

Noble Ruler 681

Chapter 681: Purplish-Gold Buddha Leaf

The bronze layer fell apart in an instant, and a few flower petals started furling up.

Chu Liuyue's eyes widened slightly as she stared at the beautiful, fully bloomed, and transparent crystal peach blossom—which felt cool to the touch—in her hand.

The petals were oval with jagged edges, and in the middle of it all were a few stamens.

So this is what lies underneath that rough bronze exterior? She was caught between laughter and tears as she played with the item in her hands. It's a teleportation device... but how do I use it?

All of a sudden, the petals closed slightly, and the sensation of this made her subconsciously inject her force into it.

The stamens shook and cut her slender finger, and her crimson blood instantly seeped into the crystal, staining it pink.

She completed the entire process in a smooth and natural way, feeling no fear in the face of this scene. She merely continued to stare intently at the crystal.

With a flash of light, the crystal peach blossom disappeared.

Feeling pain in her left wrist, Chu Liuyue looked down and noticed that a pink peach blossom mark had appeared on the inner side of it.

The finger-sized, fully blossomed flower appeared vivid on her fair and slender wrist.

Did it just recognize me as its master? She wondered in puzzlement. I don't know what this thing is called, but it just transformed into a mark on my wrist before I knew it...

When she circulated her internal force toward the flower mark, she saw a flash of white light and felt as if she was falling. The next instant, she vanished from her spot.

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Darkness flashed across her eyes, and Chu Liuyue felt as if something was pulling her body down. However, that feeling only lasted for a brief moment. Before long, her feet were touching solid ground.

As the darkness gradually faded, she opened her eyes and took in the scene in front of her, her heart nearly jumping out of her mouth as she did so.

This place was none other than her zither room—the place she loved the most in her previous life and where everything in it was arranged according to her preferences. All it took was a glance for her to recognize it. *It's my zither room indeed. The bookshelves, the table, and the zither...*

The shock she felt from coming to this place where everything was all too familiar to her almost made her blood freeze. Her mind had drawn a blank for once, and for a moment, she didn't know what she should do.

It took some time before she inhaled deeply and slowly calmed her racing heart. All sorts of questions filled her mind in the meantime. *The crystal peach blossom really can teleport me around, but why did it bring me here? Although many places came to my mind previously, this is the last place I'd think of! Could it be that... I subconsciously wanted to come here?*

"It's just as well."

"The purplish-gold Buddha leaf is right here!" said the legendary three-eyed eagle out of the blue.

"For real? Are you sure?" Chu Liuyue froze. *I know the layout of the zither room very well, but I don't remember placing a purplish-gold Buddha leaf here.*

The eagle couldn't be more certain about it though. "Of course! Good thing your body has a little of my aura because of the contract you've made with me. The purplish-gold Buddha leaf is still sleeping now, so it's a good time to take it away."

"Where is it then?" Chu Liuyue looked around her. *Since we're already here, we have to make full use of this opportunity! If I have to follow normal procedures, god knows when I'll be able to enter this room!*

Despite returning to this place of her past, she had no time for reminiscing. All she could think about was finding the purplish-gold Buddha leaf.

"It's in the zither," answered the eagle.

"What?!" she exclaimed in surprise, having never expected that the legendary purplish-gold Buddha leaf would be hidden within her phoenix-tailed zither. Her voice shook as she asked with uncertainty, "Do you mean to say that... the leaf is hidden underneath the zither?"

“No, it’s inside that zither.”

The corners of Chu Liuyue’s eyes twitched. “So I have to split open this zither in order to get the purplish-gold Buddha leaf?”

This was a zither that she cherished dearly, so she was very reluctant to destroy it. Besides, despite the zither’s delicate appearance, it was actually made out of an incredibly hard wood. Given her current cultivation level, splitting it apart would take her quite a bit of effort.

The most important thing, however, was that Jiang Yucheng had this place tightly guarded. She would attract herself a lot of trouble if she were to cause a commotion here.

“No need for that. The purplish-gold Buddha leaf is spiritual in nature. Since it chose to stay there, it must be because it likes the zither. All we have to do is lure it out.”

Chu Liuyue heaved a sigh of relief. “And how do we go about doing that?”

“The purplish-gold Buddha tree is a divine tree in our clan, so we have some sort of pull toward each other. I’ll lure it out myself.”

That couldn’t be any better! Chu Liuyue nodded approvingly. *As expected of a divine tree—even its leaves are so hard to handle.*

A black shadow then slowly appeared in front of her. In order not to attract attention, the legendary three-eyed eagle took on a smaller form—which was about the size of a normal eagle—than usual. When it spread its wings, it was only as long as that antique zither.

As it hovered in the air and looked down at the zither, it slowly emanated a heavy pressure that formed a barrier around the zither.

There was a seeming flash in the zither that Chu Liuyue failed to notice, but the eagle did, and it opened its third eye right away.

Meanwhile, there was a strange movement on the zither as if something was running across it.

When Chu Liuyue took a closer look at it, she saw a small undulating ripple. It seemed that there was something inside the zither that wanted to escape, but it could only run back and forth just like this because the zither had been sealed with the legendary three-eyed eagle's aura.

Slowly, the ripple became even smaller, and the little thing finally revealed its true glittering appearance—it was a purplish-gold Buddha leaf.

Chu Liuyue was amazed by it. *So this is the legendary purplish-gold Buddha leaf! Although it looks like an ordinary leaf, it's more like an intelligent spirit!*

The eagle's third eye stared intently at the leaf, and it was just about to put it away when a flurry of footsteps was heard coming from outside.

"Greetings, Eldest Young Master!"

Chu Liuyue was shocked to hear that. *What prompted Jiang Yucheng's sudden visit?!*

Chapter 682: Stolen

Jiang Yucheng's voice floated over. "I'm just here to take a look as usual. You may leave."

"Yes!"

By the sounds of it, it seemed that the guards who were manning the zither room had left.

Jiang Yucheng took out a key to unlock the doors.

Creak!

He entered the room and turned around to close the doors. Then, he looked around the zither room, which was as quiet as usual.

Everything looked about the same as if nothing had happened here. His gaze then shifted to the antique zither.

The broken string hadn't been repaired to date.

As countless memories replayed in his mind as if they had just happened yesterday, Jiang Yucheng's face slowly darkened. He retracted his gaze, walked over to the table at the side, and sat down. He then closed his eyes and slowly let out a long breath.

He failed to catch a good night's rest again with nightmares haunting him all night. Unlike the previous dreams—where he felt excruciating pain as if he was engulfed in a sea of fire—the weather was good in his dream this time. It would've been a pleasant dream had that person not said those words to him— She said that she had someone she liked.

In that dream, Jiang Yucheng heard himself asking who that person was and saying that their engagement couldn't be called off over and over again. But at that time, they weren't formally engaged yet. They merely had the intention, but nothing was done about it.

The Crown Princess had to ascend the throne sooner or later and thus needed to be engaged. Countless young and talented men in the entire Tianling Dynasty adored her, but she ultimately chose him. Although it might've been because of his father's status or even his overall outstanding traits.

Everyone thought they were in love with each other, but he knew that wasn't the case. That person was born noble and flawless, except she didn't love him. She treated him very well, but that applied to everyone else as well.

Thus, he didn't think that it was anything special. In fact, he hated it a little.

No matter what he did, there would always be an invisible barrier shielding her. Although it couldn't be seen or touched, it was there at all times. He thought nobody could get close to her, so he took comfort at the thought that he was ultimately a little closer to her than anyone else if they got married.

He was proven wrong one day. Someone in this world had easily entered her heart, but that person wasn't him.

Although he kept questioning her non-stop in the dream, he didn't do that in reality. He got over his shock in no time and calmly asked her who that person was. That said, he still didn't know that person's identity even now.

At the end of that day, he only said smilingly, "Okay."

They were still engaged to one another in the end though.

...

Jiang Yucheng rubbed his glabella before taking a look at the zither. But the next second, his eyes widened at the sight, and he shot up to walk over to it.

At a glance, nothing seemed wrong with the zither, but he continued staring at a certain corner of it. *Since when was there a purplish-gold mark on it? I come here to take a look at the zither every now and then, so nobody is more familiar with it than me. From what I remember, this mark didn't exist! It wasn't even here on my last visit!*

Just as he extended his hand toward the zither, a cold blast of wind hit him from behind.

Alarm bells went off in his head, and he immediately turned around, only to see a huge black figure swooping in to knock him aside. Before he could even get a clear look at the other party, he was flung to the ground.

Meanwhile, a black figure suddenly appeared from behind the side cabinet.

I didn't even notice that someone was in this room! His eyes widened in shock when he saw that person holding the zither in their arms. "Don't you dare!"

Holding his breath, he did a flip, brandished his knife, and slashed it toward the intruder. However, his knife cut through the air instead, for that person vanished from the spot.

He looked back in shock, only to see a pair of huge wings flying past and disappearing into thin air as well.

Everything happened in just an instant. By the time Jiang Yucheng came back to his senses, he was alone in the zither room.

Blood rushed up his lung cavity because of the huge black shadow's heavy impact, but he couldn't be bothered about that now, for the zither was stolen right in front of him.

Incredulous, he shouted angrily, "Guards! Guards!"

The guard outside rushed in at once. "What's wrong, Eldest Young Master?"

"What's wrong? What do you think?!" Jiang Yucheng swallowed the blood in his mouth. His face was flushed, and his veins were bulging out of anger. Even his expression looked a little sinister. "How did you guys even watch the zither room? How could you allow someone to slip inside here? What's the use of having you people here then?!"

Bewildered, the guards immediately went down on their knees. "Eldest Young Master, we've been standing guard outside all the while and have never left our spot. We didn't let anyone else enter the room!"

It was then that Jiang Yucheng recalled how the intruder vanished from the scene earlier. *There weren't any ripples in the air at all, and they disappeared at once. By the looks of it... they must've used a special method to get in and out of the room.*

“So you've been standing guard outside without letting anyone inside, nor have you all sensed any movements?” asked Jiang Yucheng harshly.

The guards were in trepidation. “W-we're speaking the truth!”

Jiang Yucheng believed them somewhat when he saw the bewildered and fearful looks on their faces. However, it also meant that it would be much harder to find out who the intruder was. *There was a huge pair of black wings too... I don't think I've ever seen such a fiend before...*

“You may leave! Make sure to keep your lips sealed about what happened here!” barked Jiang Yucheng.

The guards exchanged looks with one another. *Eldest Young Master flew into such a huge rage, but he's letting us go just like that?*

Jiang Yucheng gave them a look. “What, can't you understand my order?”

“We understand!” The guards then hurriedly took their leave.

Once they left, Jiang Yucheng turned his gaze to the spot where the zither originally sat—it was empty now.

It was a well-known fact that Thousand View Garden's zither room was one of the late Crown Princess's favorite places. Should the news of the zither being stolen spread, someone would definitely make an issue out of this matter.

When that happened, he—who had been tasked to watch over the zither room—would surely become the target of all criticisms. Therefore, he had to investigate this matter on his own.

At the thought of this, he glanced in the direction the guards left, his eyes gleaming murderously.

Chapter 683: Don't Know

Chu Liuyue opened her eyes again, and she had returned to her own room in Chong Xu Cabinet.

After confirming that she had returned back safely, she sighed deeply. *How close... I was almost discovered by Jiang Yucheng! If I were any later... Who would've thought that Jiang Yucheng would suddenly go to the zither room at this time?*

She removed her black robe and said to the legendary three-eyed eagle, "He didn't see you just now, right?"

"Nope." The legendary three-eyed eagle's voice was as cold and nonchalant as usual, with a hint of contempt. "He's just strong on the outside, but nothing on the inside."

Compared to normal cultivators of the same standard as him, Jiang Yucheng's reaction speed was absolutely horrible.

There had to be something wrong with his body.

Even though the legendary three-eyed eagle didn't have a physical body, it was a legendary fiend after all. Besides, its own body had always been recovering after it made an agreement with Chu Liuyue.

Though it was slow, its aura was indeed strengthening. It was no problem to deal with a Jiang Yucheng.

Upon hearing this, Chu Liuyue relaxed and couldn't help but sneer upon hearing the legendary three-eyed eagle's analysis. "I noticed that too. His abilities... are indeed much weaker than before. It seems like he really is the culprit behind the Messed Yuan Gravel incident back then."

Even though I don't know what method he used to make his cultivation level seem like it didn't change, his abilities have obviously deteriorated. In addition to the bloody wound I gave him previously... Jiang Yucheng's body is probably a mess now.

"But... This item is pretty good... It was such a long distance to go there and back, yet it only used up a small portion of my force," said Chu Liuyue as she looked at the peach blossom mark on the inner side of her left wrist.

The peach blossom was bright as it bloomed gently.

Though she didn't know how this item suddenly brought her to the zither room, the fact that it could bring her back safely and smoothly proved its abilities.

This item was much more useful than she had thought.

“When I see 36 Elder next time, I must thank him properly.” Chu Liuyue then confirmed that all her doors and windows were locked once again and that nobody would disturb her before taking out the ancient zither from her Cosmic Ring and carefully placing it in front of her.

She had almost accepted the purplish-gold Buddha leaf earlier, but she had to stop once Jiang Yucheng came.

Looking at this ancient zither, Chu Liuyue felt conflicted. *I really didn't expect myself to bring it back in such a strange manner... Jiang Yucheng won't dare to broadcast this matter loudly, so I'm not worried that he'll openly investigate the matter.*

After thinking for a while, Chu Liuyue collected her thoughts and prepared to find the purplish-gold Buddha leaf.

After looking left and right, she finally saw a hint of purplish-gold at the corner. It was as if a brush had gently brushed one stroke, and its color was brilliant.

That speck of purplish-gold moved slightly as if it was tempted to escape. But its edge was covered by a light layer of black, so it couldn't struggle free.

This was the seal the legendary three-eyed eagle had hurriedly laid on it.

Chu Liuyue's gaze darkened. “Let's begin!”

Clang!

The legendary three-eyed eagle appeared again.

A gigantic black figure hung high in the sky, and tremendous suppression filled the entire room.

The legendary three-eyed eagle's third eye suddenly opened, and that light layer of black on the ancient zither rapidly disappeared.

A purplish-gold leaf suddenly jumped out.

A bright-red ray shot out of the legendary three-eyed eagle's eyes.

Bam!

That purplish-gold leaf was instantly wrapped up, and it could not move.

With one glance, the exterior was presented in an ovular shape that was shining brightly, looking like a crystal.

Chu Liuyue stretched out her hand and took the item.

It was slightly warm to the touch, and it exuded a light leafy fragrance. In her hands, she could clearly feel the overwhelming lively and energetic aura and strength within.

Chu Liuyue's force seemed to be brought along by this strength as it gradually increased its flowing speed.

"This purplish-gold Buddha leaf is actually this powerful?" Chu Liuyue was shocked in her heart as she widened her eyes slightly.

This purplish-gold Buddha leaf alone contained strength that overwhelmed all the herbs she had seen before.

"This is a leaf from a magical tree, so it naturally can't be compared to ordinary herbs." The legendary three-eyed eagle's voice was filled with faint pride.

Something that could be seen as a magical tree by the legendary three-eyed eagle's clan was definitely something extraordinary.

Chu Liuyue held that small ball in her hands. "So you've locked this temporarily?"

"Yes. When you find the remaining items, I can then restructure my physical body!" Even the calm and cold legendary three-eyed eagle couldn't conceal its excitement when it talked about this.

It had been trapped in the Heavenly Square Cauldron for thousands of years, and it originally thought that it would vanish into thin air after being destroyed by the endless torture and pain. It never expected for its fate to be changed and that it would have a chance of rebirth.

Logically speaking, a purplish-gold Buddha leaf was impossible to appear in a place like the Tianling Dynasty. However, it actually did!

If this wasn't fate from the heavens, what else could it be?

Chu Liuyue was also happy that the legendary three-eyed eagle was another step closer to recovering its physical body. However, she had a question in her heart: "Why would this purplish-gold Buddha leaf suddenly appear in the zither?"

She never told the legendary three-eyed eagle her true identity. Hence, it didn't know that the zither actually belonged to her.

She had played this zither for more than ten years, but she never knew that a purplish-gold Buddha leaf was hidden within. *Could it be that it hid too well, so I never discovered it? After all, if it weren't for the legendary three-eyed eagle's reminder, I wouldn't have known about this.*

"This purplish-gold Buddha leaf should've stayed in this ancient zither for a few years. As to who put it there... I don't know."

Chu Liuyue was quite surprised. "You're saying that... someone purposely put it inside?"

"Of course. In this world, there are only two purplish-gold Buddha trees. One is in my clan, and the other is in an extremely east area. How far is that place from here? It's impossible that a small purplish-gold Buddha leaf can land here single-handedly. Therefore, someone must've purposely brought it here."

Chu Liuyue knitted her brows. *A few years... There was an extra purplish-gold Buddha leaf here, but why didn't I know about it at all?*

Chapter 684: Set Off

After thinking for a while, Chu Liuyue still couldn't figure out the answer, so she could only temporarily set this matter aside.

After carefully putting away the purplish-gold Buddha leaf, she entered into cultivation mode again.

Two days quickly passed.

On the third morning, Chu Liuyue had just finished one cycle when she heard Ye Ranran's voice from outside. "Liuyue, we should set off!"

Chu Liuyue opened her clear eyes, which sparkled brightly within. After connecting her five treasures, not only had her cultivation speed increased, but the force within her body was even purer.

She clenched her fists and stretched—she could even vaguely hear her body cracking. The feeling of being filled with strength that she hadn't experienced in a long time rejuvenated her.

She walked over to open the door.

Ye Ranran and Qiang Wanzhou were already waiting for her together.

"Let's go!"

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After the few of them left the mountain, they went straight for Ping Liang Square. They were going to Dahuang Swamp from there.

The usually lively Xi Ling City seemed a little solemn today, and much fewer people were on the streets.

After they reached Ping Liang Square, they discovered that there were even fewer people here. This was because the Black Guard had already guarded this area in advance.

In the large square, many transportation formations were temporarily closed. Only the one in the middle was open.

The army of 1,000 Black Guards was on standby beside the transportation formation.

A young man wearing black armor was standing at the front of the Black Guards with his back straight and his entire body exuding an intense murderous aura—it was Mu Qinghe!

Even though he was a general, he wore casual clothes during most situations in Xi Ling City. Today, he suddenly wore his armor, and the harsh and ferocious aura that came from killing millions of people during battle was instantly very obvious.

This made the crowd frightened.

Ye Ranran softly said, "Lieutenant Mu looks very different today... No wonder he's the Black Guard's lieutenant!"

He definitely had his abilities to be able to rise up to this position in a short ten years.

Chu Liuyue glanced at him calmly and averted her gaze, with peace in her eyes. *Whatever Mu Qinghe looks like now no longer has anything to do with me.*

Ye Ranran glanced at her and saw that her reaction was calm, so she felt a bit strange. "Liuyue, are you not on good terms with Lieutenant Mu? Do you want to go say hi to him?"

Chu Liuyue smiled slightly. "The Third Princess and the rest will be coming soon. It's not very appropriate at a time like this, right?"

Ye Ranran thought for a moment and agreed. After all, there were 1,000 Black Guards behind Mu Qinghe.

"Let's go over there and wait? I think some people from the other clans have already arrived!"

Chu Liuyue nodded.

The three of them walked in another direction.

Mu Qinghe looked up and coincidentally saw Chu Liuyue and the rest walking over from a distance away.

Quite a few people in the surroundings looked at her.

Curiosity, admiration, respect, envy, jealousy... All sorts of gazes landed on her.

Compared to the previous time they met, Chu Liuyue's body seemed to have changed. She seemed... even more eye-catching than before.

It was very hard to describe such a feeling. All in all, she was like a Yuan Stone that gradually sparkled in a color that belonged to itself after slow refinement. Or perhaps she was like a pearl that was covered in dust. Now that she finally removed that layer of dust, she could sparkle in full glory.

She was completely different from the very careful and restricted girl back in Country Yao Chen a few months ago. In such a short period of time, Chu Liuyue had already become famous in Xi Ling, and her reputation was known to all.

She was in the limelight.

Even though he was the one that brought her over, everything that happened to Chu Liuyue in Xi Ling later on had nothing to do with him, especially after she moved out of the Mu Residence. After that, the two parties didn't even interact at all.

Now that he saw her again, he sighed in his heart for some reason. However, Mu Qinghe only took a glance before rapidly retracting his gaze.

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People from a few clans had already arrived.

Chu Liuyue looked over and saw quite a few familiar faces.

Seeing the three of them, the crowd that was still exchanging pleasantries instantly fell silent.

They had long heard the news that Chong Xu Cabinet would only send three representatives. As a result, the other clans even had extra spots.

They were guessing who Chong Xu Cabinet would send out. Seeing Chu Liuyue's trio at this point, the crowd was mostly shocked. *These three... are the best few disciples in Chong Xu Cabinet! Not talking about Chu Liuyue and Qiang Wanzhou, but even Ye Ranran has displayed extraordinary heavenly doctor talent during the clan competition. Dahuang Swamp is a dangerous place after all. How could Chong Xu Cabinet really bear to let all three of them out at once? Are they not afraid that they will get into trouble?*

Facing all sorts of gazes from the crowd, Chu Liuyue ignored them, and Qiang Wanzhou didn't care at all.

Ye Ranran... Anyway, she was following Liuyue and Wanzhou, so what was there to be scared of?

Therefore, the trio found a place to stand by the side as calmly as ever. Thereafter, a few people went to greet them, and Chu Liuyue and the rest also answered them in return.

"It looks like Chong Xu Cabinet is still pretty confident in you all. They actually let all of you come together?" A sharp voice was heard.

Chu Liuyue lazily looked up.

Ning Jiaojiao.

Chu Liuyue smiled and slowly said, “Ms. Ning, are you worried about our safety? With so many people around, I think nothing much will happen. Don’t you agree?”

Ning Jiaojiao lightly snorted. “One can never be too careful! I was just casually talking about it. I don’t have any other meaning!”

Compared to before, the attitude she had toward Chu Liuyue had a slight change. This was still a world where the strong were respected after all.

Chu Liuyue first took the highest ranking during the Wan Zheng Competition and later won three matches consecutively during the clan competition.

Ning Jiaojiao was also present back then. Even though she was filled with indignation, she had to admit that Chu Liuyue’s abilities couldn’t be underestimated.

Before she came out this time, her father—Ning Binghai—had specifically instructed her not to stir up trouble.

Ning Jiaojiao had suffered before, so she naturally didn’t dare to be too overboard this time. She just wanted to let her mouth run.

Of course, nobody knew what exactly she was thinking.

Seeing that the other knew how to retreat at the right time, Chu Liuyue didn't care much as her lips curled up, and she didn't say anything.

Ning Jiaojiao then secretly heaved a sigh of relief. Suddenly, her gaze focused, and she asked uncontrollably, "You broke through and became a stage-five warrior?!"

Chu Liuyue nonchalantly looked at her. *Isn't it very obvious?*

Ning Jiaojiao then realized that she had lost her composure as she bit her lips and averted her gaze. However, she was still quite shocked. *How long has Chu Liuyue been in Xi Ling? She actually broke through and became a stage-five warrior from a stage-three warrior? Then, isn't she even stronger?*

Not only Ning Jiaojiao, but even the crowd at the side were all quite stunned.

"What's so good about a stage-five warrior?" A cold and mocking voice came from behind.

Chapter 685: Alliance

The surroundings fell silent.

Chu Liuyue turned around and saw that it was people from the Purple Xiao Sword Sect.

This was said by the man at the front. He looked like he was 27 or 28, and he was very skinny and tall. His looks were ordinary, and the ends of his hair were glowing with faint purple.

Song Qingnian? Chu Liuyue recognized him.

He was the eldest son of Purple Xiao Sword Sect's Master—Song Lian—and he was also the young master of the sect.

He is pretty talented. If I don't remember wrongly, he had just broken through and become an advanced stage-seven warrior back then. Now, it seems like he didn't continue breaking through.

However, it was natural that he didn't care about a stage-five Chu Liuyue with his cultivation level and abilities.

“Senior Brother Qingnian, she's the champion of the Wan Zheng Competition and had challenged three people during the clan competition. She even won all of them, so it's hard for her not to be proud...”

Chu Liuyue glanced at the woman talking behind him. *Nice, it's another familiar person.*

Yang Qin'er—her words seemed to be advising Song Qingnian, but unconcealable envy was written all over her face.

Chu Liuyue was innocent. “I was just standing here previously, and I don't think I said anything, right? Why did I suddenly become proud?”

Yang Qin'er was stumped.

Song Qingnian was still the experienced one as he scrutinized Chu Liuyue from head to toe. As if he didn't hear her words, he said, "You're just a little nothing. Qin'er, when you experience more of the world, you naturally won't care about this kind of... You just have to cultivate properly in the future, and you won't lose to her."

Chu Liuyue raised her brows and secretly admired the other girl in her heart. *How long has it been, yet Yang Qin'er is already on very good terms with the people in the Purple Xiao Sword Sect? Even Song Qingnian is telling her this.*

In her memory, Song Qingnian was very arrogant due to his identity as the Purple Xiao Sword Sect's young master. Seeing this today, his old habit didn't change at all.

Yang Qin'er seemed to blush a little. "Thank you for the compliment, Senior Brother Qingnian."

Seeing her smile, Song Qingnian patted her arm and walked to the other side with the rest.

"You—" Ye Ranran was infuriated and was about to go forward to argue with them.

Chu Liuyue pulled her back and gently shook her head.

Ye Ranran was angered. "Liuyue, that person talked about you like that. Are you just going to let it be?"

Chu Liuyue smiled lightly. "He just scolded me with two sentences, and I wasn't physically hurt anyway. Why do you want to care so much about them? Many people have talked about us privately, so are we going to pursue the matter with them one by one?"

"But they did it openly..."

"Almost everyone is here. Let's be more low-key in case we attract any trouble."

"...Okay." Ye Ranran's heart seemed to be stuffed with anger, but looking at Chu Liuyue's determined stance, she could only listen to the latter. She glanced at Song Qingnian and softly said, "What's so good about being the Purple Xiao Sword Sect's young master? When he was your age, Liuyue, he was so much weaker than you!"

Chu Liuyue curved her lips slightly. "I know."

Song Qingnian was a few years older than her. Back then, he wasn't convinced by her and went to challenge her. In the end, Song Qingnian was beaten by her until he would turn around and take another route whenever he saw her, and he didn't even attend the routinal palace banquets.

Qiang Wanzhou glanced at Song Qingnian coldly and retracted his gaze.

Song Qingnian faintly felt his back was chilly, but he didn't see anything when he turned around.

On the other hand, Chu Liuyue's trio was softly talking about something, and their expressions were calm.

Song Qingnian coldly chuckled. “Qin’er, you’re right. This Chu Liuyue is arrogant on another level. When we reach Dahuang Swamp, I’ll show her who’s boss!”

Yang Qin’er lowered her head and didn’t say a word.

...

“Liuyue!” A surprised greeting floated over.

Chu Liuyue looked up, and her face was filled with smiles.

A familiar face appeared in front of her—it was Mu Hongyu.

She originally came together with Dragon Teeth Mountain’s people. However, she saw Chu Liuyue from afar when she walked at the front, so she rushed over first.

“I knew you would go too! Hm? Why are there only three people from Chong Xu Cabinet?” Mu Hongyu had been busy cultivating with Jian Shuye lately, so she didn’t know anything about the outside world.

Chu Liuyue nodded. “My senior brothers and senior sisters couldn’t find the time to come, so only the three of us are here.”

A snicker came out from the side.

Song Qingnian's face was filled with mockery as he said to the people beside him, "Hah, you're saying it nicely. Who doesn't know that they're in this situation because Chong Xu Cabinet can't send anyone out?"

It really made him feel like his status had been lowered when Chong Xu Cabinet—which had less than 100 people—was placed in the same position as them as the four biggest clans.

Chu Liuyue's smile faded away.

But Mu Hongyu smiled coldly and said, "Isn't it enough that they sent the three of them? I remember that many of us here had participated in the clan competition, right? Did any of you win against Liuyue?"

Naturally, not everybody could fight with Chu Liuyue during the clan competition, but who didn't know that she had won against a stage-six warrior?

Quite a few people present weren't even stage-six warriors...

Chu Liuyue was indeed strong—this was unquestionable.

The surroundings immediately fell into silence.

Song Qingnian knitted his brows. "Who are you? How dare you be overboard in front of me?"

Yang Qin'er softly said, "Senior Brother Qingnian, she's the one with the Faint Yuan Body..."

Song Qingnian squinted his eyes. "You're the slave that Jian Fengchi spent six million white crystals to buy?"

Once he said this, the crowd gradually looked over with strange expressions. Anyone could hear the mockery in his voice.

In the Tianling Dynasty, people with the identity as slaves were lower than the rest. But Mu Hongyu had the Faint Yuan Body, so most people were more envious and jealous of her.

With this physical strength, she didn't need to be afraid of being looked down on when she became a strong warrior in the future. But now that her identity was singled out, it was obvious that Song Qingnian was purposely making it difficult for her.

Chu Liuyue's face turned cold.

A handsome young man had already walked forward and calmly said, "Hongyu is my master's final disciple. Do you have any doubts about that, Young Master Song?"

Song Qingnian's expression changed slightly.

The surrounding people also looked shocked. *Mu Hongyu is actually Jian Shuye's final disciple? Then, her identity must be extraordinary...*

One had to know that all these years, Jian Shuye had only accepted three specialized disciples.

Mu Hongyu was the fourth one!

Jian Shuye seemed not to care about her identity as a slave. Since he was willing to do this, it was enough to prove that he thought very highly of Mu Hongyu.

In other words, he was Mu Hongyu's backer!

Even though Song Qingnian was normally very arrogant and looked down on others, he wasn't stupid and knew who he could offend and who he could not.

Dragon Teeth Mountain's Jian Shuye was someone that protected his disciples a lot. Even his father didn't dare to go head-on against Jian Shuye, let alone him!

He coldly snorted and harshly waved his sleeves, turning his face.

That young man walked to Chu Liuyue and smiled gently with good manners. "Ms. Chu, I am Zhu Hong. Before we came, Master and Young Master specifically instructed us to take care of you. I wonder if you will be willing to go with us during this Dahuang Swamp journey?"

Jian Shuye and Jian Fengchi? Chu Liuyue was dazed for a moment. Seeing Zhu Hong and the rest's sincere expressions, she smiled. "Sure! Thank you all then!"

Chapter 686: Things of the Past

The relationships between the various sects varied, but from Dragon Teeth Mountain's attitude, it was clear that they intended on taking care of Chong Xu Cabinet.

Many people exchanged looks with one another as fear sprouted in their hearts.

Ever since Chong Xu Cabinet fell from grace after encountering an ambush, Dragon Teeth Mountain had somehow become the boss of all sects.

Although Purple Xiao Sword Sect was by no means weak, they were still a little lacking compared to Dragon Teeth Mountain. Hence, they would try their best to avoid starting a conflict with the latter. Of course, it went without saying for the other sects.

We owe Dragon Teeth Mountain another favor, thought Chu Liuyue. Oh well, this will probably save us a lot of unnecessary trouble during the trip. Although I'm not afraid of trouble, it's a hassle to deal with them.

Both sects' members then introduced themselves to each other.

Having seen and heard of Chu Liuyue's and Wan Qiangzhou's capabilities, as well as Ye Ranran's astonishing talent, Dragon Teeth Mountain's disciples treated the trio very politely.

There might be many disciples in Dragon Teeth Mountain, but most of them were pretty much like their clan master, Jian Shuye—upstanding and forthright. They didn't have many fancy tricks up their sleeves, although speaking of it, Jian Fengchi was their most rebellious and unrestrained disciple. Thus, Chu Liuyue had always had a pretty good impression of them.

Anyway, both sides found out that they got along quite well after a brief exchange and thus became closer to one another.

The people around them, however, looked at them with complicated expressions. Some were baffled, some were envious, and some others were disdainful, but neither Chu Liuyue nor the rest of her party paid any attention to them.

...

“The Third Princess has arrived!”

Shangguan Wan finally appeared when everyone else had arrived.

The Black Guards on both sides had long cleared a path for her, and she slowly walked over with two elders from the royal family—Elder Qiu Xi and Elder Duanmu Chun—in tow.

Walking further behind was Jiang Yucheng. He didn’t walk next to his fiancée because they had yet to hold their wedding.

A hush instantly fell over the entire Ping Liang Square before the crowd paid their respects in unison. “May the Third Princess live for a thousand years!”

Shangguan Wan must’ve been looking forward to this scene for a very long time. Standing among the crowd, Chu Liuyue went down on her knees and bowed as well, her eyes gleaming with sarcasm when she lowered her head. But when she rose to her feet once more, she had assumed her usual expression.

Standing still, Shangguan Wan swept her gaze across the crowd. “The purpose of this trip to Dahuang Swamp is to seek medicine for the Emperor. Although there are valuable treasures at Dahuang Swamp, it doesn’t change the fact that it’s a very dangerous place. I’m grateful that all of you here are willing to go with me and lend me a helping hand.”

Her speech sounded really polite. “I’ll give a handsome reward to the person who can help me find the treasures I need! Except for those few treasures, you’re welcome to keep any treasures that you find!”

Many people’s eyes lit up in eagerness. Everyone here had mustered up their courage to venture into Dahuang Swamp just for this reason, so they were naturally delighted to hear this. “Thank you, Third Princess!”

Shangguan Wan smiled. “I hope this will be a smooth and worthwhile trip for everyone! Lieutenant Mu, let’s go.”

Mu Qinghe took a step forward and cupped his fist in his other hand. “The army of 1,000 Black Guards will be split into two teams. The first team will be at the front, while the second team will be at the back. Make sure to protect the Third Princess and everyone else’s safety!”

As he spoke, he lifted his right arm. The Black Guards behind him immediately parted in the middle, clearly dividing themselves into two teams.

The sound of their iron boots stomping on the lapis lazuli ground was extraordinarily powerful.

As the first team of 500 Black Guards marched up to the transportation formation, Shangguan Wan and her entourage followed behind, with Mu Qinghe standing right next to her to protect her. Behind them were the various sects’ disciples, and finally, the second team of Black Guards.

The people standing around them went down on one knee and shouted, "We bid farewell to the Third Princess!"

"Activate!" When Mu Qinghe gave that order, the transportation formation started spinning really quickly.

All of them vanished the next instant.

...

Dahuang Swamp was located really far away from Xi Ling, so a lot of traveling time was still needed even with the transportation formation. But the good thing was that there wasn't much spatial turbulence because this transportation formation was specifically built for this purpose and was consistently maintained. Therefore, everyone wasn't affected much.

Mu Qinghe had long gotten his subordinates to prepare water pearls that would be specifically used in the transportation formation, so there were more than enough water pearls to illuminate everyone even though they made quite a large crowd.

Such water pearls were expensive, so the average person wasn't able to afford one. But because Shangguang Wan was the Third Princess, possessing a hundred of them was nothing to her.

The scale of this trip left many marveling in amazement. "As expected of the Third Princess. The way she uses water pearls is like money is nothing to her."

“Who are you compared to the Third Princess? The entire Tianling Dynasty will be hers in a few months, let alone a few water pearls.”

“That’s true! I heard that the scale of the late Crown Princess’s expeditions was even greater than this. It’s a pity that she only brought the Black Guards with her, so we couldn’t get a chance to see it.”

“The late Crown Princess’s status is almost on par with that of the Emperor. Even though she was a princess, she could mobilize tens of thousands of Black Guards. They can’t be compared since the Third Princess hasn’t... Then again, those are just matters of the past. It’s pointless to bring them up!”

...

Even though the people around Chu Liuyue whispered really softly, she could hear them all since she had connected her five treasures. Looking nonchalant, she raised her head toward a certain direction.

Right ahead, Mu Qinghe was currently whispering something to Shangguan Wan. He seemed to be explaining Dahuang Swamp’s situation to her. “...Your Highness, we’ll be arriving at the western border’s transportation formation first. From there, we’ll be transported to Dahuang Swamp. The mist stretches for hundreds of miles within Dahuang Swamp, so you have to...”

Mu Qinghe carefully explained Dahuang Swamp’s situation, while Shangguan Wan carefully listened.

Although Chu Liuyue couldn’t see Shangguan Wan’s expression from her position, she could still see her nodding her head seriously from time to time. She tugged the corners of her lips as she thought to herself, *Mu Qinghe’s explanation sure is detailed. There wasn’t anyone to tell me the dangers of Dahuang Swamp in such detail when I entered it back then. I can’t even remember how many dangerous encounters I’ve experienced there. The knowledge he’s sharing with her is gained through years of battle at Dahuang Swamp, but it’s mine too.*

The outside world only knows that he volunteered to join the Black Guard, made great military achievements in just a decade, and suppressed the rebellion in Dahuang Swamp. With his military power, he made a heroic contribution in stabilizing my position as the Crown Princess. However, only a few know that I entered Dahuang Swamp a few times as well. The current Mu Qinghe might be all formidable now, but he wasn't like this right from the start. Without me helping him in the dark, he probably would've died at Dahuang Swamp. That being said, these are all... things of the past now.

Chapter 687: Dahuang Swamp

Calmly and idly, Chu Liuyue listened to their conversation. From the sound of it, nothing major had happened at Dahuang Swamp in the past two years. Then again, it was only natural that the situation was much more stable now since Black Guards were stationed there.

But as those Black Guards were just responsible for guarding the place, it was more convenient for Shangguan Wan to bring a few of her own men since she was there to look for a few herbs and the legendary fiend's blood.

...

As this was Shangguan Wan's first time going to Dahuang Swamp, she made sure to listen carefully to Mu Qinghe's every word and keep them in mind. By listening to what Mu Qinghe had to say now, she could gain some confidence when she was there later. Actually, she had no interest in going to such a dangerous and remote place. If it weren't because she had to find a suitable place to execute her plan, she might not ever set foot in this piece of land.

As the Tianling Dynasty's Third Princess, the rumored rare treasures and legacies held no interest to her. Besides, she would be ascending the throne in a few months. The entire Tianling Dynasty would be hers by then, so there wasn't a need for her to risk her life by going to Dahuang Swamp.

Not only was it dangerous, but there also were no promises that one could find any treasures.

“That’s the general situation of Dahuang Swamp. Feel free to ask questions if there’s anything you don’t understand. I—as your lieutenant—will definitely tell you everything I know.” Mu Qinghe changed the way he addressed himself after putting on his armor to lead the army.

Shangguan Wan smiled. “I got it. Thank you, Lieutenant Mu. This trip would’ve been dangerous without you.”

Mu Qinghe lowered his head. “You flatter me. This is what I should do.”

“No need to be modest. We might have to trouble you further once we arrive at Dahuang Swamp. Don’t you agree, Yucheng?” As Shangguan Wan spoke, she looked at Jiang Yucheng, who was standing next to her.

But Jiang Yucheng was deep in thought, so he didn’t catch what she was saying.

“Yucheng? Yucheng?”

Only then did Jiang Yucheng snap back to his senses and look up.

“What’s wrong?” Shangguan Wan furrowed her eyebrows when she saw him seemingly waking up from a trance. *For some reason, he seems distracted during the entire journey. What Mu Qinghe said earlier is really important, yet he didn’t listen to him at all? If I remember correctly, he’s never been to Dahuang Swamp either. Someone as cautious as him ought to be very concerned about the situation there. It’s strange that he seems so distracted...*

“Did you not hear what Lieutenant Mu said earlier?”

Jiang Yucheng let out a cough before he adjusted his clothes. “Oh, he’s briefed me about it.”

Shangguan Wan was skeptical though. *As his subordinate, it makes sense that Mu Qinghe would tell him about Dahuang Swamp’s situation in advance, but... Something is off about him today.*

“Are you okay, Yucheng? Did you overwork yourself in the past few days?” Concern surfaced in her eyes. *He’s been looking for the person who almost assassinated him lately. Did he overwork himself because of this?*

Jiang Yucheng’s gaze shifted slightly, but he neither denied nor admitted it. “A little, I guess. But I’ve left those matters to Sun Qi and the others to settle.”

Given his current status, it’s inevitable that he feels disgraced since he couldn’t find the person who attempted to assassinate him after so many days. Shangguan Wan thought her guess was right as she studied his expression. “Don’t worry. Sun Qi has always handled things well.”

Jiang Yucheng smiled and nodded. He then silently glanced at the back before quickly retracting his gaze.

After a while, he suddenly asked, “If my memory serves me right, Mu Hongyu possesses the Faint Yuan Body, right?”

Mu Qinghe nodded.

“What’s wrong? Why did you mention her out of the blue?” asked Shangguan Wan out of puzzlement.

“It’s nothing, actually. I heard the others talking about her when we came earlier, so I got a little curious... After all, such a physique hasn’t appeared in a millennium. I hear that people with this physique can travel through space at will?”

“That’s right. Yu Xiang Hall went through a lot of trouble catching her back then. If her physique wasn’t so rare, how could Jian Fengchi possibly bear to spend six million white crystals on her?” Even though Shangguan Wan spent most of her time in the palace, she knew everything that happened outside. In fact, she couldn’t resist sneaking glances at Mu Hongyu when she saw her earlier. But other than the latter’s delicate appearance and cheerful disposition, she couldn’t see anything special about her.

“I didn’t expect Dragon Teeth Mountain’s clan master to take her as his disciple though...” commented Shangguan Wan calmly. *Although I look down on slaves, Jian Shuye doesn’t seem to care about such things. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have insisted on marrying that woman of ordinary status back then. Speaking of which, Jian Shuye and Jian Fengchi are considered Mu Hongyu’s benefactors.*

“She appears to be on close terms with Chu Liuyue though?” said Shangguan Wan with a slight frown.

Mu Qinghe explained, “Mu Hongyu is actually from Country Yao Chen. Chu Liuyue and her were from the same school.”

“No wonder.” Shangguan Wan nodded in understanding, but inwardly, her detest for Mu Hongyu and Chu Liuyue increased.

Meanwhile, Jiang Yucheng cast a meaningful look at Mu Hongyu. *Could she be the one who broke into the zither room and stole the zither that day?*

...

After some time, a hint of light finally appeared in the darkness.

“We’re here!” said Mu Qinghe in his deep voice.

Everyone started to quiet down out of nervousness.

The light in front of them quickly spread to reveal an exit ahead.

The Black Guards in the lead were the first to come out, followed by Shangguan Wan and the rest.

Ye Ranran was a little worried and excited at the same time. “Are we at Dahuang Swamp already?”

Chu Liuyue was about to say, ‘not yet,’ but she swallowed the words down upon catching herself in the nick of time.

They followed everyone else outside.

...

After experiencing a powerful suppression, they finally saw the bright sky.

Chu Liuyue felt a little dizzy as her feet stepped on solid ground. She closed her eyes for a moment and waited for her eyes to adjust to the light before opening them again.

In front of her was a vast and boundless desert with blinding gold sand and undulating sand hills, where the blazing heat made everything seem a little distorted.

Marvels and exclamations could be heard. "So this is Dahuang Swamp..."

"We're only at the edge of the western border. We have to go further inside to get to Dahuang Swamp," said Mu Qinghe.

While the person who spoke earlier let out an awkward cough, many people were surprised to hear what Mu Qinghe said. *We're not there yet? Then, what does the real Dahuang Swamp look like?*

Mu Qinghe then made a hand gesture and ordered, "Open, Team One!"

The 500 Black Guards in front immediately turned around and marched to the side, stopping only about 500 steps away from the transportation formation. As they let out a cry, they lifted their hands in unison.

Golden sand flew into the air to reveal a huge transportation formation underneath it.

Chu Liuyue's eyebrows rose slightly. *Oh? The transportation formation I set up is still here.*

Chapter 688: Mystic Forest

There used to be a transportation formation that connected the western border to Dahuang Swamp—something that was left behind from the time of the Tianling Dynasty’s ancestor. However, it was no longer working due to the destruction caused by the elements and people over the years.

The current transportation formation was specifically set up by Shangguan Yue so that the Black Guards could conveniently travel to and from Dahuang Swamp. However, not many people knew about this matter.

...

Shangguan Wan’s eyes lit up when she saw the transportation formation. “This transportation formation looks rather new. Did you specifically set this up, Lieutenant Mu?”

Mu Qinghe froze for a second, but he soon assumed his usual facial expression and calmly answered, “It was left behind by the late Crown Princess.”

The smile on Shangguan Wan’s face crumbled slightly. “...So it was left behind by my sister... I didn’t know that...”

Jiang Yucheng’s eyes shifted slightly as he took another look at the transportation formation.

Chu Liuyue thought that Mu Qinghe would give more details about the transportation formation, such as when and why it was built. But contrary to her expectations, he mentioned none of that.

Instead, he only said, "This transportation formation is rather large and well-maintained, so we can all travel together to the inner parts of Dahuang Swamp."

With a forced smile plastered on her face, Shangguan Wan nodded and no longer posed any other questions about the transportation formation.

As Chu Liuyue fiddled with the Cosmic Ring on her finger, she thought, *Tsk, isn't it just a transportation formation? What's there to hide about it?*

The rest of the people, on the other hand, seemed oblivious to the raging undercurrents of emotions surging here. For most of them, all they were thinking about was how they were about to set foot into Dahuang Swamp.

Under Mu Qinghe's leadership, the group was transported to Dahuang Swamp through this transportation formation.

...

"This transportation formation seems really stable too... There's not much turbulence at all... In fact, it's pretty similar to the one we used earlier!"

"The first formation was personally set up by the Ancestor and was carefully maintained throughout the years, so it's only natural that it works well. As for this one... Wasn't it left behind by the late Crown Princess?"

"The late Crown Princess was born with a Tianjing Yuan meridian, and her talent and capabilities were unparalleled. Setting up a transportation formation is nothing to her."

“It’s a pity what happened to her in the end... It was rumored that she was highly likely to be the second person to attempt to break through the ninth stage of cultivation... What a shame!”

Whispers from all directions could be heard.

As Chu Liuyue quietly listened to these conversations, she glanced at Shangguan Wan—who was standing stiffly at the front—while smirking. *Even though my past self has died and Shangguan Wan has taken over my position, some things—like the fact that she can never possess a Tianjing Yuan meridian—just cannot be changed or replaced. That point alone is enough for her to feel indignant forever. People will always be comparing her to me now that she’s sitting in my position. Whether or not she will do better or worse than me will depend on her own capabilities.*

All of a sudden, Chu Liuyue felt that it was worthwhile for her to make this trip. *Although it’s still not time for me to show my hand and teach these people a lesson, watching them suffer unspeakable indignation isn’t bad either! Dahuang Swamp might be the place where Mu Qinghe became famous, but it also used to be my territory!*

“Liuyue, what are you laughing about?” asked Mu Hongyu out of puzzlement.

Chu Liuyue’s smile deepened as she blinked and said, “Nothing. I’m just a little excited at the thought that we’ll be reaching Dahuang Swamp soon and that we might be able to find a lot of treasures.”

Mu Hongyu—who had no doubts about her words—chuckled. “Me too!”

“Same here!” Ye Ranran raised her hand.

Only Qiang Wanzhou remained as aloof as ever. He merely shot them a quick glance before looking down again.

...

After some time, they finally arrived at the transportation formation's exit.

Many people could be seen getting increasingly restless as what lay outside the transportation formation was Dahuang Swamp this time.

Mu Qinghe looked at them and said, "Get ready to exit, everyone!"

A powerful suppression hit them once more, and they came pouring out of the transportation formation. The travel time was shorter this time, so everyone adapted to the brightness around them as soon as they came out.

When Chu Liuyue came out, she heard a collective gasp around her that made her halt her footsteps and look around.

Beneath her feet was a grayish-white rock that seemingly stretched for tens of miles, while behind her was a golden desert that looked very similar to the one they saw earlier. A lush forest was on her left, and a vast lake was on her right. The lake—which appeared to be connected to the sky on the far horizon—was slightly silvery in color, making it look like a huge mirror.

"This rocky area is the heart of Dahuang Swamp. It's also known as the Gray Triangle because it connects the Red Moon Desert, the Mirror Lake, and the Mystic Forest together," explained Mu Qinghe to

Shangguan Wan, although he deliberately raised his voice this time so that the others could clearly hear what he was saying too.

“Things are very different at those three places, and so are the dangers lurking inside. Even someone who’s experienced with this place might not be able to completely avoid the dangers here, so make sure to be careful at all times and avoid moving alone.”

Everyone became alert at once. They only heard the rumors about Dahuang Swamp in the past, but now that they were here to see it for themselves, they finally realized what sort of place this was.

Mu Qinghe turned to Shangguan Wan. “Where would you like to go first, Your Highness?”

Although Shangguan Wan was also amazed by the scene in front of her, she didn’t show it on her face. She appeared as calm and composed as before as she mulled over the question for a moment. “Legend has it that a legendary fiend once appeared in the Mystic Forest. May I know if you’ve seen it before, Lieutenant Mu?”

Mu Qinghe shook his head. “I’ve never seen it before, but... It’s true that there are many high-level fiends in Mystic Forest.”

Shangguan Wan was a little disappointed at first, but she couldn’t help but feel somewhat excited and curious when she heard the second part of what Mu Qinghe said. She used to own a fiend, but it was burned to death when her Yuan meridian was destroyed. She hadn’t been able to contract with a new fiend because her Yuan meridian hadn’t recovered, so this trip might be an opportunity for her.

The others were unable to hide their eagerness as well, and all of them turned to look at Shangguan Wan.

“I think the rumors about the legendary fiend might be true. Who knows? We might be able to find it in the Mystic Forest, so I feel that we should head there first!” Shangguan Wan finally made her decision after a brief hesitation.

Mu Qinghe, however, appeared a little hesitant. “Your Highness, the Mystic Forest is the most dangerous of the three places. Are you sure... you want to go there first?”

The most dangerous of the three places? Isn't that even better? Shangguan Wan nodded her head affirmatively. “For the sake of the Emperor, I have to go there no matter how dangerous it may be! The Mystic Forest it is then!”

Mu Qinghe didn't bother to argue further, and he just led the way. “This way, Your Highness.”

As everyone walked in the mentioned direction, Mu Qinghe said, “The mist I told you about earlier actually comes from the Mystic Forest. Once we're inside, you have to use your force to set up a barrier for yourself. Or else... the poisonous mist will enter your pearl of essence.”

Shangguan Wan stopped in her tracks, her face looking ashen. *How am I going to do that with a destroyed Yuan meridian?*

Chapter 689: Taking the Risk

The force in her body was forcibly stored using a special method. Although she had quite a bit of force, it would ultimately run out. She couldn't convert the Heaven and Earth Force into her own, and there was no telling how long they would stay in the Mystic Forest.

Just when she was fretting about this matter, the distant dark clouds started rolling in over them, and the clear and blue sky darkened in no time. From a distance, it looked like a drop of thick black ink spreading across an azure-blue painting.

Roar!

An alarming roar suddenly resounded through the mountains, striking fear in them.

“What was that?” asked Shangguan Wan upon sensing a dangerous aura.

Mu Qinghe took a look in the direction the roar came from. “I think a high-grade fiend is about to break through!”

“To be able to trigger such a phenomenon... Could it be a ninth-grade fiend?”

Although an ordinary high-grade fiend would also cause quite a commotion when it was about to break through, it wasn't to this extent. The dark clouds were currently gathering in the sky swiftly, and they were starting to loom over the Mystic Forest.

“I've never encountered such a situation, but... It's likely to be a ninth-grade fiend indeed,” answered Mu Qinghe.

Shangguan Wan's eyes lit up as all the worries and anxiety in her instantly vanished, leaving behind only curiosity and eagerness. *Once that ninth-grade fiend breaks through, it'll become a legendary fiend! Not*

only can I retrieve its blood by then, but I can also make it become mine and contract with it once my Yuan meridian fully recovers!

The thought of a legendary fiend being under her control excited very much, for nobody—except the Tianling Dynasty’s ancestor—had contracted with a legendary fiend in the past millennium. Even Shangguan Wan only had a ninth-grade Nine-Colored Heavenly Pheasant for a fiend, and that seemingly small difference in grade meant a huge disparity between a ninth-grade fiend and a legendary fiend.

If I can contract with a legendary fiend, I can easily surpass Shangguan Yue’s achievements! Under her sleeves, Shangguan Wan slowly clenched her fists. Her throat felt a little parched, and all the blood in her body seemed to be circulating faster.

Throughout the journey, she had heard so many comments about Shangguan Yue. Strictly speaking though, people had been comparing her to her deceased half-sister ever since she assumed this position—be it their cultivation talent and cultivation base or even their appearance and mannerisms. She couldn’t avoid these comparisons, and she would almost always lose to the other woman.

Despite having to go to great lengths every day to keep her physical condition a secret and handle all sorts of Tianling Dynasty affairs, Shangguan Wan was still living in Shangguan Yue’s shadow. Even after Shangguan Yue’s undignified passing, many people still thought that she was irreplaceable.

Things had been like this when Shangguan Yue was alive, and they remained unchanged even after she died. Thus, Shangguan Wan—who had had enough of this life—desperately wanted her Yuan meridian to recover and her cultivation level to increase as soon as possible. She wanted to prove to everyone that she was more outstanding than Shangguan Yue.

“This is a chance not to be missed. I have to get the legendary fiend blood for my father!” After saying that, Shangguan Wan strode off and headed straight in the direction where the dark clouds were gathering.

Jiang Yucheng's countenance turned somewhat serious as he glanced at the overcast sky and followed her.

With Mu Qinghe quickly leading the way, everyone headed in the Mystic Forest's direction.

...

After leaving the Gray Triangle, they entered the Mystic Forest, which appeared no different from an ordinary forest at a glance. But because Mu Qinghe had warned everyone of the dangers within earlier, they used their force to set up a barrier around themselves upon entering the forest.

Chu Liuyue's gaze flickered as she glanced at the lush forest and asked the legendary three-eyed eagle inwardly, "Do you know what fiend is currently breaking through in there?"

She figured that the eagle—which was also a legendary fiend itself—could sense a thing or two about it.

"Because we're quite far away from it and it deliberately concealed its aura, I can't tell what it is." The eagle's voice turned solemn. "But it must be a formidable fiend to be able to conceal its aura so thoroughly."

So there really is a legendary fiend in the Mystic Forest? Even though Chu Liuyue was surprised to hear that, she hid her emotions, and like everyone else, started casting a barrier around herself before walking ahead.

...

It was quiet in the forest, save for the rustling sounds made by the dangling tree leaves that sashayed in the wind and the thick piles of fallen leaves when stepped on.

Many people couldn't conceal their curiosity, so they would look around their surroundings as they walked. Even though the Mystic Forest looked pretty much like any other forest, everyone put their guards up when they recalled Mu Qinghe's earlier warning.

It was hard to see what was going on in the sky after entering the lush and dense forest, but from time to time, they could hear the roars that were becoming clearer and clearer. This somewhat set Shangguan Wan's mind at ease, for it meant that they were indeed getting closer to the legendary fiend.

"Why is it so quiet here?" asked Jiang Yucheng after walking some distance into the forest. He was the first person to sense the odd situation.

Elder Qiu Xi stroked his beard and explained, "It's probably because the ninth-grade beast is about to break through, so the other fiends have run off to hide. Legend has it that heavenly lightning will be triggered when high-grade beasts break through. If they survive the lightning, they'll successfully become a real legendary fiend. Hence, it's natural that the other fiends would run off."

Elder Duanmu Chun nodded in agreement. "Elder Qiuxi is right. Such a phenomenon has only ever existed in legends. I didn't expect that we'd encounter such a situation the moment we arrived at Dahuang Swamp. How lucky we are!"

Not everyone in this world could get a chance to witness this phenomenon.

"I see." What the two elders had said put Jiang Yucheng's mind at ease.

Elder Qiu Xi laughingly said, “Didn’t Lieutenant Mu say that he’s never seen anything like this before? The Third Princess’s filial piety and bravery to seek medicine for the Emperor despite the dangers involved must’ve moved the heavens. That must be why we’re lucky enough to see this!”

Shangguan Wan’s mood improved greatly when she heard that. “I’m willing to do anything as long as I can help the Emperor. Besides, I have nothing to be afraid of with everyone around. All we have to do now is find that fiend and wait for it to break through to become a legendary fiend so that I can draw its blood to take back for the Emperor!”

Just then, the sky above them darkened considerably, which made everyone look up.

“What’s wrong? Why did the sky suddenly darken?”

“Have the dark clouds gathered here as well? They can’t possibly move that fast, can they?”

All of a sudden, someone shrieked, “Look! That tree is moving!”

Chapter 690: Doubt

That got everyone’s attention.

Countless pairs of eyes turned to the direction that person was pointing in, and sure enough, they saw a tree with a thick trunk slowly moving on the right side of them. If one looked carefully, they would see that the ground was rippling underneath the thick piles of leaves. It was precisely because of this that caused the tree to shift to the side.

Without any warning, an arm-sized tree root poked out from underneath the fallen leaves. It turned out that underneath these piles of leaves were the tree's roots.

While everyone was dumbfounded by this bizarre sight, Mu Qinghe calmly took one look at it and explained, "That's a rolling leaf fir. Its roots are buried near the ground surface, and it can move on its own under special circumstances."

Everyone looked enlightened. "I see..."

"As expected of Dahuang Swamp. Even its trees are different..."

"I got a bad scare earlier! I thought something major was going to happen!"

"Wait, didn't Lieutenant Mu say that it'd only move under special circumstances? So does that mean... It's moving because the ninth-grade fiend is about to break through?"

Other than the Black Guards, all the disciples were talking about this matter.

Mu Hongyu was looking at the moving tree when she suddenly felt movement.

She looked down to see that the golden mane bear cub had come out of its own accord. It was hugging her arm and shaking its head uneasily as if it were warning her about something.

"What's wrong, Congcong?"

The bear let out a soft whimper as it turned to look at the moving rolling leaf fir before squirming around in her embrace.

Nearly a year had passed since she rescued the cub, so it had grown a lot. It was already quite tough for Mu Hongyu to carry it, so she could hardly manage it squirming around. While trying her best to calm it down, she whispered worriedly to Chu Liuyue, “Do you sense anything amiss, Liuyue? Congcong doesn’t behave like this for no rhyme or reason. I think it feels unsettled around here...”

Chu Liuyue glanced at the cub in her friend’s arms and knitted her eyebrows slightly. Having seen the rolling leaf fir moving before, she wasn’t surprised to see this scene. However, she indeed found the cub’s behavior a little strange. *Could it be because of the ninth-grade fiend?*

At the thought of that, she inwardly called, “Tuan Zi.”

A fluffy red shadow appeared in front of her in a flash. As Tuan Zi stared at the cub in Mu Hongyu’s arms with blinking eyes, it fell into deep thought for a second before jumping into Chu Liuyue’s embrace.

Unfortunately, Chu Liuyue caught its tail effortlessly and forced it to loosen its grip on her clothes with a light tug. “Of all habits to learn.”

When she shook her wrist, Tuan Zi—who was dangling upside down—shook as well. *Wah... I’m also a fiend, but why am I treated so differently? I’m just longing for her hug! That fella over there is so big in size, but its owner doesn’t even mind it! I, on the other hand... can’t even touch my master’s hair! How infuriating!*

Chu Liuyue was indifferent to Tuan Zi’s watery eyes. “Do you sense anything amiss?”

Tuan Zi froze for a second before hugging her wrist to do a backward flip. It then obediently sat on her arm and turned to look at the moving rolling leaf fir.

A dark gleam flashed across its eyes, but it scratched its head and looked back to shake its head at her. *No?*

“Look! The rolling leaf fir over there is moving too!” shouted someone.

“This one here too!”

“No! It seems like all the trees are moving!” shouted someone else.

Silence fell over them for a moment.

As Chu Liuyue surveyed her surroundings, her expression turned a little serious.

Sure enough, the surrounding rolling leaf firs had quietly begun moving. Most importantly, the directions in which they moved were all different, so it looked very chaotic at a glance.

I've encountered such a situation before, but only a small area was affected at that time. The rolling leaf firs were all moving in the same direction to flee from danger back then, but now...

Tuan Zi climbed onto her shoulder, where it obediently curled up into a ball and shot a glance in the golden mane bear cub's direction.

Upon sensing something, the cub gradually calmed down as it lay in Mu Hongyu's embrace.

Seeing that it had finally calmed down, Mu Hongyu's heart settled down a little as well. After successfully coaxing the cub to go back into hiding, she said with uncertainty, "I guess it was frightened by that ninth-grade fiend."

A frown formed on Chu Liuyue's forehead. *For some reason, I have a slightly ominous feeling about this.*

...

"Lieutenant Mu, what's going on with those rolling leaf firs?" Shangguan Wan was slightly flustered upon seeing this situation.

With a grave expression on his face, Mu Qinghe answered, "I've never encountered this situation before."

Shangguan Wan sneered. "You've never seen anything like this in the decade you've been here, Lieutenant Mu? It seems that you don't know this place that well, either."

Mu Qinghe knitted his eyebrows as he replied in a harsh manner, "There are many other dangerous areas in Dahuang Swamp other than the Mystic Forest. I was here to lead the army to suppress the rebellion. We go wherever the enemies are, so it's only natural that we didn't stay in one particular area for long. I dare say that nobody in the Tianling Dynasty is more familiar with this place as I am! If I've never seen it before, then it's even more unlikely that anyone else has seen it before."

“It was just a passing remark. Do you need to overreact to this extent?” Embarrassment and anger crept up Shangguan Wan’s face when she felt everyone’s eyes on her. *I only said one sentence, but he bombarded me with many more sentences—and right in front of everyone too! Does he even have any regard for me?!*

Jiang Yucheng looked at Shangguan Wan with a disapproving frown. *We have to depend on Mu Qinghe the entire trip, yet she chose to doubt his abilities at this critical juncture? Isn’t she just finding trouble for herself? Given the number of years he spent here risking his life in battle, what she said about him can be considered the greatest insult he could ever receive.*

“That’s enough, Wan’er. Lieutenant Mu won’t lie to us. Since he’s never seen it before, then it means that there’s something strange about this matter. It’s most likely due to the ninth-grade fiend trying to break through. Don’t take it to heart. What’s most important now is that we find the ninth-grade fiend. All our efforts will go to waste if we get there too late.” Jiang Yucheng stepped forward to play the role of peacemaker.

The mention of the ninth-grade fiend made Shangguan Wan swallow down her anger and continue walking ahead. *I shouldn’t be wasting time here when the force in my body is depleting by the second.*

“Your Highness, things are very chaotic now. You shouldn’t—”

A furious growl coming from the distance cut Mu Qinghe’s words short all of a sudden. The next instant, the ground beneath their feet cracked.