

Noble Ruler 761

Chapter 761: Taking Food from the Tiger's Mouth!

Once he said that, Chu Liuyue was stunned for a while as she stared at her ancestor dazedly. "W-what do you mean?"

Shangguan Jing looked into Chu Liuyue's eyes and said with determination, "I mean that... the aura of someone from the Tianling royal family is hidden in there! According to my guess, it's most likely a soul!"

Chu Liuyue's eyes shrunk, and words slipped right out of her mouth. "H-how is this possible?"

"It really is possible." The Tianling Dynasty's ancestor stood with his hands behind his back and looked solemn. "If it's just a pure wave of force, what's the point of locking it up singly? Do you remember the scene when you flew down the heavenly pit and entered the space below the Long Yuan Sword?"

Countless scenes flashed across Chu Liuyue's mind at that moment. *Of course, I remember. Everything that happened that day is still fresh in my memory.*

"Did you know that I specifically hired people to set up that space and that those who aren't from the Tianling royal family aren't allowed to enter?!"

Shangguan Jing's one sentence was like a heavy hammer that harshly landed on Chu Liuyue's head, and her eyes suddenly brightened. *Right! After I jumped into the heavenly pit back then, the surrounding sword aura was threatening. At the critical point, the black pyramid flew out and opened the door to let me in.*

“A crack then appeared on the black pyramid’s seal. At that time, I already felt that the aura within was extremely familiar! At that time, I thought that the soul of some descendant from the Tianling royal family was sealed in it, so I agreed to give you the Long Yuan Sword and leave the Tianling God Realm with you!”

Shangguan Jing was originally thinking of finding a chance to touch the black pyramid and find out what secret was hiding within. In the end, the crack actually repaired itself!

The aura within was separated once again, and it was very difficult for him to break open that seal with his current capabilities and cultivation level. Thus, he put this incident aside first.

He finally came clean with Chu Liuyue today after he confirmed her identity.

Chu Liuyue listened bit by bit, and shocking waves rippled in her heart. She had guessed countless times what was hidden within the black pyramid, but she had never thought of this possibility!

“C-can you confirm that the thing inside is really—” Chu Liuyue’s throat tightened.

Shangguan Jing nodded. “Without a doubt.”

Chu Liuyue closed her eyes. *Since Ancestor is so sure of it, it most likely is true. However... this is indeed too incredulous!*

“To be honest, I unintentionally obtained this item in Country Yao Chen’s Imperial Mausoleum back then. There was originally no seal on it, but I met a mysterious person in between, and he forcefully placed a seal on it before giving the item to me,” said Chu Liuyue as she stretched out her right hand.

The black pyramid appeared in her palm again. The surface was very dark, and it looked ordinary.

The crack that previously appeared had already been repaired.

Chu Liuyue knitted her brows. If there really is a person’s soul inside... Then, whose would it be? It’s impossible to start investigating the Tianling Dynasty’s history that is over a thousand-plus years. The strange thing is: Why would it appear in Country Yao Chen’s Imperial Mausoleum?! Country Yao Chen has existed for a much shorter time than the Tianling Dynasty, but it’s also hard to find anything if we investigate using this logic. In my impression, none of the Tianling Dynasty’s ancestors have been to Country Yao Chen. However, history books don’t represent true history. Other than the people involved, nobody else would know what exactly happened back then.

“If only we can break open the seal...” said the Tianling Dynasty’s founder. “Do you know who set up the seal?”

Chu Liuyue shook her head. “I have never seen the other party before, but he seems to be a man.”

“That makes it difficult... If we don’t open the seal, we can’t confirm who the soul inside belongs to.” Shangguan Jing was quite confused. “I wonder what the person’s motive for doing so is.”

Chu Liuyue stared at the black pyramid in her hands and suddenly said, “Ancestor, I feel that this seal wasn’t repaired by itself but that the person who set up the seal repaired it.”

“Why do you say that?”

Chu Liuyue paused for a while and shook her head. "It's just my gut feeling..."

"If it really is that person who did it, why did he still give you the item back then? Can't he just leave it for himself?"

To be willing to spend so much effort to set up this barrier proves that this item must be important to that person. Then, why did he spend so much effort and leave it with Chu Liuyue?

Chu Liuyue entered deep thought. *Ancestor's words make sense. If only I had seen that Master's appearance back then...*

After thinking for half a day, she still had no clue. In the end, Chu Liuyue could only put away the black pyramid and set this matter aside.

She had a feeling that this 'Master' would definitely come back and look for her!

One day, I will find out the true secret hidden within this pyramid! After settling all these tasks, Chu Liuyue sat cross-legged once again and breathed out deeply, preparing to cultivate.

This time, Shangguan Jing didn't say anything more as he stood beside her and silently protected her.

Chu Liuyue closed her eyes and gathered her focus.

A period of time passed, and the surrounding Heaven and Earth Force was much stronger than before. One could tell how much force that Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed had absorbed within this short period of time.

The water droplet within her dantian started to spin slowly.

The surrounding force—which was originally heading for the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed—started to change its direction gradually.

At the start, Shangguan Jing didn't notice this. Later on, he observed that the dark-green light started shaking like a wave, so he curiously turned back to take a look.

This one look stunned him.

Chu Liuyue was wrapped by a layer of dark-green light, and the surrounding force was entering her body!

She quietly sat there like a statue and stayed motionless like a mountain as she quickly absorbed that force.

Also... She was getting faster and faster!

The Tianling Dynasty's founder was stunned. *Chu Liuyue, s-she... She's actually fighting for force with the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed? I originally thought that she would just meditate for a while, but I didn't expect that she would actually start cultivating. The key point is that she did it!*

The Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed looked very small, but it was very unreasonable in reality! The entire Mystic Forest was under its control and whatever happened earlier was it playing tricks.

It could quickly absorb all the force in the surrounding space until it caused the space to collapse entirely in the end.

Chu Liuyue could actually steal some force from it to aid her own cultivation... Even I might not have the confidence to do it! Besides, she's just a stage-five warrior now! Shangguan Jing was shocked with his eyes wide open and mouth agape.

Chu Liuyue was ignorant of all of this.

In her eyes, she was just absorbing the surrounding Heaven and Earth Force to cultivate. Oh, but the water droplet seemed to be spinning a little quicker than before.

The five lines on the water droplet gently shook.

That crystal also suddenly moved and floated toward Chu Liuyue!

Shangguan Jing gasped. *Chu Liuyue is stealing food from the tiger's mouth!*

Chapter 762: Who is Stronger Than Whom?

Shangguan Jing originally wanted to stop that crystal, but its surrounding suppression was heavy to the point that even he couldn't take it.

But luckily, the crystal still stopped in midair in the end.

It quietly hovered in the air as the dark-green light moved like ripples, heading in all directions while looking as dazzling as ever.

The faint green light shone on the surrounding stone walls, and the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed could clearly be seen within.

The Tianling Dynasty's founder held in his breath. *This is the closest I've ever been to the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed! At first glance, it doesn't look any different from an average herbal seed. Who could imagine that a small item like this has the power to cause ultimate destruction? Luckily, its aura and suppression are basically separated with the crystal layer's obstruction. If it really exposed itself completely, I wonder how terrifying it would be!*

Shangguan Jing turned around to glance at Chu Liuyue.

The latter's eyes were currently tightly shut as she peacefully cultivated, allowing the surrounding Heaven and Earth Force to enter her body quickly.

The ancestor looked solemn. *Being able to meet with this Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed is unquestionably a miraculous work of fate! However, not everybody can handle such a fate. If one isn't careful, they might even throw their lives in! I wonder if the girl can make it through this time...*

Just as Shangguan Jing was filled with worry, Chu Liuyue's aura silently strengthened. All the force entered her dantian through her limbs and finally went into the water droplet.

After nourishment, the water droplet spat out purified force and sent it to all parts of Chu Liuyue's body.

As the changes silently happened, the strength within Chu Liuyue's bones, muscles, and blood was all strengthened.

Time passed bit by bit.

Chu Liuyue had completely immersed herself in her cultivation, so she didn't notice time passing by.

But to Shangguan Jing, this period of waiting was especially hard to endure. Gradually, he discovered that the situation wasn't quite similar to what he had expected.

This was because... Chu Liuyue had already absorbed too much force. According to her current cultivation level, she should've long reached her limits. However, Chu Liuyue's expression didn't change, and she looked calm, without any signs of something being wrong.

A dark-green light, coupled with rich force, all entered her body.

T-this isn't right! Shangguan Jing widened his eyes in disbelief. Why does Chu Liuyue's body seem like a... bottomless pit?

He knew that Chu Liuyue had a few trump cards and that she was much stronger than average cultivators. However, this was too much of an exaggeration!

For some reason, Shangguan Jing suddenly recalled the scene of Chu Liuyue swiftly going up by herself to drag the lightning down when she was sharpening the Cloud-Sky Copper Sword, but the lightning refused to fall.

Compared to now, they were different tunes but worked equally.

This isn't something a normal person can do! The Tianling Dynasty's ancestor looked at Chu Liuyue with a headache as he was elated and worried.

He was happy that Chu Liuyue's cultivation potential and talent were much better than he had predicted. After all, she was a descendent of his bloodline, and the ancestor really didn't know how to dote on her.

He was worried that something would happen to Chu Liuyue since she absorbed so much force within a short period of time and had even stolen it from the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed.

What if that thing explodes? My old bag of bones can't even help with anything! His gaze turned, and he looked at the red-tailed phoenix guarding by Chu Liuyue's side.

It had stood there since the start, and at some point, its body was also wrapped in a layer of dark-green light.

It was a fiend that Chu Liuyue had an agreement with. As Chu Liuyue's capabilities strengthened, it would naturally be affected as well.

But compared to Shangguan Jing's stomach full of worry, that red-tailed phoenix kept its wings folded and closed its eyes as if it were very relaxed.

It was like... it wasn't even worried that something would happen to Chu Liuyue.

Whir!

At this point, a whirl suddenly came from the crystal!

Shangguan Jing immediately turned back to look and shockingly saw that the last pattern on the seal had also silently disappeared.

The crystal vibrated slightly. At that moment, the surrounding light started rushing toward the crystal crazily!

The light that originally filled the space started retreating at an observable speed as if it was low tide.

Very quickly, the surroundings darkened and eventually entered into pitch-black darkness.

Shangguan Jing was nervous as he inched toward Chu Liuyue and instantly raised his surrounding aura.

At this moment, the air seemed to have completely frozen.

Just as the ancestor was finding a way to bring Chu Liuyue out of here, a light suddenly appeared in the darkness.

Gradually, that light expanded.

The light that appeared was indeed that crystal, but at this point, only a faint layer of dark-green light was on the crystal!

For some reason, Shangguan Jing felt that the light seemed quite different from the one before.

A layer of light spread out from the crystal. Wherever it passed, space collapsed as patches of black appeared!

That light was transparent, and it presented an extremely faint dark-green color.

Shangguan Jing knew that something was amiss and was about to take action when he realized that his strength was completely restrained. He couldn't execute anything.

Very quickly, the layer of light spread to this side and gently passed through the ancestor's translucent soul.

Then, it arrived in front of Chu Liuyue and enveloped her.

Shangguan Jing felt secretly thankful that this didn't seem to affect his descendant much.

When the light eventually spread to the sides of the surrounding rock walls, it finally stopped.

If someone looked down from above now, this place looked as if it had turned into a gigantic, dark-green stone.

The ancestor looked up, and it was endless darkness.

He knitted his brows slightly. *The Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed should've completely absorbed all of the strength from outside! I'm afraid the next thing is—*

Whir!

After a momentary silence, the crystal started moving even more violently! It seemed like the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed was going to escape from within!

Shangguan Jing stared at it closely, and his heart hung high in his throat. *This Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed isn't as big as the one I saw previously, and it shouldn't be as formidable. But if it really comes out, I'm afraid that it would also be hard to contain!*

Within the light, all the external force was separated cleanly from Chu Liuyue and the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed.

A crazy suction force exuded from that crystal! It looked like it wanted to snatch back the force within Chu Liuyue's body.

The black shield was placed in front of Chu Liuyue's body. As the ground cracked open, it started to move.

At this point, Chu Liuyue suddenly opened her eyes—two balls of red fire were burning within them!

She stared at the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed and gradually raised her hands.

A transparent water droplet suddenly appeared in front of her, and she gently pointed forward.

Bang!

The water droplet flew up! The next moment, it formed a water curtain in front of her!

That terrifying suction force was instantly separated outside!

Chu Liuyue's hands trembled slightly as she grabbed at the neighboring space.

That crystal actually came toward her!

Chapter 763: Make it Through

However, that crystal seemed to have noticed the danger, and it burst out with an extremely strong aura! Finally, it slowly stopped about ten steps away from the water curtain.

But this time, it didn't try to snatch Chu Liuyue's force anymore.

Chu Liuyue tried again and realized that she couldn't make it go forward anymore, so she decisively gave up.

She stared at that crystal for a while and lightly laughed. "I hate people stealing my things."

As if in fear, that crystal moved another step back!

Shangguan Jing was confused. *Wh-what's going on? It's different from what I expected! The Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed is inside the crystal, yet it became a coward in front of Chu Liuyue?!*

Even though the Tianling Dynasty's founder had seen the unreasonable behavior of Chu Liuyue facing the lightning, he still felt that this scene was too impactful and couldn't digest it.

Seriously speaking, even though this item pulled Chu Liuyue down, she had already stolen its force at this point. After all, the force that Chu Liuyue had intercepted was all gathered by this Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed.

However, Chu Liuyue was acting very righteously as if the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed really took advantage of her!

Shangguan Jing instantly felt his head ache. *I stayed in the Tianling God Realm for a thousand years, yet I don't know how the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed became so... cowardly. Did this world really change?*

The ancestor looked at the crystal with a complicated gaze, and he couldn't accept it. He could even clearly hear something crashing in his heart.

Ever since he stuck with Chu Liuyue, this kind of thing kept happening. Many things in the world became unimaginable, but the key was that Chu Liuyue seemed to have gotten used to everything and didn't realize how harsh she was!

In this entire mainland, there probably aren't many people who dare to threaten the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed in this manner... The Tianling Dynasty's ancestor looked at the scene ahead and fell into deep thought. The Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed is naturally not scared of a mere stage-five warrior. The key should be that... water curtain later!

The water curtain wasn't big—it was the height of a person. As it coincidentally presented itself in front of Chu Liuyue, it separated her and the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed.

The Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed seemed to be terrified of this water curtain and didn't dare to go near it. Because of this, it didn't even care that it had to give up on all the force that Chu Liuyue had absorbed!

After a temporary silence, the crystal started to move again. But this time, it was much more hidden than before.

The surrounding space gradually started to become sticky.

Chu Liuyue squinted her eyes.

The ancestor seemed to have suddenly thought of something as he gasped in shock.

“Ancestor? What’s the matter?” asked Chu Liuyue curiously.

Shangguan Jing widened his eyes, and shock could still be seen in them. “It... It controlled this space! Have you noticed that this space seems different from before?”

Chu Liuyue nodded. “Force seems to be moving slower.”

The ancestor paused for a moment and then said with much difficulty, “That’s because... the time flow here has decelerated!”

Chu Liuyue was stunned; she knew what this meant. *Legend has it that the mighty figures that broke through as stage-nine warriors can create a God Realm that belongs to themselves and that they can control everything within that God Realm at will—including the passing of time. The stronger the person is, the more shocking their control in this aspect.*

There are many advantages to slowing down the time flow. For example, cultivators can enter the space to cultivate and can also grow some precious herbs. If a day in the outside world is equivalent to ten days in the God Realm, then it’s akin to increasing the speed of cultivation by ten times. Herbs that need a hundred years to grow can be harvested in ten years.

Anyway, there are countless advantages. However, can’t this only be done by the rumored top elites? My ancestor—who is also very strong—only left behind a broken Tianling God Realm. He couldn’t even do this. And this Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed...

“Rumors have it that the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed can indeed do this.” Shangguan Jing knitted his brows and nodded.

Chu Liuyue then realized that the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed seemed stronger than she had expected.

“I think it wants to trap you in here.”

The decelerated time flow would be very hard to endure. If Chu Liuyue couldn't make it through, then it would give the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed a chance. By that time...

“It feels great!” said Chu Liuyue elatedly as her eyes lit up.

“What?” The Tianling Dynasty's ancestor was confused. “A-aren't you afraid that it will trap you here forever?”

There is no night or day in this place, and she is alone. Even if she isn't afraid, won't she be lonely after a long time has passed? One has to know that people would definitely be driven crazy if they stayed in this kind of environment for an extended period of time. Even if it's me here, it would be hard to make it through. Who knows when we can exit?

Chu Liuyue blinked, smiled, and said, “What's there to be worried about? I feel that we can take this chance to properly cultivate! Do you know how much slower time flows here compared to the outside world?”

Shangguan Jing hesitated for a moment before saying, “One day outside... is probably about a month here. But you can't see the sun or moon here, so it's very hard to know how much time has passed.”

Chu Liuyue smiled and took out an hourglass from the Cosmic Ring. "This isn't a problem. This hourglass takes an entire day as a measure of time. After it's filled, it will turn around automatically. However, I'm afraid I have to trouble you to help me pay attention to this."

When she entered cultivation mode, she had no concept of time. With her ancestor's help, it would be much more convenient.

The ancestor grunted. "You do have all sorts of things with you, even this."

Chu Liuyue coughed.

Actually, she didn't prepare this herself. The Cosmic Ring that Rong Xiu gave her had plenty of things in it.

When she was bored, she did check through it before. Other than money and all sorts of treasures, there were all sorts of small trinkets inside—including this hourglass.

She didn't expect to use it at this point.

"Since you've already planned everything, I won't say anything further. Just like you said, this is indeed a rare opportunity. If you can leave this place in the end, nothing is a problem."

Chu Liuyue nodded. "Don't worry. I know what I'm doing."

Even though her breakthrough speed was already considered rapid compared to an average person or even most cultivators, it still wasn't enough! The enemies she had to face were the most powerful characters in the Tianling Dynasty, who could currently cover the entire sky.

Even if she had quite a few trump cards, she was still lacking when compared to them. Now that she could take this chance to increase her cultivation speed, she was naturally elated.

As for Ancestor worrying whether I can make it through... I've already experienced so much pain and torture. What can this count for? Chu Liuyue closed her eyes and placed her hands on her knees with her palms facing upward.

The water curtain moved slightly.

Kacha!

A broken piece suddenly dropped down from the crystal!

Chapter 764: Good

That piece was very thin and small—about the size of a nail—and it looked very unassuming.

But when Shangguan jing saw this scene, shock flashed across his eyes. *Without that seal suppressing it, this crystal has indeed started breaking!*

Just as he was very nervous, he saw the piece flying toward Chu Liuyue.

This piece was light green in color and looked crystal clear as it contained tremendous strength. Wherever it went past, the sticky area seemed to break open.

Just like this, it slowly and determinedly flew to the water curtain. Then, a shocking scene happened.

That crystal piece didn't directly pass through the water curtain, but it gradually and silently melted.

A dark-green color very quickly dyed the water curtain. Then, a dark-green water droplet gently formed and flew toward Chu Liuyue.

Chu Liuyue naturally swallowed that water droplet and then converted its strength to her own! With that, her bodily aura strengthened again!

The entire process was very smooth and didn't have any interruptions.

Shangguan Jing opened his mouth, but he was at a loss for words. *Isn't this equivalent to Chu Liuyue absorbing the force that the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed previously accumulated? D-did she take the crystal's force for herself?*

Seeing Chu Liuyue's calm face and slightly flushed appearance, the Tianling Dynasty's founder suddenly felt that his previous worries were all redundant. *The Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed is formidable, but it met with Chu Liuyue, who doesn't play her cards according to logic... It's unknown who will win!*

The ancestor thought for a while before swiftly moving backward, returning to his position at the top-right and conveniently 'stole' the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed's force.

Glancing at the red-tailed phoenix that had been very calm since the start, Shangguan Jing vaguely felt that it long knew that Chu Liuyue could do such a thing. *It really followed the right master. Its arrogant, high, and mighty attitude is really exactly the same!*

Putting down his initial worry, the Tianling Dynasty's ancestor felt more assured and started standing at the side... to watch a show!

...

Chu Liuyue was still slowly spending her time within the God Realm that the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed had created. She couldn't leave for now or contact the people outside, so she could only focus on her cultivation.

As for Qin Yi and the rest—who didn't know her current situation—they were naturally very worried.

Qin Yi looked at the dark-green light faintly glowing from the position where the branch was cut off and felt uneasy.

The light that suddenly appeared at the branch made his entire body tense up. *That seal should've already been completely destroyed. I remember very clearly that Her Highness was swallowed by light of the exact same color below. Judging from its appearance, it most probably has already come up from below. If it really does erupt... it would be extremely dangerous!*

This made him even more worried about Chu Liuyue's current situation.

Qin Yi held in his breath, walked forward step by step, and stood still in front of the trunk.

The mother tree was very thick, and Qin Yi looked extremely tiny in front of the trunk.

The leaves on top had all fallen down. From a closer point of view, numerous tiny openings had already cracked open on the trunk.

Every opening was filled with that strange light, looking as if it would rush out at the next moment.

Qin Yi's entire body tensed up, and he reached forward to try and touch it. But before he could touch the trunk, the light suddenly dimmed.

In just a blink of an eye, all the lights in the tiny cracks disappeared—silently!

This rolling leaf fir finally stopped as well, and it didn't become more wilted.

The surroundings were so quiet that one could hear a pin drop.

Qin Yi paused for a moment before a silver light flashed in his hands as a sword appeared. He stared at the front closely as his hands held the sword before slashing it down slowly and determinedly.

Ka!

The sword gleamed harshly, and a layer of the trunk was slashed down. It left a deep cut on the trunk!

Qin Yi gathered his focus and realized that all the force within the trunk had been absorbed and that it became much frailer due to the wilting. However, he couldn't find out anything more.

The terrifying aura also seemed to have disappeared.

After waiting for a moment, everything was peaceful, and nothing happened.

The light wind blew over, and Qin Yi felt a chill run down his spine. He closed his eyes, put away his sword, and slowly moved backward.

Mu Hongyu and the rest anxiously watched on from behind and didn't even blink, afraid that they would miss something.

After seeing Qin Yi send a slash out, he actually turned around, and the crowd was stunned.

Lei Laosi couldn't hold himself back as he took two steps forward and hurriedly asked, "Big Brother, what's the matter?"

Qin Yi shook his head.

Lei Laosi's face turned pale.

The other people's expressions all froze.

Qin Yi sighed and explained, "I can confirm that she's trapped underneath by a strange force and that she can't come out. The force should've rushed out originally, but it retracted for some reason."

Lei Laosi was stunned. "Big Brother, you mean..."

"You should still remember the scene that happened when we first came here, right?" Qin Yi glanced at him and slightly squinted his eyes. "The same thing also happened to the mother tree back then, and a force planned to rush out. However, the Nine-Colored Heavenly Pheasant appeared later and repaired the seal. Afterward, I'm not sure what happened."

Lei Laosi's eyes moved, and he nodded.

In actual fact, this wasn't exactly what happened back then. How could the Nine-Colored Heavenly Pheasant do this alone? However, there was no need to tell the children all of this.

"So... It's not because of that Nine-Colored Heavenly Pheasant this time? No, it has already broken through to become a red-tailed phoenix. Perhaps... it became stronger?"

Qin Yi nodded. "It's not impossible."

When Mu Hongyu and the rest heard this, they all heaved a sigh of relief. "So does this mean that Liuyue might very possibly come out?"

"The red-tailed phoenix is a legendary fiend. It should be able to help her, right?"

Mu Hongyu and Ye Ranran both had positive attitudes, but only Qiang Wanzhou glanced at Qin Yi deeply before pressing his lips against each other, not saying anything.

He had seen that scene before. *The red-tailed phoenix... is definitely not the match of that force!*

But Qin Yi obviously didn't want Mu Hongyu and Ye Ranran to know of all this.

"What should we do now then? Can we only wait for Liuyue here?" asked Ye Ranran as she wrinkled her small, round face.

Qin Yi turned around to look at that mother tree. "I hope so."

...

At the border connecting the Mystic Forest and Mirror Lake.

The Dancing Lotus's appearance excited Shangguan Wan and the rest.

Shangguan Wan immediately suggested to have Mu Qinghe retrieve the Dancing Lotus. Once she said this, the originally bustling surroundings quietened down immediately.

The crowd looked at Mu Qinghe with various expressions—curiosity, envy, worry...

Everyone knew that Mirror Lake was dangerous. The first one to go would suffer the most.

Mu Qinghe paused for a moment and nodded. "Okay."

Mu Qinghe then turned around and went toward the Dancing Lotus.

The barrier between the Mystic Forest and Mirror Lake was very distinct—there was a dam-like existence in the middle. On this end, the Mystic Forest was piled with many fallen leaves, while the other end was the glistening Mirror Lake.

The strange thing was that the dividing dam was very narrow, but not a single leaf on the Mystic Forest side had flown to the opposite lake area. The ripples caused by the lake also didn't cross the boundary and arrive at the other side.

There seemed to be an invisible barrier in the middle that clearly separated the two sides.

Mu Qinghe quickly arrived at the narrow dam. He took a deep breath in, turned the force in his body, and flung his right hand.

A longsword flew out, floating in front of him!

Mu Qinghe jumped up and stood on that flying sword!

Just as he was about to fly forward with the sword, he unintentionally glanced from the corner of his eyes and realized that there seemed to be something flashing on the near side of the lake.

He squinted his eyes and focused; then, he was stunned. This was because the flashing thing was a piece of floating ice!

The light from the sunset shone on it, and the clear, crystal-like floating ice reflected the bright and dazzling light.

Mirror Lake was extremely wide, and it was surrounded by the Mystic Forest and the Red Moon Desert. It was spring and summer all year long as the lake rippled.

Why did a floating piece of ice suddenly appear?

“Lieutenant Mu, what’s the problem?” Shangguan Wan saw that Mu Qinghe didn’t move and chased him.

Mu Qinghe didn’t immediately reply as he surveyed his surroundings. As expected, he saw another floating piece of ice in a not-so-distant place.

Those floating pieces of ice swayed on the lake surface and looked very unassuming. If it weren’t because Mu Qinghe was coincidentally in midair and the light reflected off of them, he definitely

wouldn't notice the pieces of ice—just like how Shangguan Wan and the others couldn't see this strange situation.

Mu Qinghe felt uneasy. "This Mirror Lake is weird."

Shangguan Wan knitted her brows. "What's weird?"

Mu Qinghe pointed his finger. "Floating ice had never appeared in Mirror Lake before."

Shangguan Wan saw that Mu Qinghe looked solemn and thought that something major had happened. I didn't expect that it's just because of one or two pieces of floating ice?

She laughed and nonchalantly said, "It's just two pieces of floating ice. I don't think it's anything important, right? If you're really worried, why don't you hurry up and retrieve the Dancing Lotus? Then, we can leave immediately, okay?"

Mu Qinghe knitted his brows even more tightly. "Third Princess, you might not know, but Mirror Lake is always like this all year round. This situation has never occurred before... I'm afraid that something amiss happened. For everyone's safety, it's best if everybody retreats immediately."

"Retreat immediately? What about the Dancing Lotus?" Shangguan Wan was stunned. We met it with much difficulty, so how can we just leave like this? What should we say when we go back to Xi Ling? Also, my Yuan meridian...

"Lieutenant Mu, I feel that you're overly worried. I know that you've stayed in Dahuang Swamp for many years and that you know this place very well, but how long has Mirror Lake existed? Do you dare to say that from the very day it existed, it has been like this? Perhaps when you didn't know, such things have long happened. What do you think?"

Mu Qinghe couldn't retort to this.

Shangguan Wan was bent on taking the Dancing Lotus away. "If you're really worried, Lieutenant Mu, why don't I get Elder Qiuxi to go with you?"

Upon hearing this, Elder Qiuxi wasn't worried and was filled with excitement instead. "I will definitely follow the Third Princess's commands."

Being able to retrieve the Dancing Lotus is undoubtedly gaining good merit, and such a rare treasure is extremely precious! Even if one only touches it, they might benefit greatly! As for danger... Other than lake water, there is nothing else here. It also doesn't look as confusing or messy as the Mystic Forest. Even if we really meet with some danger, we can just escape right back. How dangerous can it get?

Shangguan Wan nodded. "Then, I have to trouble you, Elder Qiuxi, Lieutenant Mu."

Elder Qiuxi acknowledged her words and rapidly rushed to Mu Qinghe's side.

Mu Qinghe glanced at him. Since he wants to court death, I can't convince him otherwise.

"Lieutenant Mu, please—" Elder Qiuxi raised his hand.

Mu Qinghe didn't say anything more as he rode on his sword and continued forward.

Elder Qiuxi followed him closely, and his pair of eyes was glued closely to the Dancing Lotus in the distant lake center.

Mu Qinghe kept looking down from time to time, and his expression gradually turned cold. This was because he discovered that there weren't only two pieces of floating ice on the lake.

The further in they went, the greater the number of floating ice pieces. Also, they gradually gathered and connected together to form a large piece of ice.

The surroundings of that Dancing Lotus were filled by an ice layer.

Mu Qinghe stopped.

Elder Qiuxi hurriedly followed him and stopped. "Lieutenant Mu, why didn't you continue going forward? That Dancing Lotus is right in front. We can get it right away!"

Mu Qinghe's face seemed to be covered by a layer of frost. There's definitely something wrong with this Mirror Lake. I've come to Mirror Lake many times, but every time I get close to it, I encounter all sorts of dangerous scenarios. This time, Mirror Lake is indeed too peaceful.

Not only did this not calm him down, but he became even more uneasy. Something must be off!

"Since you want the Dancing Lotus so much, why don't you go first?"

Elder Qiuxi immediately chickened out. His gaze kept going back and forth between Mu Qinghe and the Dancing Lotus, and he was very conflicted. He really wanted to retrieve the Dancing Lotus, but he was also really afraid that something would happen. Mu Qinghe's reaction is really unsettling...

Seeing that the two of them actually stopped, Shangguan Wan couldn't hold back and pressed them again.

Elder Qiuxi was determined. Since there are so many people around, what's there to be worried about? If I'm the one who retrieves the Dancing Lotus, my identity and status will definitely greatly improve after I return to Xi Ling.

Thinking of this, his balance finally tilted toward the side of desires.

He passed by Mu Qinghe and went nearer to the front. However, he wasn't stupid and didn't directly use his hands to retrieve it. It's definitely not easy to retrieve such a treasure.

He flung his sleeves and threw out a rope as thick as a thumb, wrapping it around the Dancing Lotus's stem.

After waiting for a moment, nothing strange happened.

Elder Qiuxi was more confident as he pulled his wrist back and tried to pluck out the Dancing Lotus directly.

But the moment he moved, the rope slid down the stem.

Elder Qiuxi fell backward. He looked up in shock and realized that the stem was as smooth as ever—its surface even had faint marks of water.

It was indeed hard to wrap around it using a rope.

After thinking for a moment, he set up a barrier around himself and put away the rope at the same time. This time, he used a longsword instead.

He went in closer step by step and finally raised his sword to slash it. But the moment the sword body touched the stem, it also slipped!

Before Elder Qiuxi could react, his body was dragged down by an invisible force!

Plop!

He directly went through the ice layer and fell into the lake!

Chapter 766: Ignoring The Danger Ahead Just To Get The Dancing Lotus

A hole suddenly appeared in the middle of the smooth and flat ice. With a splash, Elder Qiuxi completely disappeared under the lake.

He didn't even have the chance to let out a scream.

Mu Qinghe—who stood nearest to him—narrowed his eyes in shock. It had happened so abruptly that Elder Qiuxi was gone before he knew it. On top of that, he didn't even have the chance to try to save the latter.

Even Shangguan Wan and the others—who were standing at a distance—were appalled by the sight. This was especially so for Shangguan Wan—whose eyes widened in shock—as she had been excitedly waiting for Elder Qiuxi's return with the Dancing Lotus. *Success was so close, and yet... I didn't even manage to get a clear look at what had happened! Wasn't everything going smoothly just now? However, Elder Qiu Xi disappeared into the water in the blink of an eye!*

Elder Qiuxi didn't even make a sound before and after he fell into the water, and the lake has become calm again. Under normal circumstances, anyone who falls into water should struggle for help, but he didn't. It can only mean that he was already dead in that short period of time! Shangguan Wan clutched at her chest and grabbed Jiang Yucheng's arm with her other hand as she staggered a little. "Yucheng... What happened just now?"

Jiang Yucheng furrowed his eyebrows and said gravely, "I think something pulled him into the water... but I didn't get a clear look at it."

"But... Elder Qiuxi is a stage-seven warrior! How did he..." Shangguan Wan's throat became parched as belated fear and relief hit her. *Thank goodness I didn't go pluck the flower myself, or I would be the one dead instead! It's terrifying to see how he died in such a short span of time! If it were anyone else, they would've died even faster than he did!*

"Elder Duanmu Chun is gone, and now even Elder Qiuxi..." Jiang Yucheng had a somber look on his face. *This trip turned out to be more dangerous than we expected!*

Shangguan Wan lowered her eyelids, her eyes flickering slightly behind them. *Yucheng doesn't seem to know that it was I who killed Elder Duanmu Chun. Did he naively think that I'd only make a move on those young, talented disciples?*

The truth was that she had long found Elder Duanmu Chun to be an eyesore, for the latter wasn't her trusted aide and used to be on good terms with Shangguan Yue.

Elder Duanmu Chun was an amiable person. Although he was part of the royal family, he never meddled much in their affairs. Even though Shangguan Yue used to admire him a lot, he had never worked for her and had always been alone. He treated Shangguan Wan the same way.

While others might not take this to heart, Shangguan Wan was extremely upset about it. On top of that, he was always comparing her to Shangguan Yue when the latter was still in power—be it intentional or not.

That was an absolute taboo to Shangguan Wan. Thus, she took the chance to get rid of him once and for all. His death didn't matter to her at all, for it didn't make much difference when she had already killed aplenty. She reckoned that those who refused to work for her were better off dead.

However, she found it somewhat a pity that Elder Qiuxi had died.

"What's the meaning of this, Lieutenant Mu?! Why didn't you save Elder Qiuxi when you were so close to him?" After getting over her initial shock, Shangguan Wan looked at Mu Qinghe with sullen anger. *He must've done it on purpose! He has never liked Elder Qiuxi!*

Mu Qinghe coldly replied, "I wish I could, but I don't have the capability to do so. Even Elder Qiuxi himself failed to retaliate, so what makes you think that I would be able to rescue him in time when we were quite a distance apart, Your Highness?"

Shangguan Wan coughed. *What Mu Qinghe just said makes sense. Everyone can tell that he probably wouldn't make it in time...*

“I told you that something was strange with the lake. Do you believe me now?”

Embarrassment colored Shangguan Wan’s cheeks. *Still, isn’t he as good as openly finding fault with me by saying this in front of everyone?*

Mu Qinghe took a last look at the spot where Elder Qiuxi had disappeared, and he spotted a seeming flash of dark-green light there. He narrowed his eyes as he tried taking a closer look at it, but the surface had once again frozen over.

It looked as smooth and flat as before, and there was no evidence to show that someone had fallen through its cracked ice. The lake in the distance was beginning to freeze as well.

Mu Qinghe said solemnly, “Your Highness, Eldest Young Master, we should leave this place as soon as possible!”

...

In this quiet and sticky space, Chu Liuyue was cultivating at ease in a cross-legged position with the crystal quietly floating in the air not far away from her.

All of a sudden, the crystal was enveloped in a faint greenish glow that produced a slight ripple. A ball of green light then passed through that light and headed toward the crystal.

Upon sensing something, Chu Liuyue opened her eyes. When she saw that ball of light, she lifted her eyebrows slightly and mumbled, “You sure have a lot of tricks up your sleeve...”

It must've swallowed all of the Mystic Forest's force, but I'm surprised that it can still find itself such a rich force. Chu Liuyue's ruddy lips curved up.

With just a thought, the water curtain began shaking lightly. The ball of light that was about to reach and merge with the crystal suddenly flew toward the water curtain as if something was pulling it.

Like before, the ball of light silently dissolved into the water curtain and transformed into a water droplet, which ultimately stopped right in front of Chu Liuyue.

"Thank you for your generosity!" Chu Liuyue's eyes curved, and with that, she swallowed the water droplet's force.

Her ancestor—who was standing at the side—raised his eyebrows as he glanced at the crystal.

The crystal was trembling slightly, but not because of its force—it was trembling out of anger!

Chapter 767: Wait A Little Longer

For the first time, Shangguan Jing felt a little sorry for the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed. It hadn't been easy for it to break the seal. Freedom is just so near, yet Liuyue appeared out of nowhere, snatching the force it gathered not only once but several times. I don't know where it managed to get its hands on that ball of force, but it ended up getting snatched by Liuyue again. It's only natural that it'd get angry, although it seems a little wary of her.

He believed that Chu Liuyue would be no match for the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed if she didn't have the water curtain's protection, but the reality was that she had it.

Speaking of which, the Heaven-Wrecking Holy Seed is the one that pulled her down to this place right from the start. By the look of things, it was just finding trouble for itself! The ancestor slipped his hands into his sleeves as he laughed. The probability of it breaking out of that crystal has gotten even lower, and it's hard to tell who will eventually emerge as the winner!

Chu Liuyue's aura was still intensifying. Meticulously and patiently, she refined that force and converted it into her own, her flesh and bones slowly becoming stronger in the process.

Time slowly trickled past.

All of a sudden, Chu Liuyue's aura intensified considerably. A soft cracking sound was then heard coming from her body—her cultivation base had reached the intermediate fifth stage!

Isn't she breaking through a tad too quickly?! Shangguan Jing subconsciously glanced at the hourglass in shock. Although he had already made some mental preparations in advance, he still couldn't help feeling incredulous at Chu Liuyue's smooth and fast breakthrough. While her Dijing Yuan meridian can't be compared to a Tianjing Yuan meridian, her cultivation speed is significantly faster than that of an average cultivator with a Dijing Yuan meridian.

When she was still Shangguan Yue, her cultivation base was at the advanced eighth stage, which was only a step away from reaching the ninth stage. That experience will indubitably save her a lot of time and effort in her current cultivation journey. Besides, she has Lady Luck on her side. Putting his hands behind his back, the ancestor quietly stared at Chu Liuyue with excitement and appreciation shining in his eyes. Although it's regrettable that she no longer possesses a Tianjing Yuan meridian, she's capable enough on her own. I wonder which stage her cultivation base will be when she leaves this place.

...

Nobody knew what was happening underground.

Presently, Shangguan Wan was facing a dilemma of leaving this dangerous place immediately as advised by Mu Qinghe or risking her life and the others to get her hands on the Dancing Lotus. She found it a pity to leave just like that.

Everybody turned to look at Shangguan Wan quietly, and even the excited disciples that had been marveling at the Mirror Lake's beautiful scenery began to feel nervous. Nobody took Mu Qinghe's warning to heart at first, but Elder Qiuxi's bizarre death made them instantly realize that this place was completely different from what they had initially expected and that Mu Qinghe wasn't being an alarmist. In fact, the latter had most likely put it lightly.

Most of them had come to Dahuang Swamp in search of the treasures here, but they had to be alive in order to do that. While the Dancing Lotus was indeed a rare treasure, nobody wanted to lose their lives while trying to get it.

Shangguan Wan had also realized this point by now. Regardless of who she sent, it would be an unwise decision as that would be akin to sending them to their deaths. However, she truly wanted to get her hands on that Dancing Lotus.

When Jiang Yucheng saw how conflicted she looked, he could roughly tell what was running through her mind. "Wan'er, we saw that earlier scene for ourselves. There's indeed something strange about Mirror Lake. We'll only suffer heavier casualties if we continue to stay here, so it's best if we leave now. The Dancing Lotus will be right here anyway, and its flowering period is a few years. Let's go back to Xi Ling and think of a way to get it before coming back again."

Shangguan Wan remained somewhat unconvinced though. "But... What if something happens to it during our absence?"

“You saw how difficult it was to deal with the Dancing Lotus—not even Elder Qiuxi’s life was spared. It won’t be so easy for anyone to take it.”

Shangguan Wan gave Jiang Yucheng’s words some thought. *That’s true. There aren’t many cultivators who are stronger than Elder Qiuxi in the entire Tianling Dynasty. As long as we keep quiet about the Dancing Lotus, there shouldn’t be much of a problem.*

Jiang Yucheng spoke to her in a gentler voice. “Besides, we need to get you back to recuperate as soon as possible. We can always come again after you’ve recuperated enough. It won’t take much time anyway.”

That finally convinced Shangguan Wan, for her face and body were in serious need of proper healing.

Oh well, I doubt I’d get a chance to lay my hands on anyone else. I might as well return to Xi Ling first. Who knows? I might be able to find someone suitable and an opportune time to act. After giving it much thought, Shangguan Wan finally nodded. “Okay.”

The deaths of the two elders from the royal family were proof of how dangerous Dahuang Swamp was. If they were any unluckier, they might very well be the next ones to die. Hence, everyone heaved a sigh of relief when they heard Shangguan Wan agreeing to go back.

Everyone thus doubled back under Mu Qinghe’s leadership, looking disappointed and demoralized—which was a far cry from the thrill and excitement they felt on their way here. They had come here with high hopes. However, not only did they return empty-handed in the end, but they had also almost lost their lives.

Zhu Hong and the rest of the Dragon Teeth Mountain disciples stayed at the back of the group due to them having many injured members. That said, their survival rate was fortunately much higher compared to the other clans since nobody died. This alone was enough to make people envious.

The disciples who came on this trip were famous for being geniuses of their respective families and clans. Any one of them dead meant a great loss to the families and clans, but it wasn't Tian Ji Residence or the other weaker clans that suffered the greatest loss—it was the Purple Xiao Sword Sect!

They came with ten people, but only three had survived. Among the three, one was the Purple Xiao Sword Sect's young master, Song Qingnian. Although the other two had luckily survived, their injuries were so serious that their future cultivation might be affected. Who would've thought that the vigorous Purple Xiao Sword Sect would end up in such a state?

The sky had completely darkened, and the moon was hanging high above it.

After walking for some time, the group finally returned to the Gray Triangle, feeling completely different than when they first stood here.

On their left, the lush Mystic Forest had turned into a piece of wilderness land, where the uneven ground was littered with dead branches, leaves, tree trunks, and festering roots. Even from afar, one couldn't help but shudder at the sight of this piece of ghost land that was shrouded with an eerie atmosphere.

Zhu Hong couldn't resist looking at Mu Qinghe to ask, "Lieutenant Mu, Hong Yu and the others are still inside the Mystic Forest. Can we wait for them a little longer?"

Chapter 768: Two Hours

The people around them instantly fell silent as they looked over with varying expressions.

The solemn-looking Mu Qinghe didn't answer Zhu Hong right away. Instead, it was Shangguan Wan who replied to him. She narrowed her eyes dangerously upon hearing the commotion over on this side. "What are you all talking about, Lieutenant Mu?"

Despite knowing that she had actually heard Zhu Hong's question and was just asking this on purpose, Mu Qinghe bowed his head slightly and said, "Mu Hongyu and the others aren't back yet, Your Highness. Do you think we should stay and wait for them for a little while to bring them back to Xi Ling with us?"

Shangguan Wan slightly widened her eyes in feigned surprise. "They aren't back yet? It's been a long time already. Don't tell me they haven't given up..."

There was no need for her to complete the sentence for everyone to guess what she was insinuating.

The crowd fell silent.

"Your Highness, since they're in the Mystic Forest, they probably don't know that we intend to go back already," Zhu Hong couldn't resist saying. *Why would they come here when they never even received any news from us? Isn't she making things difficult for them?*

"Oh, I see... I was so focused on getting the Dancing Lotus to treat my father's illness that I forgot all about it." Shangguan Wan quickly said something in her own defense before shooting Zhu Hong a dark, meaningful look. "It looks like Dragon Teeth Mountain is on pretty good terms with Chong Xu Cabinet for you to remember them even at this point."

Zhu Hong straightened his back and spoke frankly. "Liuyue saved the other Dragon Teeth Mountain disciples and me, so we owe her our lives. Besides, Hongyu is also there. It's only natural that we're concerned about them."

Shangguan Wan was rendered speechless.

Before she could say anything, Zhu Hong added, “Your Highness, I sincerely hope that you can release a signal to summon them back so that we can leave together. Dahuang Swamp is a dangerous place. If they are to stay here alone, I’m afraid that—”

“Do you expect us to keep waiting for them if they don’t come back? Zhu Hong, I know you’re concerned about their safety, but you should also consider the big picture,” Shangguan Wan interrupted impatiently.

Zhu Hong gulped at that.

Seeing that he had nothing more to say, Shangguan Wan tucked a stray fringe behind her ear in satisfaction. “Qin Yi and Lei Laosi are around, so it’s unlikely that anything will happen to them. On top of that, many of us here are badly injured and are in need of timely treatment.”

She turned to leave after saying her piece, only to hear a sharp, ear-piercing sound right next to her the next second. She looked back in shock and saw Jiang Yucheng holding a jade cylinder in his hand.

Boom!

There was a loud explosion in the sky.

Shangguan Wan looked up to see a brilliant firework display in the night sky. Given how eye-catching it was in the dark, chances were that Mu Hongyu and the others would be able to see it too even if they were in the Mystic Forest.

“We’ll wait for two hours, but we’ll leave without further ado if they’re not here by then.” Although Jiang Yucheng’s voice sounded calm, it was filled with authority. Clearly, he had decided this on his own without discussing it with Shangguan Wan.

“Okay,” responded Mu Qinghe, who then ordered everyone to rest on the spot before they set off again two hours later.

Zhu Hong and the others breathed a sigh of relief as they started waiting anxiously for Mu Hongyu and the others to return.

Many others did the same as well as they turned to face the Mystic Forest while whispering, “I wonder if they’ll make it back in time...”

“I’m more curious about Ms. Chu’s situation. Do you think she’s still alive?”

“I-it’s hard to say...”

“In any case, I owe her my life! If it weren’t for her, I would’ve died underneath the Mystic Forest! While I do hope for her safe return... Anyway, we should be more polite to Chong Xu Cabinet’s members in the future!”

“Well, I think she might be alive! Did you guys forget that she took first place in the Wan Zheng Competition? She managed to defeat so many people in the Tianling God Realm back then. Who knows? She might come back safely this time as well...”

“I sure hope so...”

Many people had been saved by Chu Liuyue, and most of them were the steely Black Guards. They took this kindness seriously, and they wished from the bottom of their hearts that Chu Liuyue and the others could return safe and sound.

Shangguan Wan naturally heard what the others were saying loud and clear. She clenched her fists as she shot a furious glare in Jiang Yucheng's direction. *What's the meaning of this?!*

"It's only two hours; it'll pass by quickly," said Jiang Yucheng calmly, who was seemingly unaffected by the glare. "Many of them were saved by Chu Liuyue. If we were to leave just like that... What do you think they would say about you in private?"

Shangguan Wan bit her lower lips and swallowed the rest of her words down before turning away from Jiang Yucheng, who frowned at her actions. *Shangguan Wan might be a scheming person, but she's too narrow-minded and short-sighted for her own good. Doesn't she know the importance of the Black Guards in maintaining imperial power? The Black Guards aren't easy to deal with. One will only end up losing if they go against them!*

As the Black Guard lieutenant with military power in his hands, Mu Qinghe's words carried more authority than Shangguan Wan, the Third Princess herself. This was also one of the reasons why Jiang Yucheng decided against killing Mu Qinghe back then—going against the latter was akin to going against the entire Black Guard.

Even though Mu Qinghe obeyed Jiang Yucheng's every order now, the latter dared not underestimate the former and the Black Guards behind him.

As Jiang Yucheng looked at the enraged Shangguan Wan from behind, he rubbed his temples in frustration. *Thinking back, Shangguan Yue's position as the Crown Princess was so firm that it was practically unshakable. She could've set herself high above the masses and enjoyed everything from her palace, but she didn't.*

Jiang Yucheng had specifically looked into this matter before, and he found out that Shangguan Yue had spent a lot of effort grooming the Black Guard, be it openly or in the dark. Much of the credit for taking down Dahuang Swamp belonged to her as well, which was why the Black Guards had always treated her with respect and admiration.

She didn't deliberately publicize it though. She kept quiet about it, allowing others to think that Mu Qinghe had only become her right-hand man because he had volunteered himself for the battle and ended up fighting a glorious battle. Nobody knew that there was more to it.

Shangguan Wan is in a disadvantageous position in the first place, having taken over Shangguan Yue's position. If she offends the Black Guard completely... Her efforts will go entirely to waste! Shangguan Yue wouldn't have made such a basic mistake! As Jiang Yucheng closed his eyes, a face with fair skin and a bright, gentle, and elegant smile that carried a hint of nobility appeared in his mind. The woman this face belonged to seemed lofty and unattainable.

A small smile formed on Jiang Yucheng's face, only to fade away quickly to be replaced with pure hatred. He didn't mind the fact that she didn't like him as long as she didn't like anyone else either, but she did.

That face slowly faded away and was replaced with another face.

Jiang Yucheng looked toward the Mystic Forest. *If she comes out alive...*

Chapter 769: Whose Seal Is That?

Boom!

Mu Hongyu and the others—who were still waiting in the Mystic Forest—looked up when they heard the explosion. Ye Ranran’s eyes widened a little. “Isn’t that Eldest Young Master Jiang’s signal?”

Mu Hongyu—who had no fond feelings toward Jiang Yucheng and his company—frowned. “Shouldn’t they have left by now?”

“I think they’re gathering everyone... Are they waiting for us to go back?” asked Ye Ranran, who then exchanged a baffled look with Mu Hongyu. *They left ages ago, so why are they summoning us now?*

“That signal came from the Gray Triangle. They probably intend to wait for you guys for a bit before leaving. They won’t wait too long though,” Qin Yi told them. *If those people really wanted to leave together with these kids, they would’ve sent a signal long ago. Why wait until now when they’re already at the transportation formation? It doesn’t matter to them when they call these kids over, for they’re just doing it in passing.*

Mu Hongyu shook her head. “I’m staying until Liuyue comes out.”

“Same.” Ye Ranran nodded firmly.

Qiang Wanzhou—on the other hand—silently stood on the side. He didn’t even look at the signal, for all his attention had been on the mother tree the whole time.

“Hypocrites!” Lei Laosi snorted at the sight of the gradually disappearing fireworks. *Given the kind of a person Jiang Yucheng is, these kids are probably nothing in his eyes. Only god knows why he’s calling them back. Either way, he must be up to no good again. If Her Highness hadn’t been forming a contract with the red-tailed phoenix, we wouldn’t have let that scumbag off. As for Shangguan Wan... Since the Nine-Colored Heavenly Pheasant has successfully broken through to become a red-tailed phoenix, there’s no need for Qin Yi and me to be stationed here anymore. Therefore, we can leave with Her Highness once she comes out. When that time comes, they’ll be in for it!*

In any case, they weren't too bothered about the signal. After talking about it for a bit, they put this matter aside and focused on waiting for Chu Liuyue instead.

At Qin Yi's request, Mu Hongyu and Ye Ranran began cultivating. There was no telling when Chu Liuyue would emerge, so they figured that they might as well make use of the time to raise their cultivation level.

As for Qiang Wanzhou... He swallowed a pill before he continued his wait.

Qin Yi didn't pay much attention to Qiang Wanzhou at first, thinking that the pill was just something for the latter to heal his injuries with. However, it didn't take long before he realized that Qiang Wanzhou's aura was intensifying. The point was that the latter wasn't absorbing the surrounding Heaven and Earth Force to raise his cultivation—the force came from his own body. His cultivation base was slowly improving even though he wasn't concentrating on it like Mu Hongyu and Ye Ranran.

Slowly, a layer of ice formed on Qiang Wanzhou's body, and the ground underneath his feet even frosted over. While cold air emanated from his body, the Cloud-Sky Copper Sword burned with blue flames.

As the sword contained Chu Liuyue's force, it could sense her aura better. Thus, Qiang Wanzhou cultivated while waiting for Chu Liuyue under two extreme temperatures.

"What's wrong with this kid?" Lei Laisi muttered the question under his breath when he noticed something amiss with Qiang Wanzhou. *I've never seen such a cultivation method before.*

Qin Yi narrowed his eyes. "I think there's cold qi in him, and it contains a lot of force. To get stronger, all he needs to do is dissolve this cold qi."

Secretly marveling at Qin Yi's keen eyes, Lei Laosi couldn't resist giving the other a thumbs-up. "How did you know this when you're not a heavenly doctor?"

Qin Yi flashed him a smile. "It was just a guess."

Qiang Wanzhou turned to look at them, his gaze stopping on Qin Yi's face for a second as he furrowed his eyebrows—which were covered by his short blond hair. Apart from himself, the only other person who knew about his condition was Chu Liuyue, so he felt wary when he realized that Qin Yi knew it too. *How did he... know about it? I don't believe that it was just a guess. It was too accurate to be true!*

Upon sensing his suspicion, Qin Yi raised his eyebrows. "You don't have to look at me like that. Your condition merely reminded me of a similar case I came across in a book."

Astonishment flashed across Qiang Wanzhou's face, and he hesitated for a moment before asking, "You... came across a condition similar to mine in a book?"

"According to the book, that person successfully dissolved the cold qi in his body and eventually became a top warrior. It was a grueling process though; the average person won't be able to take it," answered Qin Yi with a nod.

However, he didn't mention that this wasn't the only example recorded in the book—in fact, there were thousands of similar cases, but only one survived. Still, it meant that there were likely many other people with the same condition as Qiang Wanzhou, although he was the only one who had luckily survived this long.

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It was clear that Qiang Wanzhou knew nothing about this.

“...What book is that? May I take a look at it?” Qiang Wanzhou asked.

His condition had been like this for as long as he could remember. Having no parents, relatives, or even friends, growing up in the barren and uncivilized Nan Jiang had been tough on him. If he hadn't met that person later on, he probably would've died at Qian Wei Lake long ago.

“That book doesn't belong to me, and I don't think it can be found anymore.” A hint of despondency showed in Qin Yi's eyes as he said this.

Qiang Wanzhou thus didn't ask further questions about that book.

After a brief silence, Qin Yi asked, “Was the pill you took earlier supposed to help dissolve the cold qi?”

Qiang Wanzhou nodded.

“Where did you get it from?”

“Liuyue refined it,” answered Qiang Wanzhou honestly.

As I expected. Her Highness has also read that book before, so it's unsurprising that she knows how to refine it. I'm surprised that Qiang Wanzhou managed to survive on his own though. Qin Yi smiled. “You sure are lucky.”

Qiang Wanzhou gave a solemn nod of his head. *Indeed. All the people I met have been really kind to me too.*

All of a sudden, a faint pattern flashed across his glabella, which was much to Qin Yi's surprise. "There's a seal in your body?"

Qiang Wanzhou looked at him in surprise as he nodded hesitantly. *Not even Liuyue knows about this.*

That seal had been covered by the cold qi, but the seal was slowly starting to surface as it gradually dissolved. Qiang Wanzhou hadn't paid much attention to the seal because nothing had happened to it before.

Filled with shock, Qin Yi hurriedly asked, "Who left that seal on you?!"

That looks like...

Chapter 770: She's Back

"I have no idea either." Qiang Wanzhou shook his head. I only know about the seal's existence; I don't know when or who placed it on me. Thinking about it, the seal is pretty strange too. Seals in other people's bodies are usually used to suppress their force, but it doesn't work that way for mine. In fact, the seal inside me has frozen because of the cold qi.

Even now, he still didn't know what the seal inside his body was for. He had thought about removing it and thus tried a lot of methods to do so, but it was to no avail. Seeing that the seal didn't cause any problems to him, he decided to put this matter on hold.

Qin Yi's ability to determine his condition and his anxious reaction upon the discovery came as an unexpected surprise to him.

A hint of disappointment surfaced in Qin Yi's eyes when he heard Qiang Wanzhou's answer. He walked over to the latter to take a closer look at the pattern to confirm if it was the same as he had guessed, but the pattern had disappeared.

Qiang Wanzhou realized that there might be something on his face when he saw Qin Yi scrutinizing him. "Do I have something on me?"

Upon realizing that the pattern wouldn't appear again, Qin Yi sighed inwardly and nodded. "It was just a flash, so I failed to get a clear look at it."

Qiang Wanzhou carefully read Qin Yi's expression as he asked tentatively, "You've seen this seal before?"

It took Qin Yi a moment to answer him. "I think so, but my memory is a little fuzzy. I also didn't get a clear look at it, so I can't really remember."

Qiang Wanzhou appeared skeptical. If the seal's pattern really appeared on my glabella just now, then he must've seen it. The shock in his eyes was proof of it, and it definitely didn't belong to someone who couldn't remember the pattern. Does he not want to talk about it? But why?

Despite the many questions running through Qiang Wanzhou's mind, he didn't voice them out.

Qin Yi looked at Qiang Wanzhou with a complicated gaze before retracting it. He then spoke in a serious tone. "As your cultivation level increases, that seal will definitely appear again. Just pay more attention to it yourself and inform me as soon as possible if you detect anything unusual about it."

Qiang Wanzhou nodded after giving it a thought.

Meanwhile, the others were baffled by this scene. Lei Laosi couldn't resist asking, "What's going on?"

"Nothing," answered Qin Yi with a shake of his head.

Naturally, the others couldn't talk much about it since he refused to talk.

Lei Laosi was somewhat apprehensive though. Qin Yi has always been a calm and composed person. Apart from what happened to Her Highness back then, I've never seen him getting so worked up before. Pity I didn't manage to see what was on Qiang Wanzhou's face, or I would've known what made him so agitated...

Everyone quieted down once more, with the exception of Qin Yi. Despite his calm exterior, his emotions weren't quite settled down. If what I saw was correct... Her Highness is probably still unaware of this. When I have the chance, I have to inform her about this as soon as possible.

...

Two hours soon passed by, but the Mystic Forest remained as quiet as ever. There was no sign of Mu Hongyu and the rest of her companions.

The hope in Zhu Hong and the others' eyes gradually died out. Time is already up, but they're still not here yet. That means they don't intend to go back with us.

Looks of regret and disappointment showed on many people's faces, for they had been hoping that Chu Liuyue and the others would show up.

"Time's up, right?" asked Shangguan Wan. By now, she had already regained her composure, and her mood had improved a lot when Chu Liuyue and her gang failed to return on time. That means Mu Hongyu and the others still haven't found Chu Liuyue. They're hoping that they can find her? What a joke! Well, there might be a small chance of them finding her if they turn the entire Mystic Forest over, but she would've turned into a pile of bones by then!

Jiang Yucheng's eyes drooped slightly as he tried to conceal the emotions in them. "Let's go!"

Mu Qinghe then stepped forward to activate the transportation formation, and the group disappeared in no time.

Moonlight spilled down on the vast and boundless Dahuang Swamp, making it look bleak and lonely. A red dot appeared on the moon out of nowhere and slowly grew bigger. Just like that, the bright moon became completely blood-red, which made it look treacherous and demonic.

While the desert was scorching and dry in the daytime, it was freezing at night due to the bone-chilling breeze.

Under the undulating sand dunes, something seemed to be stirring. A misty voice was heard just then. "She's back?"

It was impossible to tell the gender of the voice's owner, but their voice sounded pleasantly melodious and bewitching.

A moment later, sand began rolling down the nearby dunes, forming quicksand. "How is that possible?"

The voice this time seemed to belong to a toddler, but it was spoken in a wise and grudging tone. "She told us that she'd return in a few days, but several years have passed, and she's still nowhere in sight! How can you trust someone who goes back on their word? I never want to see her again in my life!"

"Then, why do you still bother looking outside whenever the moon turns red at night? Did you think that we're clueless about what you've been up to?" This time, the speaker sounded old. Their voice was mellow with tinges of laziness in it. "You've turned this desert upside down."

The owner of the babyish voice went silent for a moment before spitting angrily, "So what? I want to see when exactly she's returning! She's the only person in the whole world who dares to lie to me to this extent!"

The owner of the babyish voice continued grumbling, "I'll teach that lass a good lesson when I see her! Let's see if she dares to disappear without a word again!"

"Beat her if you want, but count me out. I can't bear to hit her." The owner of the old voice chuckled.

"This old fart!"

"Right back at you."

The person who first spoke scoffed. "What's the use of talking about this now when we haven't seen her yet? Why did she go to the Mystic Forest though?"

"She's even forgotten the rules!" The owner of the babyish voice fumed. "Wait! I think there's something wrong with the Mystic Forest!"

The other two people went silent.

"Is that thing going to come out?!" exclaimed the owner with the old voice. "Of all times, why did she go there now?! Didn't we already tell her—"

"It looks like she's gotten quite brazen during the years of her absence." The melodious voice sounded like it could be gone with the wind at any time. "I'm going to see for myself."

"I'll come too!"

"What's the hurry? Wait up!"

The voices gradually disappeared, and all that could be heard was the gentle rustling sound of the moving sand.

Once again, the Red Moon Desert was quiet.