

## T. Times 41

### Chapter 41: Second Layer of the Profound Gate

We returned to the main matter at hand. Everyone was having normal conversations the entire evening. I thought you didn't mind something awkward like this happening, but it turns out you were constantly thinking about it. Were you waiting for this moment?

Zhao Changhe wanted to cry. There was no way he could respond to Yue Hongling!

To make things even more awkward, he did have some inappropriate thoughts and could not, in good faith, say that he did not have any other ideas.

There's no helping it. That's just how we virgins are... Zhao Changhe pouted and replied honestly, "I really didn't have any ideas before... I was just playing along with my brothers in the stronghold. Don't take what I said to heart."

Yue Hongling scowled.

What do you mean, you didn't have any ideas "before"? Those that mean you have some funny ideas now?

To her surprise, though, Zhao Changhe said, "Could you refrain from touching me? I'm still an ordinary man... It's just taking deep breaths. I know how to do it. There's really no need for this..."

Yue Hongling almost lashed out, barely stopping her hand from smacking him in the face. She gnashed her teeth in anger and said, "I'm not just touching you! I'm helping you direct the air you're breathing into your dantian and having it fuse with your qi while it circulates! Do you really think breathing techniques only consist of breathing? If I don't guide you, how are you going to learn!?"

Zhao Changhe's mouth went agape and he lowered his head. "Keep touching me then."

Yue Hongling: "?"

Why are you talking like I'm the one taking advantage of you?

I sought shelter from you; you sought me out to teach you. I agreed to teach you without wanting anything in return. We were both acting respectfully and spoke with propriety. Just how did it turn out like this?

She grit her teeth even harder. "Take a deep breath. Calm your mind and focus..."

"Boss! Boss!" The door banged open and a bandit came running in, panting. "Outside... Eh..."

Yue Hongling looked at him with a blank expression, then slowly looked down at herself standing next to Zhao Changhe, pressing against his abdomen. It was not hard to imagine what other people would think if they saw such a scene.

It would be over for her once rumors about this started spreading.

No. I'm not Yue Hongling. I'm just someone that looks like her.

Zhao Changhe's face went stiff. "What happened?"

"Eh. Just now when one of our brothers went behind the mountain, he discovered that one of the traps had been activated. It doesn't seem like a wild beast triggered it. Someone may have come up the mountain."

Zhao Changhe quivered. Any stray thoughts he had vanished and he abruptly stood up. "You've done well... Everyone drank a bit too much tonight. It's indeed prime time to conduct a night attack. It looks like I was careless..."

He strolled about the room as he uttered this and said to Yue Hongling, "Yue... Yue'er, you stay here. Do not, under any circumstances, leave the building. I'll go see the situation and direct some people here to protect this place."

Yue Hongling's mouth twitched as she tilted her head without responding.

Zhao Changhe strode through the door. Outside, he could still hear some bandits say, "Boss, sister-in-law really looks like Yue Hongling. It turns out you really have a thing for her..."

Zhao Changhe's gloomy voice traveled far out. "That's none of your business, you dumbass. Assign some men to guard her. Don't let your sister-in-law be afraid."

"Of course. You can trust your brother over here! If sister-in-law loses even a single strand of hair, I'll twist my head off and let you use it as a chamber pot, boss!"

"Stop fucking boasting! Go!"

Yue Hongling suddenly wanted to laugh. Just whose reputation will be ruined by rumors? No one here knew that she was the real Yue Hongling, so her reputation would not actually be affected. On the other hand, it would be impossible to wipe away rumors that Zhao Changhe was secretly in love with Yue Hongling.

Will that Saintess Xia cut him down for this...

As she thought this, her heart suddenly skipped a beat and she drew her sword. "From whence do you come to honor us with your presence? Why do you not reveal yourself?"

From the treetops outside the window came a low voice. "It's me."

There was a weak, sickly quality to his words.

"Cui Yuanyong?" Yue Hongling was dumbstruck. It's over. Now someone actually knows the woman here is the real Yue Hongling...

Wait, no. What did you come here for!?

She was so furious she wanted to cut down someone. "Your injuries are far graver than mine. What are you doing running to a mountain stronghold in the middle of the night? When did your Cui family start caring about low-level criminals? If you really want to arrest a wanted fugitive, you shouldn't do so in a way that risks your own life!"

Dispirited, he replied, "I heard some rumors that the stronghold mistress of the Beimang Mountain Stronghold was of outstanding beauty and even looked a bit like Yue Hongling. Word was spreading

that Zhao Changhe liked this type of woman... Then I thought something wasn't right. Could it be that you were defeated and captured by bandits? I couldn't stop worrying and specially came to take a look. It looks like I was wrong, and not only that, I came at the wrong time."

Yue Hongling's expression was darker than the bottom of a pot. "When did you arrive?"

"Just now...when you drew close to him and laid your hands on him. It looks like women, in such situations, have their senses completely dulled... Once he left, you became incomparably alert. I didn't even do anything and you noticed my presence..."

Clang!

Cold sword qi and killing intent surged.

"Cui Yuanyong, why don't you go and die! The only reason I had to seek shelter with him, the only reason why I fell into that trap was all because of you!"

Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!

The sounds of swords clashing traveled far from the building.

Cui Yuanyong coughed. "I came with good intentions and only unintentionally interrupted you as you were about to go about your refined and elegant business. Is there really a need to do this..."

"I'll—I'll kill you!"

"Really, it's difficult to deal with women and children... Farewell."

"If I hear any rumors spreading about me, I'll—I'll never forgive the Cui family!"

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"So it was a mistake? The intruder didn't have any bad intentions?" Back in his room, Zhao Changhe looked on silently at Yue Hongling with his hands clasped together. He was so angry with

her his skin looked red and he suddenly thought, There's no way this Cui Yuanyong was actually acting as my wingman, right? He's done a pretty good job...

Zhao Changhe really did not want the situation to end up like this. He and Yue Hongling really did not have that kind of relationship—it would have only brought them both trouble. Not only that, but if she wanted to avoid rousing suspicion, she would have to completely break off relations with Zhao Changhe.

He did not know if he should thank this Brother Cui or seek him out to kill him.

While he was worried about whether he could still be friends with Yue Hongling, she suddenly said, “There's a spy in your mountain stronghold.”

Zhao Changhe stared blankly and nodded. “Yes. You only fell in the pit this evening, but it hasn't even been a few hours and Cui Yongyuan managed to hear about this in the city. Of course there's someone leaking information outside.”

Yue Hongling asked, “Do you know who it is?”

“Yes.”

“Do you need me to help you take care of him?”

“For the time being, no. When the time comes, I can take care of him myself... Of course, if you want to vent your anger, we can get rid of him right now. There's no problem.”

“Since you already have a plan, there won't be any need for that.” Yue Hongling replied indifferently. “Enough. It was just a misunderstanding. Don't think too much. Sit properly and I'll continue to guide your breathing.”

Zhao Changhe was dumbstruck. “You... Still...”

“What? What's wrong? Cui Yongyuan is the son of a prestigious family. He's not vulgar enough to spread rumors like an old woman in the countryside. What's more, I, Yue Hongling, act with a clear conscience. I do what I must without a care in the world about the words of others.” Yue Hongling looked at him and suddenly smiled. “What? Don't tell me you think I'll really break off all relations

with you because of something like this? You didn't do anything wrong. Why would I be angry at you?"

"I..." Zhao Changhe pursed his lips and finally said no more, sitting down quietly.

She was still the Yue Hongling of his heart—honest and valiant, and able to distinguish her gratuities and grudges, never mistaking one for the other.

Trying to stop her is like trying to stop the sun from rising. So how could she be fettered by the trivial hearsay of the mortal world?

Zhao Changhe sat down quietly while Yue Hongling pressed against his abdomen with her hand. As he took a deep breath, gentle qi was sent into where his abdomen was, mixing with the air he inhaled. This was a demonstration. "Remember this feeling. After this, take in three long breaths followed by two short ones and adjust your breathing. After you're used to this, it'll become second-nature."

"Got it."

"I'll teach you a mnemonic chant. Remember it well..."

The delicate fragrance of Zhao Changhe's female master still lingered around him; the ends of her hair still brushed his cheeks. However, he no longer had any inappropriate fantasies. As he heard each of her words, spoken clearly and to the point, he slowly immersed himself in his breathing and circulation of his qi, gradually entering a meditative state.

Yue Hongling then withdrew her hand and sat by the side with her eyes closed as she circulated her qi to tend to her injury.

After a while, Zhao Changhe opened his eyes. Light flashed through the darkness of night; it was as if electricity forked through the empty space in the room.

The second layer of the Profound Gate.

Yue Hongling opened her eyes at about the same time and grinned. "The first time someone learns a new technique, they have to familiarize themselves with it, but you managed to perceive an

opportunity to break through and actually went through with it without hesitation. This overbearing boldness—your name really suits you. You’re just like a rushing river stream that cannot be stopped[1].”

“...You flatter me too much. I think my name is pretty lame. Come to think of it, it would have been great if the Tome of Troubled Times gave me a line like that. Fucking shitty book...”

Yue Hongling did not acknowledge what he said and frowned slightly. “This internal art of yours...is very good... With just a measly breakthrough to the second layer of the Profound Gate, there’s lightning streaming through the room. I’ve never heard of such a powerful internal art. It’s unfortunate it doesn’t seem to possess any special characteristics. It’s purely vast and powerful... What’s the name of this miraculous internal art?”

## Chapter 42: Vicious Blood Sweeps Through the Air

It would be strange if this internal art wasn’t powerful. It’s something the number one person on the Ranking of Heaven intended for his own child to cultivate. It wouldn’t make sense if it was some low-level shit.

When he first started cultivating this internal art, he could not perceive anything special about it. Moreover, he had no reference to compare it to. Now that Yue Hongling was here, it was a good time to let her explain it to him.

However, even though he trusted Yue Hongling, he did not dare to reveal all of his secrets at once and only answered, “I don’t know what it’s called either. It didn’t even come with any breathing techniques or mnemonics. I’ve been going at it blind. Eh, let’s just call it the Eight Blind Gates[1]... Can you help me check the quality of my qi?”

Yue Hongling glared at him. “Stretch your hand and I’ll take a look.”

Zhao Changhe did as he was told and Yue Hongling put her palm on his. The more she examined his qi, the more stunned her expression became.

The quality of the qi cultivated by Zhao Changhe’s internal art was outrageous. Even if she had given an overly high estimate before starting, it would have still surpassed her expectations.

“Why do cultivators divide themselves up into levels? Whether it’s practitioners of internal or external arts, their strength can be measured. Those at the same level have about the same strength

and this provides a standard for cultivators to use to create said levels. Being able to fight someone possessing a higher cultivation is worth bragging about precisely because these levels have meaning.

“To use an illustrative example, suppose that the amount of qi a normal person has is one unit, and that someone at the first layer of the Profound Gate can store up to ten units of qi. Once one cultivates ten units of qi, they hit a bottleneck and need to break through to the second layer of the Profound Gate to be able to continue increasing the amount of qi in their body. This is the case for everyone.

“The effects of a breakthrough for internal arts are not as obvious as external arts. For the latter, once someone breaks through, the strength of their flesh will increase significantly, and it’s possible for them to gain the ability to instantly kill their enemies after that one step. However, for the former, one needs to continue accumulating more qi in order to surpass others.

“With a miraculous internal art, accumulating ten units of qi from one unit could take maybe three days and it’s easy to successfully achieve breakthroughs; with a lousy internal art, you would likely need three years to do the same and breakthroughs are difficult enough to make you wish for death.

“Additionally, the upper limits of good internal arts can allow you to reach the Profound Mysteries while garbage internal arts might only be able to take you to the second or third layer of the Profound Gate, if that.

“More importantly, however, is that different internal arts cultivate qi of different characteristics and varying quality. Everyone’s dantian is a reservoir of a certain size, containing a certain material. For some people, their dantian stores ordinary, clear water. For others, it might be poison, flammable oil, refreshing rain, or even solid ice. Dantians which contain solid ice cold have a volume multiple times larger than regular ones...

“This is the difference between powerful sects and influential families on the one hand and random cultivators on the other. The appearance of miraculous internal arts can lead to bloody conflicts.”

Zhao Changhe had just broken through to the second layer and his dantian was the size of a regular one for a person at the second layer. There was nothing strange about this. However, the quality of his qi was simply ridiculous. It was the same as someone whose dantian stored ice! For others with the same cultivation, their qi would basically be formless. However, Yue Hongling could see that his qi was dense and white, like smoke or mist.



People who were stuck at the second layer of the Profound Gate for a long time without being able to break through had no choice but to slowly refine their qi. It was common for their qi to only reach the same quality as Zhao Changhe's after many months of work. But you just broke through. How is your qi of such high quality? What would your qi be like if you put in the work and refined it? Are you trying to defy heaven? Also, what was the name of this miraculous internal art? The Eight Blind Gates... Never heard of it.

After listening to Yue Hongling's lecture, Zhao Changhe held his chin and said, "Like this, does that mean my problem of beginning my cultivation too late has been resolved?"

"No." Yue Hongling shook her head. "Why do people say that one needs to begin cultivating from a young age? Because children can be molded. Their dantian and meridians can slowly be expanded as they cultivate, while yours have already ossified. Your meridians will forever be that narrow, and they have no way of withstanding qi that surges or is circulated too violently. Your dantian will forever be that small even after you break through all nine heavenly layers. You'll realize that your dantian won't be able to hold that much qi. If you don't get some treasure or something like that to help you change that, there will be a limit to what you can achieve in this life."

Zhao Changhe smiled. "I see. Thanks for your explanation. I get it now."

Yue Hongling asked curiously, "How are you so at ease after hearing all of this?"

A treasure that could purify his body once appeared before his very eyes and he gave it up. But at least this meant that there existed such things in the world. Zhao Changhe was not bothered at all and smiled, feeling unrestrained. "Heaven never bars one's way. There will always exist treasures of heaven and earth in this world. In any case, things have already gotten to this point. What use is there in worrying? I'll just work on the Vicious Blood Art first. According to you, it's a very good art."

Yue Hongling could not deny that his free and easygoing attitude was very much to her liking. "The Vicious Blood Art cultivates one's qi and blood. It's most suitable for young men to cultivate and can indeed help you turn your age from a disadvantage to an advantage. Furthermore, the upper limits of this martial art are not low, so you can rest easy cultivating it. When the time comes, who knows if a lucky opportunity will descend from heaven?"

"Indeed." Zhao Changhe said unhurriedly. "For this, I have to endure its side effects, there's no going around it. Hey, come to think of it, the Vicious Blood Saber Art has an ultimate technique called Scattering the Gods and Buddhas. It requires one to stimulate their vicious blood qi to an absurdly high level. I heard that one needs to at least reach the third layer of the Profound Gate to

be able to use it once, and with great difficulty at that. Can I fulfill this requirement using my qi? If that's possible, with the quality of my qi, I might be able to use this move once."

"Of course it's possible. It'll only be lacking in viciousness, so the effects of the attack will be diminished. After all, complementary martial arts can only bring out unique effects when utilized together. No other martial arts will do. However, if you just think of it as an ordinary saber technique and don't rely on any special effect, the power will be the same."

"So it won't have as much of that intimidating effect but the power won't be much lower. Then that's fine."

Yue Hongling felt that his way of speaking was very strange, but it suited him. This bandit looks to be even more cultured than me... After thinking for a moment, she asked, "I have a feeling you have a definite goal in mind. What do you want to do?"

Zhao Changhe grinned. "How would it be okay if I didn't have an ultimate move? This doesn't necessarily have anything to do with having a definite goal."

Yue Hongling cast him a sidelong glance and felt that there was something ominous about his smile. It was like he was concealing some evil tricks. "Do you remember I said I could teach you three things? Guiding your cultivation of internal arts is only one of them."

Zhao Changhe scratched his head. After so many interruptions, he had almost forgotten. Yue Hongling had indeed told him that she could teach him three things. Cultivating internal arts was only the first.

He smiled apologetically. "I'm really thankful for you teaching me your internal art. What's the next thing?"

Yue Hongling grit her teeth without letting him notice and leisurely pulled out her sword. "Sparring with you."

Zhao Changhe retreated a step in shock. "What do you mean, sparring? Won't you just one-shot me? How can I learn anything then?"

“If you keep fighting with those small fry, you won’t learn much. If you never experience hard battles or defeat, then what use is there in training through combat?” Yue Hongling was in high spirits. “Alright, cut the nonsense and present your neck—uh, I mean, prepare yourself!”

Zhao Changhe broke into a run. “Hold on, you’re still injured. Let’s fight another day...”

Yue Hongling readied her sword and pursued him. “What does this injury count for? I still have what it takes to beat you up!”

“Do you just want to beat me up?”

“Don’t slander me. I, Yue Hongling, am strong and upright. I don’t take out my anger on innocents.”

“Hey! What the fuck... I’ll really fight back!”

“Come. Let me see what kind of strength you have that allows you to call me Yue’er.”

“So you really just want to get back at me for that...” Zhao Changhe did not know if he should cry or laugh. He suddenly stopped running around his courtyard.

“If defeating you means I can call you Yue’er, then I’ll give it a try!”

Yue Hongling, filled with exhilaration, stopped her pursuit. She wanted to say something, but Zhao Changhe abruptly drove his right foot into the ground and suddenly twisted around, leaping with his saber in hand and slashing toward her at a ridiculous speed.

This scene was at once fantastical and very much like that of a demonic cult.

The waning moon hung hooked in the night sky on new years eve. A blood-red saber looked as if it was descending from the nine heavens, blocking the lunar crescent. It was like there was a waning, sanguine moon falling from the sky, streaking across the firmament.

In the darkness, Yue Hongling could not make out Zhao Changhe’s face, but could see that his eyes were now a bloody red. Up in the air, he resembled a demon.

Vicious blood swept through the air. If gods and Buddhas were in its path, gods and Buddhas would scatter!

This was not a third layer saber technique. Those at the third layer of the Profound Gate could barely use it once.

This technique needed someone to at least be at the fifth or sixth layer to be able to use it on a regular basis. This was one of the most famous saber techniques of the Blood God Cult. And it was the first time Zhao Changhe unleashed its terrifying fangs.

Yue Hongling had seen this technique before—used by Cult Leader Xue. Indeed, if it was used together with the appropriate level of the Vicious Blood Art, there really would be an intimidating effect like what Zhao Changhe had guessed earlier. Facing an opponent who used this attack, those weak of will would be terrified out of their wits.

With that said...she did not know if it was that she was injured at the moment, or if it was due to the current atmosphere, but Yue Hongling felt that when she faced Xue Canghai, his attack did not possess this force of Zhao Changhe. The young man in front of her seemed like a blood god wielding the new moon to cleave the universe in twain!

Is he really a natural-born bandit? This martial art of a demonic cult suits him unexpectedly well.

As she thought this, Yue Hongling's sword had already made contact with that bloody moon.

A resplendent evening afterglow filled the sky—a setting sun and blood-moon hung on the horizon, both fading away.

Bang!

Zhao Changhe flew back head-first a few zhang and coughed bitterly as he crashed into the courtyard wall.

As he looked up, he saw Yue Hongling wearily leaning on her sword. Her abdomen was oozing with a little bit of blood. Her wound had reopened. She looked at the coughing Zhao Changhe with

no small amount of admiration in her eyes. How could she have known beforehand that their battle would end like this?

Her injury should not have been that much of a problem—nothing more than what an adult would have suffered at the hands of a child. Also, she did not need to exert much strength from her core muscles to move her sword. Why had her wound reopened, then?

It was because the power of Zhao Changhe's attack vastly exceeded her expectations and she needed to activate her core to brace his attack, thus naturally causing her wound to reopen.

She reaped what she had sowed. She was supposed to be recuperating but had ended up hurting herself again.

Yeah, this doesn't count as him beating me. I won't need to be called Yue'er... The Tome of Troubled Times shouldn't appear either. Otherwise, just this one attack would let Zhao Changhe's name really spread far and wide.

Zhao Changhe struggled to prop himself up, but suddenly smiled. "This is great! This. Is. Great! Damn, you were right! This type of battle is far more interesting. Let's spar again after you recover!"

#### Chapter 43: Children of the Jianghu

Yue Hongling really wanted to say to him, "You want to spar after I recover? Do you know how many days you'll need to rest?"

Actually, Zhao Changhe was not really injured by Yue Hongling's counterattack. Rather, the overexertion from forcing himself to use that ultimate technique was ridiculous. Yue Hongling could see that his entire body, his qi and blood, every bit of energy, all was spent, and his muscles were limp. His qi, which Yue Hongling had said was of a very high quality, was completely used up and not a sliver of it remained. Even a random duck would be able to kill him right now.

However, he was still smiling, filled with jubilation; he was truly looking forward to when next they would spar.

How truly valiant.

This type of person shouldn't be so bothered about affairs between men and women. He's naturally suited to carve his way through the mountains and rivers of the jianghu.

Yue Hongling's mouth twitched and she did not mock him but said, "I have a rough guess as to what the nature of your qi might be."

"Hmm?" Zhao Changhe raised his head and looked at her.

"You didn't just use your qi to drive Scattering the Gods and Buddhas. You used the power of your vicious blood qi together with your qi, and you were actually able to fuse them together, almost like they were part of the same martial art. This is to say that the compatibility of your qi is second to none. At any time, it can transform into whatever type of power you need, regardless of whether it's for an internal or external art. This means that at present, you basically have an additional store of the blood qi and vicious qi used in the Vicious Blood Art."

Zhao Changhe was delighted. "That's great!"

Yue Hongling said, "Currently, it's like this because you're only cultivating the Vicious Blood Art. I suspect that once you cultivate your internal art to a high level, no matter what other martial arts you pick up, this qi will be able to change itself to suit them. This plasticity and the ability it gives you to achieve the same ends with different means is magnificent. Just who created this internal art? It's incredibly impressive."

Zhao Changhe nodded. This should be the case... This type of internal art would be extremely suited for Xia Longyuan's bastard and whatever martial arts he decides to train in. It wouldn't matter if his child chose to follow in the mother's footsteps or sought out others to teach him, this internal art would be compatible with all martial arts he learned and could grow with them.

Moreover, in the future, it would even be able to turn into the qi used by whatever martial art he primarily trained. This way of using different means to achieve the same ends is indeed befitting of an emperor. Or to put it another way, it's like how the lands under heaven all belong to the emperor—all martial arts belong to Xia Longyuan's internal art.

For the first time, Zhao Changhe felt some reverence for this emperor he had never met. He was remarkable—truly remarkable. Suddenly, another thought came to him. If he's so great, did he really lose his mind and send everything into disarray in his twilight years? He shouldn't be that old. People like him are virtually gods, so does aging a few decades even count as growing old? Could it be that there was another problem... Maybe he's already dead? Did he meet with some accident while cultivating?

While he was pondering, Yue Hongling lazily entered the building. “Whatever thoughts you may have, you must rest well tonight. Now I’m no longer seeking protection from you to recover from my injuries. It’s more like I’m protecting you now.”

Zhao Changhe bitterly walked into the building. Inside, the first thing he saw was Yue Hongling wrapping the wound on her abdomen with a medicated bandage.

It was strange. Previously, Zhao Changhe felt that he should avoid walking into these types of situations. Even when he stood outside, Yue Hongling blushed. But now, he felt that there was nothing about this that warranted him to avoid such situations. There was a wound on her stomach, and a gruesome one at that. Just how could it give off any charming feeling? There was absolutely nothing worth making such a big fuss.

Or maybe it’s because we were strangers that had only met once then while we are friends now?

He did not know. Anyway, Zhao Changhe felt nothing as he threw her a glance then sat down beside his bed and closed his eyes as he recovered. Yue Hongling also minded her own business. After she finished applying the medicated bandage, she also sat in a lotus position on a chair by the side and closed her eyes. Everything was completely natural.

Soon, both of them entered a meditative state and the night returned to silence.

This was what Yue Hongling had hoped things would be like when she had sought shelter with Zhao Changhe. It was only that she had come a little too late... It would have been better if none of those embarrassing situations had occurred. Before they entered their meditative states, this thought flashed through both of their heads.

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The following morning, Yue Hongling was the first to stop resting and opened her eyes.

Zhao Changhe still sat in a meditative state. His brow was slightly furrowed and it looked like he was in a bit of pain.

Yue Hongling watched him. Cultivating is much more painful for this guy than for ordinary people. The simmering pain of Vicious Blood Art is always present, and the harder he trains, the intensity of this pain will only increase. A lot of disciples from the Blood God Cult slack off when it comes to cultivating the Vicious Blood Art, while Zhao Changhe just puts in more and more hard work, as if challenging the pain, telling it to come at him.

Other people could not see his hard work. They only saw his valiance and his strength, which was like a raging river.

He asked about all kinds of martial arts from all sorts of perspectives and about the problem with his age because he wanted to know if he could replace the Vicious Blood Art with his internal art. In the end, the answer was that that was not possible yet. He should have been disappointed, but from the looks of it, he seemed completely unbothered and at ease.

Yue Hongling knew that she indeed liked this sort of person. He told her that he saw in her the jianghu he had always imagined. In reality, from her perspective, how could she not see her ideal jianghu in him?

The temperament of a bandit? In reality, Yue Hongling also had it. Banditry and chivalry were two sides of the same coin. All could be considered children of the jianghu and they differed greatly from people like Cui Yuanyong. In Cui Yuanyong's eyes, Yue Hongling was simply a crude woman with the temperament of a bandit.

Yue Hongling and Zhao Changhe were the same type of people, and thus could become close with each other. On the other hand, Cui Yuanyong was the typical young master; he was like a piece of polished jade. He was indeed a good person and had even come to save Yue Hongling because he suspected that she fell into the hands of bandits. However, it was difficult for them to get along.

Footsteps could be heard outside. There was someone nearby.

Yue Hongling grabbed the hilt of her sword, and her expression suddenly turned fierce.

Knock knock.

“Boss.”



Yue Hongling heaved a sigh and cast Zhao Changhe a glance. He was still frowning in pain. She shook her head and approached the door.

The person outside looked like a cook and had a tray with some cornbread and two bowls of gruel along with a few other dishes. Seeing that it was his “sister-in-law” that opened the door, he was stunned for a moment and did not dare stare too much. He lowered his head and smiled apologetically. “Good morning, sister-in-law. This is the breakfast the boss ordered. I added an extra portion for you.”

Yue Hongling rubbed her forehead. It’d be great if you stopped calling me sister-in-law...actually, can you just not talk to me? I’d be more at ease if there were none of these annoying matters.

However, since things had gotten to this point, she could only play along and act her role. She could do nothing but stretch out her hand to accept the tray of food. “Thank you.”

The cook rubbed his hands together. “Sister-in-law is as beautiful as a goddess. The boss is really lucky.”

What kind of fucking luck does he have? The luck of having to sit down and recuperate? Yue Hongling turned around and returned to the building displeased, forcefully placing the tray onto the table.

At the same time, Zhao Changhe opened his eyes. The pained expression he had slowly faded away and was replaced by that familiar bright smile he put on everyday. “Morning. Eh, breakfast is already here? I don’t know what you’re used to eating in the morning. Just put up with this for the time being.”

“How can the children of the jianghu be so picky? Yue Hongling sat by the table with one foot resting on a stool by the side and gulped down her gruel.

Her appearance now was a world apart from what she looked like yesterday when she sat leaning against the window. Zhao Changhe was more used to seeing her as she was now. This is what children of the jianghu are supposed to be like. We’re not pretty daughters from humble families.

He rubbed his face and gave it a quick wash before sitting across from Yue Hongling with a smile. “You look pretty peppy. Are your wounds healed?”[1]

“My injuries weren’t very serious in the first place. As far as external injuries go, I only received that one cut, and my internal injuries were only caused by a bit of sword qi. A single night of rest was enough to sort out most of it. In two to three more days, I should fully recover.” Yue Hongling furrowed her brow. “The words you use are so strange. What do you mean by ‘peppy’...”

“It’s the dialect of the Zhao House. As long as you can roughly understand, it’s fine.” Zhao Changhe paused, lost in thought. “There’s a good chance that after a while, you’ll no longer be able to hear me utter such words. After all... I’m part of the jianghu now.”

Yue Hongling thought that he was referring to the deaths of the people of the Zhao House and refrained from speaking more about his village’s way of speaking. She could not help but sigh. “If only I had arrived a bit earlier...”

“What’s done is done. There’s no point saying all this. Don’t tell me you’re hoping for me to constantly tell others about you saving me?”

Yue Hongling replied, irritated, “I’ve never once seen you be thankful for it.”

“Then what do you believe is my reason for wanting to kill Cui Yuanyong after seeing you injured? I have no grudges with him. I’ve never even seen him before. Do you really think it’s because I secretly love Yue Hongling? Don’t get sucked into the blind rumors of others.”

Yue Hongling: “...”

“Oh, speaking of Cui Yuanyong, I’m not very knowledgeable about those powerful families. Can you give me a simple introduction to them?”

“I already told you yesterday. Not everyone possesses a miraculous internal art. Over time, those with powerful martial arts are the ones who form all sorts of large sects and powerful families, and they are able to pass down their inheritance. This is very normal. I don’t know what kind of introduction you want.”

“Why is the Cui Clan of Qinghe also a powerful clan here?”

“Also?” Yue Hongling was confused. “Why can’t it be the Cui Clan of Qinghe?”

“...Eh, don’t tell me they survived up till now from the previous era? Or did they obtain some inheritance from the previous era? To be honest, I actually flipped through a few history books but basically none of them brought up anything related to these families.”

“I’m not sure either. These powerful families have indeed been around considerably longer than the great Xia Dynasty. No matter how many dynasties rise and fall, they still remain... As for the illustrious history of his family, you can go ask Cui Yuanyong himself. I’m sure he’ll be very happy to get the chance to brag. What I’m uncertain of is how much of what he’ll say is true.”

“Will he talk to me?”

Yue Hongling thought for a moment. “I’m not sure. These types from powerful families appear cultured, refined, and polite on the surface, but I always feel like beneath this, they maintain a sense of distance and judge us. It’s uncomfortable. I’m the Second Hidden Dragon, so they regard me as someone important and will even befriend me. As for you... I’m not sure how they see those at the bottom of the Ranking of Hidden Dragons. It shouldn’t be too bad, I guess? In any case, you’re in the Tome of Troubled Times like him.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. “If the chance arises, could you refer him to me?”

Yue Hongling asked curiously, “Why are you interested in these things? You even want to get close to them when they’ll likely give you the cold shoulder. You shouldn’t be doing this...”

Zhao Changhe had a perplexed expression as he looked at her. What do you even know about me?

However, her understanding of him was correct. With Zhao Changhe’s nature, he was indeed uninterested in such things and could not be bothered contacting someone from a powerful family... It was unfortunate that probing the mysteries of this world had nothing to do with one’s nature. All this information was of great importance to clearing the fog that shrouded him. He had to contact them even if he did not enjoy it.

Yue Hongling felt uncomfortable looking at Zhao Changhe’s strange expression. Finally she was unable to restrain herself and slammed the table. “What’re you looking at? I’m not very familiar with you so what’s so strange about not having a good understanding of you? How is your recovery? Come, it’s time to spar!”

Zhao Changhe did not know if he should cry or laugh. He had no way of telling her: “You do understand me.” He felt that if he did so, this whole scene would turn into a comedy and ruin the friendly atmosphere between them.

In reality, he really wanted to spar now, but it was a pity he still had not recovered enough. He was also afraid of Yue Hongling’s wounds reopening again and thought for a while before asking, “You said you can teach me three things. What’s the third?”

“How to tell where something is with your hearing to perceive unseen enemies, and...” Yue Hongling suddenly picked up one of the chopsticks on the table and threw it. It swooshed through the air and lodged itself deep into the door. “...how to kill enemies from afar and take someone’s life while chasing them. Do you want to learn?”

#### Chapter 44: Stronghold Mistress

Swoosh!

A stone flew through the air and accurately hit a sparrow.

Zhao Changhe strode up to examine it. He had an incomparably delighted expression.

Yue Hongling’s coming made up for his shortcomings of being a mountain bandit. Even if he was given ten thousand stronghold mistresses, he would not swap Yue Hongling out for them.

Theoretically, cultivating internal arts could improve one’s hearing and vision; learning how to determine the position of something using sound, as well as ways of killing enemies from a distance, could be learned by oneself.

That was, of course, only in theory. In reality, it was completely different from being taught by someone.

To use concealed weapons effectively, it was not enough to have power and accuracy. Technique was equally important. There were even standalone concealed weapon arts, and what Yue Hongling taught him was her very own concealed weapon art, Falling Feathers Soaring Plume. Seeing that rock fly out of his hands, whistling through the air and finally hitting its target, Zhao Changhe thought that this was what a bird gun was supposed to feel like.

Yue Hongling leaned against a tree by the side with her arms crossed and sized up the sparrow's body. She was shocked and said, "I never thought you'd be talented at this. You haven't even practiced yet, but you're already so accurate!"

Zhao Changhe smiled. "I've played with a bow and arrow before. Accuracy is transferable."

In the great Xia Dynasty, crossbows and armor were contraband goods. Travelers could carry sabers and swords but not bows and crossbows. However, this clearly had nothing to do with mountain bandits. The mountain stronghold had all sorts of homemade bows. Yue Hongling did not think what Zhao Changhe said was strange at all, and she nodded. "If it wasn't inconvenient to do so, carrying a bow while wandering the jianghu is actually much better than carrying a concealed throwing weapon."

In reality, Zhao Changhe never played with any of the bows in the mountain stronghold. He had limited time to practice his martial arts. There was simply too much to learn and he had no time to spare for this. Of course, he had learned archery in the real world and was a member of the archery club. Even though he was less skilled than his peers, he still had a foundation and did not need to learn from scratch. Now with his improved vision due to his internal art and steadier hands, his accuracy was naturally higher, as if he had instantly maxed out his stats. Wherever he pointed, he could hit.

After listening to what Yue Hongling said, Zhao Changhe held his chin and pondered. In the future, if I fasten my saber on the left, tie a wine gourd on the right, sling a bow over my shoulder and carry a quiver full of arrows...uh...I'll look like a walking weapon rack. No way. I won't be able to go out like that.

What a pity. In an era like this, a bow would really be useful...

However, he would certainly be able to use a bow during special times... Thus, Zhao Changhe gleefully ran to the storehouse. "What's the best bow our stronghold has?"

"The best bow we have is a three shi[1] bow. Instructor Sun used to play with it, but I guess he forgot to bring it along with him when he left. It's too heavy for our brothers to use, even those who like archery, so it's been left here ever since. It's a pain in the ass to take care of it... Boss, would it be better for us to sell it?"

"Instructor Sun, you really are my good father!" Zhao Changhe exclaimed. "What do you mean, sell it? I want this bow!"

Yue Hongling followed from behind and saw Zhao Changhe disappear like a wisp of smoke to the warehouse, then once again to the arena. Once he took the arrows by the side, he rushed to loose an arrow at a target.

Dong~

It was like someone had struck a drum. The arrow lodged itself halfway into the hardwood target, yet its tail still swayed to and fro from the sheer shock.

The bandits training here all looked on, dumbstruck. Is our boss this strong?

“That felt really good to shoot! I almost shot my entire body away! Oh fuck... Ugh...”

Yue Hongling folded her arms and put on a blank expression as she looked at the idiot rubbing his shoulder while he squatted on the floor. He said, “It looks like I pulled a muscle...”

“How could you have not pulled a muscle?” Yue Hongling’s voice was cold. “You already overexerted yourself last night. With only that bit of rest, how much did you think you could recover? Do you really think you’d be as lively as a dragon or tiger? You idiot, you even put all your strength into that one shot. It felt good, didn’t it? Do you feel good now?”

Zhao Changhe’s face twitched. He lay there without moving. “Someone come and help me massage my shoulder...”

All the bandits looked at each other, then at Yue Hongling.

Who do you think is gonna give you a massage and steal our sister-in-law’s job? She’ll beat us to death.

Zhao Changhe roared, “Why are you all staring at her? Who cares what she... OUCH!”

Everyone retreated.

How can he be so jealous? We only glanced at her...

Yue Hongling smiled as she watched all of this unfold. She approached Zhao Changhe, grabbed him from behind by the collar and pulled him up. "Follow me back. You're embarrassing yourself."

Everyone looked on with wide eyes. It was like seeing a fierce tiger being picked up and brought away like a kitten. The whole thing felt like a dream... This sister-in-law is really strong! I guess this is what it takes to be the stronghold mistress, right?

"Sister-in-law is mighty!" shouted someone after a moment. "There should have been someone to keep our boss in check sooner!"

"Hey, do you want to die? If the boss hears what you said, he'll skin you."

"What's there to be afraid of? I'm praising our sister-in-law. Will the boss dare to do anything? Do you know what a stronghold mistress is? It's someone who can keep our entire stronghold under tight control!"

"You sure fucking know a lot about this!"

The ruckus throughout the stronghold could faintly be heard inside Zhao Changhe's hut. Yue Hongling threw him onto the bed with a blank face and began massaging his shoulder.

Zhao Changhe laid dare, not daring to make a sound. He stole a glance at Yue Hongling's expression but could not make out anything?

"What are you looking at? I can't cut any of them down. Trying to cover things up will only raise more suspicion." Yue Hongling said indifferently. "Whatever. I'm already used to it. They can call me what they like. In any case, they don't know I'm the real Yue Hongling. As long as Cui Yuanyong doesn't spread any drivel, everything will be fine."

In silence, Zhao Changhe thought the same. If he was Yue Hongling, he would also have no other choice but to play along and pray that Cui Yuanyong, who knew it was actually her, would keep his damn mouth shut.

Yue Hongling made a stern face. "Come to think of it, what were you so excited about? You even went to shoot an arrow for no reason."

“Because this will be an effective weapon for fighting someone with a higher cultivation. As long as I can use it well, there will be many people who’ll hate me for it. I’ve thought of a few things I can do and I got excited...”

“You definitely have a clear goal you’re aiming for, and it’s something you have no way of accomplishing right now.” Yue Hongling said, “Do you need me to help you take care of it?”

Zhao Changhe looked at her. Her face was still blank.

He suddenly smiled. “There’s no need. I, Zhao Changhe, don’t live off women.”

Yue Hongling’s shapely eyebrows twisted into a scowl. “You—”

Zhao Changhe interrupted her, “Big Sister Yue.”

“Huh?” Yue Hongling was taken aback and forgot what she wanted to say. Why is he suddenly calling me this again? I’m not very used to it...

“In reality, you coming here to seek shelter with me is only half the truth. The other more important reason is that you feel a sense of duty after having observed me for so long. You feel that I am good-natured and if you had just accepted my request to be your disciple, I wouldn’t be in this bandit nest today. You’re using the excuse of recuperating here to stay and teach me.”

Yue Hongling listened and slowly got lost in thought. After a while, she responded, “Perhaps.”

“Perhaps you’ve never really thought it through clearly. Instinctively, you think that by doing all this, you can make it up to yourself and no longer be bothered about your mistake,” Zhao Changhe said in a low voice. “You won’t leave when you’re fully recovered... No, whether your wounds heal or not, you definitely wish to teach me all that you know first. Only then will you leave.”

Yue Hongling pondered, lost in thought for a while, before smiling brightly. “You know me better than I know myself.”



“Since I’m correct, your hope is for me to be able to use everything you’ll teach me to free myself from my shackles and climb up the Ranking of Hidden Dragons and then out of it. You don’t want me borrowing your strength to help eliminate my enemies.”

Yue Hongling nodded with a smile. “Very good.”

Zhao Changhe rubbed his own shoulders which were still throbbing with pain and sat upright. He said sternly, “Their misunderstandings have affected you. For this, I apologize. I hope that big sister won’t mind them too much and can continue to teach me. The Yue Hongling in my heart is a teacher and a sister. I have absolutely no other ulterior thoughts.”

So it turns out he thought I was going to leave because of my serious face and he’s urging me to stay. Things have strayed so far from what they should be...

Yue Hongling suddenly felt that all this was amusing and had no idea how their conversation had reached this point. “What teacher and sister? I’m two months younger than you.”

Zhao Changhe, who had so far been speaking frankly and assuredly, was now the one that was stupefied and just sat there. For a while, he did not know how to respond.

“Rest well.” Yue Hongling patted his shoulder, stood up, and left. “Sharpening an axe makes chopping wood easier; when training in martial arts, you must never rush. As the saying goes, what you store in winter will flourish in spring. Winter is about to end and spring is upon us. You will make remarkable progress in your cultivation. The trifling second layer of the Profound Gate is merely the starting point for you.”

Zhao Changhe looked at her leave with a dumb expression. He originally thought that he had fully understood her psychology. How is it that I can’t see through her at all now? Women are really troublesome!

“Sister-in-law, sister-in-law!” From outside came the voice of one of Zhao Changhe’s subordinates. “Branch Master Fang has sent someone over to remind us that the boss didn’t wish him a happy new year. Could you tell the boss...”

“What’s there to tell him? Your boss—I mean, the head of our family has injured himself while training. All of you saw it. Why does he still need to send people new year wishes? What gall. Does this whatever branch master think he’s some high-ranking official? Does he think that a valiant hero like the stronghold master is a paper pusher? This branch master really makes me want to vomit.”

“Sister-in-law is bold! We’ll tell the messenger at once!”

For a while, Zhao Changhe was at a loss. Then, he started laughing.

## Chapter 45: Strength Akin to a Prowling Tiger

“Good morning sister-in-law!”

“Good morning sister-in-law.”

The new year for the bandits was worse than corporate drones in the real world. They only had half the day off on New Year’s Eve and the first day of the new year off. In total, their break only lasted one and a half days.

On the morning of the second day of the year, the stronghold resumed all its operations. Zhao Changhe headed to the training grounds, gathered the fighters in the stronghold, and personally taught them and trained with them. Those that did not practice martial arts had their own tasks assigned to them. The laying of traps also continued.

Zhao Changhe felt that if he had not been transported to this world, he would have been strung up to a lamppost as a capitalist.

But these traps are related to the safety of everyone here...

While Zhao Changhe was managing things, Yue Hongling walked all around the stronghold mainly to familiarize herself with the positions of the traps and avoid falling into one again... Even though her injury was not that much of an impairment, she did not want to have to leap out of a pit.

In reality, she wanted to take the damn things apart...

Whatever, forget it.

“Sister-in-law, are you taking a look around?”

“Sister-in-law, how did you and boss meet each other? The others say you two met in a mid-grade brothel, but I don’t believe them.”

“If you don’t know how to talk, then you can cut off your tongue by yourself.” Yue Hongling had a blank expression on her face.

A surprising number of bandits did not know how to speak to a normal person, and few were aware of it. There were even some idiots who asked their boss how he had overexerted himself the day before. For such a fierce man to pull a muscle—this sister-in-law is too brutal...

Those idiots were now hanging naked upside down by the side of the training grounds. Their boss did not dare say anything about it, which clearly showed who was really the one in charge of the stronghold.

“Don’t put spikes at the bottom of these traps.” Yue Hongling blocked a bandit that was trying to set up traps in one of the pits. “The stronghold is very big. Not everyone is clear about the position of the traps. It won’t be good if someone steps into one.”

The bandit scratched his head. “It’s useless if we don’t put spikes below. Are we trapping people or letting them inside to take a shit?”

Bang!

The bandit was kicked away.

She had felt that Zhao Changhe was crude, but it was only after interacting with these bandits that she found out what it really meant to shoot one’s mouth off and speak one’s mind. At most, Zhao Changhe would utter a few vulgarities when he scolded people, but his daily speech was still civilized.

Yue Hongling rubbed her head and pointed at the people shuttling around by the side. “You, you, you... You people, go and remove the spikes from the other pits. There’s no need to set lethal traps inside the stronghold. It’s enough to set up more dangerous traps outside, behind the mountain and on the mountain roads. Within the stronghold, it’s enough to just trap our enemies. We’ll avoid accidents this way.”

“Alright! We’ll do as you say, sister-in-law!”

“Even without spikes, there are other things we can put down there. For example, water. In this weather, anyone that falls into it is going to have a bad time. Or maybe a bunch of thorny vines and things like that! There are so many things people can do in this world. Work your imaginations! Whoever sets up a good trap will get a reward! Oh and it’s the beginning of spring. The mountain is so big, there are definitely places where we can grow things to eat. It’ll help a bit with the food, so you don’t end up erasing every animal on the fucking mountain.”

“Umm...can you please say that again? It doesn’t sound like a bandit thing to do...”

“You don’t have any problem with it, right? Then get to work.”

“Objections from the boss? Boss, what do you think?”

Zhao Changhe’s voice came from far away. “Listen to her...”

Who’s the real boss?

The people in the stronghold truly felt like they now had a housewife commanding them around, and unfortunately, this housewife spoke unreasonably. She did not know one bit about their internal affairs, and only knew how to fantasize. If they asked her to suggest what crops they could grow, she would glare at them. They did not know if she was angry or if her mind was simply devoid of anything.

She also did not look at the ledgers for the storehouse. In fact, she could not understand them. Even though she could read every word, when she strung them together, she had no idea what they meant. Her dumb appearance was rather adorable.

In the end, the boss had to take one final look while she fiercely guided the underlings’ training.

No one knew who was the real stronghold master and who was the stronghold mistress. It appeared like their roles had been flipped.

Lunchtime.

The stronghold master and stronghold specially had their meal in their hut. The two of them ate quietly, and no one said anything for a while. They felt like it would be weird if they opened their mouths.

“Umm...” After they were about done eating, Zhao Changhe hesitantly began speaking.

Yue Hongling’s looked at him while her cheeks moved along to her chewing.

Zhao Changhe did not mean to be so stricken by her cuteness and refrained from continuing to look at her. He coughed dryly and said, “I’ve asked them to build another hut by the side. You can live there starting today. There’s a tub inside. Every night, I’ll send people to heat up some water for you.”

Yue Hongling’s eyes blinked and blinked. These arrangements are pretty good. You can come and be the mistress next time.

In actuality, Yue Hongling was not the same as Luo Qi—she did not need to sleep at all. It was enough for her to meditate on a chair. Whatever embarrassing things that happened before were not going to occur again. Yue Hongling herself also had no intention of living separately from Zhao Changhe. After all, it would arouse suspicion if the stronghold mistress did not live with her stronghold master. At the very least, some would think that the stronghold master’s mistress was not obedient.

However, Yue Hongling knew that when a man and woman lived together, there would indeed be some inevitable problems. Zhao Changhe’s actions meant that he was willing to endure ridicule for not having an obedient wife if it meant that she could avoid such embarrassing situations.

“Does the head of the house not fear the ridicule of others?” She asked on purpose.

“Compared to that, I’d much rather hope that you don’t feel any discomfort and you can stay here a little longer.” Zhao Changhe murmured. “Even though you are pretty fucking clueless as a housewife.”

Yue Hongling glared at him in anger and Zhao Changhe raised his hands in surrender,

After glaring at him for a while, Yue Hongling’s mouth finally twitched. “Fine. No matter how long I stay, I have to leave eventually. Eat up and rest. Today we’ll continue sparring.”

\*

“Second brother, the atmosphere of the city has been strange recently.” At an inn in the city, a young lady was a little bewildered and asked her brother, “I’ve realized that few people from faraway gangs have come here, like Lin Feihu from the Black Tiger Gang. He’s a master at the fourth layer of the Profound Gate... Could it be that he heard about both you and Yue Hongling being injured after you challenged her on the street and came to pick a low-hanging fruit?”

This pair of brother and sister no longer wore the peasant clothes they put on when they first arrived in Beimang. The young lady was covered from head to toe in clothes made from sable fur. Her head was wrapped in a furry hat which revealed her rosy cheeks. It was very cute. No one would be able to tell that she was just a regular traveler with her current appearance.

Knowing how to dress and travel low-key was an essential skill to pick up to wander the jianghu.

Cui Yuanyong wore satin robes and sat leisurely by the window reading a book. He was truly a delicate and refined young master, as polished as jade.

After listening to his little sister’s question, he smiled warmly. “That’s probably not the case. When I fought with Yue Hongling, we acted with propriety and battled until we sustained wounds that would’ve taken at most three to five days to heal. The spectators also saw that we weren’t heavily injured. Even if someone came after hearing the news, they would take weeks to get here... Everyone would know that we’ve fully recovered by now, so why would they come for this reason?”

Indeed, it had been half a month since they fought. Yue Hongling had now been at the mountain stronghold for a month pretending to be the stronghold mistress. No matter how he thought, Cui Yuanyong could not understand why she would do something like that. However, he had seen it with his very eyes. She chose to continue this affair of her own accord.

It’s already been half a month and she’s still there. Zhao Changhe must be strong and vigorous enough to make her so satisfied, right?

A village girl really is a village girl. She might be able to fight, but she’s still crude.

It was good that Cui Yuanyong was not one to gossip. He did not even tell his little sister what he had seen. It would not be good to tell her, a maiden, about this sort of thing. He only told her that Yue Hongling was hiding in the Beimang Mountain Stronghold to recuperate, and in doing so gave her a reason not to go rushing in to eagerly capture a wanted criminal.

Cui Yuanyong thought for a moment and smiled. “Anyway, Lin Feihu’s coming should have nothing to do with us. He’s probably here to give Zhao Changhe some trouble. Zhao Changhe has already crushed everyone in Beimang with his saber. It was about time he attracted some tigers from outside. This person is still chasing after the bottom of the Ranking of Hidden Dragons at the fourth layer of the Profound Gate. How truly shameful.”

After listening to her brother, the young lady harrumphed. “How smart can a crude country bumpkin be? Once this person at the fourth layer of the Profound Gate shows up, will Zhao Changhe get cut down? If that happens, what will I do about my mission?”

Cui Yuanyong was a little speechless. “Yue Hongling is staying at the stronghold and she’s fully recovered. I can’t even defeat her myself, so how do you think he’ll fare? Other than masters from the Rankings of Heaven, Earth, and Man, anyone else can only beg for some miracle to happen...”

The young lady also realized this and laughed. She then immediately knit her brows, feeling perplexed. “It’s already been half a month. Yue Hongling should have long since fully recovered, why is she staying at the mountain stronghold rather than going off on her way?”

Cui Yuanyong continued reading his book and did not raise his head. “Others are free to go where they want. Why do you care so much about where she stays?”

“What about my mission then? How am I supposed to complete it?”

“I told you to break through to the third heavenly layer. What have you been doing recently?”

“...aren’t you injured? I’m supposed to protect you.”

“Yes, yes, yes. I am so in need of your protection. Cui Yuan Yong sighed. “This mission from First Seat Tang—I’ve always thought it was her entertaining your childish...”

“Hmm?”

“...desire to catch wanted criminals. That’s why she chose a random fugitive for you to have fun with. Zhao Changhe’s strength today is akin to a prowling tiger. Normal bandits cannot compare to him. I feel that she’s either underestimated how difficult this mission would be, or she’s trying to probe what our Cui family thinks about certain matters... Anyway, give up this mission. This is not a suggestion. This is an order.”

The young lady’s eyes rolled round and round. She giggled and said, “Strength akin to a prowling tiger, eh? Like how it’s said he was picked up by the stronghold mistress like a cat? Really? A tiger sitting on a balcony?”

“...don’t interrupt me. If I tell you to give it up, you give it up.”

“How boring.” The young lady was seething as she stamped out. Cui Yuanyong had no idea if she took his words seriously.