the mans Decree: Kai Ping/Chen Ping

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The next instant, he moved.

Without gathering power, without warning, without any fluctuation of spiritual energy, Kai's figure vanished from his spot as if it had disappeared into thin air, leaving not even a trace.

When he reappeared, he had already traversed a thousand feet of void, appearing before the light screen of the sect's protective array. His posture was upright, his gray robe fluttering gently in the breeze, as if he had never moved.

He raised his right hand, his five fingers slightly spread, and gray-purple chaotic power condensed in his palm into a deep, almost pitch-black vortex.

Within that vortex was the ultimate primordial power of the return of all things to nothingness and the annihilation of all laws, which gently adhered to the dark golden light screen of the sect's protective array. There was no earth-shattering roar, only a soft "hiss," like hot iron melting into ice.

"Break."

The sound of that single word was not loud, yet it echoed between heaven and earth like a decree of the heavens, making the eardrums of all cultivators ache and their hearts tremble.

The dark golden protective array's light barrier abruptly froze. Then, starting from the point where Kai's palm touched it, countless fine cracks spread rapidly like a spiderweb!

Those ancient array patterns, passed down for millennia and reinforced by successive sect leaders, shattered, dimmed, and vanished in an instant, without even a chance to repair themselves.

The thick, dark golden light barrier exploded like a broken glass wall, turning into countless golden fragments that scattered and hissed into the lava river below, instantly dissolving without leaving a trace.

The protective array shattered in a single blow!

"Impossible! This is absolutely impossible!"

a Grand Elder exclaimed in disbelief. "This is the Blood Refining Divine Sect's protective array, passed down for ten thousand years! Even a peak fourth-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal couldn't shatter it in a single blow! What kind of monster is he?"

The Crimson Sun Venerable's pupils suddenly contracted to their maximum, his composure and cunning shattering completely, replaced by raw, undisguised terror.

The three Grand Elders behind him were even more pale and trembling. They had lived for tens of thousands of years and experienced countless battles.

They had never seen anyone shatter the Blood Refining Divine Sect's proud protective array so easily. The young man's strength was beyond their comprehension.

"You—"

The Crimson Sun Venerable instinctively wanted to retreat, his body shifting slightly as he prepared to flee this dangerous place. However, Kai's figure had already vanished again after the shattered array light, his speed so fast that even divine sense couldn't catch him.

The next instant, a Grand Elder felt a chill run through his chest, an icy coldness instantly engulfing his entire body.

Looking down, he saw a long, powerful hand had silently pierced his chest, the five fingers clutching a pulsating crimson divine core. The core emanated the

Daoist principles cultivated over millennia, flickering like a warm, translucent glass lamp, radiating faint divine power.

The Grand Elder's pupils dilated, his mouth slightly open, but before he could even utter a scream, the light in his eyes extinguished completely.

He became an empty shell, falling softly towards the lava river at the bottom of the rift, instantly swallowed by the magma, leaving not even a trace of his remains.

Kai's hand gently closed, the movement soft yet carrying an irresistible force.

The crimson divine core shattered, disintegrated, and dissipated in his palm like glass, turning into countless crimson specks of light. These specks were instantly devoured, refined, and reduced to nothingness by the grayish-purple chaotic power, leaving not even a trace of divine soul fragment. A

fourth-grade Grand Luo Golden Immortal was killed in one move, without even a chance to resist.

The remaining two Supreme Elders froze on the spot as if struck by lightning, their bodies trembling violently, not daring to even flee.

They had lived for tens of thousands of years, long accustomed to their lofty and aloof demeanor, looking down upon all living beings.

But now, facing this gray-robed young man, they felt that their ten thousand years of cultivation were as fragile and laughable as a child's toy, and they couldn't even muster the courage to raise their hands.

"There's one more."

Kai slowly turned his head, his purple eyes falling on the other Supreme Elder, his tone calm, as if he were counting items, without the slightest emotional fluctuation.

The moment his words fell, he attacked again, without any unnecessary movements, raising his hand and clenching it in the air.

The space around the Supreme Elder suddenly collapsed and contracted. Grayish-purple chaotic power, like an invisible giant hand, gripped him and his protective divine light, the force increasing with each crushing sound. The

Supreme Elder let out a shrill scream as his divine light instantly dissipated, the sound of his bones shattering clearly audible, yet he had no power to resist. With a

muffled thud, the Supreme Elder didn't even have a chance to scream before he was crushed into a bloody, crimson mass in the void, his divine foundation, soul, and the laws of the Dao annihilated along with him.

Even the remnants of his reincarnated soul were completely obliterated, vanishing from the world.

In two breaths, both Supreme Elders were dead.

The last Supreme Elder lay limp in the void, trembling like a leaf, his teeth chattering, no longer able to maintain the composure and dignity expected of a Great Luo Golden Immortal.

He collapsed to his knees in the void with a thud, desperately kowtowing to Kai, his forehead pressed tightly against the air. His voice was hoarse and shrill, filled with extreme fear: "Senior, spare me! Senior, spare me! I know nothing!

It was all the Sect Master's idea! It was the Sect Master who ordered us to guard the Crimson Flame Prison, and he ordered that woman to be drugged! I will never dare to do it again! Please, Senior, spare my life!"

Kai didn't even glance at him, his gaze fixed on the Crimson Sun Venerable, calm and cold as if he were watching prey, as if the pleas for mercy were irrelevant to him.

His aura remained completely still, yet it plunged the entire world into a deathly silence. All the cultivators held their breath, afraid to utter a sound.

The Crimson Sun Venerable's face was now deathly pale, cold sweat pouring down his forehead. His divine power surged and churned in extreme fear, yet he couldn't even muster the courage to attack.

The events of those two breaths had completely shattered his Dao heart.

His cultivation level was only at the fourth rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm, yet he couldn't even withstand a single serious attack from this young man before him. The opponent's strength far exceeded his expectations.

He abruptly turned around and, without hesitation, plummeted into the depths of the rift!

He even abandoned his dignity, his sect, everything, wanting only to escape this inferno before death arrived, to save his life and make plans for the future.

His speed reached its limit, and divine light erupted from his body at full force, attempting to... He slowly raised his finger and gently slashed at the figure, his movements slow and unhurried, as if performing a trivial task.

A condensed, extremely thin, hair-like, and no more than three feet long grayish-purple sword light burst forth from his fingertip.

The sword light was silent and traceless, piercing through the void as easily as piercing thin paper, arriving before the Crimson Sun Venerable, precisely grazing the knees of the fleeing Crimson Sun Venerable's legs without the slightest deviation.

*Sizzle.

* A faint, almost inaudible cutting sound rang out, yet it clearly reached the ears of every cultivator.

The Crimson Sun Venerable's figure suddenly froze, followed by an extremely shrill scream that echoed throughout the entire rift valley, causing rock fragments to fall and the lava river to surge.

His two lower legs had been neatly severed at the knees, the cuts as smooth as mirrors, without any blood or flesh, yet carrying a fatal wound.

Crimson-gold divine blood gushed forth like a fountain, scattering across the sky and rising as a faint blood mist in the scorching air, instantly filling the entire rift valley with the stench of blood.

He lost his balance and plummeted towards the bottom of the rift like a bird with broken wings, crashing heavily onto a protruding dark red rock wall.

His bones cracked and shattered, yet his screams of agony continued, filled with extreme pain and fear.

Kai descended slowly, his gray robes billowing in the scorching air, as if treading on invisible steps towards the rock wall where the Crimson Sun Venerable had fallen.

His steps were steady and composed; with each step, the chaotic energy around him dissipated slightly, isolating him from the surrounding heat and debris.

He looked down at the Blood Refining Divine Sect Master, covered in blood, both legs broken at the knees, utterly wretched, his purple eyes devoid of pity, only a calm, almost cold indifference.

"Where is she?"

Kai asked, his voice still calm and devoid of emotion, yet carrying an undeniable authority.

The Crimson Sun Venerable trembled violently, crimson-gold divine blood gushing from his severed limbs, rising in a faint mist in the scorching air. His face was deathly pale, his eyes unfocused, utterly shattered by fear that had shattered all his dignity and pride.

He spoke hoarsely, his voice filled with extreme pain and terror: "In...in the deepest part of the Crimson Flame Prison...I didn't touch her! The drug...the drug was just administered, I didn't have time to do anything to her!

Please spare my life...I'm willing to hand over all the treasures of my sect, willing to submit to you, please spare my life..."

Kai's purple eyes fell upon his pale, distorted face, remaining silent for a moment.

Then he spoke slowly, his voice calm yet carrying a chill that sent shivers down the spine of Venerable Chiyang: "You've drugged me. You still wanted to force dual cultivation? Your life won't be spared."

He raised his hand and lightly pointed, a gray-purple chaotic power entering Venerable Chiyang's dantian, precisely shattering his ten-thousand-year-old Great Luo Golden Immortal divine foundation core, without the slightest hesitation.

Venerable Chiyang's body arched violently, letting out an extremely shrill howl. His divine power dissipated rapidly like a deflated sack.

His cultivation at the fourth rank of Great Luo Golden Immortal plummeted at a visible speed, falling straight to the Golden Immortal realm, ultimately returning to zero. He became a cripple, slumped against the rock wall, barely able to move, only able to utter weak groans.

"No... my cultivation..."

Venerable Chiyang's eyes were empty, muttering to himself, his eyes filled with despair and resentment, but he could no longer utter any powerful sound.

Kai glanced at him again, turning to walk towards the deepest part of the rift valley, towards the crimson Crimson Flame Prison.

His steps were steady and unhurried, his gray robe lightly brushing against the scorching rocky ground, the chaotic energy around him automatically isolating everything that approached from the heat and the aftershocks of the array.

Wherever he passed, the array patterns on the rock walls dimmed and crumbled, leaving not a trace of resistance.

The iron bars of the Crimson Flame Prison were reduced to dust with a wave of Kai's hand, the sturdy prison door as fragile as paper.

Deep within the prison, Jiang Xuelan slumped against the cold rock wall, her body burning hot, her cheeks flushed.

Her icy blue eyes were hazy and unfocused, her breath weak and disordered, yet she still clung to her last shred of consciousness, refusing to give in.

But the moment that gray figure stepped into the prison, it was as if a final glimmer of light was ignited in her pupils, and an indescribable emotion appeared on her weak face.

“Chen... Kai...”

Her voice was weak and hoarse, trembling and choked with sobs, like a drowning person grasping at the last piece of driftwood. Tears silently streamed down her face, soaking her cheeks.

Kai took a step forward and appeared before her.

He knelt down, his purple eyes falling on her flushed, hazy yet still stubborn face. A slight pang of pain shot through his heart, and the coldness in his eyes softened, replaced by a barely perceptible gentleness.

He reached out and touched her wrist, the power of the Chaos Origin flowing into her meridians like a warm current, precisely targeting the scorching medicinal aura deep within her dantian, slowly enveloping and dissolving it.

Though the medicine was potent, it was ultimately just a mortal elixir. Under the crushing force of the Chaos Origin, it rapidly dissipated, melted, and purified like snow meeting the blazing sun.

The scorching heat within Jiang Xuelan's body rapidly subsided, her burning temperature slowly decreased, and the misty fog in her icy blue eyes gradually dissipated, replaced by a clarity and a relieved, moist look.

Could she clearly...? "I'm sorry I'm late."

Kai reached out and gently pulled her into his arms. A warm, steady body temperature emanated from beneath his grey robe. His voice was deep and gentle, carrying a rare warmth. "I'm sorry you had to suffer."

Jiang Xuelan buried her face in his chest, tears soaking his clothes, but she didn't cry out.

She simply clutched his robe tightly, as if trying to release all the fear, despair, and struggle she had just felt in this embrace. Feeling his presence, the unease and anxiety in her heart gradually dissipated.

Kai didn't say anything more, gently patting her back to soothe her emotions.

He slowly stood up, one arm around Jiang Xuelan's waist to steady her, the other hand raised and gently grasped the dome above the Heavenly Prison.

There was no overwhelming aura, no flashy moves, yet it carried a power capable of destroying everything.

Boom!

The entire dome of the Crimson Flame Heavenly Prison instantly collapsed and exploded, dark red divine iron fragments and lava debris flying everywhere.

Countless cracks spread from Kai's palm in all directions, completely tearing apart, collapsing, and destroying the prison that had held Jiang Xuelan captive for days!

Scorching magma surged and churned below, yet it couldn't even approach the chaotic domain within three feet of Kai, not even a spark could touch his robes.

He supported Jiang Xuelan, step by step walking out of the ruins, his purple eyes gleaming with a deep, cold light as he surveyed the chaotic Blood Refining Divine Sect below.

The entire sect was now in utter chaos and collapse: fleeing disciples, wailing elders, shattered halls, and crumbling array patterns. The

once mighty Twenty-Two Heavens Sect had been reduced to scorched earth and ruins by his two palms and one sword.

The sounds of cultivators fleeing in panic and their desperate cries echoed through the rift, but all of this was no longer relevant to Kai.

He helped Jiang Xuelan rise into the air, a streak of gray-purple light shooting upwards before slowly landing beside Hao Ling at the edge of the rift.

Hao Ling looked at the woman in Kai's arms, her body covered in blood but her breathing gradually stabilizing, then at the billowing smoke and wailing ruins deep within the rift.

His throat moved, his eyes filled with utter shock and awe, unable to utter a complete sentence.

"Senior...you...you really destroyed the Blood Refining Divine Sect?"

Hao Ling asked with difficulty, his voice trembling, his eyes filled with disbelief. "That was a great sect with a ten-thousand-year history, and four Grand Luo Golden Immortals of the fourth rank, and you just...just like that, you destroyed it?"

Kai didn't answer immediately, but gently supported Jiang Xuelan, smoothing her disheveled hair with a tender gesture, a stark contrast to the coldness he displayed when destroying the sect.

He spoke calmly, his tone even: "They deserve to die."

Hao Ling trembled, nodding hurriedly, his eyes filled with even greater awe: "Senior is absolutely right. The Blood Refining Divine Sect has committed countless evils and should have been destroyed long ago.

Senior's divine might is unparalleled; today, I have truly witnessed what a true powerhouse is."

He paused, then couldn't help but ask, "Senior, your strength clearly far surpasses that of a Grand Luo Golden Immortal, so why is your aura only at the eighth rank of the Golden Immortal realm? Such methods are truly astonishing."

Kai slightly raised his purple eyes, glanced at him, and said calmly, "Cultivation aura is merely an appearance. True strength lies not in the level of one's realm, but in one's fundamental foundation.

You only need to remember to obey, otherwise, the Blood Refining Divine Sect will serve as a warning."

"I will remember Senior's teachings!"

Hao Ling immediately bowed deeply, his attitude extremely respectful, no longer daring to be negligent in the slightest.

He watched Kai's retreating figure, already revering him as a god in his heart. He knew that the strength of this senior before him far exceeded his imagination, and that if he could follow him in the future, he would surely benefit immensely.

Kai stood on the precipice at the edge of the rift valley, his gray robes fluttering, his purple eyes gazing back at the ravaged Blood Abyss Rift Valley.

Finally, he uttered a calm yet undeniably authoritative sentence: "From this day forward, the Blood Refining Divine Sect will cease to exist."

The wind rose, swirling up dust and scorching ashes, slowly burying the ruins.

The gray-purple figure, carrying the person in his arms, transformed into a streak of light and disappeared into the horizon, leaving behind only endless silence and shock on this land once ruled by the Blood Refining Divine Sect.

In the rift valley, the crippled Crimson Sun Venerable, his leg broken and his cultivation crippled, slumped against the rock wall, looking up at the departing streak of light. His cloudy eyes surged with resentment and despair, yet he couldn't even utter a curse.

His Blood Refining Divine Sect's ten-thousand-year foundation crumbled with a single palm strike;

his cultivation as a fourth-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal vanished into nothingness.

He stared blankly at the sky, where a faint gray-purple trail remained on the crimson sky stained with blood mist.

Like a sharp and resolute sword mark, it was forever etched into the heavens above the Blood Abyss Rift, a warning to those who would come after: never easily provoke those who are not to be trifled with.

Kai didn't kill the Blood Refining Sect Master; that would have been too convenient . A streak of greyish-purple light, like a comet piercing the deathly night, swept across barren mountains and parched valleys.

Wherever it passed, even the air itself rippled slightly before returning to stillness.

Kai, supporting Jiang Xuelan, swept his divine sense across a hundred miles like an invisible tide.

He meticulously examined every inch of land and every rock, confirming there were no signs of tracking or ambush before slowly descending.

He waved away a layer of withered vines and pebbles covering the rock wall; the soft sound of the vines snapping was particularly clear in the silent valley, revealing the entrance to a naturally formed stone cave.

The entrance was narrow and deep, allowing only one person to pass sideways, but the interior was quite spacious and dry, the floor smooth as a mirror, the rock walls smooth and warm.

Clearly, it was a temporary secluded retreat for a cultivator in ancient times, abandoned for many years, which conveniently became its most inconspicuous hiding place.

A thin crack in the cave ceiling let in a few slivers of sunlight, illuminating the dust inside like fine gold dust. A faint, fresh scent of grass and trees filled the air, a stark contrast to the desolate and oppressive atmosphere outside.

Kai gently placed Jiang Xuelan on a simple bed made of jade.

His fingertips rested on her wrist, and the Chaos Origin flowed in like a warm stream, carefully examining her body once more.

Although the poison had been completely removed, the Crimson Phoenix Bewitching Powder was exceptionally potent, leaving burns on her meridians like fine cracks, clinging to her Dao foundation.

Coupled with the loss of vital energy from days of imprisonment, her complexion remained somewhat pale; it would be difficult to recover to her peak condition without three to five days of rest.

Jiang Xuelan leaned against the bed, her icy blue eyes half-open, her gaze fixed on Kai's busy back.

He stood tall and straight, his grey robe gleaming softly in the dim light, as he used the primordial chaos to create layer upon layer of isolation arrays at the cave entrance.

A greyish-purple halo flickered, each array pattern precisely embedded in the texture of the rock wall, merging seamlessly with the natural stone veins, completely isolating the internal and external energies.

These array patterns, seemingly randomly scattered, actually contained the folding mysteries of spatial laws in every stroke.

Layer upon layer, even a Great Luo Golden Immortal's divine sense would only perceive this as an ordinary stone wall, utterly unaware of the hidden world within.

"Where were you teleported from that void turbulence? What happened?"

Jiang Xuelan asked, her voice still somewhat hoarse, but clearer than before, breaking the silence of the cave.

She shifted slightly, adjusting to a more comfortable position, her gaze fixed on Kai, carrying a hint of barely perceptible concern.

Kai didn't turn around, nor did his hands pause; the chaotic power at his fingertips continued to trace intricate array patterns on the rock wall. He

then simply said, "A mortal realm enslaved by the gods for a thousand years. Mortals were forced to create nuclear bombs, periodically detonating them as sacrifices, while the gods absorbed the nuclear energy for cultivation.

I destroyed those sacrifice towers and returned the heavens to them."

In just a few words, he summarized the millennia of suffering in the Ash Land and his own actions.

His tone was as calm as if recounting a trivial matter, as if he were merely brushing away a speck of dust.

Yet, Jiang Xuelan could sense the danger and resolve hidden beneath that nonchalant tone.

She had witnessed Kai's actions and knew that behind every seemingly effortless move lay untold planning and sacrifice.

She paused for a moment, her fingertips gently tracing the edge of the jade bed, and whispered, "You're always like this. No matter how difficult the situation, you always bear it all alone, never easily speaking of it."

Kai finally finished setting up the last array pattern, the gray-purple aura at his fingertips slowly receding into his body.

He turned to look at her, a faint question in his purple eyes, the coldness in them softening, replaced by a subtle gentleness.

He walked slowly to the bedside, stopped, and waited quietly for her to continue.

Jiang Xuelan shook her head slightly, a faint smile playing on her lips, her icy blue eyes reflecting Kai's image: "It's nothing.

I just feel... wherever you are, even the deepest darkness can be torn open, and even the most desperate situation can offer hope."

Her voice was soft, yet filled with unwavering certainty; the experiences of these past few days had deepened her trust in Kai.

Kai didn't reply, but simply sat down beside her. The Chaos Origin slowly condensed into a small, warm, azure halo in his palm, gently pressing it onto her shoulders and back.

That power, like a spring stream, seeped into her meridians, flowing slowly along her damaged veins, nourishing her scorched foundation and depleted blood and qi.

Wherever it passed, the stinging pain in her meridians gradually eased, and the last trace of paleness on Jiang Xuelan's face faded, replaced by a faint blush.

The two sat quietly for a while, a peaceful and silent atmosphere permeating the cave, a world apart from the hellish battle in the Blood Abyss Rift they had just witnessed.

Only faint breathing and the subtle hum of the Chaos Power emanating from the cave could be heard. Time seemed to stand still at that moment, all the strife and danger shut out from the outside.

“I sensed something else within the void turbulence,”

Jiang Xuelan suddenly spoke, her icy blue eyes slightly raised as she looked at the rock wall above the cave, her tone grave. “Before the fall, I vaguely saw Senior Xuanzhenzi using his sword light to protect the Seven Fairies.

They must have been together, at least they weren’t separated at the beginning of the fall.

But the spatial turbulence suddenly became extremely violent midway, as if some external force was tearing the passage apart, completely disrupting everyone’s trajectory.”

She frowned, seemingly trying to recall more details, her fingertips tightening slightly, revealing her unease: “Ning Zhi and Su Yuqi... they were swept away by a black vortex.

The aura of that vortex was strange, unlike the fluctuations of the void turbulence itself, but rather like a corner of a sealed spatial passage suddenly leaking out.

It was dark and heavy, as if it could devour all light, even divine sense would be instantly swallowed up if it probed into it, making it impossible to track their whereabouts.”

Kai’s hand paused slightly, a barely perceptible dark glint flashing deep within his purple eyes.

A black vortex.

Jiang Xuelan's description stirred a vague idea within him, but it was still unclear and required more information to confirm.

He nodded, not pressing for details, and said calmly, "You rest well. I'll handle the rest. No matter where they're taken, I'll find a way to locate them."

Jiang Xuelan didn't object and gently closed her eyes.

She trusted Kai's judgment and knew that forcing herself to participate in her current state would only slow him down. Only by quickly recovering her strength could she help him.

She slowly adjusted her breathing, guiding the spiritual energy within her body to merge with the chaotic energy Kai had injected, gently nourishing her damaged meridians.

Just as a sense of tranquility settled into the cave, a sound suddenly came from outside the cave entrance. Immediately afterward, a golden figure staggered through the outer, not yet fully closed, concealment barrier, and knelt with a thud at the edge of the cave entrance.

It was Hao Ling.

His face was deathly pale, cold sweat dripping from his forehead down his jawline, spreading a small damp patch on the dry ground.

A golden divine mark between his brows was flashing uncontrollably, each flash causing him to tremble as if enduring an extremely violent shock to his soul.

He gasped for breath, his chest heaving violently, his golden eyes churning with suppressed fear and panic, his voice hoarse and almost incoherent: "Senior... Senior! Something's happened! The Haotian Clan Chief... sent a message using the Soul Lamp!"

Kai stood up, his purple eyes fixed on the flickering golden divine mark, his expression calm and undisturbed.

His divine sense, like an invisible thread, reached out, tracing the laws governing the divine mark in reverse.

He clearly sensed a domineering will spanning a vast distance constantly assaulting the outer shell of the barrier.

That will was majestic and unyielding, like a supreme emperor issuing an inviolable command to his subordinates.

With each impact, the divine mark between Hao Ling's brows brightened, his face paled, and his aura became increasingly disordered.

"He ordered me to return to headquarters within three days to report and submit my report,"

Hao Ling's voice trembled uncontrollably, his hands gripping his robes tightly at his knees, almost tearing them apart.

"If I don't return by the deadline... the restrictions on the Soul Lamp will be activated directly. At that time, the Clan Chief will forcibly probe my soul with his divine sense to search through all the fragments of my memories.

Everything that happened in Jintu, your existence, the news of the Blood Refining Divine Sect's destruction... will all be exposed!"

He suddenly looked up at Kai, his golden eyes filled with despair and struggle, his voice trembling with sobs: "Senior, if I don't go back, I will surely die, and the Haotian Divine Clan will attack Jintu, and you will be completely exposed.

But if I go back... I'm not sure I can play this role well.

The Haotian Divine Clan Chief is an old monster at the peak of the fifth rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal. He has lived for countless millennia.

His insight is outrageously sharp, and he has seen countless cultivators. If I lie to him, I don't even believe I can deceive him!"

The air in the cave suddenly stagnated, the oppressive atmosphere making it hard to breathe.

Jiang Xuelan sat up straight on the bed, her icy blue eyes filled with solemnity, her brows tightly furrowed.

She understood the implications of Hao Ling's words.

Kai faced a dead end: keeping Hao Ling meant certain death, severing all clues about the Haotian Divine Clan, and halting future plans;

letting Hao Ling return meant he could be exposed at any moment, instantly reversing the situation in the entire Twenty-Second Heaven, and potentially plunging the billions of mortals of Jintu into annihilation.

Kai stood rooted to the spot, the hem of his grey robe falling silently to the ground, his purple eyes deep and unfathomable, his face expressionless, as if the predicament before him were irrelevant.

He didn't answer immediately, but silently gazed at the wildly flashing golden divine mark between Hao Ling's brows.

The Chaos Origin flowed silently from his fingertips, like invisible streams of water slowly swirling in the air, as he pondered a solution.

Having experienced countless ages and witnessed countless perilous situations, he had long since cultivated a calm and composed mindset. Although the current predicament was thorny, it was not insurmountable.

After a long silence, Kai finally spoke, his voice calm yet undeniably firm: "You must go back."

Hao Ling abruptly looked up, his eyes filled with helplessness and panic, his voice urgent: "Senior! If I..."

"You will not have any flaws."

Kai interrupted him, slowly walking to Hao Ling's side, his slender fingers gently rising and pressing against the golden divine mark between Hao Ling's brows.

A grayish-purple chaotic essence flowed in like a warm current, weaving an extremely delicate, concealing membrane around the divine mark.

This membrane was as thin as a cicada's wing, almost invisible to the naked eye, yet it acted like a thick gray veil covering a bright lamp.

It instantly weakened the connection between the divine mark and the laws of the outside world by more than 80%, perfectly concealing even the detection of the Soul Lamp.

Hao Ling felt it most directly.

The oppressive feeling on his soul, like a mountain pressing down, suddenly lessened considerably, and the stinging pain between his brows quickly subsided.

Instead, he felt a soothing sensation, like being enveloped in warm water, and his disordered breathing gradually calmed down.

He stared blankly at the changes within his body, feeling as if he had been pulled out of drowning water, gasping for breath, his eyes filled with disbelief, and his gaze towards Kai filled with increasing awe.

"The Soul Lamp can see that you're still alive and can sense your basic divine sense fluctuations."

Kai withdrew his hand, his tone still calm, as if he had only done a trivial matter. "But it can't remotely probe your memories or pinpoint your location.

This barrier will simulate a chaotic state of 'damaged divine sense and blurred memories,' which looks a lot like the aftereffects of being hit by a spatial storm.

When you go back, tell them that 'I encountered a void storm during nuclear energy collection, resulting in a large loss of nuclear energy, and I am still seriously injured and have damaged divine sense.'

Speak less, explain less, act tired and fearful, and don't reveal any details.

If the clan leader asks, say that your memory is somewhat disordered after being hit by the turbulence, and you can't remember the specific details. They can't verify your words remotely.

Forcibly detonating the restriction to read your memories would mean losing you as a disciple, which is not worth it in the current situation of scarce resources. It will only temporarily put aside the doubts."

Hao Ling slowly stood up, clenched his fist, took a deep breath, and felt the pressure within his body. Having regained his sense of control, he nodded vigorously, "Junior understands! Senior, rest assured, I will definitely perform this act well and will not expose any flaws!"

He paused, as if remembering something important, and quickly lowered his voice to add, "Senior, after I return, I can secretly investigate the movements of the Xuanming Ancient Clan.

The Xuan Tian Soul-Severing Jade originates from a secret realm deep within the Xuanming Ancient Clan's territory, but the Xuanming Ancient Clan and the Haotian Divine Clan have always had secret trade dealings.

Every now and then, a small number of rare items will flow out through an underground trading market called 'Xuanming Ancient Market.'

If I'm lucky, I might be able to find out a way to obtain the Soul-Severing Jade and help you remove my soul restriction."

Kai nodded, quite approving of Hao Ling's attitude: "Good. After you return, use the excuse of seclusion to recuperate and minimize your appearances, avoid attracting attention, and avoid arousing unnecessary suspicion.

If there is any emergency, touch one-third of the chaotic barrier between your eyebrows with your divine sense, and I will sense it.

Remember, everything should prioritize stabilizing yourself, and do not act rashly."

"I understand!" Hao Ling nodded.

"Haoling, let me ask you, when we arrived here, there was a small town to the southwest. What was its name?" Kai asked.

"Southwest?" Haoling frowned slightly, then tried to recall, before saying, "Oh, I remember now, it's called Qing Shuang City."

"Hmm!" Kai nodded.

Seeing that Kai didn't ask anything further, Haoling bowed deeply again, his attitude extremely respectful, then turned and strode out of the cave.

Golden divine power surged slightly around him, transforming into a dim stream of light that shot into the sky, rapidly heading northeast.

His figure quickly shrank against the gray sky. The cave fell silent again, save for Jiang Xuelan's steady breathing.

Jiang Xuelan leaned back on the bed, her icy blue eyes fixed on Kai's figure standing with his hands behind his back at the cave entrance. She remained silent for a moment before speaking, her voice tinged with worry: "Do you think he can hold on?

The Haotian Clan patriarch is cunning and treacherous. If he discovers our plan, the consequences will be unimaginable."

Kai didn't turn around, his voice steady and calm, brimming with confidence: "He doesn't want to die. So he will do his best.

And as long as he does his best, there won't be any problems in the short term. Besides, half his life is in my hands; he wouldn't dare betray me."

His tone was calm, yet it exuded an air of complete control, as if he had already factored in every possible variable.

He turned around, his purple eyes falling on Jiang Xuelan's face, which had regained some color. He softened his tone: "Rest assured and recover. I will go out within two days to investigate the situation in Qing Shuang City.

If Xuan Zhenzi is still alive, he may have left traces in that area. His righteous sword intent is highly recognizable; I can find it even if there is only a trace."

Jiang Xuelan was slightly taken aback, a hint of doubt flashing in her eyes: "Qing Shuang City? How do you know that Senior Xuan Zhenzi might be there? We lost contact with him long ago after we fell. Why are you focusing on this direction?"

"The Void Merchant Guild's intelligence only mentioned your location in the Blood Abyss Rift; they didn't provide a definite answer regarding the whereabouts of the others.

But when I led you through the southwest direction, I vaguely sensed a wisp of extremely faint, pure, and righteous sword intent."

Kai narrowed his purple eyes slightly, recalling his perception at the time, his tone certain. "It was very faint, almost imperceptible. If I weren't extremely sensitive to various primal auras, I wouldn't have been able to detect it at all.

But that aura is unmistakable; it resonates with Xuan Zhenzi's sword dao primal essence. That direction happens to be where Qing Shuang City is located, so I speculate that he most likely appeared in that area."

This is also why Kai suddenly asked Hao Ling what the city in that direction was called.

Jiang Xuelan nodded gently, not pressing further, her worries easing somewhat.

She lay back down on the bed, her icy blue eyes slowly closing. The tension in her mind and the injuries to her body from the past few days finally began to relax in the safe environment.

Her breathing gradually became steady and long, and the spiritual energy around her began to circulate autonomously, nourishing her damaged meridians.

The night passed without incident.

The next morning, the first rays of sunlight pierced through the cracks in the cave ceiling, falling upon Jiang Xuelan.

Her breathing had stabilized considerably; though not fully recovered, she could at least circulate her spiritual energy to nourish her meridians, and her complexion had become increasingly rosy.

Kai set up several layers of protective barriers around her, left some healing pills from his storage ring on the stone platform, instructed her to rest and recuperate, and then transformed into a streak of gray-purple light, rushing out of the cave and speeding southwest.

Qing Shuang City was several thousand miles away from the valley where they were hiding, and at Kai's speed, they arrived in less than half an hour.

From the air, it was a medium-sized city, its walls constructed of grayish-white cold iron stone.

A thin layer of frost, which never melted, clung to the walls, gleaming coldly against the gray sky, exuding a chilling aura.

Cultivators patrolled the city gates, and few pedestrians entered or left. Those who did were hurried, heads bowed, creating a tense and cautious atmosphere throughout the city, clearly indicating some unrest.

Kai concealed his aura, compressing his Chaos Origin to the level of an ordinary early-stage Golden Immortal. His spiritual energy fluctuations were minimal as he blended in with a few rogue cultivators entering the city, passing through the gates.

His divine sense, like invisible tentacles, silently spread out, inch by inch, sweeping across every corner of the city, trying to capture the faint remnant of the vast sword intent.

Most shops along the streets were closed. The few that were open were owned by wary shopkeepers, scrutinizing strangers closely, fearing trouble.

He followed the direction with the strongest aura, passing through several narrow alleys, avoiding the patrolling guards, and finally stopped in front of a dilapidated tavern.

The tavern's sign hung crookedly, its paint peeling and the writing illegible.

The wooden steps at the entrance creaked underfoot, and the air was thick with the mingled smells of cheap ale and damp wood, making the place feel eerily deserted.

Kai pushed open the door and entered. The tavern was empty except for a gaunt, middle-aged owner sitting behind the counter, listlessly wiping glasses with a rag, his eyes occasionally glancing towards the door with a hint of wariness.

Kai's gaze swept across a corner of the tavern, and under a table missing a leg, he found a small, broken fragment of a talisman.

The fragment was of a peculiar quality, retaining a faint aura of righteous energy—the work of Xuan Zhenzi.

He walked over and bent down to pick it up, his fingertips tracing the remaining Daoist patterns on the fragment's surface. He could still feel a faint trace of blood and burn marks.

The edges were torn, as if hastily ripped and discarded, indicating that Xuan Zhenzi had likely stayed here and probably encountered some misfortune.

The tavern owner noticed Kai's movements, a flicker of wariness crossing his eyes. He put down his wine glass, coughed lightly, and casually asked, "Sir, that's something an old Taoist priest left behind. Do you know him?"

As he spoke, he subtly sized up Kai, trying to glean some clue from his expression.

Kai raised his eyes, his purple pupils holding a hint of scrutiny, and said calmly, "Where is he? I'm his friend, and I've come specifically to find him."

His voice wasn't loud, but it carried an invisible pressure that sent a chill down the tavern owner's spine, causing his Adam's apple to bob.

After hesitating for a moment, he whispered, "That old Taoist priest... was taken away by the city lord's patrol team at the city gate a few days ago

. They said he was 'possessing forbidden magical artifacts and suspected of stealing spiritual veins.' The old Taoist priest refused to accept this and even injured several guards. As a result, the city lord's high priest personally took him down and imprisoned him in the dungeon.

I heard that the city lord's mansion is planning to search him for some treasures, and they've been interrogating him in the dungeon these past few days."

The tavern owner's voice grew softer and softer, his eyes filled with apprehension, clearly afraid that the city lord's mansion would discover that he had leaked information.

Although Kai's aura did not change significantly, the temperature deep within his purple eyes was slowly decreasing at a rate imperceptible to the naked eye. The air around him seemed to thicken, and even the trails of falling dust became... He didn't act immediately.

Although Qing Shuang City was only a medium-sized city, the Grand Elder of the City Lord's Mansion, who could capture Xuan Zhenzi, must have at least the cultivation level of a second-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal.

Coupled with the City Lord's Mansion's defensive formations and guards, alerting him might put Xuan Zhenzi in even greater danger.

He needed to wait until nightfall, until people's guard was relaxed, and until his divine sense had thoroughly pinpointed the location of the dungeon and its weak points, before rescuing Xuan Zhenzi in one fell swoop.

Night slowly fell.

One by one, the artificial lights in Qing Shuang City went out, the number of pedestrians on the streets dwindled, and the number of patrolling guards gradually decreased, plunging the entire city into a silent and oppressive darkness.

The City Lord's Mansion was located in the very center of the city, occupying a vast area. Its walls were built of thick, cold iron stone, with watchtowers at the four corners. The footsteps of the patrolling guards would pass over the walls every incense stick's time, a testament to the city's tight security.

Kai's figure appeared silently in the shadows of the north wall of the City Lord's Mansion.

He didn't activate his spiritual power, nor did he fly; he simply leaped lightly with his physical strength. His gray robe swept over the wall without making a sound, landing gently in the courtyard like a falling leaf.

His divine sense spread out the instant he landed, precisely locking onto the dungeon entrance.

Hidden beneath a rockery in the city lord's back garden, the entrance was concealed by vines and guarded by two Golden Immortals of the second rank. Their spiritual energy fluctuations were stable, clearly indicating rigorous training.

Kai's figure moved through the courtyard like a ghost, avoiding the patrolling guards, and silently approached the dungeon entrance.

The two guards didn't even have time to turn their heads before feeling a numbness in the back of their necks, their consciousness instantly plunging into darkness, collapsing limply to the ground.

Before their bodies hit the ground, Kai gently supported them with his chaotic power, without making a sound.

Then, with a wave of his hand, the iron gate of the dungeon entrance was silently melted by the chaotic essence, turning into a handful of iron dust that fell at his feet, revealing the stone steps leading downwards.

The stone steps descended, a damp and chilly atmosphere washing over them, the stone walls covered in dark green moss.

A few dim oil lamps flickered in the corners, casting shadows along the passage, the air thick with a faint smell of blood and mildew.

Kai descended steadily, his steps light and silent, his divine sense constantly monitoring his surroundings for any ambush.

At the end of the passage was a row of cells enclosed by thick iron bars, several empty, only the deepest one emanating a faint aura.

In that cell, a gaunt figure sat cross-legged on a cold pile of straw, his Taoist robe tattered and stained with blood, his long, gray hair disheveled, his face stern yet exuding an air of quiet authority.

His hands were bound to the stone wall behind him by two dark golden chains, the chains bearing runes that sealed cultivation, yet his back remained ramrod straight.

His cloudy eyes were half-closed, as if he were in a quiet Taoist temple rather than a cold, damp dungeon, showing no signs of the wretchedness of imprisonment.

Hearing footsteps approaching, the figure slowly opened his eyes, his cloudy gaze falling on the gray-robed figure at the end of the dungeon passage.

A flicker of wariness crossed his aged eyes, quickly replaced by understanding and relief. A slight smile, though weary, revealed a confident one.

His hoarse voice carried a hint of teasing: "I knew you wouldn't abandon me."

Kai stood before the iron bars, his purple eyes fixed on Xuan Zhenzi's scarred yet composed face. After a moment of silence, he raised his hand and gently waved it.

The iron bars twisted, broke, and crumbled before him like rotten wood, scattering into fragments without a sound.

He stepped into the cell, the chaotic essence flowing in his palm, landing precisely on the dark golden chain on Xuan Zhenzi's wrist.

The sealing runes on the chains trembled violently, flickering for a few breaths before melting, disintegrating, and falling off inch by inch like snow meeting fire, losing all their function.

Xuanzhenzi moved his wrists, which had been chained for days, the bones making a crisp cracking sound. He exhaled a soft breath and brushed the straw and dust off his robes.

Then, he waved his hand dismissively: "A superficial wound, nothing serious. But there's something I need to tell you immediately.

These past few days of being locked up here haven't been wasted."

His expression shifted from relaxed to serious, a sharp glint flashing in his cloudy eyes, clearly indicating he had detected important information.

“That City Lord Qiao from the City Lord's Mansion interrogates me in the dungeon every three days, ostensibly about the ‘stealing of spiritual veins,’ but actually he’s trying to extract information from me.

He came again the other day, but he was accompanied by a mysterious masked guest.

Although my cultivation is mostly locked up, I can still use some of the Daoist divine sense techniques, and I overheard a few of their conversations.”

Xuan Zhenzi lowered his voice, speaking each word with utmost seriousness. “That mysterious guest is from the Haotian Divine Clan.

They’re discussing a deal; the Haotian Divine Clan is secretly acquiring some key material at a high price, something about nuclear conversion, which I don’t quite understand.

But it doesn’t sound like anything good. They’re being very secretive, saying that once it’s done, more than half of the cultivators in the Twenty-Second Heaven will die.”

Kai’s purple eyes suddenly narrowed, the air around him seemed to chill slightly for a moment, and a cold killing intent surged in his eyes.

It seems the Haotian Divine Clan plans to conduct a nuclear explosion in the Twenty-Second Heaven and then collect the energy.

Although the Twenty-Second Heaven is resource-scarce, everyone there is a cultivator. If they could acquire the technology of the Ash Earth World and develop nuclear energy, they could do so a hundred times faster than mortals.

However, once implemented, the Twenty-Second Heaven would be plunged into darkness, and many cultivators would perish.

In this way, the Haotian Divine Clan would no longer need the resource realms of the lower realms.

If the Haotian Divine Clan established a nuclear energy collection system within the Twenty-Second Heaven, Ash Earth would completely lose its value.

At that time, only one fate awaited the people of Ash Earth: to be silenced, wiped out, or completely eliminated as an unnecessary burden.

"Is there more?"

Kai asked in a deep voice, a hint of barely perceptible urgency in his tone. He needed more intelligence to deal with this crisis.

Xuanzhenzi shook his head, a look of regret on his face: "They quickly realized someone was spying on them. That mysterious guest's divine sense was extremely sharp; I almost exposed myself.

Fortunately, a guard came to deliver food at that moment, interrupting their conversation.

But those few words alone are enough to illustrate the seriousness of the problem."

Kai remained silent for a moment, his purple eyes gleaming with deep contemplation.

He knew he had to do two things immediately:

First, ensure that Haoling maintained stability within the Haotian Divine Clan, preventing them from quickly realizing that the lower realm's nuclear energy collection system had undergone a change;

Secondly, they needed to obtain the Xuan Tian Soul-Severing Jade as soon as possible to remove Hao Ling's soul restriction, allowing him to truly break free from the control of the Hao Tian Divine Clan and thus obtain more core intelligence. Both of these things required time, which was precisely what he desperately needed.

"Let's go."

Kai pulled himself together, raising his hand to unleash a gray-purple chaotic force that enveloped Xuan Zhenzi's body, gently lifting him to his feet. His tone was decisive. "Leave here first; this place is not safe to linger."

He didn't retrace the dungeon's original path, but instead raised his hand upwards. The chaotic force, like a spiral, pierced through the thick layers of rock and stone slabs above the dungeon, silently creating a passage about ten feet in diameter.

The two of them soared into the sky from the passage, into the night... The night was as dark as ink. Kai's figure transformed into a streak of gray-purple light, carrying Xuan Zhenzi as they sped away, drawing an almost invisible arc across the sky above Qing Shuang City before instantly piercing the gloomy expanse of sky outside the city. The

cold night wind howled past their ears, and the earth below receded rapidly like a blurry, dark ribbon, mountains and valleys becoming flowing silhouettes in their vision, quickly left behind.

Supported by Kai, Xuan Zhenzi, though the remaining seal within his body had been broken, had not yet recovered the vital energy depleted by days of imprisonment. He could only barely maintain his form by circulating his Dao power.

He glanced back at the receding silhouette of Qing Shuang City, a hint of emotion flashing in his cloudy eyes: "Kid, your speed is even a third faster than mine at my peak."

Kai didn't reply, his gaze calmly fixed ahead, a deep light surging in his purple eyes. His divine sense, like an invisible thread, constantly extended backward, keeping a watchful eye on the movements behind him.

He could sense a rapidly surging surge of spiritual energy gathering in the direction of Qing Shuang City, like a swarm of disturbed bees rushing out of their hive, quickly chasing after them.

"They've caught up,"

Kai said calmly, his tone devoid of any panic, as if stating something ordinary that had nothing to do with him.

Xuanzhenzi frowned slightly, his divine sense probing behind him. His expression darkened. "It's the City Lord's Mansion.

The leader's aura is that of Qiao Yuanshan, the City Lord of Qingshuang City, a peak fourth-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal. Beside him are two other strong auras, likely the Grand Elder and the Deputy City Lord. The rest are minor figures, first-grade Great Luo Golden Immortals.

They're quite fast; it seems they used some kind of tracking artifact to lock onto our auras."

Kai's purple eyes narrowed slightly, but he didn't accelerate his escape.

He simply adjusted his flight direction, slowly descending towards a wide-open wasteland ahead, landing on a flat, open plain.

The ground was grayish-brown gravel and cracked soil, sparse withered grass swaying slightly in the night wind. The surroundings were open and unobstructed, offering no cover or possibility of ambush.

Kai gently placed Xuan Zhenzi on a relatively flat rock, stood with his hands behind his back in the center of the wasteland, his gray robe fluttering lightly in the night wind, his purple eyes calmly gazing at the dark blue streak of light rapidly approaching behind him.

His aura remained at the level of an eighth-grade Golden Immortal, his spiritual energy fluctuations smooth and gentle, making him appear like an ordinary cultivator from the lower realm who had happened to pass by, posing no threat whatsoever.

"Boy, what are you doing...?"

Xuan Zhenzi sat on the rock, frowning as he looked at Kai's back, his eyes filled with confusion.

He had thought Kai would simply take him away to escape the pursuers, but unexpectedly, Kai had stopped on his own initiative and adopted a waiting posture.

Kai did not turn around, his voice calm: "Some things need to be clarified face to face."

As soon as he finished speaking, the night sky behind them was suddenly torn apart by several streaks of light.

Dark blue, crimson, and pale gold lights intertwined, like several sharp blades slicing through the night, plummeting with a sharp whooshing sound, landing neatly about ten feet away from Kai.

The leader, a man of about fifty years old, was tall and robust, wearing a dark blue brocade robe. His face was ashen, and his hawk-like eyes were fixed on Kai and Xuan Zhenzi on the rock.

Divine light flowed around him, and his aura as a peak fourth-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal was undisguisedly released, causing the surrounding air to slightly stagnate.

Behind him stood two men: a lean old man in a gray robe, whose aura fluctuated between the fourth and peak fourth-grade Great Luo Golden Immortals, the Grand Elder of the City Lord's Mansion;

and a pale, beardless middle-aged man with sinister eyes, whose cultivation was slightly inferior, around the mid-stage of the fourth-grade Great Luo Golden Immortal, the Deputy City Lord of the City Lord's Mansion.

Behind them stood over twenty elite cultivators, mostly between the first and second ranks of the Great Luo Golden Immortal realm. They wielded uniform dark blue magical artifacts, forming a neat array that completely surrounded Kai and Xuan Zhenzi.

Qiao Yuanshan stood at the front of the formation, his gaze sweeping over Xuan Zhenzi before settling on Kai.

His divine sense probed out without hesitation, scanning Kai twice.

Confirming that Kai's cultivation was indeed only at the eighth rank of the Golden Immortal realm, a cold smile slowly crept onto his lips. His previously gloomy expression relaxed slightly, replaced by contempt and disdain.

"I thought he was some big shot, daring to break into the City Lord's mansion at night to rescue a prisoner."

Qiao Yuanshan spoke, his voice low and mocking, his gaze like a knife fixed on Kai. "A mere eighth-grade Golden Immortal junior dares to run wild on Qing Shuang City's territory?

Which sect trained this hothead? Doesn't he know the meaning of 'death'?"

The Grand Elder behind Qiao Yuanshan narrowed his eyes slightly, a sinister smile appearing on his gaunt face, his voice hoarse like a broken bellows: "City Lord, this kid probably crawled out of some remote corner..." " Xiu, you're so naive, thinking you can get away unscathed by getting a bargain.

In my opinion, we should capture him on the spot and throw him back into the dungeon to keep that old Taoist priest company, then interrogate him together."

The deputy city lord chimed in, "City lord, since this person can break through the dungeon's restrictions, he might be hiding some incredible treasure. Capture him and search him; we might find something unexpected."

Kai stood there, listening to their discussion, his purple eyes unmoved, as if their words were nothing more than a gentle breeze, not even worthy of his attention.

He silently watched Qiao Yuanshan, waiting for the other's laughter to finally subside before slowly speaking, his voice clear and calm: "You are the city lord of Qing Shuang City?"

Qiao Yuanshan raised an eyebrow slightly, arrogantly lifting his chin: "Indeed, it is I. What, you want to beg for mercy when you're about to die? Too late."

Kai ignored his arrogance and continued to ask: "You are cooperating with the Haotian Divine Clan, aren't you?"

Qiao Yuanshan's expression suddenly changed; his contemptuous smile froze for a moment, then was quickly replaced by a chilling aura.

The deputy city lord and the Grand Elder behind him also changed their expressions slightly, exchanging a meaningful glance.

Qiao Yuanshan's gaze suddenly sharpened, staring intently at Kai like a venomous snake, his voice becoming low and dangerous: "What do you know?"

Kai's purple eyes remained calm, as if the other's knife-like gaze was nothing more than a harmless breeze: "Answer the question."

Qiao Yuanshan's breath hitched slightly, then a strong killing intent surged in his eyes.

He slowly raised his hand, a ball of eerie blue divine light gathering in his palm, his tone icy. He abruptly waved his hand and shouted, "Take him down! Life or death!"

The moment his words fell, more than twenty elite cultivators moved simultaneously.

Dark blue magical artifacts lit up in the night, shooting towards Kai like dozens of will-o'-the-wisps!

The deputy city lord's longsword was the first to unleash a sharp blade of light, tearing through the air and aiming straight for Kai's neck!

The Grand Elder quietly took a half step back, his fingers forming a hand seal, condensing an even more sinister dark gray light shuttle behind him, poised to strike.

Kai did not move.

He stood still, not even blinking, only a deep light flashing slightly in his purple eyes.

The next instant.

An aura as vast as the collapse of the ancient heavens erupted from his body!

The aura erupted without warning, without any pre-emptive buildup, like a volcano dormant for millennia suddenly erupting!

A chaotic, grayish-purple aura swept across the area like a tangible tide, instantly crushing, annihilating, and reducing to nothingness the dark blue magical artifacts that shot towards it!

The deputy city lord's blade of light was only three inches from Kai's throat, yet it melted away silently upon contact with the grayish-purple aura, like an ice blade entering a furnace, leaving not even a trace!

He himself was violently thrown back by the terrifying shockwave, a series of cracking sounds emanating from his chest.

He spat out a mouthful of dark red blood, flying dozens of feet like a kite with a broken string, crashing heavily onto the wasteland, leaving a long trail of blood in the ground, his fate unknown.

In that instant, more than twenty elite cultivators simultaneously experienced what utter despair meant.

Their prized magical artifacts and years of painstakingly cultivated spiritual power were like ants facing a collapsing sky before that chaotic, grayish-purple aura.

Before even a thought of resistance could arise, they were neatly thrown to the ground, lying prostrate on the wasteland, coughing up blood, their meridians in disarray, unable to rise again.

The dark gray light shuttle in the High Priest's hand shattered on its own before it was even used. His face changed from ashen to sallow, then to deathly gray.

His whole body trembled violently, his knees buckled uncontrollably, and he collapsed to his knees, his knees hitting the gravel heavily, yet he felt no pain.

He simply stared wide-eyed at Kai's figure, which seemed like a god descending to earth, his lips trembling, unable to utter a single word.

Qiao Yuanshan stood frozen in place, as if struck by lightning.

He maintained the gesture of waving his hand to give the order, his arm still hanging in mid-air, but the contempt and arrogance in his eyes had shattered completely, transforming into an extreme, indescribable fear and bewilderment.

His consciousness was frantically telling him that the gray-robed youth before him clearly only possessed the cultivation aura of an eighth-grade Golden Immortal.

Yet his physical body trembled, shuddered, and submitted with primal instinct, as if facing a terrifying being far beyond his comprehension.

"You..."

Qiao Yuanshan's throat emitted a hoarse sound, like a duck being choked, "What exactly are you...?"

Kai slowly took a step forward.

The sound of that step landing wasn't loud, but it sounded like thunder in Qiao Yuanshan's ears, causing him to shudder violently and his face to turn completely pale.

He instinctively wanted to retreat, to escape, but his legs felt as heavy as lead, unable to move even an inch. It was as if the entire power of the wasteland had been frozen by Kai's will, locking him firmly in place.

"I'll ask you one more time,"

Kai said, his voice still calm, yet the pressure contained within that calm was more suffocating than any roar or howl. "What are you cooperating with the Haotian Divine Clan on?"

Qiao Yuanshan's lips trembled violently, cold sweat dripped from his forehead like raindrops, and a trickle of blood escaped from the corner of his mouth—the blood from the internal organs injured by the chaotic energy surge earlier.

He wanted to lie, to give evasive answers, to buy time and find a chance to survive, but the moment he met Kai's purple eyes, all his thoughts and calculations shattered like thin ice.

Those eyes held no emotion, only an indifference like the heavens looking down upon all living beings, as if any lie before him was as transparent as a piece of paper, easily torn apart.

"It was...it was the Haotian Clan who came to find me..."

Qiao Yuanshan finally spoke, his voice hoarse and trembling. "They said they wanted to build a...something array core outside Qing Shuang City, and they needed a lot of cultivators as laborers, so they asked Qing Shuang City to

provide manpower. They promised me that after it was done, they would give me a share of cultivation resources converted from nuclear energy to help me break through to the fourth rank of the Great Luo Golden Immortal...I was only responsible for providing manpower.

The specific array layout and core parts were all done by their own people...That's all I know! Really, that's all!"

Kai's purple eyes lowered slightly, seemingly judging the truthfulness of Qiao Yuanshan's words.

Judging from his spiritual fluctuations, this person was indeed not completely lying, but what he knew was obviously only the outer layer of information; the real core part was firmly controlled by the Haotian Clan.

However, this was enough—at least it confirmed that the Haotian Clan's layout within the Twenty-Second Heaven had begun to advance substantially, much faster than he had expected.

"Where is the location of the array core?" Kai continued to ask.

Qiao Yuanshan trembled, hesitated for a moment, but when Kai's fingertips lifted almost imperceptibly, he screamed like a frightened bird, "It's...it's in an abandoned mine three hundred miles northeast of Qing Shuang City!

It was originally a remnant of an ancient spiritual vein, but it dried up later. The Haotian Divine Clan took a liking to the terrain there, saying it was suitable for setting up a core formation!

I've given them the truth! Please...please spare my life..."

Kai remained silent for a few breaths, his purple eyes swirling with thoughtful light.

After a moment, he withdrew his gaze and said calmly, "Your matter ends here."

Qiao Yuanshan was stunned for a moment, then his pale face suddenly burst with the wild joy of surviving a calamity.

He almost wept with joy as he repeatedly kowtowed, "Thank you, senior! Thank you for your mercy! This junior will never dare to do it again! This junior will take his leave

now." Qiao Yuanshan's words abruptly stopped, his pupils contracted sharply, he glanced down at the smooth, mirror-like wound running through his chest, then looked up at Kai's still calm and expressionless face, his eyes filled with disbelief and bewilderment.

His lips moved a few times, but no sound came out. The light in his eyes quickly faded and went out completely, his body collapsing heavily onto the wasteland with a dull thud.

Kai withdrew his fingers, the faint gray-purple sword light disappearing from his fingertips as if it had never appeared.

He looked down at the fallen Qiao Yuanshan, his purple eyes devoid of any emotion: "You just said, 'Life and death are irrelevant.' I'm just following suit."

He turned and walked towards the Grand Elder.

The gray-robed elder was now completely limp on the ground, trembling like a leaf, making hoarse sounds, unable even to utter a complete plea for mercy.

Kai didn't even glance at him. He raised his hand and unleashed a surge of chaotic power, shattering the Grand Elder's divine foundation. The Grand Elder collapsed, lifeless.

The Deputy City Lord had already perished in the previous attack. The remaining twenty-odd Golden Immortal realm elite cultivators lay prostrate on the ground, some still groaning weakly, others completely lifeless.

Kai glanced at the devastation of the wasteland, his figure flickering as he returned to Xuan Zhenzi's side. The chaotic power once again enveloped the old Taoist's body.

"Let's go,"

Kai said calmly, as if wiping out an entire city lord's pursuit force was merely a matter of brushing dust off his robes.

Xuan Zhenzi was helped into the air. He looked back at the desolate wasteland littered with corpses, then at Kai's still calm and composed face, his cloudy eyes swirling with complex and poignant emotions.

He sighed softly, his voice tinged with a hint of mockery, but mostly with genuine admiration: "Young man, young man... I've lived a long life and seen countless geniuses, but a monster like you... is truly a first."

Kai didn't respond. The gray-purple streak of light tore through the night once more, carrying Xuan Zhenzi towards the valley.

The night wind howled, slowly dispersing the bloody stench that permeated the wasteland, leaving only a silent, empty expanse of land, silently witnessing the one-sided crushing defeat under the moonlight.

In the distance, from the direction of Qing Shuang City, the faint sound of bells could be heard.

It was the warning sound from the city's cultivators, finally noticing the disturbance at the City Lord's Mansion.

But all of that was irrelevant to Kai.

His figure had already vanished into the vast night, leaving only a gray-purple streak of light, like a shooting star streaking across the sky, etching a brief but sharp mark on the dark heavens.

A streak of greyish-purple light silently traversed the night, like a needle disappearing into the sky, gliding across the wasteland and valleys without a sound, finally settling back at the entrance of the cave hidden by layers of arrays.

Kai dispersed the chaotic energy emanating from his body, helping Xuan Zhenzi through the greyish-purple barrier and stepping into the cave.

Jiang Xuelan, who had been reclining on the jade bed with her eyes closed, sensed the fluctuations in energy at the cave entrance, and her icy blue eyes snapped open.

A hint of wariness flashed across her cold face, but upon seeing the gaunt yet familiar figure, that wariness quickly transformed into surprise and relief.

She propped herself up from the bed, her steps still unsteady, but the light in her eyes shone brightly: "Senior Xuanzhenzi! You're still alive!"

Xuanzhenzi, helped by Kai, sat down on a flat stone platform in the cave. His long, gray hair was disheveled, and his Daoist robe was stained with blood, but his weathered old face still wore its usual carefree smile.

He waved his hand, his voice hoarse yet still strong: "I'm incredibly resilient; a few chains and a few lashes couldn't harm me.

But you, little girl, look quite well; Chen has taken good care of you."

Jiang Xuelan curved her lips into a smile, walked closer, and looked Xuanzhenzi up and down. Seeing that although he was injured, he wasn't in any life-threatening danger, she was relieved.

His tone carried a hint of teasing: "It's the first time I've seen you in such a disheveled state, senior. It's a pity those fairies aren't here, otherwise they would have certainly made fun of you."

Xuanzhenzi's old face flushed

slightly, and he coughed twice: "I was ambushed. If it weren't for the Grand Elder of the City Lord's Mansion taking advantage of my unpreparedness to seal me with a restriction, a mere Qing Shuang City wouldn't have been able to trap me." As he spoke, he glared at Jiang Xuelan, "You little brat, you're injured and still can't behave, always making fun of me."

The two exchanged a few teasing words, which lightened the atmosphere in the cave. Kai stood aside, watching Xuanzhenzi and Jiang Xuelan bickering, the coldness in his purple eyes dissipating slightly. Xuanzhenzi and Jiang Xuelan had always had a good relationship, and their banter was commonplace; this familiar atmosphere was actually quite reassuring.

After the two had chatted and laughed for a while, Kai finally spoke, his tone calm yet carrying an undeniable decisiveness: "Both of you stay in the cave to recover.

Although Senior Xuanzhenzi's seal has been broken, his vital energy has been greatly depleted, and he will need at least two or three days to recover; Xue Lan's injuries also make it unsuitable for her to move around. I will go and inquire about the whereabouts of the Seven Fairies, and I will return as soon as I find them."

Xuanzhenzi frowned slightly upon hearing this: "You're going alone? The Twenty-Second Heaven is not like the Lower Realm. The forces here are intricate and complex. Although you have strength, you can't fight against so many forces.

Moreover, your whereabouts have already attracted the attention of the Haotian Divine Clan. What if..."

"I know,"

Kai interrupted him, his purple eyes still calm as still water, "So we must hurry. The seven of them are the furthest away. If they are captured by some force, their situation will probably be even more dangerous than that of the Blood Refining Divine Sect. Every moment of delay increases the danger."

Jiang Xue Lan pursed her lips, a trace of worry flashing in her icy blue eyes, but in the end, she did not stop him.

She understood Kai's character; he rarely changed his mind once he made a decision, and with his methods, ordinary forces couldn't hold him back. She simply said, "Be careful."

Kai nodded and was about to turn and leave when suddenly his brow twitched slightly.

An extremely subtle yet exceptionally clear fluctuation of divine sense traveled from a distant direction, precisely triggering one-third of the chaotic barrier he had left within Hao Ling's body.

Kai's figure faltered slightly, his purple eyes suddenly narrowing.

That divine sense was from Hao Ling.

He closed his eyes, immersing his consciousness into the fluctuation, and after a moment slowly opened them, his expression still calm.

But Xuan Zhenzi and Jiang Xuelan both keenly noticed that the light in his eyes had become even deeper.

"Hao Ling sent a message,"

Kai said, his voice low and clear. "He reported back safely. Although the clan leader has some doubts about his report, the barrier of the divine soul restriction has blocked the investigation, and it hasn't been exposed yet. "