

T. Times 226

Chapter 226: Rumors

Splash~

There were some people who had come in search of the ancient sword currently standing by the lakeside. Suddenly, two heads that looked like those of pigs emerged from the water, scaring them out of their wits and causing them to run in fear.

Who wouldn't run in such a scenario?! Two pigs popping out of a lake was weird enough, but one of them was even emitting smoke all around it, looking like a real monster!

Vermillion Bird burst out into laughter, finding the scene very amusing.

Zhao Changhe gave her a glance, filled with regret.

When he had entered the sword chamber, his mind had been focused on sensing the residual sword intent from when Han Wubing had stayed in the chamber. With that, he had pretty much forgotten about her, and he had not even gotten to take a good look at her. It was quite hot lately, so most people were wearing thin clothes. Just how hot would a mature lady's wet body look like after she had entered the water?

And now, as soon as she emerged, she dried her clothes with her true qi, leaving nothing to be seen....

Is everyone at the ninth layer of the Profound Gate really this amazing?

At the moment, Zhao Changhe could only dry his body with his true qi. He was far from being able to dry his clothes. Even if he did eventually advance his cultivation to the point where he

could dry his clothes, he highly doubted that he would be able to dry them instantly like her, evaporating all of the water in contact with her body.

Vermillion Bird said, “What’s with that look in your eyes? Are you regretting not taking a look at me in the sword chamber just now?”

“No, no, I’m admiring your cultivation.”

“We cultivate fire-attribute true qi, so things like this are naturally not that difficult for us.” Vermillion Bird smiled. “We’re not like you and some others who practice the Spring Water Intent, always getting yourselves wet for no reason.”

Zhao Changhe rolled his eyes. Why do I feel like shots are being fired at me?

Vermillion Bird casually continued, “Being all wet like that isn’t comfortable, huh? Want me to help you out?”

“If you’d be so kind.”

“Call me big sister first.”

Is that where you were trying to get to? Zhao Changhe could not help but snort. He did not hesitate, and said coquettishly, “Big sister~”

Seeing the pig-masked head in front of her calling her “big sister” in that weird voice, Vermillion Bird almost burst out laughing. She tried suppressing it, but she finally bent over and clutched her stomach as she laughed. “Hahahaha...”

Zhao Changhe looked at her speechlessly.

This big sister seems to be laughing more and more as time passes. She's changed from when we first met. It's as if after taking off the serpent mask and putting on the pig mask, she's let go of a lot of things.

Vermillion Bird seemed to realize her loss of composure, but she did not seem to care. She continued laughing before eventually patting Zhao Changhe on the shoulder.

With a surge of hot true qi, a blanket of mist covered him as his clothes dried instantly.

Zhao Changhe was stunned. "Awesome..."

"Want to learn?" Vermillion Bird asked mischievously. "Just join the cult, then I'll teach you."

Zhao Changhe remained silent and strode directly toward the city.

Vermillion Bird snorted and followed after him.

Sword Lake City had always been a rather special city. Zhao Changhe had learned about it the last time he came here. Despite its prosperity and expansion due to tourism, it remained classified as a town by the imperial court. There was not even a yamen in this town, which technically made it a lawless land, where various gangs and factions coexisted.

Zhao Changhe had been puzzled by this before. Without a yamen, who collected the taxes here? And who controlled the unruly factions that existed in the town?

The Demon Suppression Bureau did not have an independent office, and for some unknown reason, they had actually set up their branch here in a brothel. Over the passage of time, knowledgeable and observant figures like those from the Four Idols Cult had more or less

guessed the true nature of the Myriad Flowers Tower, but it was unclear if the local gangs also knew this.

In any case, while this scene did appear quite often in martial arts novels, it was logically pretty unrealistic. With that in mind, there had to be a reason for Demon Suppression Bureau to set up their branch here in such a way, but Zhao Changhe hadn't thought of delving deeper into it.

Familiar with the route, they arrived at the bamboo forest behind the Myriad Flowers Pavilion. The gatekeeper was still the same, but with his pig mask, Zhao Changhe was unfamiliar. As expected, they were stopped. "This is a private bamboo forest; it isn't a spot for young lovers to enjoy some romance."

Vermillion Bird's jaw dropped.

Everywhere we go, we're accused of being young lovers. Even those robbers said the same thing before. Aren't we just wearing the same pig mask? How does that immediately mean that we're lovers?

Zhao Changhe did not reveal his identity; he simply took out his jade token and showed it to the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper was startled, but a hint of excitement could be seen in his eyes. He looked around and lowered his voice. "Greetings, secret envoy, do you have any orders for me?"

Hmm, it seems like this token isn't for a normal secret agent, but for a secret envoy...

Vermillion Bird glanced at him but said nothing. This token was probably exclusively given out by Tang Wanzhuang, and she could tell that it was likely one of those tokens that represented her as well. This guy doesn't even seem to realize that from the moment he received the token, he's already begun representing Tang Wanzhuang rather than just being a subordinate of the Demon Suppression Bureau. He's being played by his big sister without even realizing it.

Zhao Changhe acted like a secret envoy and said, "Take us in. Who is in charge of this area now? Tell them to come and see me."

After saying that, he confidently strode into the courtyard, heading straight to the bamboo building where Tang Wanzhuang had once resided. The gatekeeper felt his actions were only natural and quickly went to inform the person who was in charge of the area.

Not long after, a well-dressed middle-aged man hurriedly ascended the steps and respectfully greeted him. "Sword Lake City Delegate Wei Zicai reporting, what orders does the special envoy have for me?"

"I want the whole story about Han Wubing."

Wei Zicai responded promptly, "He had a conflict with Ji Yanan from the Xingyi Gang. In the ensuing conflict, he killed Ji Yanan. The Pinghu Association intervened on behalf of the Xingyi Gang. They worked together to capture Han Wubing. Finally, unable to withstand the combined forces of the two factions, Han Wubing was forced to flee, and the Xingyi Gang was ultimately absorbed by the Pinghu Association."

Zhao Changhe's immediate reaction was skepticism. "Absorbed?"

Wei Zicai smiled faintly and said, "Yes... So whether or not it really was Han Wubing who killed Ji Yanan is still unconfirmed. There is a possibility that it was Yan Lianping's doing instead. By framing Han Wubing, he could then gather the strength of both factions to go against Han Wubing in an attempt to force out the location of the ancient sword and the source of his new sword art. At the same time, he could also absorb the Xingyi Gang, killing two birds with one stone."

This was something to be expected from the jianghu. Zhao Changhe and Vermillion Bird, who had just recently been discussing high-level politics when it came to the Wang Clan, now felt as if they had left the imperial court to enter the jianghu. They both felt as if they were in a different world.

But to be honest, this was what they preferred. At least Zhao Changhe was far more interested in such matters than the grand affairs of the state.

Hearing that Han Wubing had only fled and nothing serious actually happened to him, Zhao Changhe felt a lot more at ease. He asked again, “Han Wubing should have been living in seclusion. Why did he suddenly expose a new sword art and get in a conflict with a gang? Did he arouse suspicion by occasionally appearing and disappearing in the city?”

“Han Wubing occasionally appeared in the city to purchase food supplies, and these are very normal activities. He behaved similarly when he secluded himself by the lake, and no one really paid attention to him,” Wei Zicai explained. “His new sword art only ended up getting revealed due to a matter involving Zhao Changhe”

Zhao Changhe was stunned. “How did Zhao Changhe end up involved in this? Please elaborate.”

“Some people spread rumors that Zhao Changhe’s physique and broad saber did not resemble those of the Central Plains, saying that it was possible that he was a spy from the Grasslands, possibly being the illegitimate son of Mad Lion He Lei. Han Wubing overheard this while purchasing supplies, got angry, and fought with the person whom he had heard spreading the rumor. It was then that he revealed sword arts beyond those that could be learned from the Sword Pavilion, causing people to suspect that he had found some secrets in the sword lake.”

Zhao Changhe fell silent for a moment.

Vermillion Bird glanced at Zhao Changhe. This guy and his friends are really loyal. Since Han Wubing managed to flee and seems to be fine, it might not have been necessary to dig deeper into the matter. But now, it seems like it will be impossible for him to ignore this.

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath. “His Majesty used this kind of saber during his conquests, so where do people even get the idea of a certain style being of the Grasslands? Are there really people who believe such nonsense?”

“There are many fools in the world. If someone says something, there will always be people who believe it,” Wei Zicai said. “In addition, the spreading of these rumors may have deeper intentions behind. I wrote a letter to the bureau head a couple of days ago. Now that you are here, Special Envoy, it’s even better than I hoped...”

Zhao Changhe frowned. Yes, his background was actually a very sensitive matter. In other words, this rumor could be meant to fundamentally shake his position as the heir to the throne of the Great Xia, and this sounded an awful lot like something the Four Idols Cult would do.

He turned to look at Vermillion Bird, who met his gaze coldly. Zhao Changhe smiled and shook his head. Of course, it wouldn’t be the Four Idols Cult. Times had changed, and the Four Idols Cult was even planning to recruit him into their cult. Doing such a thing would serve no purpose for them, and would perhaps be even detrimental.

It could be the Wang Clan, Maitreya Cult, or simply a foreign force.

“When did this happen?”

“Three days ago.”

If it’s three days ago, then the Wang Clan is the most likely suspect, and this place isn’t too far from Langya.

However, while the exposure of new martial arts knowledge that Han Wubing had acquired might be related to this, the trouble involving the Xingyi Gang and the Pinghu Association might not be directly related to it. There could be other factors at play, and Han Wubing could have been involved in other conflicts.

Sword Lake City was truly an anomaly, and there were bound to be secrets hidden all over.

After contemplating for a while, Zhao Changhe suddenly asked, “Why is the structure of Sword Lake City the way it is? Can you elaborate on that, Delegate Wei?”

Chapter 227: How About a Bet

Wei Zicai was quite surprised to be asked such a question. “Respected envoy, you don’t even know about this?”

Zhao Changhe pointed at his own mask. “What do you see?”

“A pig.”

“That’s right. What’s strange about me asking such a question then?”

While Wei Zicai was unsure how to react, Vermillion Bird, who was behind him, bent over in laughter. “Pfft...hahahahaha!”

Even Wei Zicai could not help his face from twitching. After a while, he said, “Respected envoy, you truly know how to jest... Well, I take it that you’re new to your position? In fact, it isn’t that complicated. The first and largest reason for things being the way they are is that His Majesty does not want to monopolize all of the ancient secrets. His Majesty lets everyone try their luck—”

Zhao Changhe raised his hand and said, “I do know this. His Majesty is indeed rather open-minded in this regard.”

Vermillion Bird glanced at him, her expression ambiguous.

Most people would indeed conclude that Xia Longyuan had a broad mind in this regard, but she did not think so. She preferred to think of it as Xia Longyuan making use of these locations

as testing grounds, where various factions would reveal their true colors for the sake of ancient secrets.

In Vermillion Bird's eyes, much of the chaos in the world was actually due to Xia Longyuan's actions and arrangements.

Otherwise, if he had married the White Tiger Saintess and secured the Four Idols Cult, then the cult would have at least not turned against him, and he would have had a valuable ally. However, his actions had absolutely destroyed that possibility, turning a force that could have been an ally into a demonic cult hell-bent on furthering chaos. What angered Vermillion Bird the most was that, even though they knew that this was probably what Xia Longyuan wanted, they still went along with it.

Wei Zicai hesitated for a moment and continued, "Anyway, there are many strong individuals and forces who do not care about anything else and only care about exploring ancient secrets, places such as the Ancient Sword Lake, rumored to hold ancient secrets. These places often have multiple forces permanently stationed nearby, which ends up creating a delicate balance of power. Many years ago, there were several major battles surrounding the Ancient Sword Lake, ones which even some on the Ranking of Heaven participated in."

Zhao Changhe arrived at a judgment similar to that of Vermillion Bird. He realized that it seemed like Xia Longyuan was making use of these places that held ancient secrets to instigate chaos and wars among various factions. "Then what?"

"They had all been fighting one another in a mess, but at the time, they were not even sure if there was really anything hidden in the Ancient Sword Lake, so they found their actions to be foolish. And so, discussions arose between the various factions, and eventually, they agreed not to personally occupy the area. Instead, they would occasionally carry out some investigations, like the Cui Clan and the Four Idols Cult do, and whoever finds something gets to claim it.

"However, everyone was wary of other factions secretly occupying the area, so they all supported subordinate gangs to observe it, creating a complex network of power. Meanwhile, our Demon Suppression Bureau has inserted a few spies to monitor for any changes that might take place. This is how the unique situation in Sword Lake City was born. In fact, there are many similar cases all around the world, and Sword Lake City is actually one of the typical examples."

Zhao Changhe scratched his head and realized that there were probably countless “Sword Lake Cities” in the world, places that were outside the conventional rule of the imperial cult and gangs instead held sway.

During normal times, this would not matter much, but during troubled times, these places could evolve into pockets of power, with various “city lords” popping up here and there and becoming local overlords.

Sure enough, Wei Zicai continued, “After many years of development, these forces probably do not actually care about what’s in the lake anymore. Initially, while we knew that the Four Idols Cult had likely taken something away from the lake, local forces seemed to remain unaware, indicating that they had long since deviated from their original intentions of wanting to find the ancient secrets.

“It has become increasingly likely that they have changed their purpose to carving out some territory for themselves and fighting for their own interests, especially now during times of chaos. The struggle between the factions to decide who would rule the city among them has become increasingly apparent. With the absorption of the Xingyi Gang into the Pinghu Association, Yan Lianping’s dominance over the city has begun to take shape. We are now just waiting for a response from the bureau chief to see if we should withdraw our forces from here.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and said, “I’ve got two questions. How strong is Yan Lianping? And which force is backing him?”

“Yan Lianping is at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate...”

“So did he need the help of others when going against Han Wubing?”

“Since Han Wubing is already at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate, with his mastery of the sword being unparalleled, if Yan Lianping were to fight him alone, it was actually unlikely for him to be able to win.”

“Damn, how is that guy even faster than me... Alright, what about my other question? Who’s the force backing Yan Lianping?”

Wei Zicai looked somewhat embarrassed as he replied, “Well... We actually don’t know which force is backing him.”

Zhao Changhe was stunned. “Huh? Isn’t that something that you should have figured out a long time ago?”

Wei Zicai cleared his throat and said, “Theoretically speaking, the Pinghu Association should belong to the Four Idols Cult. However, when the White Tiger Saintess came here previously, it appears that she did not contact them. There are two reasons that would explain that. The first is that the White Tiger Saintess may have sensed that the Pinghu Association was already under our surveillance, and so she did not want to expose their affiliation and avoided contact with them. The second reason is that the Pinghu Association may have already distanced themselves from the Four Idols Cult, and thus the White Tiger Saintess may have no longer trusted them.”

Zhao Changhe glanced at Vermillion Bird, but her pig mask hid her expression.

This whole situation is quite amusing. Everything is tangled up. This is no longer just about Han Wubing, with it now involving Zhao Changhe himself and even the people around him. We came at just the right time.

Zhao Changhe pondered for a moment and asked, “What caused you to reach that second conclusion? What did the Pinghu Association do to make you think that?”

“When Mad Lion He Lei was injured and left Mount Tai, he passed by here and quietly stayed at the Pinghu Association to recuperate. Because of that, we have come to suspect that the Pinghu Association may have connections with the barbarians, but we do not know if the Four Idols Cult knows about this or what their attitude toward the barbarians is. This is what is making it difficult to be certain about their affiliations.”

“I see.” Zhao Changhe felt relieved. He smiled and patted Wei Zicai on the shoulder. “Good job, your information is complete and well-organized. I will discuss this matter with the bureau chief when I return.”

Only then did Wei Zicai show a pleased expression. “Thank you for your support, respected envoy.”

“I have one last question.”

“Please go ahead.”

“Where did Han Wubing hear about the rumors regarding Zhao Changhe?”

“At the Kangle Gambling House. Han Wubing was passing by when he overheard someone spreading the rumor there.”

“Which faction is supporting the Kangle Gambling House?”

Wei Zicai showed a puzzled expression. “I have not found that out yet.”

Zhao Changhe stared at him for a moment, then suddenly smiled. “It’s okay, nobody can know everything. Just make sure to work harder in the future.”

Wei Zicai sighed in relief and said with a smile, “Farewell, respected envoy.”

After leaving Myriad Flowers Tower, Zhao Changhe suddenly stopped and turned to look at the bamboo building, losing himself in thought.

Vermillion Bird asked curiously, “What are you thinking about?”

“According to the theory that each of the factions in the area has subordinates of the Demon Suppression Bureau stationed within them, it would not make sense for none of them to know who’s behind Kangle Gambling House. There isn’t really any point in concealing it, since they shouldn’t have anything to do with Kangle Gambling House in the first place. Furthermore, I was only casually asking, so why hide it from me?”

Vermillion Bird said leisurely, “Kangle Gambling House arrived later and it was not part of the original factions in this area, so it wouldn’t be surprising for them to not know who exactly is backing them. However, it is strange that they do not have any speculations. Our holy cult suspects that it might be under Ying Five.”

Zhao Changhe’s heart skipped a beat. “The one ranked eighth on the Ranking of Heaven!”

“That’s right... But this matter seems unrelated to that person, doesn’t it?”

“What do you think about the Pinghu Association?”

“Yan Lianping is the Moon Swallow of Wei[1] from the Twenty-Eight Mansions. Chichi probably did not contact him back then to avoid revealing that he is associated with us. We did not expect the Demon Suppression Bureau to already know this...” said Vermillion Bird. Then, her tone became colder. “But we also didn’t know that he had connections with the barbarians. The Demon Suppression Bureau has inadvertently helped us.”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “Is he a traitor then?”

Vermillion Bird’s tone lightened as well. “Which faction doesn’t have any traitors? It’s good to discover them early. However, we cannot jump to conclusions just because of what the Demon Suppression Bureau says. We still need to investigate the truth ourselves.”

Zhao Changhe asked, “What’s your plan?”

“We’ll split up. I’ll openly visit Yan Lianping, while you can do whatever you want. Tonight, I’ll quietly look for you at the inn.”

Vermillion Bird suddenly smiled. “It’s really peculiar. Initially, I just wanted to get to know you better and protect you from being killed by the Wang Clan. I never would have expected to come across affairs relevant to me. Now, it’s turned into a collaboration between us.”

Zhao Changhe laughed. “Seems like even the heavens don’t want me to be indebted to the Four Idols Cult... Maybe, on the contrary, if this thing goes wrong for you, you’ll even end up owing me a favor.”

“Tch.” Vermillion Bird sneered. “Owe you a favor? And how are you going to do that? You’re just at the sixth layer of the Profound Gate. Or are you considering the leads that the Demon Suppression Bureau has given us as a favor to you?”

Zhao Changhe snorted and said, “Then how about we make a bet? If you end up helping me more after all of this, I’ll call you big sister from now on.”

Vermillion Bird’s eyes gleamed as she lightly laughed. “And if I lose, will I have to call you big brother?”

“If you lose, can you take off your mask in front of me in the future?”

Chapter 228: Please Help Us Seek Justice

Vermillion Bird accepted the bet.

It seemed like an unequal bet, after all, while one would only have to address the other big sister, the other had to reveal their true face.

However, Vermillion Bird simply believed that there was no possibility of her losing the bet.

As one of the strongest existences in the world, she had her pride and confidence. Venerable Vermillion Bird could single-handedly suppress all of the forces in this city. Any assistance that she would receive from Zhao Changhe would most likely be in the form of intelligence gathering. Besides that, in what aspect would she genuinely need his assistance?

On the other hand, getting him to regularly call her big sister whenever they were conversing seemed like it would be rather amusing.

And so, the two of them went their separate ways, with Vermillion Bird leisurely heading to the headquarters of the Pinghu Association.

Assuming that He Lei had indeed recuperated here but had since left, questioning the lower-ranking members in a discreet manner would not reveal much. If she truly wanted to get to the truth of things, it would be much quicker and much more reliable to capture one of the association's high-ranking members. The downside to this was that it could easily alert the association. In the end, she decided to temporarily put that matter aside and focus solely on inquiring about the Pinghu Association's plans for unifying Sword Lake City.

This was actually one of the tasks assigned to Yan Lianping by the Four Idols Cult. They would provide him with resources and manpower, while he was responsible for working toward taking control of Sword Lake City. This was also one of the aspects of the Four Idols Cult that Vermillion Bird was referring to when she said that the extent of the cult's power and influence was far beyond what Zhao Changhe could imagine.

As for the specifics of how he was going to achieve the unification of Sword Lake City, that was entirely up to Yan Lianping, and Vermillion Bird had refrained from interfering further. It was possible that there had been progress reports sent to the headquarters recently, but with her being away, she had not been able to receive any of such information.

Excluding the matter with the barbarians, when it solely came to the task of unifying Sword Lake City, Yan Lianping seemed to be doing an impeccable job. As for utilizing individuals like Han Wubing to further their goal, from Vermillion Bird's perspective, that was a non-issue. In fact, if she had been personally handling the matter, Han Wubing may well have ended up dead by this point.

She pondered for a moment, then reluctantly removed her pig mask and replaced it with the mask of the Fire Serpent of Yi.

Inside a meeting hall, Yan Lianping, the president of the Pinghu Association, was discussing plans with his subordinates. "How is the progress on the acquisition of the properties under the Xingyi Gang?"

"It's mostly done. We are only having some trouble with the shops on Taiping Street. Those are really the only ones left. The Ji Clan is claiming that the shops are their personal property, and they are saying that these properties are meant for their young master to inherit. Basically, they are saying that those shops are not owned by the Xingyi Gang and they have no reason to surrender them to us."

"Any news from those that were sent to deal with the young master of the Ji Clan?"

"They have reported that they took care of him when he was on the road. The Ji Clan does not seem to be aware just yet. It is expected for them to receive word of this tomorrow."

"Hm... The young master of the Ji Clan is a disciple of the Divine Brilliance Sect. Although he's only an outer disciple, this matter should still not be made public."

"What do we do about the old and the young of the Ji Clan..." asked a subordinate, making a cut-throat gesture at the same time.

"There's no need for that. Their young master is already dead, so what else can they even do? Keep their elders, women, and children alive to uphold our reputation. This will also help

stabilize the old members of the Xingyi Gang. The Xingyi Gang has quite a few strong members, and they still have their uses. If we want to unify Sword Lake City, we can't kill everyone. How else are we supposed to compete with Sha Seven?"

"The president is wise."

"Is there any news about Han Wubing?"

"None. It's like he has vanished completely. The old members of the Xingyi Gang are currently searching for him everywhere."

"What a pity..." While he said that it was a pity, his tone was completely indifferent, as if he did not really feel much regret toward what had happened.

A subordinate said, "It doesn't really matter whether he has left or he's hiding somewhere in the city. While he does indeed have great potential, he's only at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate. With his power, he alone won't be able to change the outcome."

"Mm-hm. Proceed with the plans. Make sure to properly reorganize the Xingyi Gang. I'll be heading to rest now."

The subordinates began leaving the hall. "You have been working hard recently, sir. Please have a good rest."

The meeting hall soon became empty, leaving Yan Lianping alone in the main seat, a flickering candlelight lighting up his face.

After a while, he slowly said, "Which expert has come? Why don't you show yourself?"

The candlelight flickered. The wind blew, and a woman wearing the mask of the Fire Serpent of Yi suddenly appeared in front of him.

“Fire Serpent of Yi?” Yan Lianping frowned. “Isn’t that position vacant? Are you new, or...”

As he spoke, he suddenly made a move and a shuttle silently darted toward her shoulder.

Then, the shuttle suddenly disappeared, as if it had never existed.

Yan Lianping’s pupils narrowed. “So it seems you truly are the Fire Serpent of Yi.”

Vermillion Bird was amused and said calmly, “I heard that there have been changes in Sword Lake City. The venerable sent me to inquire about the situation and offer assistance if needed.”

Yan Lianping immediately responded, “You came at just the right time. We do indeed need help.”

“Hm?”

“Firstly, if Han Wubing escapes, unforeseen changes may take place. I cannot make any rash moves while holding down the fort here, and the others aren’t a match for Han Wubing. If you can take his life, that would be for the best.”

“Why is Han Wubing causing such trouble when he has a history with the saintess?”

“I don’t know either. Originally, we made use of that reason to work together with him, and he did kill Ji Yinan as we asked of him. But for some reason, he suddenly turned on us, and we’re also puzzled as to why that happened. But whatever the reason, he has since turned against us and wants to kill us. We can’t just sit back and wait for death.”

Vermillion Bird asked, "Even knowing that you were associated with the Four Idols Cult, he was willing to help you kill someone?"

"It was because he discovered that Ji Yinan was colluding with the barbarians and sheltered the Mad Lion He Lei. Originally, Han Wubing wanted to kill He Lei, but he was too late, so his target became Ji Yinan instead. It was a pleasant cooperation at first, but it somehow turned sour."

Vermillion Bird was stunned.

This is different from what Wei Zicai said... Looking at Yan Lianping's calm attitude, it doesn't seem like he's lying, and this matter would be easy to expose. It should have been very easy to find out whether He Lei stayed at the Pinghu Association or the Xingyi Gang, so why is there such a discrepancy in their accounts?

Despite being confused, her tone remained calm, "Besides Han Wubing, what else do you need help with?"

"We've already taken advantage of the situation to absorb the Xingyi Gang. Once we've completely assimilated them, our influence and strength will be considered to be the strongest in the city. The next step would be to have a chat with Sha Seven from Kangle Gambling House. If he cooperates, that would be well and good. But if he doesn't... I've already sent a letter to the headquarters yesterday, asking for instructions from the venerable on how to proceed if Ying Five personally intervenes in the power struggle between the factions in Sword Lake City."

Vermillion Bird asked knowingly, "What does it matter?"

"If Ying Five personally intervenes, then we will need the venerable to come and negotiate with him. If he does not intervene and just leaves the factions here to settle things themselves, then perhaps we can prepare for a war with Kangle Gambling House. We're being wary at the moment due to how similar Sha Seven's name is in relation to Ying Five's name..."

Vermillion Bird pretended to be a clueless newcomer. “I see... I’m not very clear about the things behind the scenes, so I’ll also send a letter to the venerable for instructions.”

“Mm-hm.” Yan Lianping smiled broadly. “I did not expect to have a new sister joining the cult. It’s already getting quite late, so you should go have a rest. Tomorrow, I’ll host a banquet to properly welcome you.”

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When Vermillion Bird was pretending to be a new recruit of the Four Idols Cult in the Pinghu Association, Zhao Changhe went to the Ji Clan.

After removing the pig mask and applying a disguise formula to his face, he quickly transformed into a sallow-looking man, the same appearance that he had used when he had attacked Fa Sheng.

He did not bother hiding the broad saber on his back, as there were now quite a few people impersonating him and they generally also carried such sabers on them.

The head of the Ji Clan had recently passed away, and his body was laid out at home with white banners everywhere. As Zhao Changhe walked down the street, he overheard people talking, “Why hasn’t Young Master Ji returned yet? It’s already been several days...”

“The Divine Brilliance Sect is quite far away. The news must have reached there by now... Alas, it’s useless even if the young master comes back. He is just an outer disciple of the Divine Brilliance Sect, so what could he have really learned? And with him having such a low status in the sect, the Divine Brilliance Sect is unlikely to stick up for him.”

“Wasn’t the old master a part of the Divine Brilliance Sect too?”

“He was just supported by the sect, nothing more. There are many such cases throughout the world.”

Zhao Changhe silently listened to the whispers around him as he walked up to the gate of the Ji Clan. He was quickly stopped by a gatekeeper, who seemed to be quite despondent. “Sir, our master has just passed away. If you’ve come to pay respects, please leave your name.”

Zhao Changhe improvised on the spot and said, “I’m actually from the Divine Brilliance Sect. Junior Brother Ji could not rush back right away, so he asked me to come here to help him pay respects to his father. He also wanted me to see if there was anything that your clan needed help with.”

The gatekeeper was overjoyed and immediately rushed inside. “Mistress! Mistress! The young master’s senior brother has come!”

Soon, a middle-aged woman came out and cried out to Zhao Changhe from afar, “Young hero, please help us seek justice for our clan head...”

Zhao Changhe said calmly, “Miss, please do not worry. Please take me in first so that I may pay my respects. You can slowly tell me the details as we make our way.”

He had not gotten any information from Vermillion Bird’s end... But from the start, this matter had felt incredibly complex to him. There were just too many forces involved, and it truly did not seem like it was just a matter between the gangs in the city.

It would not be of much use to ask anyone about what had happened. Perhaps the best way to get answers was instead to have a look at those that had passed.

Chapter 229: There Are No Good People in Sword Lake City

Upon entering the memorial hall, he saw women weeping with their heads lowered while they paid their respects to their departed clan head.

Zhao Changhe approached, offering his respects and burning incense. As he glanced around at the mourners, something felt off.

It was strange that there were not any children mourning together with the women. Furthermore, all of the women who were mourning seemed to be in their twenties to fifties. They looked to be either widows or concubines. There were no elderly or children, nor any other relatives such as uncles or brothers. It did not resemble a typical gathering at all.

Furthermore, the constant weeping seemed especially strange. While it was indeed common for relatives to weep at a memorial, they would typically stop after a few days, with only a few individuals still showing grief. However, these people should have been mourning for several days now, yet their tears had not ceased.

Inadvertently, Zhao Changhe thought about how if time continued to pass in the modern world as it did in this world he had transmigrated to, then he should have been “missing” in the modern world for almost a year by now. He wondered how his parents had reacted to his disappearance and how they were now... Smearing the golden foil was nothing compared to the heartache his parents must be feeling. If he could beat that blind woman, he would be damn well happy to kill her.

Wait... Killing that witch...

Zhao Changhe froze in place.

He had long forgotten about his “main quest” when he had first entered this world. Initially, he had thought that he could return home once he killed that witch. After that blind woman entered his dream, she mentioned two ways that he could return: one was to fulfill this “grand wish,” while the other was to train until he could break through the barriers of time and space.

He had no idea who the witch was, having only seen her back figure in his dreams. He sometimes wondered if Chichi, Sisi, or even Vermillion Bird could be that same witch he had

encountered when he had started having nightmares. It was due to this that he eventually came to stop exploring who that witch truly was, fearing what trouble it might bring.

Yet now, he suddenly remembered the three cards that were shown to him when he had transmigrated. The first card depicted the Back Eye. The second card depicted a round jade pendant with a dragon carved into it, hinting at his entanglement with Chichi that eventually came to burden him with the identity of a prince.

The third card was supposed to be a clue to the witch's identity... But as a clue, how was it considered to "belong to him"?

So far, the only way I could think of it manifesting is—

The awakening and unsealing of the Heavenly Tome.

Is it really this thing that I smear every now and then? Maybe the third card has already taken effect long ago and I just haven't realized it...

But if that is indeed the case, then there's a glaring issue. Those three cards were given to me by the blind woman. If she's the spirit of the tome, then did she give herself to me?

Does this mean that she isn't the spirit of the tome?

The logic was a bit confusing at the moment, and he could not quite figure it all out. However, he had never thought about these things before. The unexpected homesickness he was struck with had triggered some valuable insights, and he resolved himself to consider these things more in the future...

Zhao Changhe gathered his thoughts, realizing that the people from the Ji Clan had been staring at him blankly for quite some time. With his current persona of a sallow-faced man who

claimed to be from the Divine Brilliance sect, he had just been silently staring at the coffin since he arrived, giving off an eerie vibe.

“Ahem,” Zhao Changhe finally spoke up. “Junior Brother Ji asked me to investigate the situation. How did Uncle Ji die?”

The woman who had earlier asked him to seek justice on their behalf choked out between sobs, “Originally, my husband invited Han Wubing to discuss matters over a banquet. But for some reason, Han Wubing suddenly attacked my husband during the banquet, catching him off guard and killing him on the spot. Fortunately, President Yan of the Pinghu Association happened to be dining nearby and rushed in upon hearing the commotion...”

Fortunately, eh... What suspicious word choice.

Zhao Changhe gave her a deep look but did not say anything.

But with that being the case, why still ask someone else to administer justice for you? Can’t you just ask Yan Lianping to handle everything?

An old man who looked like a steward could not hold back and said, “The gang leader was indeed killed by Han Wubing. If you, our young master’s senior brother, could help us apprehend the murderer, we would be immensely grateful. However, we most urgently require your assistance with regard to preserving the Ji Clan’s assets.”

Zhao Changhe became more attentive, “What do you mean?”

“Currently, the Xingyi Gang is leaderless and scattered, and many high-ranking members have been absorbed by the Pinghu Association. Most of the gang’s assets have also been annexed by the Pinghu Association, which we have reluctantly accepted. However, some of the assets they wish to acquire are personally owned by our master, so how can we just let those be taken as well? Right now, we have some of our people stationed to guard our assets on Taiping Street.

But how long can we really hold out? Yan Lianping is currently consolidating all of the assets under him, and if we wait a few more days, I'm afraid we would have nothing left..."

Zhao Changhe nodded and said, "Then take me to Taiping Street."

The steward was overjoyed. "May I ask for your esteemed name?"

Zhao Changhe patted the wine gourd. "Situ Xiao."

When they heard him say that, they all fell silent. Even the mistress of the Ji Clan, who had been speaking with him earlier, had her eyes open wide in shock.

Situ Xiao personally coming to visit had an entirely different meaning than if it were some ordinary disciple of the Divine Brilliance Sect!

Wait, doesn't Situ Xiao use a heavy sword? Could this saber... be a fake?

Zhao Changhe silently apologized to Situ Xiao and observed the expressions of the people around coldly, feeling increasingly certain about certain things.

He deliberately said Situ Xiao's name to stir up the muddy waters. It was only by way of provocation that the dirt below could be exposed.

From how things seem, I'm afraid there are no good people left in Hongtong County... No one here seems genuinely saddened by Ji Yinan's death. Otherwise, upon hearing me say Situ Xiao's name, their reaction should not have been shock, but rather jubilation. Even this steward doesn't seem to be genuinely trying to preserve the Ji Clan's assets. It looks like he's just trying to make some gains himself by using the power of my supposed identity as their young master's senior brother.

The steward hesitated and tentatively said, “Sir, it’s not that we doubt you, but Mister Situ isn’t generally known to wear such clothing...”

Zhao Changhe suddenly pushed his palm forward, and a gust of wind blew as thunder boomed. This move caused the white banners in the memorial hall to flutter and the candle flames to flicker.

“The Divine Brilliance Sect’s Wind and Lightning Palm!” The steward dared not take this strike and swiftly retreated while waving his hands and saying, “Mister Situ, please calm down, please...”

Zhao Changhe said coldly, “My junior brother’s father was killed, and all you care about are your assets. Just because you say that it was Han Wubing that killed him, does that actually mean that it was him that did it? I want to see your clan head’s body.”

The crowd looked at each other in confusion.

Zhao Changhe adopted Situ Xiao’s demeanor to the fullest and spat out, “What? Could it be that you had plotted for wealth and committed murder...”

Before he could finish speaking, the mistress hurriedly interjected, “Mister Situ, if you wish to examine the body, then we are naturally willing to let you do so and even assist you... Someone open the coffin!”

The coffin lid was removed, and Zhao Changhe, holding his nose, stepped forward to carefully inspect the fatal wound on the corpse’s chest.

Unlike last time, when he had gone to examine a corpse for vicious qi, the corpse he was examining this time was not rotten but still intact. Han Wubing’s sword was slightly thinner than what the average person would use, and to a professional, this wound was easy to assess—indeed, it seemed to have come from a thin sword, which in turn made it seem likely that it was Han Wubing’s doing.

However, Zhao Changhe inwardly sneered.

This was because while Han Wubing had been known to use a thin sword, that sword had broken during their adventures, and he had later found a new sword in the sword chamber. Zhao Changhe had naturally seen that sword, and it was an ordinarily-proportioned sword. In other words, the sword that Han Wubing was currently using was not thinner than the average sword.

He could then easily conclude that this person had not been killed by Han Wubing.

Of course, it would not have mattered to him whether Han Wubing killed the person or not. Even if he had indeed killed this man, it would not have been a big deal. Zhao Changhe had not come here to solve who the murderer was, but to understand the strength of the killer.

Suppressing his nausea from the foul smell being emitted by the corpse, he reached out and lightly touched the wound, sensing the lingering aura inside and getting the Heavenly Tome to analyze it.

After a while, he pulled his hand back, closed the coffin, and said lightly, “Indeed, this was Han Wubing’s doing. Miss, please accept my condolences...”

The woman bowed. “Sir, please help us.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and said to the steward, “Take me to the properties you mentioned earlier.”

The steward nodded and bowed. “Of course, please follow me, Mister Situ.”

Taiping Street was actually where the Ji Clan's residence was located. The steward accompanied Zhao Changhe to inspect a few stores and restaurants there, then said with a smile, "The master fully devoted himself to the gang, and he did not have many properties under his name, only these few stores here. If even these are taken away as well, then I fear that he may not be able to rest in peace..."

Zhao Changhe's eyes fell on a leather and sheepskin store. "Does the Xingyi Gang mainly deal with sheepskin and such products? Well... I can see that there's also cheese, kumis[1]..."

The steward said, "They are all top-quality products from the north, but you can rest assured that they have nothing to do with the northern barbarians."

"Alright, I understand. Tomorrow, I will talk to Yan Lianping. The things that rightfully belong to my junior brother must not fall into the hands of others."

"If someone like you intervenes, Yan Lianping will surely give you face!" The steward nodded and bowed. "The guest house has been cleaned. You may stay there if you wish."

Zhao Changhe shook his head. "I have already found a place to stay. I'll come to find you tomorrow morning"

The steward did not dare insist and simply smiled as he watched Zhao Changhe leave.

Zhao Changhe had silently activated his Back Eye much earlier so that he could better observe his surroundings. Suddenly, he used his movement arts to shuttle through the streets and alleys, disappearing in an instant.

Some people chased after him to a street corner, but they had lost track of him. They looked at each other in surprise and asked, "How did he disappear in the blink of an eye?"

“That’s Situ Xiao. What’s strange about us not being able to keep up with him? Quick, we need to go and tell the association president...”

“Damn, why does this city seem to be getting weirder and weirder? All sorts of bigshots seem to be showing up here.”

Zhao Changhe emerged from the shadows.

The servants of the Ji Clan had all gone to report to the “association president.”

Only then did he really start his movement art and disappear into the darkness.

He silently returned to his private courtyard in the inn. When he arrived, he saw that candles were lit inside, and a person wearing a pig mask was resting their head on their hand, looking like they had been waiting for him for quite a while.

Zhao Changhe pushed the door open and said with a smile, “So, did you find any clues on your end?”

Vermillion Bird said lazily, “It’s hard to say. At the very least, I know that Han Wubing has not been caught by the Pinghu Association. I overheard their private conversations and they all said that they had not caught Han Wubing, and they had no reason to be lying. As for what they said to me directly, I’m not sure if it’s true or not. Could you help me analyze it?”

“Oh? There’s actually something that’s leaving you stumped?”

“Yes, they told me that He Lei stayed in the Ji Clan. So, either Yan Lianping lied, or Wei Zicai lied. Whoever lied is a traitor to their own faction, while the other side isn’t a traitor, right?”

“From the way you’re saying it, it seems like you’re hoping that Yan Lianping isn’t a traitor, and the problem actually lies with Wei Zicai?”

“Of course, why would I want for there to be a traitor in the Twenty-Eight Mansions?”

“But unfortunately, both of them are lying,” Zhao Changhe said seriously. “Tomorrow, I will negotiate with Yan Lianping under Situ Xiao’s name. He might let you sit in. Whatever happens, you must be on guard against Yan Lianping. In fact, it would be best to launch a sneak attack on him when given the opportunity. I suspect he’s not just at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate. He might already be at the level of those on the Ranking of Man, so we must not be careless with him.”

Vermillion Bird was taken aback momentarily, and her expression underneath the mask turned ugly.

If what Zhao Changhe said is true, then based on how I’ve let on that the Fire Serpent of Yi is only at the ninth layer of the Profound Gate, if something were to happen, then I really might end up owing him a greater favor...

But how is he able to make the judgment that Yan Lianping is on the level of those on the Ranking of Man? Even if he got to examine Ji Yinan’s corpse, he should not have been able to determine something like that, right?

Chapter 230: The Biggest Bet

Vermillion Bird naturally did not want to question the credibility of her own Twenty-Eight Mansions, yet she found herself inclined to trust Zhao Changhe’s judgment. Perhaps it was because of Zhao Changhe’s track record of effectively solving cases, which had subconsciously instilled her with the idea that his assessments had merit to them.

Upon deeper reflection, it became apparent that Zhao Changhe’s success in solving cases could not solely be attributed to his exceptional detective skills. While his deductive reasoning and attention to detail were commendable, his primary method of investigation involved predetermining a conclusion and then seeking confirmation.

This approach could potentially lead him astray if he could not find sufficient evidence to support his initial conjecture. However, each time he pursued verification, the outcomes somehow aligned with his expectations, suggesting either a stroke of luck or an unusually sharp intuition.

After a moment of hesitation, Vermillion Bird asked in a low voice, "So, what should we do now?"

"I need to go somewhere. It's best if you don't do anything. You should just go back to the Pinghu Association and rest. If you're found to have snuck out at night, it might raise suspicion."

Vermillion Bird's eyes widened. "So, you really see me as a burden?"

"Not at all," Zhao Changhe replied with a wry smile. "You're the main combat force I'm relying on. I'm just a newbie."

"Oh really? Call me big sister then."

"Big sister~"

Satisfied, Vermillion Bird stood up. "Since you addressed me so sweetly, I'll reluctantly cooperate with you. I'll be going now."

With a fragrant breeze passing by, she disappeared.

Zhao Changhe looked out the window at the bright moonlight and silently acknowledged that the true strength of the one whom he had just called big sister might not be so simple.

The Four Idols Cult was truly a gathering of hidden talents. Originally, he already believed Wan Dongliu to be fairly formidable, but now it seemed that his ability to stand among the Twenty-Eight Mansions was likely due to the advantage of his youth. In terms of actual strength, he was likely far behind the rest.

The most crucial information brought by this big sister was that Han Wubing had not been captured by Yan Lianping. This further corroborated many of Zhao Changhe's thoughts, and now he was almost ninety percent certain of Han Wubing's whereabouts.

After a moment of contemplation, he hid Dragon Bird in his room and left empty-handed.

A short while later, a dark-faced man appeared at the entrance of Kangle Gambling House. The guard glanced at him lazily and paid him no further attention.

It was forbidden to enter this kind of gambling house with a sword or saber, as it could lead to brawls every day. Zhao Changhe had already expected it, so he simply did not carry any weapons. In fact, as long as the sword or saber was not too conspicuous, or if the clients simply brought some small hidden weapons, then the guards would not really bother them. After all, they had to do business.

Entering the gambling house, he found it quite spacious. But no matter how large it was, it could not accommodate the throngs of people. This night was when gamblers were most frenzied. Looking at the sea of people, he saw crowds of people gathered at various gambling tables, the noise overwhelming and drowning out any attempts to hear anything clearly.

There were numerous VIP boxes around the hall, their interiors concealed. Zhao Changhe paid them no mind, his gaze falling on the massive gambling table at the center of the hall, where a young master was shouting and yelling from the dealer's seat, his face flushed with excitement.

The dealer at the table was dressed like a wealthy young master, which made him seem out of place. And another thing that made him stand out was his name.

Seventh Lord Sha of Kangle Gambling House sounded more like a rugged underworld figure, but he was actually just a young master. He had never made it onto any of the rankings and he was keeping an extremely low profile, yet he was quite well-known in Sword Lake City. Zhao Changhe had easily obtained Sha Seven's description just by casually asking a random passerby.

There were numerous guards roaming the gambling house, many with visibly bulging muscles, indicating that they were not weaklings. The fact that these people gathered in such numbers in just one gambling house indicated that it was not merely a gambling house, but also a gang with a powerful backing.

As Zhao Changhe's gaze swept over the blades hanging at the guards' waists, he quietly considered whether he would be able to escape if they all rushed at him.

One of the employees saw a strange face coming in to look around. He went to Zhao Changhe and said, "Sir, what would you like to play?"

Zhao Changhe looked away from the guards' swords and lifted his chin in the direction of Sha Seven. "What is he playing over there?"

"Oh, big or small. Do you want to play, sir?"

"Do I need to exchange for chips?"

"You can exchange for chips and use those if you want. But if you'd like, you're also free to use gold, silver, other items, and even deeds of mortgage."

"Alright." Zhao Changhe leisurely walked over. Over there, Sha Seven was enthusiastically shaking the cup, his face flushed. "Bet big or small, bet big or small, bet now!"

Pah!

Zhao Changhe slammed all the silver he had snatched from the robbers and bet onto the three sixes area. "I bet on big."

No one paid any attention to the small amount of money he bet. Sha Seven opened the cup and said, "Two, two, four, small! Sorry, everyone!"

"Wait a minute." Zhao Changhe held out his hand to stop him from taking the silver. "What do you mean two, two, four? Isn't that three sixes?"

Everyone looked down and saw that the dice that had been revealed to two, two, and four had somehow become three sixes at some point.

Everyone was in an uproar and looked at Zhao Changhe with amusement.

It's obvious that you used internal energy to change the direction of the dice. Are you here to cause trouble?

Sha Seven's frenzied expression froze slightly. He tilted his head and looked at Zhao Changhe with a half-smile. "Yes, yes, it's three sixes. You won. Do you want to continue betting?"

Zhao Changhe said, "I'm fine to continue betting, but this kind of gambling seems quite pointless. How about I change what I bet?"

The frenzied look resurfaced on Sha Seven's face and he said extremely excitedly, "What would you like to bet? Your head?"

Zhao Changhe said, "I bet the Ji Clan's assets on Taiping Street. If I lose, I will give them to you. If I win, I want you to help me with something."

Sha Seven asked curiously, “Who are you to be able to bet the Ji Clan’s property? Don’t tell me that you’re that Young Master Ji who was supposedly rushing back to the Ji Clan?”

Zhao Changhe said, “Can I not be that Young Master Ji?”

Sha Seven looked him up and down for a while and said with a smile, “How can you prove that you are Ji Bochang?”

After hearing these three words, Zhao Changhe was stunned for a moment and looked down at his little brother. “Well... Can we go to a private room so I can prove it to you?”

Everyone was stunned for a moment. No one thought that anything was wrong at first, but they all realized what he was hinting at and burst into laughter.

Sha Seven laughed so hard that he banged the table. “Hahahaha! You’re pretty funny!”

Zhao Changhe’s expression did not change. It was not actually that he wanted to remain expressionless, it was just that he could not change his expression even if he wanted to after having disguised himself. “How about it, Sha Seven? Would you like me to prove it to you in private?”

“Alright, alright!” Sha Seven laughed so much that he began gasping for air. “Let’s go to a VIP room, and we can play in private.”

The crowd laughed heartily, but beneath that laughter, there was a subtle sense of apprehension.

They knew what this “private game” was—of course, it had nothing to do with verifying this Young Master Ji’s identity and everything to do with gambling on some truly important matters.

Everyone knew about the upheaval that the Ji Clan was going through. Could it be that the young master of the Ji Clan had returned and was now involved in the power struggle between the Pinghu Association and the Xingyi Gang?

It seemed like there was going to be a good show to watch in Sword Lake City.

Some people discreetly left, rushing to the Pinghu Association to report the news.

Meanwhile, Sha Seven left the dealer’s position and gestured for Zhao Changhe to follow him into a VIP room on the side. Zhao Changhe smiled faintly and followed.

Originally separated by a wide table, the two gradually converged and approached the VIP room together. Countless big men surrounded them on both sides, watching closely.

Neither of them seemed to mind. As they drew closer, Sha Seven chuckled and said, “I didn’t expect the young master of the Ji Clan to be so bold, coming to my Kangle Gambling House. Are you not afraid of being swallowed whole? What can you possibly gain by coming here?”

Zhao Changhe said calmly, “If I were to be swallowed up by the Pinghu Association, you would still end up with nothing. A gambling house is a gambling house, after all. It’s necessary for you to maintain appearances in public. You need to at least go through the formalities for the sake of your reputation, right?”

“Not bad, not bad,” Sha Seven said with a smile. “But you do not have the deeds to use as collateral, so it’s difficult to proceed with this wager. Or perhaps you can offer something else? For example, some martial arts from the Divine Brilliance Sect? We’re quite interested in those as well.”

As they spoke, they simultaneously arrived at the door of the VIP room, standing less than a chi apart.

Zhao Changhe said calmly, "If we're changing the wager, why don't we change the game as well?"

Sha Seven looked at Zhao Changhe's hand, then looked at the guards whose blades were already half drawn, and chuckled before stepping into the room. "Sure, feel free to make a suggestion."

Zhao Changhe followed in and said slowly, "How about..."

His right hand suddenly struck at the back of Sha Seven's neck. "Your life..."

Shing!

Several blades were thrust toward Zhao Changhe's back and neck. At the same time, Sha Seven twisted his torso strangely, avoiding Zhao Changhe's grasp. Then, his elbow shot backward, aiming directly at Zhao Changhe's Danzhong acupoint.

Zhao Changhe ate this strike without hesitation. Meanwhile, his hand bloomed like a lotus flower.

Sha Seven's twisting had no effect at all. Zhao Changhe's hand still managed to grab hold of his throat.

At the same time, the blades of the guards were placed against his neck and his back.

Sha Seven calmed down, and only silence remained at the door of the VIP room.

Seemingly unaware that he was under threat of being stabbed to death, Zhao Changhe held Sha Seven by the throat and continued, "...in exchange for Han Wubing's life."

Sha Seven stood silently for a few moments, then he smiled and spoke with some difficulty due to his throat being squeezed, "Isn't this just between us?"

Zhao Changhe said calmly, "Before these blades can cut my throat, I'll crush yours. You can fully trust the strength of my grip. For you, your life is all you have. Whether or not you can take me down with you is meaningless."

"Your life is also all you have." Sha Seven sighed. "Is it worth gambling like this?"

Zhao Changhe revealed a smile and said, "Isn't this a gambling house? Gambling with one's life is the ultimate gamble, no? Don't you find it exciting?"

"I'm asking whether it's worth it, not whether it's exciting or not. You're doing all this... just for a friend?"

"Isn't that enough?"

Sha Seven was silent for a moment and then laughed, "As expected of Bloodthirsty Asura Zhao Changhe. Bring Han Wubing out."