

At dawn, when the first ray of sunlight poked out into the sky, Bai Xiaochun felt his identity medallion vibrating. He stood there at the front of his courtyard, looked back at what had been his home for the past two years, and let out a long sigh.

"I'm definitely going to need to be very careful. I absolutely must not lose my poor little life...." Bai Xiaochun had a very anxious look on his face. He had eight layers of leather coats on, and was wearing Big Fatty Zhang's huge black wok on his back. Although he was actually relatively skinny, having dressed up in this fashion made him look almost spherical. With a very serious look, Bai Xiaochun left Fragrant Cloud Peak and headed toward the main gate that marked the border of the south bank. On the way, the numerous disciples who looked at him all stared in shock at his unusual getup. He scowled miserably the entire time, and whenever he ran into people he knew, he would simply wave goodbye to them. Soon he was approaching the main gate, whereupon he saw two people who had arrived ahead of him. One of them was a young man sitting cross-legged in meditation. The other was a young woman who was pacing back and forth in front of the gate, but who currently had her back to him, and yet looked familiar. "Du Lingfei?" he thought, a look of shock appearing on his face. It was at this point that Du Lingfei also caught sight of him, and her jaw dropped. Then she noticed what he was wearing, and her brow furrowed. "You're the last person in the team going to investigate Elder Brother Hou's whereabouts?" she asked. "Yeah, what a coincidence...." he replied with a dry cough. Then he looked from Du Lingfei over toward the young man. Although his face was expressionless, a murderous aura rippled off of him, and as soon as Bai Xiaochun looked over at him, he opened his eyes and looked back, an enigmatic half-smile on his face. Bai Xiaochun's heart twitched. After analyzing the matter, he had come to the conclusion that the easiest way for Qian Dajin to do something to him was to place a friend within the mission group. Then, after they all left the sect, that friend could strike at him secretly. At the moment, he found both Du Lingfei and this young man to be worthy of suspicion. And yet, he acted completely at ease, and even smiled widely at the young man. "Bai Xiaochun at your service," he said. "Elder Brother, you are...?" The young man smiled back and replied, "Feng Yan of Green Crest Peak." Bai Xiaochun quickly clasped hands in respect. "Oh, Elder Brother Feng, I should have known it was you. At first glance you're obviously an extraordinary individual. This is my first mission outside of the sect, so I really hope you can show me how it's done, Elder Brother Feng." It only took a moment for Bai Xiaochun to assess that Feng Yan's cultivation base was at the seventh level of Qi Condensation. "No problem. You flatter me." A flicker of scorn passed through Feng Yan's eyes. The only reason he'd agreed to take the mission was that Inner Sect disciple Qian Dajin had promised him a lucrative reward to secretly kill Bai Xiaochun. As far as he was concerned, that wouldn't be difficult at all. All he had to do was be careful and make it look like an accident; Bai Xiaochun was as good as dead. The only thing he had to be careful about was to make sure that Du Lingfei didn't see. Of course, he was mostly convinced that Du Lingfei had taken the mission for the same reason he had, because of Qian Dajin. As for Du Lingfei, she was currently frowning. She had never imagined that accepting a mission outside the sect would result in her being stuck with one of the people she despised the most. After all, no one had forced her to take this mission; she had selected it on her own. Although there might be some danger associated with it, it was a relatively simple mission with a hefty reward of merit points. She had been stuck in the great circle of the fifth level of Qi Condensation for some time now, and needed some Cloudsoaring Incense to break through, which of course required merit points. As soon as she thought about Cloudsoaring Incense, her revulsion for Bai Xiaochun stirred. "The lily-livered rat!" she thought, glaring at Bai Xiaochun in disgust. She especially despised his sphere-like appearance with all the clothes and the black wok, which made it more obvious than ever that he

feared death. Snorting coldly, she completely ignored Bai Xiaochun and turned toward Feng Yan to clasp hands and bow. "Elder Brother Feng, now that we're all here, please produce the windsiff. The sooner we get this mission done, the sooner we can come back." Feng Yan gave a slight smile, then slapped his bag of holding, causing a white beam of light to fly out. A blast of wind could be felt as the beam transformed into a small white ship, about six meters long. Fluctuations of spiritual power emanated off of the ship, transforming into an extraordinary pressure. Bai Xiaochun looked it over and immediately blurted, "Elder Brother Feng, what's that?" This was his first time seeing anything like this. As the ship hovered there in midair, it was obvious that it was some type of vehicle. Even as Du Lingfei's eyes flickered with scorn, Feng Yan smiled. "This is a windsiff. When missions require us to go some distance away from the sect, we can rent ships like this from the sect to make things easier. We can save some of our own spiritual power, at the cost of some spirit stones." With that, he leaped up into the air and settled down into the ship. Du Lingfei quickly followed, as did Bai Xiaochun. The ship wasn't very big, and was somewhat cramped, but there was still plenty of room for the three of them. Bai Xiaochun sat down in the very back and began to study ship even more closely. The more he looked at it, the more he realized that it truly was an incredible item. "One of these days," he murmured, "I'm going to get one of these for myself." Seeing Bai Xiaochun looking like a complete country bumpkin, Du Lingfei couldn't hold back from sarcastically remarking, "Even if you sold yourself into slavery you couldn't afford one!" Bai Xiaochun looked over at Du Lingfei, measured her up, then nodded. "True. But if I sold you, I could definitely afford one." "YOU!" Du Lingfei's phoenix-like eyes went wide, and she was just about to say something more when Feng Yan sent the windsiff flying off into the distance in a beam of prismatic light. As they sped along at top speed, whistling through the air, a shield sprang up around the ship, creating a barrier against the wind. Although they could hear the wind buffeting the shield, the inside of the ship was very calm. Meanwhile, back on Fragrant Cloud Peak, in the Journeyman Apothecary Hall, Elder Xu, who had been in charge of the promotion test, was looking at a jade slip and frowning slightly. "The Hall of Justice circumvented Fragrant Cloud Peak to force Bai Xiaochun into accepting an outside mission?" After examining the jade slip a bit further, his frown faded away. After examining the details of the mission, he realized that although there might be some danger involved, it was nothing deadly. Then he thought about what Li Qinghou had mentioned about Bai Xiaochun's personality. "If the kid's a bit lazy, then some punishment isn't uncalled for." Finally, he put the jade slip down and continued to concoct medicine. At the same time, Qian Dajin stood outside his immortal's cave in the Inner Sect, watching the ship flying off into the distance, and a cold smile appeared on his face. "With Feng Yan's cultivation base, secretly killing Bai Xiaochun should be as easy as flipping over his hand. Bai Xiaochun... you might have exceptional skill with plants and vegetation, but unfortunately, you'll never have a chance to do anything with it. You're dead!" A sinister gleam appeared deep within Qian Dajin's eyes. Smiling, he turned and headed back into his immortal's cave. The azure sky stretched out in all directions. Bai Xiaochun sat there on the ship, feeling somewhat nervous, but at the same time looking out excitedly as the scenery changed. Off in the distance he saw numerous mountain peaks that looked like swords sticking up into the sky, part of a mountain range that looked like a slumbering dragon. There was also... a massive, shocking river! "The Heavenspan River...." he said, taking a deep breath. After becoming an Outer Sect disciple, he had done a lot of research, and had learned that the entire cultivation world relied on the Heavenspan River. It was actually the source of all spiritual energy. That was why all of the sects were located in areas near it. Furthermore, the further you went into the Upper Reaches of the river, the stronger the spiritual energy was. Although the Spirit Stream Sect was technically in the Lower Reaches, even that position had allowed them to stand strong and tall for ten thousand years. According to what Bai Xiaochun had read, the Spirit Stream Sect hadn't always existed in its current position. It had previously been located in the delta region. But then an extraordinary patriarch had appeared among the countless sects and cultivator clans there. After distinguishing himself in intense fighting, he gained the approval of a higher ranking sect, and thus earned the qualifications to establish his own sect in the Lower Reaches. "Supposedly, the sects in the Upper Reaches of the Heavenspan River are so powerful that the Spirit Stream Sect can't even compare to them. Furthermore, according to the legends... there are even more terrifying sects at the source of the river." Bai Xiaochun forced himself to calm down, and reminded himself that he needed to be extra careful in this mission. Off in the distance, the Heavenspan River

looked golden, almost like a huge churning sea. Furthermore, hugging the river were four towering mountain peaks. "That must be the north bank of the Spirit Stream Sect," Bai Xiaochun thought. Also visible was the main peak of the Spirit Stream Sect, which arched over the Heavenspan River like a huge bridge! "Mount Daoseed!" Bai Xiaochun had actually seen all of this when Li Qinghou had first brought him to the Spirit Stream Sect. However, at that time he had been a mere mortal. Now that he was an Outer Sect disciple, he got a completely different feeling when looking at it. The ship shot away from the sect at top speed, following the rippling water beneath as they headed deeper into the Lower Reaches. "Junior Sister Du, Junior Brother Bai, I presume both of you have already examined the details of the mission," Feng Yan said coolly, his voice so light that it was almost hard to hear. "We're heading to an area in the Lower Reaches of the Heavenspan River called the Fallenstar Mountains. Junior Brother Hou's last message came from that area. The Fallenstar Mountains mark the boundary of the Spirit Stream Sect's sphere of influence. The rest of the mountains count as the territory of the Blood Stream Sect. "We might find ourselves in some danger on this mission. However, by preparing ourselves mentally, and also being as cautious as possible, we will likely avoid any major problems. "However, our final destination is quite a distance away, and will take quite a few spirit stones to get there. Most of our time on this mission will be spent traveling, but with our windsiff, we will be able to bypass some of the more difficult terrain." With that, a cold gleam flickered in his eyes before he closed them in meditation. Du Lingfei ignored Bai Xiaochun and began to perform breathing exercises. Bai Xiaochun felt more vigilant than ever. Despite also sitting cross-legged and closing his eyes, he was really pondering which among these two had been sent by Qian Dajin. "It's unlikely to be Du Lingfei," he thought. "Which means... there's an eighty to ninety percent chance that it's Feng Yan!"