

T. Times 156

Chapter 156: The Maid and the Bureau Chief

Gusu was still in chaos. Tang Wanzhuang took charge of dealing with the affairs involving the Maitreya Cult within the city, launching a purge of forces that were related to either the Maitreya Cult or the Lu Clan.

During this time, the Tang Clan was in mourning. The rounds of sword qi that had been unleashed by the vicious sword had claimed many lives, with further casualties from the stampede that had ensued due to panic. The earlier conflict with the Lu Clan had also resulted in some casualties. While the worst was over for the Tang Clan, nearly every household within the clan had suffered deaths, and the decline of the clan's power was undeniable.

Even Tang Wangsheng himself had suffered serious injuries amid the turmoil and now had to recuperate. During this, Tang Buqi took over the reins, attempting to unravel the tangled mess within the clan.

Zhao Changhe lay in the guest house, wrapped up tightly in bandages. He looked every bit as miserable as Wan Dongliu had when they had last met. His eyes wandered around dizzily as he lay on the bed. At the moment, he could not even turn his head.

"Sisi, did you really have to wrap the bandages this tightly? I feel like you did this on purpose..."

Sisi lounged lazily on a nearby recliner, flipping through a book on the history of the Great Xia Empire as if cramming for knowledge. Upon hearing his question, she lazily replied, "Just enjoy what you get. With the entire Tang Clan in chaos, who else has the time to attend to you other than a pitiful little maid like me?"

"You're not a maid of the Tang Clan, you're my maid.."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she responded cursorily. Her beautiful eyes suddenly sparkled mischievously as she cooed, "Then, Master, when you were changing clothes and applying medicine earlier, what was with that golden foil that you were clutching onto so tightly? Can't you let your loyal little maid here take a peek?"

"Loyal? You've bound me so tightly that it's poking me now! It hurts, you know?"

“Well, if it’s so important to you, then shouldn’t it stick to your body?” Sisi said charmingly. “Of course, if you are willing to tell the truth, what sticks to your body might not just be the golden foil, but something else entirely...”

Zhao Changhe cleared his throat with a gulp, then said, “The truth is, it’s a breastplate that I prepared in advance. Did you not see how useful it was? That stupid Maitreya thought he was being smart, little did he know that I already accounted for such a scenario much earlier...”

Sisi rolled her eyes and no longer bothered arguing with him.

What kind of breastplate could withstand the strike of someone who was fifth on the Ranking of Earth so easily? And even if it really was just a breastplate, it would still be considered an incredible treasure.

But then again, it was only because Zhao Changhe had been gripping the golden foil so tightly that it had caught her attention. She had glanced at it several times, but she could not notice anything unusual about it. It looked just like an ordinary golden foil. Maybe it was indeed a special item that was simply supposed to be placed over the heart and serve as a breastplate. That explanation did make sense, after all.

Regardless of whether it was a treasure or not, Sisi had no intention of openly snatching it from him. In fact, it was because of how tightly he held on to it that caused her to feel annoyed enough to wrap him up so tightly with the bandages.

The obviously powerful Dragon Bird is lying just right beside your bed, and I don’t even have any plans of snatching that away, much less a measly golden foil... Ridiculous.

Being wrapped up so tightly that he could not move felt really uncomfortable for an active and restless person like Zhao Changhe. After lying still for only a short while, he began fidgeting around again. “Hey, Sisi...”

“What is it now?”

“Since we’re so close now, why don’t you wash off your disguise and let me see your true face?”

“We’re not close. Who said we’re close? Who are you, and why would I get close to you?”

“...I’ve heard that leaving that kind of stuff on your face for too long damages the skin.”

“Exactly, that’s why my real face is so ugly and pockmarked, so I’d rather not show it to you.”

Zhao Changhe persisted, “Well, you also shouldn’t keep flipping through those history books, there’s no record of Dragon Bird on any of those.”

Sisi continued speed-reading through the books, “Who told you that I was looking for Dragon Bird? Can’t I just read history because I want to?”

“Then do you want to know the origins of Dragon Bird?”

Dragon Bird: “...”

Sisi finally closed the book in her hand and a smile returned to her face. “Master, are you really willing to tell me?”

Zhao Changhe cleared his throat and said, “I’ve got three conditions...”

Sisi shifted herself closer to the bed, her fingers hovering over his soft waist. She then said through gritted teeth, “Three conditions? You really think I’m easy to bully, don’t you?”

“Hold on, let me finish talking. You only need to complete one of the three conditions, then I’ll tell you.”

Sisi pursed her lips, feeling as though she could accept this. She paused her pinching motion and said in a sweet voice, “Then please continue, master.”

“First, let me see your true face.”

Sisi grunted. “What’s the second one?”

“Second, take off this bandage that you’ve wrapped around me as if we’re in an S&M film and wrap it around me normally. It’s really uncomfortable.”

“What’s ice and em? Forget it, I don’t need you to explain your dialect to me. I’m not going to untie you anyway,” Sisi smiled and said. “What’s the third one?”

In fact, Zhao Changhe did not have a third condition in mind. He just wanted to either see her true appearance or have her remove the bandages, but now he was caught off guard. Seeing Sisi’s mischievous smile made him lose his temper. He suddenly blurted out, “Third, give me a kiss. After all, it’s not like we haven’t kissed before.”

Sisi’s eyes widened.

In the next moment, a man’s screams of agony came from the guest house. It was unclear which part of him hurt, but it sounded extremely miserable.

Tang Wanzhuang, who had just entered the guest courtyard, slowed her pace.

Right beside the bed in the guest house, Sisi had her hand extended, pinching Zhao Changhe’s waist. Her upper body leaned toward him, her cherry lips nearly brushing against his cheek, slowly moving closer to his lips.

Zhao Changhe: ㄟ

Sisi seemed to be aware of it. She giggled softly as she whispered in a seductive voice, “You truly are worthy of being my master. Even when you’re so injured, you’re still so lively.”

Lips nearly touching, breaths mingling.

She then suddenly exerted more force in her fingers that were pinching his waist.

Zhao Changhe’s face turned purple with embarrassment, unsure of how to feel at the moment.

“You’re not going to continue pretending anymore, eh?” Sisi said charmingly. “Well, you’re right, that fake celestial maiden was me. What’s wrong? Are you happy to have taken advantage of me? Do you perhaps think that I’m actually promiscuous?”

“No, no... Ooh... Yes, yes, ow!”

“I wanted to uncover your secrets, perhaps even use them for my own benefit... It was just a petty scheme. I’m not constrained by so many rules like you guys...” Sisi bit her lower lip. “Actually, that was my first kiss. Do you think that I just kiss people randomly?”

“No, no... I know you’re inexperienced. You couldn’t even play Yue Hongling’s role properly.”

“So you do know...”

“...”

“I know that you’re actually smart... But do you not realize that you’re in the palm of my hand right now? Whether you live or die is up to me,” Sisi whispered softly. “Tell me your secrets, including everything about Dragon Bird. Considering that we escaped death together, I won’t torture that information out of you. Isn’t that great?”

Zhao Changhe said honestly, “If this is how you plan to torture me, with your soft breasts pressed against me, then please torture me some more. Ouch~”

Knock, knock, knock.

Knocking sounds came from the door and interrupted them.

Tang Wanzhuang was very moral and did not eavesdrop on purpose. However, it was quite hard not to hear the ooh’s and ow’s coming from inside. Unable to bear it any longer, she finally knocked on the door.

Sisi sprang up as if she had springs attached to her waist and she quickly tidied herself up to immediately look just like a well-behaved maid.

Zhao Changhe cleared his throat and said, "The door isn't locked. Come in."

As the door opened, Tang Wanzhuang stood there quietly, casting her gaze at Sisi, who was right beside the bed, and then at Zhao Changhe, who looked like a dumpling. She did not say anything for a few moments, then commented, "If you want to recuperate faster... It's best not to be too indulgent ..."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Sisi: "..."

"Ahem," Zhao Changhe cleared his throat again, feeling very helpless. "You've got a lot of things on your plate at the moment. You still have the time to visit me?"

"I've already settled most of it. As for the rest, Weiyang and the others will be here soon, they can handle it..." Tang Wanzhuang said softly. "Also, those other matters... are not as important as you."

"Huh? How can that be?" said Zhao Changhe. "I'm not important at all."

Tang Wanzhuang said, "At least this time, you are the benefactor of the Tang Clan."

"I simply did what I did for my friend Tang Buqi, as well as for the people of Gusu. What I did has nothing to do with saving the Tang Clan," said Zhao Changhe. "If you came here to thank me for helping protect the masses, I won't be falsely modest. After all, I do good deeds to receive praise and rightfully demand a reward."

Tang Wanzhuang chuckled, feeling quite amused. "Oh? And what reward do you want? Assurance that you and your maid will be allowed entry to the tomb of the Sword Emperor? Or do you want the treasure of vicious qi that Maitreya threw into the sword pond?"

Sisi could not help but feel that according to how Zhao Changhe had just spoken with her, his reply to Tang Wanzhuang would definitely be something like "I want you." But to her surprise, Zhao Changhe suddenly became so serious that it felt as if he had been replaced by an entirely different person, and he answered, "I want both, and I also want you to promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

“The tomb of the Sword Emperor should have already rejoined the main world. Please seal it off immediately. I know that you will definitely want to investigate it, and I won’t stop you. When the time comes, I just want you to take me and Sisi with you, but afterward, refrain from further exploration in the future. On the contrary, you must do whatever you can to seal it off again.”

Sisi was stunned momentarily, but Tang Wanzhuang smiled slightly and asked, “Why is that? Don’t you know that thoroughly exploring such ancient sites may bring the greatest benefits to you...”

Zhao Changhe continued seriously, “I don’t trust either the Demon Suppression Bureau or the Tang Clan. If they continue blindly exploring the tomb, they may trigger a major catastrophe such as the revival of the Sword Emperor. If that really happens, then we’ll all die. Besides...”

He paused, and then his words became more incisive, “Are you really sure that Gusu will still be under your control in the future and not Maitreya’s? Looking at the current situation, even Xia Longyuan would not dare make such claims.”

Sisi finally nodded, thinking to herself that Zhao Changhe really was smart and rational when he wanted to.

Tang Wanzhuang, however, smiled gently as moved forward and sat on the edge of Zhao Changhe’s bed. “I have already begun making preparations for this. We can go and take a look at the tomb together once you’ve recovered.”

As she spoke, her delicate hands brushed over the bandages on his body, loosening them slightly. “Who bound you this tightly? It isn’t beneficial to your recovery. I have some specially made ointment for external injuries here. Have your maid apply it to every part of your body, its effect—”

Before she could finish speaking, Sisi stood behind her with her hands on her hips and her eyebrow raised. “I only know how to wrap someone like a dumpling using bandages! Lady First Seat, you appear to have such delicate hands. You’re also skilled at treatment, right? Then please apply the ointment on him yourself and let this little maid see how much the person who is constantly expressing gratitude to their benefactor is willing to do. Those things you said earlier weren’t just empty words, were they?”

Chapter 157: Aunt and Uncle

Sisi was not afraid of Tang Wanzhuang at all. After all, she had not revealed her true face yet, so she would not even know who she was. With that being the case, what did she have to be afraid of?

Regardless, she was full of grievances at this moment. She had painstakingly bound those bandages so tight, only for Tang Wanzhuang to casually undo them and then criticize her for doing them improperly. The benefactor of your Tang Clan has been lying in bed for so long. You know how to treat the injury, but you don't come to treat it. But when someone else helps him with his injuries, it's not good enough? Who does she think she is, acting so superior?

Seeing how sulky Sisi was, Tang Wanzhuang pursed her lips, unable to refute her for a moment.

Although it seemed like Sisi had not done much in battle, who really knew just how much she had contributed below the sword pond? Even if she had not done much directly, just accompanying and assisting Zhao Changhe theoretically made her a benefactor of the Tang Clan, so Tang Wanzhuang really could not just get angry with her.

But helping Zhao Changhe apply ointment...

Tang Wanzhuang was very hesitant.

She was not as easygoing as Sisi, and besides... there were certain aspects of Zhao Changhe's identity and their relationship that made her wary. Both sides were tacitly avoiding certain things, so would applying ointment lead to something unexpected?

Tang Wanzhuang really could not bring herself to do it, so she looked at Sisi and said apologetically, "It really isn't my place to do something like this. Since you're Mister Zhao's maid, can you please..."

Sisi stomped her foot. "You're known for your intelligence, yet even someone like Tang Buqi figured out I'm not a real maid and you haven't?!"

Tang Wanzhuang: "?"

She had a lot to do since arriving, and she had not asked about such things yet. How am I supposed to know something like that... Wait, if you're not a maid, then what were you doing just now?

Zhao Changhe, watching the two women staring at each other, could not help but laugh. "Come on, Sisi, don't make things difficult for First Seat Tang..."

Sisi became even more annoyed. “Oh, look at us, both just untouched virgins. But I’m supposed to accompany you, while she, with her pure and aloof demeanor, gets treated like a queen! She’s practically an old auntie, what’s with all the pretense?!”

“Where are you talking about...” Zhao Changhe looked at Tang Wanzhuang, impressed by the fact that she was actually revealing rare embarrassment. He could not help but give Sisi a thumbs up in his mind. It was not easy to make Tang Wanzhuang feel uncomfortable like this. However, he could not say any of his thoughts out loud. He could only smooth things over. “I’m not that familiar with First Seat Tang. We’re only people who carry out official business with one another. On the other hand, you’re someone who’s been my partner in battle.”

Sisi blinked. Tsk... It’s annoying how good he is at talking.

She snorted deliberately and said, “Are you seriously saying that? Then how come you call Tang Buqi your eldest nephew so intimately? It doesn’t sound like you’re only carrying out official business with one another.”

Tang Wanzhuang glanced at Zhao Changhe with an expressionless face.

Now it was Zhao Changhe’s turn to look embarrassed, “Uh... That was just a joke, a joke...”

Sisi said leisurely, “To those who treat you well, you talk as if they’re promiscuous. To those who maintain their dignity and act pretentious, you talk as if they are innocent and deserving of respect. I’m not stupid. You two can enjoy your innocence together. I want to see if the one willing to help you treat your injuries is the promiscuous woman or the innocent official.”

After saying that, she turned around and left, slamming the door behind her.

Inside the room, Zhao Changhe and Tang Wanzhuang looked at each other. Tang Wanzhuang had no idea who Sisi was and thought she was jealous, but Zhao Changhe knew why she had lost her temper.

It seemed that his obvious respect for Tang Wanzhuang had rubbed her the wrong way. She probably felt like she’d been taken advantage of and felt aggrieved.

However, she still had not explained her background. So, what exactly was he supposed to think of her?

Tang Wanzhuang sighed and asked, “Did that girl misunderstand something? Do I need to explain things to her?”

Zhao Changhe shook his head and replied, “No, there’s no misunderstanding... I can only say that the fate of people getting to know each other is really strange. Well, you can just leave the ointment there. My injuries are mainly on the front side, so I can apply it myself. I don’t need anyone to pamper me. I’m not that delicate.”

For some reason... Maybe because Sisi had left and the situation was less awkward, or perhaps it was Zhao Changhe’s natural attitude that made Tang Wanzhuang feel more at ease, but she did not feel like there was any problem now. She casually picked up some ointment and applied it on the worst of Zhao Changhe’s shoulder injuries.

Zhao Changhe was taken aback but did not say anything. Actually, as long as there was not any awkwardness between men and women, something like this was quite normal. Talking about it made it less awkward.

He thought for a moment, then brought up another topic, “Now that we’ve settled the two matters in Yangzhou and Gusu, I believe that I’ve already done enough as a secret agent, right?”

Tang Wanzhuang chuckled and said, “In recent years, there has not been an agent of the Demon Suppression Bureau with greater achievements than you... It’s only been a short while since you arrived in Jiangnan, yet you’ve already put a stop to such major cases. If that isn’t enough, then nothing else will be.”

“So Dragon Bird and the Six Harmonies Art are simply things that I earned through my own accomplishments. You better not bring that topic up with me again in the future. The jade token is on the table over there. You can take it back.”

Tang Wanzhuang looked puzzled. “This token should be very useful to you. It grants you a lot of authority without any of the responsibility. Why are you returning it to me?”

“I don’t know if it’s merely fate... I used to roam the jianghu, seeking revenge and righting wrongs. But ever since I got that token, all I’ve been doing is solving cases. It’s really strange. Although I

can't say that doing so hasn't been interesting, I don't want to keep investigating cases all the time. It's very tiring."

Tang Wanzhuang chuckled helplessly. "Wasn't that because you came to Jiangnan with the intent to target the Maitreya Cult, knowing that the Maitreya Cult was operating secretly in Jiangnan? You shouldn't be surprised that you're solving cases all the time when you're the one looking for cases to solve. Where does fate come into play here? Keep the token. If you still somehow end up in situations where you have to solve cases, then you can just smash it if you really think it is what is causing that."

Zhao Changhe said happily, "That's settled then."

"You're afraid of constraints, after all."

"Perhaps."

Tang Wanzhuang carefully applied the ointment and thought for a while, then said, "Speaking of Dragon Bird... Now that its power has been revealed, interested parties like Maitreya, my elder brother, and several others are likely aware of what it is. Even if you get rid of the saber, it's already too late. Trouble will still surely follow you. What are your plans?"

"It's not a big deal if Maitreya knows. I was worried about attracting trouble before, but I've already offended him to death anyway. We've long been at loggerheads, so what difference does it make if he knows that I have the saber?"

"What if he spreads the news to others? Like Vermillion Bird."

"It's unlikely. He's not just a martial artist concerned with personal grudges; he's a rebel leader with political considerations."

"Such as?"

"If he's the only one who knows the secret and he captures me in the future, he might stand to gain something. Would he really leak it to the Four Idols Cult for their benefit, allowing them to further boost their reputation for killing a prince? Or would he keep the valuable information to himself? If I were him, I would definitely not leak this information to others. Well, whether he actually thinks the same is hard to say. After all, a madman can do anything."

Tang Wanzhuang chuckled again, “You say you’re not suited for the court, but I find you more fitting with each passing moment.”

“Give me a break,” Zhao Changhe retorted. “The imperial court is rotten, whether it’s Xia Longyuan or the Tang Clan. Am I supposed to join the court and learn how to sacrifice everything for others like you? I’m not sick in the head.”

Tang Wanzhuang continued applying the ointment absentmindedly, not responding.

Zhao Changhe added, “As for your elder brother and the others knowing, I trust that you’ll keep them quiet. That was never really a problem to begin with, right?”

Tang Wanzhuang came back to her senses and a hint of a blush spread across her face. “I can indeed keep them quiet, but the issue is how they’ll perceive it. I’m afraid that my father would rush from the capital to see you in a few days if news of such actions were to get out.”

Zhao Changhe remarked, “Have you ever considered that this is a simple matter? I don’t understand why someone like you, who’s known for her wisdom, would be troubled by such trivialities.”

Tang Wanzhuang asked curiously, “Simple?”

“Of course, it’s simple,” Zhao Changhe said matter-of-factly. “All I have to do is tell your family that I have no interest in a twenty-eight-year-old lady, and that would be the end of it.”

As Tang Wanzhuang listened, her expression unconsciously turned fierce, and her hand involuntarily applied more pressure.

The strength of someone ranked third on the Ranking of Earth was no joke. Even the slightest increase in force made Zhao Changhe’s eyes bulge. “Holy crap, are you trying to kill...”

“Brother Zhao, brother Zhao!” The door suddenly burst open, and Tang Buqi rushed in. “My dad said... Uh, wait, did you just say ‘kill’? Uh...”

He looked at Zhao Changhe, who was lying on the bed with his bare chest, and then at his aunt, who was sitting on the edge of the bed applying ointment to him. His mind echoed with the phrase “kill your husband.” His face turned a myriad of colors as he slowly backed away, his back hitting the door frame with a loud thud as he then fell to the floor outside the room.

Taking a deep breath, Tang Wanzhuang suppressed the anger and embarrassment bubbling within her, then she gritted her teeth as she said, “Is it a part of Tang Clan’s etiquette to barge into people’s rooms without knocking?”

Our Tang Clan’s etiquette also doesn’t allow women to touch men like this before marriage.

Tang Buqi muttered in his mind. However, how could he actually dare to say that out loud to his aunt? His expression was on the verge of tears as he said, “Uncle said that I don’t need to knock in the future if we’re to be friends...”

Zhao Changhe’s mouth hung wide open.

Chapter 158: Sisi's True Face

Tang Wanzhuang, who was known for her calm and graceful demeanor, was probably experiencing her first bout of rage in her entire life. Zhao Changhe watched helplessly as she grabbed Dragon Bird from beside the bed and stormed out the door toward Tang Buqi. She kicked him sending him tumbling, then used Dragon Bird like the door panel it was and delivered a resounding smack to Tang Buqi’s ass. “He tells you not to knock, he tells you to call him uncle, and you listen?! Who told you that this guy is your uncle?!”

Tang Buqi screamed: “I was wrong, I was wrong! I understand! Aunt, you care about face! He isn’t my uncle, he isn’t my uncle!..”

Tang Wanzhuang was furious, “Who told you that it’s because I care about face?” “Ah, I was wrong, you don’t care about face...”

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Amid Tang Buqi’s cries of agony, Zhao Changhe finally closed his mouth, which had been gaping for what seemed like ages.

What a genius. If you don't get beaten, who will?

Hm? Why does it feel as if this aunt has been bullying this nephew since he was a child? She's so skilled at it...

He wanted to intervene but did not know how to. In the end, he could only say, "Stop hitting him. You aren't well. What if you tire yourself out..."

Tang Buqi: "..."

I'm the one who's being beaten, yet she's the one you're worried about? And you still dare to call yourself my uncle!

Tang Wanzhuang really did get exhausted from beating her nephew. She leaned on the saber, panting heavily as she coughed, "Tell me, what did your father say for you to barge in like that?"

"Dad said that the saber is probably the Dragon Bird of the Great Xia, and brother Zhao is probably..." Tang Buqi covered his head, cautiously glancing at his aunt. "So I came to confirm it, but it looks like there's no need for that anymore."

Tang Wanzhuang was almost driven to death by anger. She coughed violently for a long time, unable to speak.

Zhao Changhe could not help but wonder if her condition had been in fact caused by the idiots in her family...

He could only say: "Nephew... Er, I mean, brother Tang, this saber is indeed Dragon Bird. Please help keep it a secret. Besides, being able to use Dragon Bird does not mean that I have any special status. Look, even your aunt can use it. Don't jump to conclusions..."

My aunt is the head of the Demon Suppression Bureau, and she carries the aura of the Great Xia. There's nothing strange about Dragon Bird recognizing her? But what about you?

Tang Buqi felt like he had a stomach full of words but dared not speak any of them. It seemed like anything he said at the moment would only end up causing him to get beaten up.

Anyway, the saber is indeed Dragon Bird, and you're the prince. Isn't it normal for my aunt to be close to you? This should be a joyous occasion for the family. But what right do I have to say anything? I'm just a poor nephew who suddenly has an uncle who is younger than me, and I even have to endure the beatings of my aunt.

Tang Buqi felt aggrieved, and it took him a while to gather himself before finally saying, "There aren't many who can recognize this saber. If my dad had not told me, I wouldn't have been able to tell. And as long as I don't tell them, most others wouldn't know either."

"Alright, I believe that the Tang Clan will handle this matter appropriately," Zhao Changhe sighed. "Come in and sit down."

Tang Wanzhuang glanced at him but ultimately did not say anything. She tiredly brought the saber back into the room and sat on the table.

Tang Buqi cautiously followed in and sat on the chair opposite her at the table, his buttocks still sore from being smacked just now.

"Brother Tang," Zhao Changhe suddenly called out.

Hearing him speak in such a formal tone, Tang Buqi looked at him in surprise.

But then Zhao Changhe continued, "I understand the anxiety that parents feel when they see their daughter of marriageable age still unmarried, and I understand the desire to find a suitable match for her, as well as the desire to seize an opportunity to benefit the family... However, Tang Wanzhuang is not an ordinary person. She supports not only your entire clan, but also the empire... The Tang Clan should not, and does not have the right to, force her to do anything."

Tang Buqi said hurriedly, "We never forced her to do anything..."

Zhao Changhe acted as if he had not heard anything and continued, "The Tang Clan should not take advantage of her filial and kind-hearted character. If someone like me, a lawless bandit, were in her place, I would have definitely had a falling out with the clan a long time ago. But every one of you wants to take charge; just who do you think you are? Never mind being unmarried at twenty-eight, even if she were unmarried at eighty-two, it's none of your business!"

Tang Buqi: "..."

"I'm not saying that I have such status, but even if I did, I would refuse such political marriages. No matter how you see me, please kindly convey my words to your old man."

Tang Buqi found it extremely strange. You're not wrong, but with you having just acted the way you did, are you just trying to evade responsibility now?

But looking at his aunt's expression, she was actually smiling. Her beautiful eyes glanced over at Zhao Changhe with appreciation.

You actually appreciate it when someone eats you up but doesn't want to own up to it? Forget it, when it comes to elders' affairs, juniors shouldn't interfere.

Tang Buqi sighed helplessly and said, "Alright, I'll convey your words to my dad."

"That's good," Zhao Changhe chuckled. "I must say, eldest nephew... Er, brother Tang, the way you stood against the vicious sword was truly impressive."

Tang Buqi snorted and said, "It's just a clump of sword qi, what's so great about it?! I just haven't cultivated enough. If my cultivation were a bit higher, you wouldn't have even gotten the chance to show off!"

"Alright, alright, do you dare to go out by yourself next time?"

Tang Buqi was startled, then suddenly chuckled, "The matters here are pretty much settled. I'll be heading north soon. I suddenly feel like there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Once you see more of the world, you'll find that a lot of things aren't actually that special," said Zhao Changhe with a smile. "I look forward to meeting you again in the jianghu someday. I feel like it would be quite an interesting scene."

Tang Buqi fell silent for a moment before saying softly, "Sure enough, if I don't knock on the door, you treat me as a friend."

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Tang Wanzhuang: “...”

Bang!

The door was blown open as Tang Wanzhuang grabbed her nephew’s ear and threw him out the door. “Go and focus on your training! You’re not allowed out unless you break through to the fifth layer of the Profound Gate within ten days! In ten days, I’ll assess your swordsmanship. If I find you lacking even a bit, you’ll have to face the wall at the rear mountain for a year!”

“We don’t have a rear mountain anymore...” Tang Buqi’s sighing voice was already far away.

Finally, the room quieted down. Zhao Chang and Tang Wanzhuang looked at each other and they both suddenly chuckled.

Zhao Changhe asked, “So you’re planning to stay here for the next ten days?”

“Well, with everything going on here, I don’t even know if ten days will be enough to handle them all.”

“Then you should go and attend to those matters. My injuries are just superficial. I’ll be fine after a bit of rest. You don’t need to keep wasting your time here.”

“Is it really a waste of time, though?” Tang Wanzhuang smiled faintly. “If I had not come here, how would I have heard your words about the Tang Clan?”

“...In fact, it was just a more polite way of saying no to an unmarried twenty-year-old lady, right? Ultimately, it’s still a refusal.”

Tang Wanzhuang smiled and said, “I’m still a lady. Which lady would want to hear hurtful words rather than pleasant ones?”

Zhao Changhe did not further pursue this topic and instead said, “When Tang Buqi said that there’s no rear mountain anymore, didn’t you feel that the Tang Clan was showing signs of decline? Even

Tang Buqi, who is generally carefree, is filled with worries for the clan, and yet you can still smile like this...”

“Buqi’s transformation was due to his loyalty and dedication for the glory of the Tang Clan. That was what allowed him to even stand against the ancient vicious sword. While others might see the state of the Tang Clan as a state of decline, I see it as the beginning of the Tang Clan’s resurgence,” Tang Wanzhuang said softly. “This had to happen at some point, and right now is a perfect time.”

Zhao Changhe stared at her intently without saying a word.

This encounter was the first time that he had seen Tang Wanzhuang truly act like the head of the Demon Suppression Bureau.

“The Tang Clan owes you a great deal for your assistance this time. Without you, the consequences would have been unimaginable. Whether you did it for the people of Gusu or for your friend Tang Buqi, I now owe you a favor,” Tang Wanzhuang said. She then took out a blood-red bead and continued, “This is the treasure that Maitreya threw into the pond. It’s probably helpful to you, but you may be a little disappointed.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. “No worries, it’s just a little gift anyway. Even if it was just a copper coin, I wouldn’t mind.”

Tang Wanzhuang smiled and said, “It’s not that bad... However, you should recover from your injuries first before you start playing with it. Otherwise, it may end up being detrimental to your blood and qi.”

After saying that, she placed the bead on the bedside table. “I’m afraid that I’ve disturbed your private time with Miss Sisi. I shall not intrude on your time any further. I’ll come visit you when I have the chance again, Mister Zhao.”

As Tang Wanzhuang left, the room that had been bustling just moments before suddenly quieted down.

Zhao Changhe welcomed the silence, closing his eyes to recuperate, paying no attention to the bead on the bedside table.

He did not need to even look at it, he could sense the intense bloodthirst contained within the bead. It was definitely not suitable for him to tinker with it when his blood and qi were still weak due to his injuries.

Seriously, with people coming and going like this, it only ends up delaying my recovery... If they want me to recover quickly, then I'd rather have them come and dual cultivate with me. They speak of owing favors, yet refuse to do any heavy lifting.

Just as he was thinking this, he suddenly caught a whiff of a fragrance. It was a scent that he had never smelled before.

Zhao Changhe opened his eyes.

A stunningly beautiful girl dressed in foreign attire stood beside him. She had an expressionless face as he examined him, her eyes seeming to say, "She didn't even tie the bandage properly either. Should I just wrap him up like a dumpling again?"

Her eyes not only seemed to be able to speak, but they also seemed to carry a hint of flirtatiousness, with a hidden charm as they flickered and expressed admiration and tenderness.

Even though she was not doing anything, her natural charm that could deeply captivate anyone simply oozed out of her.

Her face did not have any pockmarks or skin damage that she claimed to have. It was fair as jade, crystal clear, and slightly flushed, like plum blossoms in the snow.

Paired with her foreign attire, the rope around her waist from which jades hung and swayed, and the tinkling of bells at the hem of her skirt, she was just like an ethereal fairy.

Zhao Changhe stared blankly, momentarily at a loss for words.

There was no need for introductions. He instantly knew that this was Sisi.

I didn't expect to see Sisi's true face so suddenly... If Tang Wanzhuang embodies the elegance of the divine land, then Sisi embodies the allure of foreign lands.

If you're so beautiful, then why the hell did you make yourself look like an ordinary maid?

Chapter 159: Gu...

Seeing Zhao Changhe's dumbfounded expression, Sisi could not help but feel a bit smug. She maintained a straight face and said, "What are you looking at? Do you think that you've hit the jackpot? Did it not even occur to your little bird brain that this face might also be fake?"

"Erm..." Zhao Changhe's thoughts raced. He replied calmly, "Real or fake, and whether you're the ordinary maid from before or not, it doesn't affect me in any way."

"Huh?"

"I'm still going to tease you either way. It's just that now, teasing you will be a bit more enjoyable."

Sisi had no idea how to react. "Hey!"

"You got peeved by Tang Wanzhuang and you want to compete with her, right?" said Zhao Changhe. "Don't take what I said earlier as just perfunctory words. There really isn't anything between me and her. On the other hand, we've fought alongside one another, and we've risked our lives together. So why are you even bothering to compare yourself to her?"

"The reason why I was annoyed was that you keep teasing me, while you let her act all high and mighty and regard her with such respect! Is it because her status is high? Well, my status is even higher than hers, believe it or not!"

Zhao Changhe said, "I believe you. You're a little princess of a small foreign tribe, right? You came to the Central Plains to steal the martial arts from all the major forces, starting with the Thieves Guild to learn the basics of theft, then you went to the Maitreya Cult to learn how to bewitch people's hearts. The steps are quite clear."

Sisi snorted coldly. "Your itch to solve crimes hasn't gone away yet, huh?"

"So, did I guess right or not?"

“Your guess is remarkably accurate,” Sisi said with a straight face. “What now? Are you going to arrest me and bring me to the Demon Suppression Bureau? Your skills as a secret agent seem to be quite high.”

Zhao Changhe shrugged nonchalantly and said, “You mean that jade token? You can have it if you want.”

Sisi: “...”

Zhao Changhe said lazily, “Let’s not even mention stealing martial arts, my girlfriend is still a rebel. Do you really think that I’m doing things for the imperial court just because I have a jade token? And even if I was working for them, you and Chi Li are not from the same clan. The style and patterns of the clothes you wear are completely different. It’s possible that we even team up against Chi Li, so why would I arrest you?”

Sisi chuckled softly and said, “That’s just wishful thinking. Chi Li and I are in an alliance, and what we are aiming for is the Central Plains.”

Zhao Changhe tilted his head to judge her for a moment before shaking his head and saying, “No. You have nothing to do with them, and your goal is not the Central Plains. If your goal was the territory of the Central Plains, there would be no reason for you to sneak around stealing and learning martial arts. You’re not some idiot like Murong Fu. Such actions are utterly stupid and inexplicable.”

“Hey... If, and I’m saying if, I really was allied with Chi Li’s group, what would you do?”

Zhao Changhe said matter-of-factly, “I’d arrest you and convert you in private.”

Sisi clenched her teeth and turned around to find some bandages. “Let’s see who’ll convert whom!”

Seeing the way her bells jingled, Zhao Changhe found it quite amusing. “Sisi...”

“What?!”

“Stop hiding it. I’m afraid there is some misunderstanding between you and me. If you keep having me guess with half-truths and I take it seriously, will you blame me for being frivolous? You might

as well be honest and clear with what it is that you want. I'd be willing to do it even if it were kissing... Well, transferring qi... Just be frank with me, maybe I can help you."

Sisi looked at him steadily for a while, her eyes flickering hesitantly. She sighed softly and said, "I've sworn a heavy oath, and I can't reveal anything about that place to the outside world. So, guess all you want, I have no choice but to accept it. As long as I can participate in the exploration of the Sword Emperor's tomb, I will immediately leave the Central Plains. You may never see me again in your lifetime, so why bother asking so much?"

After pondering for a moment, Zhao Changhe suddenly asked, "You came to Gusu and hid as a maid in the Tang Clan because you heard that there was a treasure of vicious qi here while you were stealing the martial arts of the Maitreya Cult at White Lotus Temple. When you heard about the treasure, you suspected that it was at Tiger Hill Sword Pond, so you came here. Is that right?"

Sisi casually sat down next to the bed and replied, "Yeah."

"So, when you came here, it was for the treasure of vicious qi, not for the tomb of the Sword Emperor, right? It was only later that you learned about the tomb of the Sword Emperor and felt that it was more important," said Zhao Changhe. "The treasure of vicious qi is now right on the bedside table. Why haven't you even spared it a glance?"

Only then did Sisi glance at the bead on the bedside, hesitating. "It's something you need for your cultivation, so it's more important to you. Since I have to cling onto your thigh to enter the tomb, I won't compete with you for it anymore to avoid any unpleasantness between us."

"Is that why you aren't looking at Dragon Bird and the golden foil now?"

Sisi remained silent.

Zhao Changhe scoffed, "Your proficiency at tomb raiding and knowledge of the ancient era cannot be acquired in a short period of time. I don't believe that you could have acquired it in the Thieves Guild. Maybe you've learned some things there, but that was just on top of the knowledge you already had. As for the tomb of the Sword Emperor, I doubt that anyone else knows about it as clearly as you do. When the time comes, I don't know who will be clinging to whose thigh. But that's enough of that. Since we're going to be working as a team to get treasures, if you need something, take it. If you don't want it, I'll keep it. Let's do things that way."

Sisi gave him a deep look and finally reached out for the blood-colored bead. She carefully examined it for a moment before probing it with her true qi.

Her brow then furrowed deeper and deeper, and she muttered to herself, “It’s strange. Where did Maitreya get this?”

Zhao Changhe said, “This is probably the actual so-called treasure of vicious qi. Originally, Maitreya was looking for this thing in Jinling, but it seems that it had already been found. Fa Yuan then mentioned that it might actually be in Gusu, which directed the trouble here... What’s wrong?”

“This is not a natural treasure, but a kind of ancient demonic sacrificial technique. I don’t know the exact details, but I can tell that it’s not meant for nurturing vicious qi... Well, perhaps if you carry it with you all the time, the strong, bloodthirsty, vicious qi contained within it might have some effect on nurturing vicious qi, but the effect isn’t that significant. On the contrary, it might even affect your temperament, making you increasingly violent,” Sisi said. “You’re not allowed to use this. I don’t want to see a version of you with a bad temper.”

“No wonder Tang Wanzhuang said that I might be disappointed... Maitreya did not seem to care too much when he tossed it out either.” Zhao Changhe then said curiously, “So what’s the main purpose of this thing?”

Sisi thought for a moment, somewhat uncertain, and said, “I feel like this is part of a set. It would be easier to determine its true purpose if we had the whole set. Right now, it’s hard to say... Anyway, just don’t use it.”

Zhao Changhe said, “Then why were you originally looking for it? Is this something that you can use?”

“It’s not suitable for me either. I originally wanted to find it to refine gu[1]... I wanted to enhance my body, like you! Anyway, it’s useless to me. It isn’t what I thought it would be.”

Zhao Changhe looked at her for a while, not sure if he had heard a key point. He just said, “Alright, just leave it here. Once I’ve recovered, I’ll study it myself. If I don’t figure anything out, I’ll just keep it until I’ve collected the entire set.” Sisi looked at him strangely. “You’re really keeping it until you maybe obtain the whole set? We don’t even know how many pieces are in the set or what effect it will have once you’ve completed it. Do you have nothing better to do?”

Zhao Changhe casually played around with the bead in his hand, murmuring, "I just have a feeling that someone should be coming to enlighten me soon. I've encountered many things that need explanation. She can't just sit back and watch the show without saying anything, otherwise, she wouldn't be a very competent director."

Sisi was stunned and confused.

Zhao Changhe's eyes fell on her red lips again, and he asked carefully, "How about... we exchange qi again? Or maybe a shoulder massage?"

"Fuck off!" Sisi kicked him in the waist and left angrily.

Sure enough, even when I'm using my actual appearance, he hasn't changed the way he treats me!

What the hell is wrong with this bird guy?!

Zhao Changhe watched her beautiful back as she left. Her top was quite short, revealing a hint of her fair skin at her waist, which was extremely alluring. As he watched her leave, he inexplicably felt a twinge of jealousy, thinking that she shouldn't be exposing herself like that to others. Immediately, he knocked his head, feeling that he might not be entirely normal right now.

Leaving aside the fact that he and Sisi were not actually in a relationship, just having such thoughts was not something that a modern person should have. How many girls flaunt their waistlines in the modern world? And who actually cared about such things in the modern world?

Zhao Changhe leaned against the headboard, thinking silently. It was likely that after a while, his memories of the modern world would fade further, and the thoughts of this world would completely take over.

The only thing that still connected him to the concept of being a transmigrator was the blind woman.

She had not appeared in his dreams for a very long time, as if to show his fading connection to the modern world.

Anyway, with all the injuries and exhaustion, he was too tired to think too much. After everyone had come and gone, when the enchanting Sisi stood before him, he found himself in a state of sage-like silence, not particularly eager to converse. He wondered if Sisi noticed it.

In the haze of half-sleep, Zhao Changhe suddenly had a strong premonition that the blind woman would definitely make an appearance today.

Chapter 160: Heavenly Tome, Blood God, Ancient Spirit Tribe

This time, Zhao Changhe's premonition was correct.

Ever since the brief encounter he had with the blind woman when he had fallen asleep in the bathtub in the Cui Clan and exchanged a few words with her, where she had mentioned "the Heavenly Dao has perished" and the "Heavenly Tome," she had not appeared before him again. But this time, just as he had drifted into sleep, she appeared in his dream.

It had been March with the gentle spring breeze still blowing during their last encounter, but now it was already the middle of May, the peak of summer. Two full months had passed, and how many things had happened during that time?

Zhao Changhe had thought that she would make another appearance on the day that he had acquired the golden foil, but she had not. This had been puzzling him the most as he really felt that she should have appeared back then.

Fortunately, his judgment was correct this time, and she had indeed come.

Zhao Changhe had a hunch that this time, it was mainly because of the Sword Emperor's tomb... and Sisi. Zhao Changhe felt that Sisi still had many secrets. The talk of her being a foreign princess was just that—talk. He believed that Sisi must have some connection to the previous era... especially with the Sword Emperor's tomb that had emerged right before them. With such frequent exploration into the previous era, it was bound to attract the blind woman's attention.

However, unlike previous encounters, this time the blind woman was far away, hovering high up in the sky.

It seemed that with each meeting, she became more distant. He remembered that in the past, he could even touch her hand. But the last time she appeared, she was suspended in the night sky. This time, she was even further away, like a dream within a dream, unclear and indistinct.

Zhao Changhe felt a bit annoyed and said coldly, “Since you’re here to talk, why are you so far away?”

The blind woman sighed and said, “Since I’ve only come here to talk, then all that matters is that you can hear me and I can hear you. Isn’t that enough? In fact, when you see me in your dreams, I don’t even need to reveal my body to converse with you. I merely reveal my form as you are more accustomed to it.”

Zhao Changhe sensed the meaning behind her words keenly, “So, you might directly converse with me through the void in the future?”

The blind woman fell silent. She had been very surprised by Zhao Changhe’s detailed analyses and keen insights during his trip to Jiangnan. These were qualities that he had not fully showcased in the past, and she had only had a vague idea of his intelligence. But now, it was abundantly clear.

Exploring the secrets of the eras requires more than just martial prowess. He seems truly well-suited for it. It looks like I should hold a deeper conversation with him.

Zhao Changhe said, “Fine, but it’s not like I can touch you no matter how close or far you are from me. Since you’ve come into my dream, you should know that I have a lot of questions. Can you answer them?”

The blind woman said directly, “The golden foil is indeed a page of the Heavenly Tome, but it’s sealed quite strongly.”

“If it’s sealed, then why did it begin to unseal itself? Did it just so happen to start unsealing itself when I obtained it? Isn’t that a bit too much of a coincidence?”

“Of course, it’s related to your actions.” The blind woman hesitated for a moment before continuing, “How did you even come up with the idea to use that thing to wipe the Heavenly Tome?”

“...Is it really related to that? This method of unsealing seems rather unique.”

“Who told you that it was the method to unseal it?” the blind woman retorted irritably. “The Heavenly Tome has a spirit, and that spirit felt deeply humiliated! Before, it had no reason to go all out to break the seal, but it certainly has a reason now. And when it’s completely unsealed itself, you might be the first one it kills!”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Could it be that the reason why you’ve refrained from coming to meet me for so long, especially on that night, and why you’re staying so far away from me right now is...that?

Although the blind woman had previously denied any connection to the Heavenly Dao and claimed that she was not responsible for the judgments and rankings in the Tome of Troubled Times, Zhao Changhe still could not shake off his suspicions. He really had a strong feeling that there was some connection with her. If she was the spirit of the Tome of Troubled Times, then had he inadvertently insulted her?

The thought amused him, and he resolved himself to ponder on it further later on.

Of course, such speculation was best left unsaid. After a moment of contemplation, Zhao Changhe changed the subject, “What do you think about the Sword Emperor’s tomb?”

“He does indeed have the potential to revive...” the blind woman paused. Her tone then became unusually solemn as she said, “Whatever you do, you must not provoke him into a premature revival. The Lu Clan’s actions were truly no different from seeking death, and not just their own, but the entire divine land’s.”

Zhao Changhe said, “You care about the divine land too?”

“I don’t,” the blind woman’s solemnity disappeared. Her serious expression was replaced by a smile as she said, “I care about you.”

“Then if I’m about to die, will you intervene to save me?”

“If you’re going to die just like that, then you aren’t worth caring about.”

Zhao Changhe was not surprised by this answer. He did not react angrily as he had in the past, but instead calmly said, “So what are the key points regarding the Sword Emperor’s tomb? Can you give me any tips?”

The blind woman remained silent for a moment, seemingly impressed by his growth. After a while, she said, “Follow the woman from the Ancient Spirit Tribe who has been staying with you. She understands the burial styles and mechanisms of the previous era better than anyone in the entire divine land.”

Indeed, the blind woman would not cover anything up for Sisi. She didn’t care about secrets that were unrelated to herself.

“Ancient Spirit Tribe...” Zhao Changhe muttered. “What kind of name is that? They don’t sound like a normal foreign race.”

“You have already seen dimensional fragments, bubbles of space such as the cramped sword chamber at the bottom of the Ancient Sword Lake or the vast tomb under Tiger Hill. Does it not make sense that it is possible for some of these places to be able to sustain life? Fragments of space where people live and thrive for generations?”

Zhao Changhe’s eyes narrowed.

In other words, there’s a possibility that there is more than one such tribe or race out there. There could even be organizations within those powerful forbidden areas... As for Sisi and the Ancient Spirit Tribe, it’s unclear what their origin is...

“They may be strong, but they may also be weak. They may have hidden treasures, or they may have nothing at all. You are going to have to explore those things yourself. I’m not here to be your tour guide,” the blind woman said slowly. “But I can tell you that if we’re talking about today’s divine land and the previous era, these are the links that connect the two.”

Zhao Changhe said calmly, “I could have figured out that last part without you saying it.”

The blind woman retorted, “Since you’re so clever, can you guess what the bloodthirsty bead is for?”

“I already know about the two things that I wanted to know about the most, namely the Heavenly Tome and Sisi. Must I also know about the Sword Emperor’s tomb and the bloodthirsty bead?”

The blind woman was stunned for a moment, not knowing what to say for a good while.

Seeing her rare moment of embarrassment, Zhao Changhe could not help feeling a sense of satisfaction.

“If you want to say something, then say it. If not, forget it.”

The blind woman was silent for a moment, but she did not hold a grudge. Instead, she explained, “This bead is indeed useless for your cultivation of vicious blood qi, because it is formed from the accumulated bloodthirst of the deaths of tens of thousands of beings. Although it does contain vicious blood qi, it is filled with much more hatred, resentment, malice, unwillingness, and regret. Prolonged exposure to it will only affect your temperament.”

Zhao Changhe secretly thought that Sisi’s judgment was incredibly accurate. Not only does she have profound knowledge of the previous era, but she also seems to have a good grasp of concepts such as bloodthirst. What exactly was she studying in the Ancient Spirit Tribe?

The blind woman said, “You cultivate vicious blood qi to hone your killing intent, not for such negative emotions, which is why it is unsuited to you. This also goes for Maitreya’s purpose of killing to achieve enlightenment... However, if you have the means to block the other parts and solely extract the vicious qi, then it would become useful to you.”

That’s probably why Tang Wanzhuang thought that it might disappoint me, but it isn’t completely useless. Damn it, why does every woman I meet seem to be knowledgeable about everything, yet even after all my efforts, it feels like I know nothing at all?

Zhao Changhe asked irritably, “So are you here to teach me how to extract the vicious qi?”

“You don’t need to learn the method from me. Perhaps that woman surnamed Tang has some methods; she’s not weak,” said the blind woman. “The reason I’m telling you all these things is that the origin of this bead is related to you.”

Zhao Changhe was stunned for a moment. Despite his recent successes in solving cases, he could not immediately understand how this bead was related to him.

But the blind woman continued, “This is one of the array stones used by an ancient demon god to set up a ferocious formation. With his downfall, the array also fell apart, and some of its main components were obtained by the people of today. From them, they felt the former power of this demon god, worshiped him, pursued his thoughts and will, and compiled a set of extremely ferocious techniques.”

Zhao Changhe’s heart skipped a beat.

“That’s right, that ancient demon god is the Blood God worshiped by the Blood God Cult, and that bead belongs to him,” said the blind woman leisurely. “Although the Blood God Cult’s lineage is quite good, they have not produced any outstanding figures. It’s not just because the practitioners they have are inadequate, but also because they lack quite a few things.”

“I see...”

“This bead is just a piece of the puzzle. It has no meaning on its own. Even Maitreya did not know what to do with it after getting it. But if it were to be given to the Blood God Cult, its significance would be extraordinary... Unfortunately, they seem to lack quite a bit, and a single bead won’t make up for what they are lacking...” the blind woman gradually began to fade as she spoke. “We’ve talked for too long. This should be enough for now. The next time there are interesting things like this, I’ll come again.”

Her voice faded away, and so did her figure.

Zhao Changhe opened his eyes to find that the sky was already bright.