

Chen Fei and his friends were always happy to gloat in the misfortune of others. As they watched what was happening to Bai Xiaochun, they couldn't help but feel as if the grand laws of heaven were truly being enforced implacably. As for the two Outer Sect disciples in charge of the trial by fire, they looked on with hatred, a sensation that no other servant had ever caused them to feel.

"I don't wanna go...." Bai Xiaochun plopped onto the ground and immediately began to wail, his voice filled with such a feeling of being abused that any listener would surely weep. Simultaneously, back down on the path, Big Fatty Zhang and Third Fatty Hei saw Li Qinghou and began to quiver. They quickly bowed their heads to avoid notice. "Ah, Ninth Junior Brother, it's not that I refused to save you. Now that the peak lord of Fragrant Cloud Peak has shown up, you have no choice but to suck it up in the Outer Sect...." Big Fatty Zhang heaved continuous sighs in his heart as he hunched his shoulders and tried to inconspicuously scuttle away. However, it was at that point that Li Qinghou's voice suddenly rang in his ears. "You two are coming along as well." As soon as Big Fatty Zhang heard the words, a powerful force dragged both him and Third Fatty Hei up into the air. They didn't even have a chance to grab onto a tree before they were hauled to the top of the mountain. "I don't want to go!" Big Fatty Zhang wailed, sounding even more miserable than Bai Xiaochun. "I'd rather die in the Ovens than climb the ladder in the Outer Sect...." He sounded so miserable, in fact, that Bai Xiaochun looked up in surprise and forgot to cry. Third Fatty Hei didn't say anything, but instead looked silently down toward the bottom of the mountain, face a picture of depression and longing. When Li Qinghou heard Big Fatty Zhang's miserable wailing, his face darkened and he said, "Shut up!" Instantly, Bai Xiaochun rose to his feet, face solemn as he stood there. Instead of looking sullen like he had before, he was the complete opposite, as if he had suddenly switched faces. Big Fatty Zhang stared in shock, and then immediately stood up. Inwardly, he felt as if the persecution he was enduring was like an ocean that threatened to overwhelm him. He just couldn't figure out why Li Qinghou wouldn't say anything when Bai Xiaochun wailed, and then yelled at him when he did the same thing. "Zhang Dahai, starting today, you'll be an Outer Sect disciple of Violet Cauldron Peak! [1] "Chen Qingrou, you'll be going to Green Crest Peak! [2] "Bai Xiaochun, you'll be staying here with me, as an Outer Sect disciple of Fragrant Cloud Peak." Li Qinghou looked at Bai Xiaochun and felt a headache coming on. He had just gone into secluded meditation when he got the news about the Ovens crew and everything that was going on. Even the sect elders were talking about it. Of course, from their perspective, the whole thing was quite amusing, and a nice break from the monotony of cultivation. None of them were even inclined to dole out any punishment. However, it wasn't something that could be allowed to go on indefinitely, so Li Qinghou came to straighten matters out. After he finished speaking, he flicked his sleeve, ignoring Chen Fei and the other two men as he looked at something further up on Fragrant Cloud Peak. Bai Xiaochun sighed bitterly and said his goodbyes to Big Fatty Zhang and Third Fatty Hei. All of a sudden, he remembered something. He turned his head to look at Third Fatty Hei, a strange expression on his face as he asked, "Third Elder Brother, your name... is actually Chen Qingrou? Hahaha! What a good name. It makes you sound like a smoking hot babe!" Third Fatty Hei gave a cold but depressed snort, then turned and began to walk down the mountain. "What's wrong with him?" Bai Xiaochun asked, looking at Big Fatty Zhang. Big Fatty Zhang looked back at him with a strange look in his eyes. Then, he clapped him on the shoulder and spoke, his voice solemn and sincere. "Ninth Junior Brother, there's something I never

told you before. Third Fatty Hei actually isn't your Elder Brother. In fact... she's your Elder Sister." Clearing his throat, he turned and hurried off. Bai Xiaochun stared at him blankly. It felt like thunder was crashing around inside his head, as if the whole world were collapsing. "Elder... Elder Sister?" After a long moment passed, Bai Xiaochun took a deep breath and was about to turn and look at Third Fatty Hei, when suddenly Li Qinghou's cold voice rang out. "Quit running your mouth and catch up!" Bai Xiaochun hurried after Li Qinghou, looking more bitter than ever. After a few paces, he turned, looked back down at the Ovens, and sighed. It had been quite a while since Bai Xiaochun learned that the Spirit Stream Sect's north bank had four mountain peaks, and that the south bank had three. Li Qinghou was the peak lord of the third mountain, Fragrant Cloud Peak. The position of peak lord was very distinguished in the sect. Although Fragrant Cloud Peak didn't look very big, upon entering it, one would realize that it was filled with the singing of birds and the fragrant aroma of flowers. It looked like a celestial paradise, and was actually much larger on the inside than it appeared to be from the outside. Actually, the finish line of the trial by fire was only the peak of one of the auxiliary spurs of the mountain as a whole, and really only counted as the foot of the mountain. Mist swirled about everywhere, as well as an occasional medicinal aroma, a single whiff of which would lift the spirits and send a warm feeling through the body. Bai Xiaochun could immediately tell that this place was extraordinary. He took a deep breath, and his cultivation base, which hadn't made much progress in the past months, instantly surged to life. Li Qinghou didn't look back, but his eyes gleamed with a bit of admiration. Even he felt that Bai Xiaochun's progress in cultivation in the past year wasn't bad. "Now that you're an Outer Sect disciple, you can't go and cause any more trouble," Li Qinghou said slowly. "Practicing cultivation is like rowing a boat against the current. It requires constant effort." Bai Xiaochun didn't dare say anything back. He put on the most charming expression he could, and nodded continuously. "Sect resources are only one aspect of cultivation for Outer Sect disciples," Li Qinghou continued. "You also need to work hard and take advantage of whatever opportunities come your way. There are plenty of missions that you can take on for the sect. In a moment, you can go look at the missions and pick a few to start your training." When Bai Xiaochun heard that, his heart suddenly thumped. A while back when flipping through the sect rules, he had noticed one particular rule about Outer Sect disciple being required to accomplish at least one mission every so often. If they didn't, they would be punished by being demoted from Outer Sect disciple to servant. He immediately went wild with joy. However, Li Qinghou had apparently realized what he was thinking, and coolly said, "Don't go thinking about breaking the sect rules. Other people might be demoted to servant for not accomplishing missions, but if you try something like that, I'll expel you from the sect and return you to your village. A hundred years from now I might even burn some incense for you, if I haven't forgotten about you by then." That frightened Bai Xiaochun half to death. If he had never seen this world of immortals, it wouldn't have been so bad. But now that he was on the way to living forever, he had no desire at all to go back to his village. If that happened, he might as well forget about trying to live forever. He quickly smacked himself in the chest and told himself that he would definitely go and accomplish some missions. Soon, they were in the middle section of Fragrant Cloud Peak. A building appeared out of the mists, not very large, but very elegant-looking. Visible through one of the windows was a young man, who sat there quietly reading a book. As if having sensed someone approaching, the young man looked up, revealing a handsome-looking face. When he saw Li Qinghou, he immediately walked out of the building and clasped hands in greeting. "Disciple offers greetings, peak lord." "This is disciple Bai Xiaochun. Take him and get him set up in the Outer Sect." Li Qinghou gave Bai Xiaochun a final look before transforming into a beam of prismatic light that shot further up the mountain. Now that Li Qinghou was gone, Bai Xiaochun could heave a sigh of relief. All of a sudden, he felt as if a weight had been lifted off of his shoulders, and the sky was now blue again. The young man measured Bai Xiaochun up, then laughed. "Ah, are you the guy who's been blocking the trial by fire and selling spots? It's... Bai Xiaochun, right?" Bai Xiaochun chuckled. "You're praising me for nothing, Elder Brother. A small thing like that isn't even worth mentioning." The young man laughed even harder at that. Clearly, he was very amused by Bai Xiaochun. Dropping the topic, he began to lead Bai Xiaochun around Fragrant Cloud Peak, pointing out some of the important buildings along the way. "Fragrant Cloud Peak occupies an important position on the south bank. Green Crest Peak is known for its sword cultivators, Violet Cauldron Peak for their magical techniques. As for the Fragrant Cloud Peak, we excel in concocting spirit medicines. "Fragrant Cloud Peak is famous even

among the four great sects on this branch of the Heavenspan River. That's especially true of his excellency the peak lord, who is one of the two most famous apothecaries in the Eastwood Continent. "Therefore, becoming an Outer Sect disciple of Fragrant Cloud Peak also makes you an apprentice apothecary. That means you need to study about plants and vegetation, as well as different medicine concocting techniques." The young man continued to provide even more detailed explanations to Bai Xiaochun as they walked along. Eventually, they reached the location where Bai Xiaochun received his Outer Sect disciple clothing and equipment, including a bag of holding. Although the bag of holding didn't fit much inside, Bai Xiaochun found the thing to be marvelous. After testing it out a few times, he put it away as carefully as if it were a precious treasure. What delighted him more than anything else was that getting promoted to Outer Sect disciple also came with a reward of twenty spirit stones. Now, he had just enough to buy the medicinal plants he needed. Soon it was dusk. Thanks to the explanations provided by the young man, Bai Xiaochun now knew a lot about Fragrant Cloud Peak. Eventually, the young man led him to a place called the 10,000 Medicines Pavilion. From there, he received a jade slip. "This jade slip describes 10,000 types of plants and vegetation. You need to memorize all of them, and then you can get the second jade slip. "Junior Brother Bai, the path of cultivation is a long one, and spirit medicines are an aid that you can't do without. If you can become an apothecary, you'll be able to achieve a meteoric rise here. "Apprentice apothecary, journeyman apothecary, master apothecary...." the young man said with a smile. "Junior Brother Bai, your future progress will all depend on what good fortune you encounter." By the time night fell, the young man had led him to the courtyard dwelling the sect had arranged as his residence. "Junior Brother Bai, I have to head off the mountain tomorrow, so I won't be able to accompany you to the Scripture Pavilion. Go there at dawn to get the rest of the Violet Qi Cauldron Control Art mnemonics. You'll also be able to pick one more magical technique from the selection they have there. It's a good opportunity to get some things for free. After that, you'll have to pay merit points for any magical techniques you want. "If there's anything you don't understand, you can always come looking for me. My name is Hou Yunfei. Many thanks for taking care of Xiaomei for me." Hou Yunfei smiled, clasped hands and bowed. Then he turned and walked away. "Hou Yunfei?" Bai Xiaochun returned the bow and watched Hou Yunfei walking off. After a moment of thought, he recalled the face of a young woman. "Hou Xiaomei!" he thought, blinking. He suddenly realized that he had struck it very lucky, as if he'd shoved a random stick into the ground only to have it grow into a lovely shady tree. After a moment, he took a deep breath and then looked over at his courtyard residence. His eyes gleamed, and he stood tall and straight beneath the moonlight. "Well, I guess becoming an Outer Sect disciple isn't that bad after all!" Flicking his sleeve, he walked into the courtyard.

1. 1. Zhang Dahai's name in Chinese is 张大海 zhāng dà hǎi - Zhang is a common surname. Dahai means ocean or literally "big sea"

2. 2. Chen Qingrou's name in Chinese is 陈清柔 chén qīng róu. Chen is a common surname. Qingrou means "soft" or "gentle." This sounds like a very feminine name