicts with Yu Wuji or other forces?”

David pressed, searching for a possible breakthrough in his psychological defenses.

Lian Xing pondered, “Fei Qing was promoted from humble beginnings by Yu Wuji and is extremely loyal to him. It’s said he has no family. He’s greedy and extremely obsessed with improving his cultivation, which is why he regularly goes to the Spirit Gathering Pool.”

“As for his relationships with others... the Jade Immortal Mansion isn’t a monolithic entity. Fei Qing, relying on Yu Wuji’s favor, controls internal affairs and has offended many people, especially some elders and stewards in the outer mansion. But we can’t delve into the deeper details of these conflicts.”

Greedy, obsessed with cultivation...

thoughts raced through David’s mind.

Perhaps, a two-pronged approach would be possible.

“Fellow Daoist Lianxing, could you perhaps find a way to convey the news that the Tu brothers are dead, and that it might be revenge from an enemy, in a way that won’t directly implicate you?”

“Ideally, it should make him uneasy, even suspecting that someone within the manor who has a grudge against him is behind it all,” David said slowly.

Lianxing’s eyes lit up: “Senior, you want to disturb his mind, make him suspicious, perhaps leading him to do something irrational, or... increase his guard?”

“Increased guard is inevitable. But once suspicion arises, he might rely more on the power he trusts most, or... want to go to a place he considers safe to confirm something.”

David’s gaze was profound. “For example, to check if the Soul Refining Crystals he’s in charge of are safe.”

Lianxing and the others were all shocked upon hearing this.

Soul Refining Crystals!

Those were the core items involved in the Soul Refining Array at Fallen Soul Slope!

“Mr. Chen wants to...” Mingli seemed to understand David’s plan.

“If he goes to check the location of the Soul Refining Crystals himself out of suspicion... that might be a better opportunity for us.”

David’s voice turned cold. “Rather than taking action in his cultivation lair, a temporary place, perhaps less heavily guarded, is more suitable for a proper talk with him.”

Lianxing felt a chill run down her spine.

This Senior Chen was not only terrifyingly strong, but also frighteningly meticulous and deep-seated.

He was trying to lure the snake out of its hole, and to strike at the opponent’s most vulnerable and vulnerable point!

“I understand.”

Lianxing nodded solemnly. “We will try to spread the news through several unreliable channels to create some chaos and speculation.”

“But Fei Qing is inherently suspicious, so whether we can provoke him is still unknown.”

“Just do our best.” After David finished speaking, he looked at Ming Li and said, “Ming Li, you assist Fellow Daoist Lianxing. Monkey, Leopard, you two strengthen the observation of the outer perimeter of Jade Immortal Mansion, especially the places where important supplies might be stored.” “

I need to know all of Fei Qing’s unusual movements during the day tomorrow.”

“Yes!” Everyone responded in unison, unknowingly, they had completely submitted to David as their leader.

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As dawn broke, the faint light pierced the misty spiritual energy above Jade Immortal City, but it could not dispel the suddenly heavy atmosphere within the city.

Inside the Jade Immortal Mansion, in the duty room of the Executioners' Residence, the atmosphere was even more oppressive, like solidified ice.

The four executioners of the Hall of Punishments stood at the lower end of the hall, their faces pale and their foreheads dripping with cold sweat, not daring to even breathe loudly.

At the upper end, behind a large table carved from a single piece of obsidian, sat a middle-aged man with a gloomy expression.

He wore a dark blue brocade robe embroidered with intricate cloud patterns, his face was thin, and he had three long wisps of beard, giving him a scholarly air.

But a pair of narrow eyes flashed with a chilling light as they opened and closed, and his entire being exuded an aura of authority and a hidden, menacing presence.

This was Fei Qing, the Grand Steward of the Jade Immortal Palace.

"Overnight, two living people, right under your noses, disappeared?"

Fei Qing's voice was not loud, even somewhat calm, but to the four stewards, it was like an icy chill.

"Reporting...reporting to the Grand Steward."

The leading steward mustered his courage, his voice trembling, "Last night...last night everything was normal. The shift change at midnight was clear; the duty records were clear. Tu Meng was on duty and did not leave the dormitory."

"Tu Gang...Tu Gang was on leave yesterday and, as usual, went to the Drunken Immortal Pavilion. He hasn't returned yet."

"At morning roll call, we found both of them absent. We immediately sent people to search—the dormitory, the Drunken Immortal Pavilion, Qianjinfang, and even several places they frequent—but...they were nowhere to be found."

"We asked their colleagues, but no one heard anything unusual last night..."

"What about the dormitory's formation? Was it triggered? Were there any signs of intrusion?" Fei Qing interrupted the steward's report, his fingertips lightly tapping the obsidian tabletop, producing a crisp, rhythmic sound. The

formation...the formation is functioning normally, with no trigger record."

"We have carefully checked Tu Meng's residence and all areas inside and outside the dormitory, but found no signs of a struggle, nor any residual aura or fluctuations of magical power. Everything...everything is eerily normal."

Another steward added, his face filled with disbelief.

"Eerily normal..." Fei Qing repeated the sentence, his narrow eyes slightly narrowed, the cold light intensifying.

"Two body cultivators at the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, especially Tu Meng, who was on duty, inside the dormitory, protected by the formation, just vanished without a sound? Without even leaving a trace?"

Fei Qing stood up, slowly walked to the window, and looked at the gradually brightening sky outside, but his eyes became even more profound.

The Tu Gang and Tu Meng brothers were his trusted henchmen, specially promoted to handle shady matters, especially the Fallen Soul Slope incident some time ago...Now the two of them have disappeared at the same time, neither alive nor dead, this is definitely not unusual.

"Recently, has anyone been inquiring about... things they shouldn't be inquiring about?" Fei Qing asked suddenly, his back to the stewards. The

stewards exchanged glances. One of them seemed to remember something and hesitated before saying, "Reporting to the Grand Steward, a few days ago... there seemed to be a rumor that someone in the Zhiwen Pavilion in the dark alleys of the West District was spending a lot of money to inquire about... about the Fallen Soul Slope."

"Especially... about that male and female cultivators. But the old ghost of the Zhiwen Pavilion is tight-lipped, and our people haven't been able to find out exactly who they are."

"Failed Soul Slope... that male and female..." Fei Qing turned around, a barely perceptible shadow crossing his face. "Anything else?"

"Anything else..."

another steward whispered, "Yesterday afternoon, an informant from the Punishment Hall reported that there seemed to be an unfamiliar face loitering near the Drunken Immortal Pavilion, seemingly... seemingly inquiring about Tu Gang's whereabouts. But at the time, we thought it was just a common revenge or debt dispute, and didn't... didn't take it too seriously."

Bang!

Fei Qing slammed his palm on the obsidian table, and a chunk of the hard corner was smashed off and turned to dust!

“Useless!”

He roared, his eyes blazing with murderous intent, “Someone has already inquired about the executioner! How dare you be so negligent?!”

The four stewards were so frightened that they knelt down with a thud, kowtowing repeatedly: “Grand Steward, please calm down! We have failed in our duty! We deserve to die!”

Fei Qing’s chest heaved slightly, suppressing the surging anger and the faint unease rising within him.

The disappearance of the Tu brothers, the inquiries about the Fallen Soul Slope incident and the executioner... these two things, when connected, pointed too clearly!

Could it be... that old acquaintances of that man and woman have come knocking?

But those two, according to intelligence, have no foundation in the Thirteenth Heaven, how could they possibly enlist such a mysterious expert who could even silently evade the dormitory’s formation?

Or perhaps, when they infiltrated the vicinity of the City Lord’s Mansion, they truly discovered something, and this involved more than just them?

Countless thoughts raced through Fei Qing’s mind.

He knew Yu Wuji’s temperament well, and he was even more aware of the consequences if anything entrusted to him by the Divine Clan went wrong.

The matter at Fallen Soul Slope had to remain a secret; any possibility of it being revealed had to be nipped in the bud immediately!

“Pass on my orders!”

Fei Qing’s voice returned to its icy tone. “First, immediately seal off all information and declare that Tu Gang and Tu Meng have secretly left the city on official business. Anyone who dares to discuss or spread rumors in private will be punished severely for disrupting the affairs of the city!”

“Second, mobilize the entire Punishment Hall and the Inner Guard to secretly investigate all unfamiliar faces entering the city recently, especially those with unknown cultivation levels or suspicious movements.”

Focus on tracking down those two people who inquired about Fallen Soul Slope and the Tu brothers! Dig three feet into the ground to find them!"

"Third, strengthen the guards and array alert levels in all areas of the City Lord's Mansion, especially key locations such as the Inner Palace, the warehouse, and Fallen Soul Slope. Without my order, no one is allowed to approach!"

"Fourth, notify the deacons of the West District to immediately impose a citywide curfew. Only entry is permitted, no exit! Strictly check all city gates and teleportation arrays. All those leaving the city must undergo rigorous inspection!"

A series of orders were issued, clear and decisive.

"Yes! We will obey the Grand Steward's orders!" The four stewards, as if granted a pardon, quickly accepted the orders and left. Fei

Qing remained alone in the duty room, his expression uncertain.

He walked to the wall and opened a hidden compartment, revealing a row of neatly arranged jade boxes, each labeled.

His finger traced over several of the boxes, finally stopping at one labeled "Jiaxu 73".

Inside were the "Soul Refining Crystals," condensed from the soul fragments of Mu Sha and Liu Qingyin, collected from the Soul Refining Array at Fallen Soul Slope.

According to custom, Soul Refining Crystals of this level needed to be periodically reinforced and imprisoned with a special array and reported to the Divine Race.

"Could it be... that they really came for this?"

Fei Qing muttered to himself, his eyes flickering.

He instinctively wanted to immediately check if the Soul Refining Crystals were safe, but years of caution made him stop.

The situation was unclear, and if he rashly went to the secret vault where the Soul Refining Crystals were stored, he might be targeted...

He hesitated for a moment, then took out a specially made communication jade talisman, infused it with magic power, and whispered a few words.

A moment later, the jade talisman glowed faintly, transmitting a brief divine thought message.

Confirming that the secret vault's formation was intact and there were no immediate abnormalities, Fei Qing breathed a slight sigh of relief, but his vigilance was at its peak.

He decided that he must see the Manor Lord Yu Wuji today and report this matter in person.

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As the sun rose high in the sky, the atmosphere within Jade Immortal City had drastically changed. The

previously relatively relaxed city gates and main streets were suddenly filled with a large number of Jade Immortal Palace guards clad in cyan armor and exuding a powerful aura.

They sealed off all the city gates, leaving only one side gate open for entry, and those who entered were subject to strict questioning and inspection.

The number of patrol teams within the city doubled, increasing from three-person teams to ten-person teams, with the leaders at least at the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, their sharp eyes scanning every pedestrian on the street.

The teleportation array area was completely sealed off, and anyone attempting to use the teleportation array to leave was rudely stopped.

“What's going on? What happened?”

“I don't know! I heard something happened at the City Lord's Mansion last night...”

“Shh! Keep your voice down! Didn't you see the look in those guards' eyes? Do they want to die?”

“This kind of situation... we haven't seen anything like it in hundreds of years, has it? Could it be that some important person is coming? Or...”

The cultivators on the street were discussing among themselves, but they all kept their voices down, their faces filled with surprise and unease .

Jade Immortal City had been peaceful for too long, and this sudden tension and martial law made everyone feel a sense of impending doom.

Some well-informed or perceptive forces restrained their disciples, closed their doors, and waited to see what would happen.

...

Inside the Bamboo Forest Abode, David, Ming Li, Lian Xing, and the others naturally noticed the changes in the city immediately.

“They’re moving so fast.”

Ming Li glanced through the bamboo grove at the noticeably increased number of patrolling guards on the distant streets, his brow furrowing slightly. “It seems the disappearance of the Tu brothers has already put Jade Immortal Prefecture on high alert. The entire city is under martial law, no entry, no exit—they’re checking us.” The monkey’s face paled, and he nervously rubbed his hands: “Senior... what do we do now? The city gates and teleportation arrays are sealed off, how ... how do we get out?”

Leopard Brother’s expression

was also grave: “The Jade Immortal Mansion’s reaction this time is probably not just because two executioners died. That old dog Fei Qing must have sensed something.”

Lianxing looked at David, who had been resting with his eyes closed and his face calm, and said in a deep voice: “Senior, our intelligence has just delivered definite news. The direction of the investigation within the Jade Immortal Mansion has clearly pointed to the two unfamiliar faces who inquired about Fallen Soul Slope at the Zhiwen Pavilion a few days ago.”

“They are currently conducting a secret city-wide search for anyone matching their description. Although we are well-hidden here, it’s probably not a place for us to stay for long.”

David slowly opened his eyes, his gaze deep and calm. “As expected. Fei Qing isn’t stupid. He must have connected the deaths of the Tu brothers to Senior Mu Sha’s matter. Martial law and a search are inevitable reactions.”

He paused, then looked at Lian Xing: “You said before that you had a way to muddy the waters, make Fei Qing suspicious, and perhaps even lure him away. How’s that going?”

Lian Xing’s spirits lifted, and she quickly replied: “Our people have already begun their operation. Through several intermediaries connected to the outer deacons of the Jade Immortal Palace, but who are not entirely reliable, they have spread several pieces of information, some true and some false.”

“Firstly, they implied that the Tu brothers were silenced because they knew certain shady details of transactions within the Jade Immortal Palace, especially those involving resource allocation and the handling of certain special materials.”

“Secondly, it implies that this matter may be related to several elders in the outer court who are dissatisfied with Fei Qing’s control over internal affairs. They secretly hired someone to retaliate, intending to cut off Fei Qing’s wings and undermine his prestige.”

“Thirdly, the most subtle point is that the stones at Fallen Soul Slope may not be sturdy, implying that there may be a problem with the Soul Refining Array or related items.”

“These messages are being spread very carefully, through roundabout channels, so they shouldn’t reach us in the short term.”

“But given Fei Qing’s suspicious nature and his emphasis on power, he will definitely not remain indifferent to these rumors.”

“Especially the last point, which involves the Soul Refining Crystal, his lifeline and his biggest source of insecurity.”

David nodded: “Well done. What Fei Qing fears most now is that the Fallen Soul Slope incident will be exposed and the Soul Refining Crystal will be compromised.”

“The rumors of internal strife will also make him hesitant to act rashly, not daring to use all his resources to investigate openly. Instead, he may rely more on his core confidants, or... personally confirm whether what he cares about most is safe.”

“Mr. Chen means he’s likely to take action today?” Ming Li asked.

“Martial law and searches are for external threats; stabilizing the internal situation and confirming the safety of core secrets are what he urgently needs to do right now,”

David’s gaze turned slightly cold. “Especially if he’s going to see Yu Wuji to report, then before that, he’ll likely go to a certain place...” “The secret vault where the Soul Refining Crystals are stored!” Lianxing interjected, her eyes gleaming.

“That’s right.”

David stood up. “Fellow Daoist Lianxing, do you have any spies among your men who can infiltrate the Inner Palace or get close to important areas without arousing suspicion?”

“They don’t need to do anything dangerous. They just need to observe from a distance whether Fei Qing will leave the core area of the Inner Palace this morning and head in a specific direction, especially west of the Hundred Gardens, near the vault or a more remote corner.” Lianxing

quickly thought: "Yes! We have a brother who works as a handyman in the Inner Palace's kitchen, responsible for transporting ingredients to some areas. He can take the opportunity to move around in some passages on the outer perimeter of the Inner Palace."

"West of the Hundred Gardens... that area is close to the Cold Cellar and the Old Pill Room, and it is indeed quite remote. I'll immediately arrange for him to keep an eye out near the passages in those directions."

"Very good." David looked at Ming Li and Leopard Brother. "You two continue to monitor the search and arrest activities within the city and the reactions of the Jade Immortal Mansion's higher-ups. Monkey, you stay here and don't go out."

"Senior, you mean..." Lian Xing vaguely guessed David's plan.

"If Fei Qing is really disturbed by the rumors and worried about the Soul Refining Crystal, and goes to the secret vault to check it out himself..."

David's voice was calm, but carried a resolute determination. "That would be the best time for us to make our move. On the secluded path leading to the secret vault, the chances are much greater than in the Spirit Gathering Pool shrouded by the array."

"But Senior, even if Fei Qing leaves the core area, he will definitely have guards by his side, and the location of the secret vault must be heavily guarded..." Leopard Brother said worriedly.

"It's all up to us."

David didn't say much, but the unwavering confidence he exuded, as if everything was under his control, unconsciously infected everyone.

The waiting time became exceptionally long.

The air in the study seemed to freeze, and everyone could hear their own heartbeat.

About an hour later, a rhythmic chirping of birds echoed outside the hermitage.

Lianxing's expression shifted, and she quickly walked out of the hermitage, returning a moment later with a mixture of suppressed excitement and tension on her face.

"Senior! There's news!"

She spoke faster, "Our people saw that about 25 minutes ago, Fei Qing, accompanied by two bodyguards, left Qingxin Pavilion and headed towards the west side of the Hundred Gardens, behind the old alchemy room!" "

Further in that direction is an abandoned courtyard and mountain wall that has been designated as a restricted area. We've always suspected there's a hidden entrance or secret room there!"

David's eyes flashed: "He really went there. He only had two bodyguards with him?"

"Confirmed to be only two, both his trusted henchmen, with cultivation levels around the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm."

Lianxing confirmed, "And they walked very fast, deliberately avoiding the main road, choosing secluded paths, and their expressions were wary."

"Good." David no longer hesitated, "Tell me the most likely point along that path, the most suitable point to make a move."

Lianxing was prepared and immediately took out a simple but clearly marked map of the inner palace's outer perimeter, pointing to a narrow path winding between the artificial hill and the old garden.

"This place is called Listening Pine Path. It's lined with ancient pines and scattered rocks, the path is winding and the view is obstructed. Moreover, because it's near an abandoned area, there are very few guards patrolling, and the intervals between patrols are long."

"It's one of the only routes they can take from Qingxin Pavilion to that restricted area, and also the most likely one."

David carefully examined the map, memorizing the route and environment.

"Ming Li, you come with me. Provide support around Listening Pine Path, guarding against any unexpected events and providing backup."

"Lian Xing, all of you, move immediately, leave this place, and go to the safe houses you prepared earlier. Don't act rashly without my message." David quickly issued the orders.

"Senior, please be careful! Fei Qing's cultivation is not weak, and he's as cunning as a fox; he must have ways to protect himself!" Lian Xing solemnly warned.

David nodded, said nothing more, exchanged a glance with Ming Li, and the two of them vanished silently from the hermitage, as if blending into the shadows under the sunlight.

The window of opportunity left for them was very short.

Before Fei Qing returns after inspecting the secret vault, the high-risk operation of intercepting, subduing, interrogating, and then evacuating must be completed on Ting Song Path.

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The sunlight outside the hermitage was perfect, casting dappled shadows on the bamboo, but David and Ming Li seemed to blend into the gaps in the light and shadow, vanishing without a trace in an instant.

Lian Xing gazed in the direction they disappeared, silently praying.

She then turned around, her expression solemn, and said to Leopard Brother and Monkey, "Pack your things immediately and move to Safe House Number Two as instructed by the senior. Be quick, and leave no trace."

David and Ming Li moved at high speed through the complex streets and rooftops of Jade Immortal City, like two invisible shadows.

They avoided all main roads and heavily patrolled areas, choosing instead quiet alleys, abandoned courtyards, and even underground drainage channels, their movements unpredictable, their auras concealed to the extreme.

As a member of the Ghost Clan, Ming Li was naturally adept at concealment. Now, she further neutralized her ghostly aura, following closely behind David, once again marveling at David's unfathomable stealth abilities.

About an incense stick's time later, the two silently approached the high western wall of the Jade Immortal Mansion.

This wasn't the main gate, and the guards were relatively weak, but faint defensive runes still flowed across the tall jade wall, and there were hidden sentries at intervals.

David didn't choose to climb over the wall. He led Ming Li around to the base of the wall, where several ancient vines, their tendrils intertwined, covered almost half the wall.

More importantly, David's divine sense detected a long-abandoned, narrow pipe inside the wall, used to drain the residual spiritual spring water. Due to

years of neglect, most of its internal protective array had long since failed, and because it was so tiny and hidden, it hadn't been covered by the routine maintenance array.

"Go in this way,"

David transmitted his voice, a flash of chaotic gray light appearing at his fingertips as he lightly touched a brick hidden under the old vines.

The gray light seeped in, and a few extremely faint "clicks" came from inside the brick, as if an internal mechanism had been quietly unlocked.

Immediately afterward, a section of the wall, about a foot square, silently caved in, revealing a dark opening just wide enough for one person to pass through sideways, emanating a musty, damp smell.

Without hesitation, David slipped inside first, followed closely by Ming Li.

Once inside, David tapped a spot on the inside of the loose brick, and the opening silently returned to its original state, appearing identical to the surrounding walls from the outside.

Inside was a narrow, downward-sloping stone path covered in slippery moss, the air thick with a musty smell and a faint dampness.

The two descended several dozen feet along the path, where a fork in the road appeared ahead.

Based on the markings on the Lianxing map and his own divine sense, David chose the deeper, more secluded passage on the left, almost half-blocked by collapsed earth and rocks.

Like the most agile pangolins, they traversed the narrow, complex, and treacherous abandoned pipes and underground crevices.

In some places, they needed to subtly corrode the rusted iron fences blocking their path with chaotic power; in others, they had to carefully avoid fragments of ancient restrictions that still retained a faint sense of aggression. Throughout

the process, David demonstrated an astonishing insight and control over energy and structure, always finding the safest and fastest path.

Ming Li followed silently, his heart growing increasingly apprehensive.

This was not merely a matter of superior strength; it required extremely rich experience and a frighteningly calm mind.

How many perilous situations had David endured to hone such skills? About an incense stick's time later, a faint light and fresh air appeared ahead.

David stopped before an exit covered in overgrown weeds, his divine sense flowing outwards like water.

Beyond the exit lay a long-abandoned corner of a garden; the artificial hills were crumbling, the ponds dried up, and weeds grew rampant.

In the distance, the magnificent eaves of the Jade Immortal Palace's inner buildings could be seen, but this place had clearly been forgotten for a long time.

"We're already in the abandoned area outside the Hundred Flowers Garden,"

David transmitted his voice. "The Listening Pine Path is to the east. Go through this abandoned garden, then through a small bamboo grove. Fei Qingruo will inevitably pass through the Listening Pine Path on her way from the Pure Heart Pavilion. Let's go there beforehand to make arrangements."

The two floated out of the cave like ghosts, quickly disappearing into the shadows of the abandoned garden, and stealthily headed towards the Listening Pine Path.

The Listening Pine Path truly lived up to its name. A winding flagstone path was nestled among tall, dense ancient pine trees.

The pines, each as thick as several people could encircle, had grown for countless years, their branches strong and their needles like canopies, cutting sunlight into dappled patterns that dappled the moss-covered flagstones. The path was

flanked by jagged rocks, further enhancing its winding and secluded nature. The place was exceptionally quiet; apart from the rustling of the wind through the pines, almost no other sound could be heard, and no one could be seen.

David quickly scanned his surroundings, his eyes sharp as lightning.

He chose a hollow at a bend in the path, flanked by tall artificial rocks and several exceptionally thick ancient pines. There were many blind spots, and the intertwined branches above created a natural, concealed space.

"Ming Li, hide behind that boulder and conceal your presence. Don't make a move without my signal."

"Your task is, in case of any unexpected events, such as patrolling guards passing by or Fei Qing's guards trying to sound the alarm, you must immediately and discreetly stop them, creating chaos or misleading them to buy us time."

David quickly assigned the task.

“Understood.”

Ming Li nodded, his figure flickering, disappearing like smoke into the shadow of the boulder, his presence vanishing without a trace, as if no one had ever been there.

David himself leaped, silently climbing a perfectly positioned ancient pine tree, hiding behind its dense needles.

From this angle, he could clearly see the area of about ten feet before and after the bend in the path below, yet remain extremely difficult for those below to detect.

Next, it was a matter of patiently waiting, and... silently making preparations.

David stretched out his hands, his fingertips simultaneously glowing with a barely perceptible chaotic gray light.

He made a sweeping motion in the air, and countless fine, gray threads shot from his fingertips, merging into the surrounding air, pine needles, cracks in the rocks, and the ground.

He was setting up an array.