

My System 111

Chapter 111: The Martial World is vast; let us hope we never meet again!_3

Even the sound of breathing was nearly inaudible.

Cheng Guang was puzzled about what Deng was staring at in the sky. Was he still bothered about the incident that had just happened?

Cheng Guang knew that Deng's state wasn't quite right at the moment, oddly similar to when he was lost in thought while pondering something.

Cheng Guang specifically instructed Qing Luan not to let the servants disturb Deng.

The next day, as the sun began to rise.

The splendid sunlight fell on Deng's face, casting deep shadows that made his facial features appear more profound.

He gazed at the sky, gazing for an entire day.

Like a stone stele, silently watching over time.

His face was aged, wrinkled, but his deep eyes sparkled with a star-like luster, resplendent and unwavering.

At sunrise, a blush of red tinged the distant sky, and Deng suddenly came to his senses.

A slight smile appeared on his face.

It was as if he had understood something, figured something out, as if he had come to terms with it.

His heart was filled with peace and satisfaction.

A slight fluctuation stirred in the aura around him.

In the sky above, a subtle phenomenon began to emerge, the glimmer of gold making its first appearance.

Deng looked up and, with mild interest, waved his hand dismissively.

The phenomenon that was about to manifest in the sky was completely extinguished.

It didn't cause any particularly large commotion.

However, throughout the entire Capital city, and even within the whole Great Zhou Dynasty, the Heavenly and Earthly Qi trembled imperceptibly.

Barely visible.

Within the Great Zhou Imperial Palace.

An imposing gaze turned towards Deng.

Deng seemed to sense something and, with a smile, nodded towards the direction of the Imperial Palace.

The imposing gaze examined Deng for a few moments, seemingly surprised.

Silence.

“Which realm of the Heavenly Human Realm have you reached?”

An authoritative, low voice sounded in Deng's ear.

A smile spread across Deng's aged face as he replied, "The Second Realm."

"Hmm."

After responding and observing Deng for a while longer, the imposing gaze slowly withdrew.

As the gaze retreated, it trembled slightly, betraying the calm exterior.

Meanwhile, at the same time, in various parts of the Great Zhou Dynasty, at the various Martial World sects and hidden families, exclamations of surprise from old men could be occasionally heard.

"This, this aura..."

"A Sky-Man has made a move..."

"It seems like it's that person from the Tianji Sect..."

"He's become even stronger?"

"After so many years, has another Sky-Man finally stepped into the Second Realm? I didn't expect it to be that person from the Tianji Sect breaking through first."

From hidden corners came astonished voices, countless gazes were all directed towards the Capital city, towards the place where Deng made his move.

And at Duke Zhen's Mansion, within the Million Specie Garden, where countless powerful figures were watching.

Everything was calm and tranquil.

The servant cleaning the Million Specie Garden would never imagine that a Sky-Man had just broken through a minor realm right under their nose.

Although it was a minor realm, reaching a new realm in the Heavenly Human Realm is equivalent to a major cycle of reincarnation, not easily broken through.

Some people, after breaking through to the Heavenly Human Realm, remain trapped in the First Realm for countless years, never touching the threshold of the Second Realm in their lifetime.

Even among today's emperors of the four major dynasties, though all are of the Heavenly Human Realm, most are only at the level of the First Realm.

With Deng's breakthrough to the Second Realm of the Heavenly Human, he now stood at the peak of the Mortal World.

In the entire Four Directions Mortal World, those who possess the cultivation of the Second Realm of the Heavenly Human could be counted on one hand.

One can imagine how shocking this was.

Yet at the scene of the event.

It was still so calm and tranquil.

The vast majority of people didn't notice and didn't know that the world had gained another Sky-Man of the Second Realm.

Only those whose cultivations had reached the Heavenly Human Realm and were closely connected with the Heavenly and Earthly senses could detect it to some extent.

“Old Deng, have you finished looking?”

Cheng Guang awoke from his sleep, yawned, and stepping out of his room, saw that Deng was no longer looking at the sky but smiling contently as if enraptured by something.

Hearing Cheng Guang’s voice, Deng came back to reality and nodded slightly.

Looking at Cheng, he felt a bit embarrassed.

Truth be told, his breakthrough to the Second Realm of the Heavenly Human was entirely due to Cheng’s guidance.

If it weren’t for Cheng’s profound insights that had entirely shattered his own cognitive framework, it’s unknown how many years it would have taken him to break through to the Second Realm of the Heavenly Human.

One sentence from Cheng saved him a hundred years of effort.

Deng’s face showed regret.

He had originally planned to take advantage of Old Cheng of Duke’s Mansion by agreeing to come to Duke Zhen’s Mansion to teach his grandson the Heavenly Gang Star Fight.

But...

How had it turned out that after coming over, he was the one who ended up being taught?

It’s difficult to repay such a debt of gratitude.

It had been centuries since a Sky-Man of the Second Realm appeared in the world, and now that he had made a breakthrough because of Cheng, he didn't know if he'd ever have the chance to repay this favor in his lifetime.

As an old man, Deng felt like crying at the thought of owing such a huge favor at his age.

Looking at Cheng, his lips moved several times, but he found himself unable to speak.

He just nodded.

Deng's expression was solemn as he said earnestly, "Hmm, Cheng, to tell you the truth, Old Man Deng has improved a little in cultivation thanks to your advice. Although it's also because of my own exceptional insight, after all, I was Great Zhou's number one genius back in the day. But your advice did play a role too."

"So here's what we'll do, Cheng. I'll agree to any one request you have. Whatever princess or devil beauty you want, just let me know, and I'll do my best to bring her back for you."

"Even if you want Empress Wei of Great Wei to warm your bed, it's not out of the question."

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Cheng Guang couldn't help but laugh silently when he saw this, "And here I thought it was something serious, but it's just this."

"I don't really want anything, it's good enough that you, Elder Deng, can have a breakthrough in your cultivation."

Cheng Guang didn't take Elder Deng's words to heart.

But Elder Deng was getting anxious, "Hey, you little rascal, are you not taking me, Elder Deng, seriously? I am not boasting. Just make any request, and I will satisfy it right now."

Elder Deng was only thinking about how to trick Cheng Guang into returning the favor he owed.

Otherwise, he truly didn't know how he would ever repay such a huge debt of gratitude.

After all, Cheng Guang was the Town-Nation Duke's Heir, undoubtedly surrounded by troubles.

If Cheng Guang were to ask him for help in the future, who knew what kind of turmoil he might get dragged into?

He was just an old man hoping to live out his remaining years in peace.

He couldn't bear, nor did he wish to endure, any big storms.

Elder Deng wanted Cheng Guang to simply make a request, but he found that Cheng seemed to care very little about his promise.

Keep in mind,

he was a Sky-Man.

Even before breaking through the Second Realm, he was one of the very few counted Sky-Men in the Great Zhou.

Why is this brat so dismissive of me?

Elder Deng felt somewhat depressed.

Cheng Guang smiled and said, "Really, it's nothing, Elder Deng. You don't have to worry about this matter; I didn't help you much."

“Besides, you taught me the Heavenly Gang Star Fight. It turns out that you’ve taught me far more; those few words I said on a whim are nothing.”

Cheng seemed to guess that Elder Deng had gotten an inspiration from his words.

But he didn’t care about that and saw no reason to ask Elder Deng to do anything for him just because of those few casual remarks.

It was simply unnecessary.

Elder Deng, however, shook his head, “No, Cheng, things have to be settled properly.”

“You have to make a request today.”

Elder Deng’s old face was ready to sacrifice his dignity.

To avoid bigger troubles in the future, he wanted Cheng to make a request right now, satisfy it, and thus repay the favor.

Cheng Guang, unable to do anything else with Elder Deng gripping his arm so tightly, it seemed today he would not be able to move unless he made a request.

In the entire Duke of the State’s Mansion, only Elder Deng dared to act this way.

“Elder Deng, if you put it that way, I can’t think of anything right now. How about this? If I encounter any life-threatening danger in the future, will you protect my life?”

After Cheng Guang finished speaking, Elder Deng was overjoyed, hastily releasing Cheng Guang’s body, as if he feared Cheng might go back on his word, and from nowhere, he pulled out a piece of paper and pen.

“Good, good, this is good. If you ever face any life-threatening danger, I will protect your life.”

“Come on, Cheng, let’s sign and make our marks. This promise is just for this one thing. Our debt of gratitude for teaching and learning ends here. You no longer owe me, and I don’t owe you.”

While speaking, he still pulled Cheng Guang’s hand to sign and seal.

When the red handprint was stamped onto the white paper, Elder Deng solemnly put it away with a serious face.

Then, a radiant smile appeared on Elder Deng’s face.

He felt this debt of gratitude was settled far too easily.

After all, Cheng was the Town-Nation Duke’s Heir; outside his home, there wouldn’t be a lack of guards, both big and small, and his grandfather was the Duke of the State, and his father was the Director of the Bureau of the Lamp in the Great Zhou—people with such immense power were unlikely to face life-threatening danger.

Even if such danger did arise, Elder Deng felt that the old Duke would act without him needing to.

What a profitable trade! What a profitable trade!

As long as the debt of gratitude was repaid, it was all good!

Elder Deng was very happy, and Cheng Guang, seeing his expression, couldn’t help but laugh, not knowing what else to say.

It seemed Elder Deng had suffered some loss regarding this matter of repaying debts of gratitude, making him extremely cautious now.

He was eager to repay the favor at once.

He wasn't even willing to delay for a single second.

Unbelievable.

But this wasn't a bad deal for himself.

Having Elder Deng, a Heavenly Human Realm expert, to protect his life was a good thing.

It was like adding an extra layer of insurance to his own life.

After stowing away the signed paper, Elder Deng thought for a moment, his fingertip glowed with a trace of starlight, and he pressed it lightly onto Cheng Guang's forehead.

"This mark of starlight will allow me to sense your existence."

"If you are in any life-threatening danger, summon me through this starlight; as long as you are in the Four Directions Mortal World, I can appear by your side in an instant."

"Of course, it can only be used once, so don't mess around."

Having said this, Elder Deng no longer paid any attention to Cheng Guang and left on his own.

"Old man, I should return to the Tianji Sect. The Martial World is vast and the roads are long; Cheng, I hope we won't see each other again."

Cheng Guang: "..."

.....

Elder Deng left.

He came in a hurry and left in a hurry.

Elder Deng had barely left when Cheng Guang was called over by Cheng Zhihai.

“Guanger, where is Elder Deng?”

Cheng Guang had just arrived when Cheng Zhihai asked eagerly.

Cheng Guang replied, “He left, just a moment ago.”

Cheng Zhihai’s expression showed a tinge of surprise and regret, “Elder Deng has left so soon?”

Muttering to himself, he then looked at Cheng Guang and said, “Guanger, you haven’t upset Elder Deng recently, have you?”

Cheng Guang shook his head.

Cheng Zhihai breathed a sigh of relief.

“Good, good. Elder Deng was already extraordinary to start with, and now... he’s even more extraordinary...”

“It’s fortunate that before his breakthrough, your grandfather had him come over to teach you Martial Arts. If we tried to seek him out now, even emptying our family’s coffers might not be enough to have Elder Deng agree.”

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Cheng Guang dismissed Cheng Zhihai's words with indifference in his heart.

If only Cheng Zhihai knew that the reason Elder Deng was able to break through was because of him, Cheng Guang wondered how he would feel about it.

After some idle chatter, Cheng Zhihai brought up the main topic of their conversation. He looked at Cheng Guang with an affectionate expression.

"Guanger, the martial arts trial between Great Zhou and Great Wei is about to start. I have arranged for you to undertake the necessary trial mission to join the Bureau of the Lamp. You are to collect the names and cultivation realms of those from Great Wei who are participating in the trial."

"You don't need to worry too much, Guanger. Just go through the motions. Your father has already collected all the information. During the time of the trial, you should just loiter nearby, take a look around, put on an act, and afterward directly submit the task to the Bureau of the Lamp."

As he spoke, Cheng Zhihai handed over a thick stack of paper filled with written information to Cheng Guang.

Cheng Guang took it and briefly glanced over, his face revealing a strange expression.

Inside, there wasn't just the appearance, name, and cultivation realm of each student from Great Wei participating in the trial, but also more secretive information like what cultivation techniques they practiced, whether they had ever killed anyone, and how many people they had killed.

If he had to collect all this information on his own, Cheng Guang had no idea how long it would take.

Cheng Zhihai had simply taken care of everything for him.

He even saved him the trouble of going door to door to inquire.

It really was just a simple walk-through.

Cheng Guang responded casually, his mind recalling the system task alert that mentioned those figures in black robes.

He didn't know how those figures in black robes managed to slip into Great Zhou's Martial Academy.

To be able to cast a prohibition inside the Martial Academy of Great Zhou, and for none of the Bureau of the Lamp's people to detect anything out of the ordinary.

Even after the fact, when they tried to track them down, they couldn't find the slightest trace.

Moreover, the slaughter by the figures in black wasn't complete; at least, many people had survived.

Perhaps those figures in black didn't slip into Great Zhou's Martial Academy from the outside, but were students of the Martial Academy of Great Zhou or Great Wei all along.

Unfortunately, the system task alert didn't specify how many people survived that massacre.

Otherwise, Cheng Guang would just need to check them off the list one by one right now.

And, Cheng Guang knew that the number of survivors must not be small.

Otherwise, if everyone else is dead and you're the only survivor, it's pretty much equivalent to having a target on your back.

With this in mind, Cheng Guang decided to take the information back and thoroughly review it to see if he could find any traces of the figures in black.

Seeing that Cheng Guang seemed preoccupied with something, Cheng Zhihai couldn't help but speak reassuringly:

“Guanger, the Martial Arts taught by Elder Deng are very difficult. If you can’t learn them in a short time, don’t fret. If necessary, your father can find you other simpler Martial Arts that are also of good quality.”

“Our Cheng Family’s Blood Sea Crazy Sword is too violent, too strenuous and exhausting, and doesn’t suit you.”

“Moreover, your grandfather suspects that this Martial Art might limit one’s fertility. Otherwise, how could our Cheng Family have only a single heir for three generations? To ensure you can extend the Cheng Family’s lineage, your grandfather categorically forbade me from teaching you the Blood Sea Crazy Sword.”

“Otherwise, under my careful instruction, your Martial Art comprehension would progress rapidly.”

Cheng Zhihai spoke with a tinge of regret.

The corners of Cheng Guang’s mouth twitched slightly as he said, “Father, I’ve learned it.”

“It’s okay if you haven’t learned it, no matter...” Cheng Zhihai continued to comfort him.

Cheng Guang, resigned, repeated himself.

“I’ve learned it.”

Upon hearing this, Cheng Zhihai’s expression froze awkwardly, blinking in disbelief, as if his thoughts had come to a halt.

“Truly learned it?”

Cheng Guang nodded.

Cheng Zhihai's face stiffened with surprise, and after a moment, his authoritative eyes revealed immense joy.

“Among all the Martial Arts in this world, Elder Deng's Heavenly Gang Star Fight is the hardest to grasp. My son, having learned Heavenly Gang Star Fight, you're virtually one step into the Realm of Heavenly Humans!”

“Guanger, you possess the makings of a Sky-Man!”

At this moment, the composure of Cheng Zhihai as a senior figure vanished completely, his face brimming with delight, and he seemed somewhat at a loss, not knowing how to express his current emotions.

Listening to Cheng Zhihai's praise, Cheng Guang felt his face burn with embarrassment, and chills ran down his spine.

He became uneasy.

If Cheng Zhihai continued praising him, he feared he might blurt out an entire one-bedroom apartment.

Accordingly, he made a quick exit.

By the time he returned to Duke Zhen's Mansion, it was already past noon.

The weather was still a bit muggy despite the dew of early autumn.

Qing Luan wore a green floral dress, her hair styled like clouds and mist, and her fair, delicate face glowed in the evening's rosy light.

The jade hairpin she purchased the day before was now adorningly placed in her hair.

Although it wasn't expensive, it looked unexpectedly lovely on Qing Luan.

Qing Luan seemed to love the hairpin as well, occasionally playing with it using her hands.

Upon noticing Cheng Guang's return to the mansion, she rose in surprise and approached him excitedly.

"Princely Heir, what did the Family Head say?" she asked curiously.

Cheng Guang walked over and sat down in the pavilion.

Bai Shuxuan, akin to a black cat, gracefully approached and rested her jade face by Cheng Guang's hand, which only needed to be lifted to caress her lips or hair.

Cheng Guang raised his hand and patted Bai Shuxuan's head as if he were petting a cat.

While doing so, he placed the papers he got from Cheng Zhihai on the table.

"I'm to join the Bureau of the Lamp, but first, I must go through the motions."

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"A mere formality?" Qing Luan did not quite understand.

Cheng Guang nodded, "It's just simple intelligence gathering, he has already collected it for me, I just need to take a stroll around that area when the time comes."

Qing Luan pursed her red lips and let out a light laugh, "Looking at it this way, it seems pretty easy, the Princely Heir need not be troubled."

Cheng Guang's eyes remained steady, his gaze as calm as still water, flipping through the paper on the desk.

As he flipped through the pages, Cheng Guang stroked Bai Shuxuan's jade-like face with one hand.

The paper was filled with writing.

Cheng Guang read carefully.

"Name: Yin Bojun, 23 years old, Great Wei Martial Academy third-year student, cultivation realm Fourth-grade Divine Realm, martial arts skill: Scorching Heaven Palm, mid-tier Divine Power."

"Name: Bao Qifeng, 24 years old, Great Wei Martial Academy second-year student, cultivation realm Fifth-grade Prime God Realm, martial arts skill not detailed, rarely seen sparring with others."

"Name: Ji Cunfu, 22 years old, Great Wei Martial Academy fifth-year student, cultivation realm Fourth-grade Divine Realm, martial arts skill: Roaring Wind Fist, mid-tier Divine Power."

"..."

Cheng Guang leafed through the pages, most of the Great Wei Martial Academy students' information was recorded on them.

Not only when they joined the Great Wei Martial Academy was noted, but also how many years they had been there.

In fact, many Divine Power rankings were also differentiated.

Very detailed.

Excessively so.

Even with such detail, there were still many whose martial arts column was marked unknown, and a casual mention of their rarity in sparring with others was made lightly.

Those with such descriptions, within the contingent of over a thousand from the Great Wei Martial Academy this time, numbered only about a dozen.

If Cheng Guang didn't know about future events, even when he saw this omen, he would only wonder briefly why, in this day and age, there were still people who had never taken action.

He would wonder for a moment, then think no more of it.

After all, not every martial artist wishes to be aggressively competitive, hiding their trump cards.

It is quite common for students from the martial academy to deliberately avoid showing their hand before a sparring tournament.

In the past, Cheng Guang wouldn't have found anything amiss, but now, having seen the information on the paper, he found things rather interesting.

If there were indeed people from the Black Robes within the Great Wei Martial Academy.

Could it be that the Black Robes were actually people from the Great Wei side?

Staging a game of a thief shouting to catch a thief.

Whether it was true or not, Cheng Guang still needed to verify further, to see among the students from the Great Zhou Martial Academy participating in the tournament, how many were marked with the unknown notation.

"Song Yunqi."

Cheng Guang suddenly spoke.

In the pavilion, from a shadowy area, Song Yunqi's figure appeared, looking at Cheng Guang respectfully and bowing, "Princely Heir."

Cheng Guang's gaze fell on Song Yunqi and he asked, "Does the Bureau of the Lamp have detailed information on the Great Zhou Martial Academy students participating in the martial arts tournament?"

Song Yunqi nodded, "Yes!"

Cheng Guang nodded slightly, "Bring a copy for me to review."

Song Yunqi promptly nodded and acknowledged the command.

By rights, intelligence collected by the Bureau of the Lamp was not to be viewed by those from outside the department.

To access intelligence information, there are also various levels of clearance within the Bureau of the Lamp.

But then again, such rules might apply to others, but when it comes to the Princely Heir, they had to be adapted accordingly.

Song Yunqi was not a stickler for rules; when flexibility was needed, he would certainly adapt without the slightest hesitation.

After a short while.

Song Yunqi returned, holding a stack of paper that appeared to be all copied by hand.

Although the handwriting was messy, one could still make out the characters.

The ink on them was still not dry.

Cheng Guang's gaze rested on Song Yunqi and he noticed that Song Yunqi's hands were still trembling slightly.

As if he had done too much of some meticulous task.

Cheng Guang's mouth curled into a slight smile, with a hint of amusement he said, "I seem to have put you to some trouble."

Information from the Bureau of the Lamp was not to be shared with outsiders, even if Cheng Guang was the Princely Heir, certain matters could not be made public.

Song Yunqi's copying of the information was partly a way to avoid responsibility while allowing Cheng Guang access to the data.

“

Very flexible indeed.

Song Yunqi smiled, "To serve the Princely Heir is right."

Having said that, Song Yunqi slowly stepped back, his figure once again disappearing into the shadows.

Cheng Guang's gaze withdrew and fell upon the group that was about to participate in the Great Zhou Martial Academy's combat trial.

The name of the first person from the Great Zhou Martial Academy immediately caught his eye.

With just one glance, Cheng Guang smiled.

“Qiao Songshan, a four-year student of the Great Zhou Martial Academy, at the Fourth-grade Divine Realm, mastering the Overlord Spear, with a high-quality Divine Power.”

“This simpleton is actually going to participate in the combat trials.”

“I said to myself, he has already returned to the Capital city these days, how could he resist coming to see me.”

“He must have been confined by the Shenyong Duke at home for seclusion and training.”

Cheng Guang chuckled helplessly as he set Qiao Songshan’s information aside and started to look through the other participants’ documents.

There were many students participating from the Great Zhou Martial Academy this time, most of them from prominent families, with only a few from humbler backgrounds.

Many students from humble families must struggle to stand out, and almost none can afford to hide their abilities.

However, Cheng Guang was surprised to find that the martial arts column for many of the Great Zhou students from humble backgrounds was marked with “unknown.”

On the side of the Great Zhou elites, there were also quite a few marked with the “unknown” tag.

The numbers were roughly equal.

Was this some kind of coincidence?

Cheng Guang spread out two stacks of paper, laying them flat on the desk, jotting down all the names of those participating in the martial trials from both Great Wei and Great Zhou, paying special attention to those marked with “unknown.”

A moment later.

Cheng Guang’s eyes narrowed slightly as he took a deep breath.

The number of people with ominous, secret martial arts from the Great Wei and Great Zhou Martial Academies was surprisingly consistent.

If those marked with “unknown” were possibly those cloaked figures...

That would mean...

These cloaked people do not belong exclusively to Great Wei, nor to Great Zhou, but to a third party?

Cheng Guang’s brow furrowed as he pondered, one hand slowly stroking Bai Shuxuan as if it were petting a cat, while the other gently pressed at the center of his forehead.

“If it’s a third party, who exactly are the powers behind them?”

“First, they set up Bai Shuxuan to lure me out of the city, then they attempted to assassinate me...”

“Next, they slaughter participants of the Great Zhou and Great Wei dynasties’ martial trials, sowing chaos between the two nations’ relations and situations.”

“To cause chaos in Great Zhou, they have resorted to unscrupulous means...”

“What exactly is their purpose in doing all this?”

One doubt after another surfaced in Cheng Guang's mind.

It was as if a huge puzzle enshrouded him, surrounded by an impregnable darkness, leaving him at a loss.

After a long contemplation, Cheng Guang slowly exhaled.

He carefully gathered up the papers containing the information on the students from the various royal martial academies.

No rush for now.

Even if these cloaked figures had greater schemes in mind.

This time, it wasn't targeting him.

He was just a passerby, an unintentional casualty, a salted fish caught in the fray.

If those cloaked individuals were too powerful, he would temporarily avoid their edge and not engage in straight conflict.

If those cloaked individuals were only so-so, with a Breaking Ban Pill in his possession, perhaps he could turn the tables and fish in troubled waters.

As Cheng Guang was in deep thought, the sound of horse hooves suddenly approached from outside the courtyard.

Clop clop clop.

These hoofbeats were slow and powerful, drawing closer and closer.

“Boss~”

A rough voice came from outside the courtyard.

It was Qiao Songshan.

Chapter 115: I've noted this grudge!

The person had not arrived.

Yet their voice had already reached.

Qiao Songshan rushed in hastily, without needing Cheng Guang to come out to welcome him.

The aura around him was much denser than when they first met.

Not having seen him for a few days, his cultivation had improved greatly.

As soon as Qiao Songshan entered the room, he began to cry out dramatically, just about to throw himself at Cheng Guang and cling to his legs, when he suddenly noticed Bai Shuxuan quietly receiving Cheng Guang's strokes like a cat would.

His eyes widened.

He put on an immediate brake.

Bang.

Qiao Songshan stumbled to the ground, his gaze lingering on Cheng Guang, then shifting to Bai Shuxuan held in Cheng Guang's arms, his surprise and tongue-clucking mixed.

"Big brother, did you buy Bai Shuxuan?"

Qiao Songshan did not know Bai Shuxuan's real identity and still thought Bai Shuxuan was just an ordinary Oiran from Wanhua tower.

Cheng Guang, with no intention of explaining, simply nodded in response, then looked at Qiao Songshan with a puzzled face.

"What brings you here today?"

At those words, Qiao Songshan chuckled, "Big brother, after I accompanied you on the brothel visit last time, my dad caught me and made me train."

"The Martial Arts tournament between Great Zhou and Great Wei is about to begin, and my dad wants me to participate in this tournament to win some glory for Great Zhou. If I can distinguish myself in this tournament, I can be granted an official position even without participating in the Martial Cultivation imperial examinations."

Cheng Guang glanced at Qiao Songshan, "Do you even care about that?"

Children of nobility are born with official positions, and even without participating in examinations, they can inherit their family businesses and live a wealthy life.

Just the title of Shenyong Duke alone is an enviable position that many people long for.

Qiao Songshan shook his head, a bitter expression on his face, "I don't care indeed."

"But my dad does. They say this year's Martial Cultivation tournament is more grand than any before, and many important figures will be watching, some of whom don't get along well with my dad."

“Their son has signed up as well.”

“So... he’s forcing me to pull out all the stops and win, at least to not lose to that guy.”

Cheng Guang gave a light “Oh”, uninterested in such trivialities.

Fights between big shots over jealousy are not very common.

“This person your dad doesn’t get along well with, does your mom know him too?”

Cheng Guang asked with a teasing tone.

Qiao Songshan scratched his head, looking puzzled, and nodded, “Yeah, big brother, how did you know?”

“It’s Duke of Pingjiang, Wang Cheng. I usually call him Uncle Wang, he used to come to my house to play when I was little.”

Damn, really?

Cheng Guang was about to concoct a dramatic soap-opera scenario, when Qiao Songshan added something else.

“Back in the day, my dad and this Uncle Wang both pursued my mom. Later, my dad secretly met with Uncle Wang and suggested they fight a duel, and whoever lost would give up.”

“And then...”

At this point, Qiao Songshan’s face showed a hint of embarrassment.

“And then what happened?” Cheng Guang asked.

Narrowing his eyes, Qiao Songshan continued, “After that, my dad did nothing humane. While Uncle Wang was in seclusion, cultivating to enhance his cultivation, my dad directly sent people to propose marriage.”

“My mom didn’t object, and they got married and had a child in short order, oh, that’s me.”

There was absolutely no need for that last detail.

Qiao Songshan sighed, “Later, when Uncle Wang came out of seclusion, all ready for the duel with my dad, before they even fought, he was first greeted with the news of my parents’ wedding feast.”

“After that, the two of them became like fire and water.”

Cheng Guang listened quietly and couldn’t help saying, “Your dad really played dirty.”

First, he tricked him with the promise of a duel, only to seize his chance to level up, preparing for a great battle.

Who would have thought, his base was raided, and he ended up having to surrender?

Qiao Songshan exhaled deeply, “I also think my dad was too cunning. Maybe because he was ashamed for not following the code of martial honor or something, he didn’t squabble much with Uncle Wang before, and he used to actively avoid him when they saw each other.”

“It’s only recently, now that the tournament is unavoidable, that he wants to show his mettle. And now, he’s passing that on to me.”

With a pained expression, Qiao Songshan said, "I had just returned to the Capital city and was confined at home for so long. If I hadn't had a breakthrough to the Divine Power realm, I would probably still not be able to get out."

Cheng Guang knew about Qiao Songshan's cultivation. He practiced Martial Arts with the Overlord Spear, and its divine quality was considered high-grade, which was quite commendable.

He took a sip of his tea and looked at Qiao Songshan, "So you came to me looking for help?"

"How could I? My dad's still hale and hearty. If I can't beat him and he troubles me afterward, I'd be in a sorry state."

Such filial piety.

So if you can beat him, it's all good, right?

Speaking of which, Qiao Songshan remembered the real reason for his visit.

"Oh right, big brother, the delegation from the Great Wei Martial Academy arrived in the Capital city today. The Great Wei envoy is hosting a banquet to welcome and refresh the students from the Martial Academy."

"It looks quite lively."

"Big brother, do you want to go over and have a look?"

Cheng Guang pondered for a moment, "Sure, let's go have a look."

With only a few days left until the Martial Arts tournament, there weren't many from the Great Wei Martial Academy he could meet openly in the city.

This arrival was a rare opportunity to see them all gathered together.

He planned to see if those in the Great Wei Martial Academy, marked as “unknown” in the martial arts data, were actually part of the same group,

Or if they had any commonalities Cheng Guang himself had yet to discover.

Before the tournament, if he could uncover all the details about the men in black robes, then at least he wouldn't be backstabbed by someone close on the day of the tournament.

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Upon seeing Cheng Guang agree, Qiao Songshan's face revealed a naïve smile, and he immediately got up, ready to bring Cheng Guang out of the residence.

“I've heard that Her Majesty, the Empress of Great Wei, will also be attending the martial arts competition.”

“It's just a pity that the Empress of Great Wei has always been reluctant to show her face in front of others; every time she appears, her face is veiled, so even if she does come, it's highly unlikely we'll get to witness her grace.”

As he spoke, Qiao Songshan clicked his tongue in disappointment.

The Empress of Great Wei...

In recent days, Cheng Guang had often heard this name from the mouths of others.

He had not only heard it from Qiao Songshan but even from old Deng.

“Songshan, who is this Empress of Great Wei?”

Cheng Guang stood up and looked at Qiao Songshan.

Qiao Songshan looked slightly startled, "Big brother, you don't know about the Empress of Great Wei?"

After speaking, he also smiled, "Well, that makes sense. You hardly leave your home, and when you do go out, it's mostly to visit the brothel. You're not usually concerned with affairs of the outside world."

Motherfucker, if I didn't know your character, I'd think you were being sarcastic.

Cheng Guang's mouth twitched.

What does he mean by mostly going to brothels?

Wasn't he enjoying the scenery along the way when he visited brothels?

"You tell me."

Qiao Songshan thought for a moment, then seemed a bit conflicted, "The background of the Empress of Great Wei, simple yet complicated, which would you like to hear, the simple or the complex version?"

Suppressing the urge to punch Qiao Songshan, Cheng Guang said, "Just say what you know."

Qiao Songshan nodded, "The Empress of Great Wei is the Empress of the Great Wei dynasty, oh, I mean, the Emperor's woman."

"You don't need to elaborate that much; I'm not an idiot."

Cheng Guang sighed, feeling anxious about Qiao Songshan's intelligence.

How could Qiao Songshan's dad, such a cunning man, produce such a simpleton?

Even dumber than Lin Cheng.

Unbelievable.

Qiao Songshan looked innocent.

“Isn’t that what you asked me to do, big brother?”

No more questions.

Diagnosed.

Cheng Guang said, “Continue.”

Qiao Songshan gave Cheng Guang a strange look and slowly began to speak.

He recounted all the big and small matters concerning the Empress of Great Wei; during which, Cheng Guang resisted the urge to shut him up and patiently listened to the end.

Simply put, the Empress of Great Wei was the woman currently controlling the power of Great Wei. The aging Emperor of Great Wei, three years ago, suddenly deposed the then Empress, the current Imperial Concubine Lin, and replaced her with Empress Wei, Yu Lu.

Starting from then, the Emperor of Great Wei retired behind the scenes, and the entire Court was controlled by Yu Lu; many of Great Wei’s loyal officials could not bear to see the land played by a woman and remonstrated to the point of death, but they were all crushed by Yu Lu’s iron-fisted methods.

The Court was bloodily purged, and any disobedient people or powers within and without the Court were cleanly erased.

It seems that Yu Lu isn't very old.

Barely into her twenties.

Other people in their twenties become Empresses, possess mystical powers, suppress the Court, and dominate with one hand.

Meanwhile, at my age of twenty, I'm still playing a body double.

Motherfucker, it's key that the Princely Heir can't be killed yet, because if he dies now, with celestial phenomena occurring, there will be no way to explain it.

Cheng Guang still needed to think of a way to see if there was anything that could block the phenomena without anyone noticing, and quietly kill the Princely Heir.

Perhaps the reward from this system task, Nine Dragons Stealing Sky, might be able to do just that.

Powerful prohibitions are not only capable of restricting certain behaviors, but they can also isolate an area of space. The phenomena that would arise from killing the Princely Heir might be shielded as well.

Lost in thought, Cheng Guang followed Qiao Songshan out of the residence.

The banquet hosted by the Great Wei envoys was located at Thousand Taste House.

Thousand Taste House was a large estate; outside its doors were White Jade Ancient Beast Statues, one on each side.

The wide and tall gate was inlaid with ancient and exquisite copper nails and beast pattern decorations.

From its exterior alone, one could sense the grandiosity of Thousand Taste House.

At this moment, many carriages were stationed outside Thousand Taste House; many were adorned with flags bearing Wei Country's insignia. A Jade Carriage at the head of these caught Cheng Guang's attention.

That Jade Carriage sat there quietly.

It was made from top-quality ebony, with the body intricately carved with dragon and phoenix patterns, every detail exuding a sense of nobility and majesty.

The wheels solidly pressed against the cobblestone pathway, conveying a sense of solidity and dependability.

On the carriage's roof, adorned with gold tassels, swayed gently in the breeze as if a Guard of Honour for a sovereign, patrolling its territory.

The six horses drawing the carriage were not ordinary steeds, but rather, they possessed a mysterious and profound aura.

With strong builds and sleek lines, their bodies were covered in a layer of black manes, like dark sprites from molten lava, wild yet mysterious.

Their hooves struck the ground, sparking flames and proving that these horses bore the bloodlines of Exotic Beasts.

In some respects,

These horses were no less powerful than his Dragon Horned Horse.

And here there were six of them at once.

Who was the owner of this foremost carriage?

Cheng Guang recalled what Qiao Songshan had mentioned in passing, that Empress Wei would also attend the event. Could the person inside this carriage be her?

Cheng Guang felt this was highly probable.

Apart from Empress Wei, no one else could command such a grand spectacle.

Cheng Guang lowered his eyelids, no longer looking towards that carriage.

“Big brother, aren’t we going inside to take a look?” Qiao Songshan, seeing Cheng Guang standing still and staring at a carriage in a daze, thought he didn’t want to go in anymore.

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Cheng Guang shook his head, “It’s fine, let’s go inside and have a look.”

“Princely Heir.”

As Cheng Guang walked into the residence, a servant who was there to welcome guests approached with a big smile to greet them.

“Please, this way.”

The Thousand Taste House was enormous. The reception banquet set up by the Great Wei envoy for the students of the Martial Academy occupied only one of its courtyards.

At this time, it wasn’t just the Great Wei envoys hosting a banquet here.

Court officials often came to the Thousand Taste House for important banquets.

First, the cuisine at the Thousand Taste House was genuinely to their liking.

Second, the Thousand Taste House had a great reputation and was known as the number one restaurant in the Capital city.

Cheng Guang now had his suspicions that the Thousand Taste House might also be a secret property of Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou.

After all, this back-stabber Emperor Zhou had quietly pocketed the Wanhua tower, a place that was a goldmine, so if the Thousand Taste House was overlooked, that would be truly surprising.

Cheng Guang looked at the servant and asked, "Where are the students from Great Wei's Martial Academy?"

The servant was momentarily stunned, then promptly replied, "In the southeast direction."

He led Cheng Guang toward that courtyard.

"Big brother, this reception banquet organized by the Great Wei envoy will be visited by many officials from Great Zhou. Despite having lost three times in a row, which surely adds some animosity, they manage to keep up appearances quite well."

"Moreover, it's not just the officials. I've heard that the head of our Great Zhou Martial Academy has also brought a group of exceptional students."

"They say they want to mingle before the competition to make as many friends as possible, but in reality, both sides want to gauge each other's strengths."

Qiao Songshan and Cheng Guang walked side by side, Qiao informing him of the rumors in a hushed tone.

“Mm, it’s evident that both sides take this martial arts competition very seriously,” noted Cheng Guang, only half-listening.

Inside the Thousand Taste House, numerous estates lay beyond the main hall, adorned with rockeries and many little bridges over flowing streams. In beauty and opulence, it was hardly inferior to the Wanhuatower.

Entering the courtyard, Cheng Guang saw that the banquet had already begun.

Lanterns had just been lit in the garden, and the myriad of flowers and trees exhaled their fragrances into the night air.

Eight Immortals Tables were set in the middle of the courtyard, laden with an assortment of fine foods and wines, like an ocean of culinary delights.

The aromas of various dishes mingled with the floral scents, whetting the appetite.

Around the courtyard, troupes of dancers clad in gorgeous costumes prepared to perform, their beautiful faces and graceful figures akin to descending fairies.

When the music started, they danced gracefully, displaying their lithe forms and their unique charm.

Cheng Guang’s gaze did not linger long on the dancers; he quickly averted his eyes, surveying the many students from Great Wei’s Martial Academy in the courtyard.

The students of Great Wei’s Martial Academy all wore matching green uniforms, not made of silk but of a special fiber spun by the Exotic Beast unique to Great Wei, the Jade Spirit Spider, known for its value, toughness, and durability.

The uniforms were embroidered with intricate patterns, faintly forming a “Wei” character.

Among them was also a noticeable group of students from Great Zhou's Martial Academy dressed in white.

On both sides, they exchanged greetings with insincere smiles, inquiring about each other's parents' well-being and showing exceptional concern for the safety of each other's female relatives.

For a moment, it was as if birdsong and the fragrance of flowers filled the air.

While the competition seemed like a friendly event, similar to a sports meet in a past life that could foster friendships,

once it involved interests,

there was no 'friendship first, competition second'.

It was all about the competition.

To hell with friendship.

Cheng Guang's gaze skimmed over the Martial Academy students who exchanged greetings, over the court officials and Great Wei envoy not far away, and finally, as if noticing something, he looked up toward the high platform.

Behind that elevated position, under a purple canopy, sat a solitary silhouette.

Just by sitting there, without saying a word, she managed to make everyone feel an inexplicable sense of oppression.

Was that Empress Wei?

Just one glance at that person made his eyes feel a sting.

Surprised, he lowered his gaze, not daring to look any longer.

How high had Empress Wei elevated her cultivation to at her age of only twenty?

With his current level of cultivation, he couldn't bear to look without his eyes hurting.

Cheng Guang lowered his head, rubbing his eyes.

His eyes were moist.

"Big brother, why are you crying?" Qiao Songshan had not yet noticed Empress Wei.

Cheng Guang pointed towards the distant figure.

"Look, now you're crying too."

Qiao Songshan cast his gaze in that direction.

He looked toward the platform, at the shadow beneath the purple canopy.

After just one glance,

he quickly covered his eyes.

Tears "whooshed" out immediately.

Cheng Guang laughed, "Songshan, why are you crying?"

That Empress Wei truly was an indiscriminate attacker.

“Moved. I didn’t expect that Empress Wei would actually come,” Qiao Songshan said after a while, rubbing his eyes, not daring to look up again at the silhouette on the high platform.

Just as Cheng Guang was about to head toward the Martial Academy students to look for the key figures, a few cheers suddenly rang in his ears.

“Princely Heir? Is that Princely Heir?”

“It really is Princely Heir, it’s been a long time.”

“Princely Heir brother, why haven’t you come to the Imperial Palace to visit your sister lately?”

Cheng Guang paused and turned to look behind him. He smiled when he saw a few familiar-looking princes and princesses.

The leading prince had a robust appearance; he was the eldest legitimate son, Wu Ming.

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And behind him was a group of chirping princes and princesses.

Younger than Wu Ming, they found Wu Ming’s escort of several princes and princesses somehow gave him the air of a family patriarch.

Wu Ming was all smiles, greeting Cheng Guang.

Cheng Guang didn’t put on airs, returning the greeting right away.

The two exchanged friendly salutations and after some small talk, Wu Ming asked curiously, “Princely Heir, what brings you here today?”

Cheng Guang replied with a smile, “I’m on assignment from the Bureau of the Lamp.”

Using a Bureau of the Lamp assignment as a shield was indeed helpful, sparing him a lot of explanations.

Wu Ming didn’t ask further. He knew Cheng Guang had already started to get involved with the affairs of the Bureau of the Lamp and maybe soon, the Princely Heir would be able to control the entire Bureau.

The thought that he was a prince, the legitimate eldest son no less, and yet the treatment and attention he received were nowhere near comparable to Cheng Guang’s, made him feel a bit bitter.

“What about you, bringing all these young ladies and princes here for what?” In the midst of conversation, Cheng Guang glanced at the noisy group of princes and princesses behind Wu Ming.

One good thing about the Great Zhou Imperial Family was their relaxed teaching of etiquette to princes and princesses.

They didn’t rigidly require maintaining imperial dignity at all times outside the palace.

As long as one acted decently, demeanor and such were not a big concern.

This might be related to Emperor Wu Shang’s own experiences when he was younger. At least these princes and princesses still had some childlike nature left in them; although they could be mischievous, none were truly prodigal.

If there were any real prodigals who caused serious trouble, Emperor Zhou, with his personality, would not hesitate to execute them, even if they were his own sons.

On hearing this, Wu Ming sighed, “Ah, it’s just that Father learned that Empress Wei has come, and he didn’t want to meet with the empress himself. But since she is, after all, the current ruler of Great Wei,

it wouldn't be appropriate for the imperial family not to show any gesture of welcome on such an occasion, so he sent me over."

"It should actually be Wu Ling's task, since she is the Crown Prince now."

"However, she is preoccupied with cultivating and couldn't make time, so here I am," he said, spreading his hands with a look of helplessness.

His tone even carried a hint of complaint.

After all, not being the Crown Prince and yet having to do the Crown Prince's work was more than anyone could bear.

Cheng Guang laughed heartily, recognizing that this matter also involved him. If it weren't for his firm support of Wu Ling back then, the position of Crown Prince might not have ended up with her.

The likely candidate would have been Wu Ming.

Cheng Guang said with a smile, "Your Highness need not pay too much attention to these details. In the end, it's all good news."

"With this visit, you'll also get to meet Empress Wei. It's said that not many have seen the face of Empress Wei. You can feast your eyes, which is not bad at all."

Upon hearing Cheng Guang say this, the corners of Wu Ming's mouth twitched slightly, and his mood lifted a bit.

"Hmm, Princely Heir, then I'll be heading over there. After all, Empress Wei is just a woman. I should be able to handle her quite easily," he said.

"While showcasing the magnanimity of the Great Zhou Imperial Family, I'll also suppress their momentum."

“Having lost three tournaments in a row already, if we lose this martial arts contest again, it won’t just be Father who’s disgraced, but the entire face of Great Zhou will be tarnished.”

Cheng Guang nodded, kindly reminding him, “Just don’t stare at her too long, or you might end up crying out of being moved.”

Wu Ming paused at these words, then nodded his head and departed.

He walked with a relaxed pace, obviously not taking Cheng Guang’s words to heart.

After all, in his opinion, Empress Wei was much younger than he was, and at best, her Cultivation Realm was on par with his.

While invisible to ordinary people, it was nothing to him.

Wu Ming left.

The chattering princes and princesses stayed behind him.

These princes and princesses probably just followed Wu Ming to have some fun and join the excitement.

If they were to meet Empress Wei in person, chances are they wouldn’t even get close before being shut down.

They were simply too noisy.

Cheng Guang didn’t bother with these princes and princesses. After casually sending them off, he strolled around the banquet hall with Qiao Songshan.

His gaze swept across the faces of each martial artist at the banquet tables.

As he recognized a person's face, Cheng Guang's mind would match it with the information he had read.

"Great Wei... Li Shibu... skip..."

"Great Wei... Geng Xijian... skip..."

"Great Wei... Zhongsun Fenglin... skip..."

When his gaze stopped on one person, Cheng Guang's eyes narrowed slightly.

The man had a pale, bloodless complexion, as if he lived in a place where sunlight never shone.

Tall and broad-shouldered, his body had stark, cold lines like ice.

His eyes were deep and pitch-black, devoid of any emotional fluctuation, and his lips were always downturned, as if he was perpetually displeased or annoyed with everything.

A deep scar ran down his face, from the corner of his right eye to the corner of his mouth.

This scar left an ugly mark on his face.

With just a glance, his name emerged in Cheng Guang's mind.

"Qiu Xiaomo, a fourth-year student at the Great Wei Martial Academy, unknown martial arts style, fifth-rank Prime God Realm."

Qiu Xiaomo kept a distance from the other students of Great Wei Martial Academy.

Even as the students from both Great Wei and Great Zhou Martial Academies were warmly greeting each other's parents, he rarely spoke and never smiled.

Quiet and reserved, he sat to one side.

Silently polishing the knife in his hands.

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It made people feel fear toward him.

Cheng Guang silently cast a glance, careful not to linger too long, as looking too intently could make the other party sense something amiss.

Gradually, Cheng Guang turned his attention to other students at the Martial Academy.

He found a few people whose martial arts records bore ominous signs.

Their cultivation realms varied, their family backgrounds diverse, and even their ages and birthplaces differed greatly.

The only similarity

was that they were all very quiet and reticent.

They didn't participate in the chirpy and floral greetings that filled the air among the academy's students.

Even if someone said in their ear, "Ye wash la you," or pointed at their noses and scolded them, their expressions wouldn't show the slightest change.

If someone unaware of the situation saw their behavior, they wouldn't give it a second thought.

After all, some people are just naturally reticent.

Moreover, among this group of Martial Academy students, it was quite normal to have one or two individuals who seemed somewhat out of place compared to the others.

However, Cheng Guang knew.

They didn't speak not because they were the quiet type.

But rather, they simply disdained to talk with the Martial Academy students.

These people seemed to exude an innate arrogance from their very bones.

Even without saying anything aloud, the occasional lofty indifference that flashed in their eyes, and their casual movements, all betrayed a scorn for these Martial Academy students.

It must be known.

The students gathered here were the new generation of geniuses from both the Great Zhou and Great Wei, two of the top dynasties in the Four Directions Mortal World.

Even if there were other geniuses who had not yet emerged, in a sense, these Martial Academy students represented the strongest new generation of both nations.

Yet... they still held contempt.

That sense of superiority, that did not stem from status or position, but emanated from their bones.

On what grounds did they feel so superior??

The identity of these individuals was probably more complicated than I imagined.

Cheng Guang's eyes narrowed slightly, as the ominous individuals that appeared in the martial arts records only accounted for less than one-third of those present here.

Cheng Guang couldn't take any rash actions; if he startled the snake by hitting the grass, the remaining two-thirds would effectively slip away.

Even if Cheng Guang used forceful measures to capture all the Martial Academy students marked with ominous signs, there would still be a chance that some would slip through the net.

Moreover, without a shred of evidence, his abrupt capture of the Martial Academy students could lead to the Wei Country's public outrage.

The people of Wei Country would wonder if Great Zhou was not playing fair.

Even if he captured his own Martial Academy students along with the others, it would be pointless.

They hadn't taken action yet, and so, even if captured, there would be no evidence against them.

Cheng Guang would have an even harder time explaining how he discovered their identities.

It might instead startle the enemy, exposing himself prematurely to those in the mysterious organization.

Previously, they had already attempted to assassinate him once.

If they became aware of him again, even if they couldn't understand how I knew about their plans, they would surely see me as a thorn in their side, a nail in their eye.

The best course of action right now seemed to be to fight poison with poison.

These black-robed individuals believed they were hidden while I was exposed.

In truth, it was I who was hidden, and they were exposed.

Using their plans against them might not save many of the Martial Academy students, but Cheng Guang could only try his best.

He was no saint.

He could only save those within his power to save.

But if it was beyond his capabilities, he could only stand by and watch.

Having walked around the courtyard, Cheng Guang felt he had almost grasped one thing—those marked with ominous martial arts records had a ninety-nine percent chance of being the black-robed individuals.

This also explained why the black-robed individuals could disappear silently after the prohibitions were lifted.

Even the Bureau of the Lamp couldn't find any anomalies at the time.

In fact, people simply didn't run or escape.

They just walked out boldly, right under their noses.

Laughing and talking.

Cheng Guang sneered. This time, he had to shake up those lurking in the shadows.

Cheng Guang was about to get up and return home.

As he and Qiao Songshan just stepped out the gate, they suddenly saw a figure walking out.

It was Wu Ming.

His hands covered his eyes, which were red with soreness.

As if he had just had a bout of painful crying.

Seeing Cheng Guang, Wu Ming's body stiffened, but as they were already walking toward each other, he couldn't stop, and instead turned his head slightly to look at an empty space to the side.

As if there was something interesting over there worth his continuous attention.

Observing this scene made Cheng Guang smile; he saw but did not expose the truth.

It was highly likely that Empress Wei had also moved Wu Ming to tears.

Compared to Cheng Guang, Qiao Songshan was far from being insightful.

He naively greeted Wu Ming with a bow.

"I've seen Your Highness..."

“Eh, Your Highness, have you been crying??”

Wu Ming: “...”

He stood there awkwardly, wishing he could dig a hole with his toe.

Cheng Guang had already warned him not to stare at Empress Wei.

He didn't take it seriously.

He hadn't paid it any heed at all.

But now...

He had only looked at Empress Wei for a second.

He hadn't even discerned the size of her bust before he burst into tears.

In that moment, Wu Ming felt like he was looking directly at the sun.

His eyes nearly went blind.

If it weren't for not wanting to embarrass the Great Zhou Imperial Family, Wu Ming would've cried out right then and there.

It was hard to contain himself after leaving Empress Wei's presence and he couldn't hold it in anymore.

His tears flowed out in a deluge.

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The tears almost spilled from his nose.

Wu Ming deliberately found a corner where nobody was around.

He had thought that this incident had already made him embarrassed enough,

but he did not expect to bump into Cheng Guang just as he came out.

What was more embarrassing was,

that dog Qiao Songshan, who had no awareness, actually dared to reveal his scars right to his face.

Good, good, good.

I have noted this vengeance.

Wu Ming took out the little notebook in his heart and made a note for Qiao Songshan.

After hurriedly greeting Cheng Guang, he quickly stood up and left.

As he left, his steps were hasty.

He somehow resembled a certain top brother who carried the train and fled overnight.

Cheng Guang chuckled, shook his head, and dispersed the fragmented thoughts from his mind. After parting with Qiao Songshan, he returned to Duke Zhen's Mansion alone.

He had now mostly figured out the identities of the men in black robes.

Most of them were those listed under the Martial Arts column, marked with words indicating 'ominous'.

As for whether there were others, Cheng Guang did not know.

Even whether teachers from the Martial Academy were involved, besides the academy's students, was something Cheng Guang did not know.

If, aside from the academy's students, even the Martial Academy's teachers were involved, that would be truly remarkable.

It would mean that those hidden behind the scenes had already infiltrated the power center of Great Zhou.

The teachers of Great Zhou's Martial Academy were all veterans who had come down from the Border Area battlefields, with illustrious military achievements. Many of them possessed no trivial amount of power and influence.

If these people were infiltrated by the forces behind the scenes, Cheng Guang dared not imagine how many more such people there were inside Great Zhou.

When a cockroach is seen under the sunlight, it signifies an overflow in the darkness.

The more he thought about it, the more alarmed Cheng Guang became.

Over the next few days, Cheng Guang did nothing else and began to carefully scrutinize all students participating in the Martial Cultivation tournament from both countries, even those who had clear Martial Arts listed, Cheng Guang did not let it slide.

Just to be cautious,

Cheng Guang also specially reviewed the Martial Cultivation teachers who would be participating in the tournament as well as some high-ranking officials.

He found that most did not show anything particularly unusual.

Only one or two Martial Academy teachers appeared a bit abnormal, disappearing frequently during this period, nowhere to be found, and then returning to their homes the next day.

With the information gathered by the Bureau of the Lamp, Cheng Guang, sitting at home, was able to trace subtle clues.

If someone unaware of the situation saw this data, even if it was laid out in front of them, they would at most be curious whether these two Martial Academy teachers had been to the brothel late at night?

They would not investigate further.

The members of the Bureau of the Lamp are not gods; it's normal for some information to slip through the cracks.

But with just a glance, Cheng Guang could keenly perceive something amiss.

This is the advantage of foresight.

As Cheng Guang methodically prepared, time gradually elapsed.

Soon, the day of the martial arts tournament arrived.

With the night sky gradually fading, a faint light began to appear at the edge of the sky.

Initially, it was just a hazy gray, but with the passage of time, the faint light gradually brightened.

As the first light of dawn slowly spread across the land,

Bai Shuxuan lazily stretched, opened the window, quickly freshened up, dressed, and headed towards Cheng Guang's bedroom.

Her attire was not glamorous, but it had a simple beauty.

She wore a light blue dress adorned with carefully embroidered white cherry blossoms along the hem. Around her waist was a delicate belt, inlaid with exquisite jade that twinkled with a soft glow. Her hair was pulled up in a high bun, a silver hairpin swaying lightly with her graceful steps.

She walked into the bedroom with light, soft steps, and the gentle light poured through the window into the corner of the room.

The bedroom was filled with a faint fragrance.

Qing Luan had already lit incense candles in the room, preparing toiletries for the Princely Heir ahead of Shuxuan.

Bai Shuxuan felt a tinge of jealousy, spurring a competitive thought in her heart.

She gently approached the bed.

"Princely Heir, it's time to get up," her voice was soft and sweet, like the morning breeze.

Cheng Guang heard the voice and lazily turned over. Bai Shuxuan smiled slightly and patiently called out again, "Princely Heir, it's time to get up."

"The contest is today."

Finally, Cheng Guang languidly opened his eyes.

What he saw was Bai Shuxuan's affectionate smile; what he heard was her gentle words.

He stretched.

Yawned.

"It's finally this day."

"Today, the two of you should stay at home, don't go anywhere."

As Qing Luan helped Cheng Guang dress, she heard his words. Her hand paused while tying his brocade belt, "Princely Heir, you don't want us to go with you?"

Cheng Guang nodded.

"There could be some accidents; I'll be fine on my own."

Qing Luan's expression momentarily faltered, "Accidents?"

She murmured to herself.

For a moment, she couldn't figure out what kind of accidents Cheng Guang was talking about.

She wanted to ask, but Cheng Guang had apparently lost interest in continuing the conversation and slightly closed his eyes.

Qing Luan puffed up her cheeks in irritation, her red lips looking even more tempting.

Hmph.

The Princely Heir was being cryptic again.

Bai Shuxuan then said with a smile, “Princely Heir, if you’re not taking Qing Luan, how about taking me with you?”

Bai Shuxuan brought her jade-like face closer.

The scent of her hair tickled Cheng Guang’s nose, making it itch.

Cheng Guang, with half-closed eyes, sized up Bai Shuxuan thoughtfully.

The mission system mentioned that the restrainer could block the use of Qi.

But it didn’t say it could block demonic power, did it?

Would Bai Shuxuan be unaffected if she were there?

Suddenly, a light bulb went off for Cheng Guang. He felt that with Bai Shuxuan around, he had an added layer of protection for his life. He immediately nodded in agreement.

“Alright, you can come with me today.”

“Yay!”

Bai Shuxuan cheered, running around happily. Her laughter was crisp and loud, like a string of silver bells swaying in the wind.

She seemed inexplicably childlike.

When she cheered, Bai Shuxuan also gave Qing Luan a smug look, lifting her eyebrow in triumph.

Qing Luan silently turned her head away, indicating she didn't want to talk anymore.

After a simple preparation, Cheng Guang was about to leave when Qing Luan, just before he departed, stuffed a pouch into his hand.

“What's this?”

Qing Luan's lips were slightly pursed, and her face looked charming, “Princely Heir, this is a safety talisman from the Purple Cloud Temple in the Capital city. Qing Luan has worn it since childhood; they say it's useful. You mentioned there might be accidents, and Qing Luan doesn't dare to ask more. How about you take this with you?”

Cheng Guang felt a warmth in his heart.

After ruffling Qing Luan's hair, he hung the pouch at his waist and stepped out of the courtyard.

Only when Cheng Guang and Bai Shuxuan's figures disappeared from view did Qing Luan slowly turn around and return to Million Specie Garden, silently tending to the flowers and plants.

The Princely Heir wasn't there.

It was quite lonely.

Not taking me with him but taking Bai Shuxuan.

Huh.

I'm getting angry.

Qing Luan squatted down, picked up a stick, and started poking holes in the ground.

Whether she felt as though she were poking at Cheng Guang instead, the force in her hands grew weaker.