

## **And thus, the trial by fire concluded. As Hou Xiaomei walked further up the mountain, Big Fatty Zhang looked at her and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.**

"Ah, so fair, so young, so pure...." he said. Then he looked over at Bai Xiaochun, as if he were comparing the two of them. [1] Bai Xiaochun was also staring at Hou Xiaomei as she walked off into the distance, his heart filled with conflicting emotions. Then he heard Big Fatty Zhang, and turned to find him looking at him out of the corner of his eye. "Hey, what are you looking at!?" he yelled. Big Fatty Zhang laughed loudly at Bai Xiaochun's anger, then pulled out the bag of spirit stones and quickly changed the topic. "Come, come, why don't we count our spirit stones? We're rich now! Hahaha! This really was a great idea." "What's the point in counting them?" replied Bai Xiaochun with a cold harrumph. "No matter how many times you do it, it won't change how many there are." "Ninth Junior Brother, you don't understand. What you're looking at is just spirit stones, but what you're counting is... life." Big Fatty Zhang rarely spoke of the profundities of life. To hear him speak in such a way left Bai Xiaochun shocked. He took the bag and tried to count the spirit stones the way Big Fatty Zhang would, but quickly got bored and handed the bag back. It was at about this time that glittering light rose up along the trial by fire path. Everyone's vision swam, and when it became clear again, they were back at the bottom of the mountain. When the middle-aged honor guard who was in charge of the trial by fire saw Bai Xiaochun and the others, a strange expression appeared on his face. After a moment, he shook his head and ignored them. As far as he was concerned, the sect would have to figure out what to do with the Ovens. Bai Xiaochun and the others were nervous, but seeing that there were no immediate repercussions, they exchanged glances, cleared their throats, and quickly headed back to the Ovens. Big Fatty Zhang kept counting the spirit stones over and over again, all the way until they were back at the Ovens. The other fatties soon returned, also elated. Everyone exchanged glances, and then looked extremely proud of themselves. After the loot had been split up, Bai Xiaochun went back to his hut. He had come to this place seeking to live forever. Were it not for the fact that he needed the medicinal plants to exchange for an Age-Prolonging Longevity-Enhancing Pill, he would never have even thought for a moment about spirit stones. That night, nobody in the Ovens could sleep. Big Fatty Zhang and the others were simply too excited from getting rich all of a sudden. In the past, their coin purses had been depressingly empty, but now, the future seemed bright and glorious. That having been said, they were still worried about the possible repercussions of what they had done, making it difficult for them to fall asleep. As for Bai Xiaochun, he couldn't stop thinking about the Age-Prolonging Longevity-Enhancing Pill, and was equally unable to fall asleep. The next day, the news about the Ovens blocking the path during the trial by fire spread like wildfire through the entire servants district on the south bank of the Spirit Stream Sect. Soon, everybody had heard. "Did you hear what the Ovens crew did?!?!" "Are they crazy? I can't believe they did that! Heavens! They sold spots into the Outer Sect! Outrageous! How come I never thought to do that?!" "I've heard that the people from the Ovens have important backgrounds and are really well connected in the sect. Otherwise, how could they dare to do something so infuriating!?" All departments and individuals in the servants district were talking about the Ovens. In the following days, the crew tried to keep a low profile, and even avoided going out alone. One evening several days later, Bai Xiaochun was ladling soup out into one thick-bottomed bowl after another. Suddenly, he heard the sounds of footsteps coming from the path outside. "Everyone from the Ovens get out here immediately! The Supervisors Department has received orders to investigate your role in what happened during the trials by fire!" Even as the voice called out, the main gate of the Ovens was kicked in loudly. The sound of the door being kicked open echoed out as several servants burst in, all of them wearing the robes of the Supervisors Department. Leading them all was none other than the burly man who had come last time with Xu Baocai. Big Fatty Zhang and Bai Xiaochun exchanged a glance, then walked out nonchalantly to face the combative group from the Supervisors Department. "I thought I heard the crows squawking this morning," Big

Fatty Zhang said. "I should have known that you would be showing up today, Chen Fei." Chen Fei laughed coldly as he looked first at Big Fatty Zhang and then at Bai Xiaochun. Their completely calm demeanor caused him to frown. On the way, he had been extremely excited, having believed himself to have finally gained the advantage he needed to be able to take down the Ovens, to put an end to the animosity that had existed for years between their two departments. "Quit pretending to be so calm!" Chen Fei said with a cold, eerie laugh. His eyes flickered with a fierce light. "People of the Ovens, allow me to ask, did the nine of you attend the most recent trial by fire for servant promotion to the Outer Sect?" "Sure did," Big Fatty Zhang replied, chuckling. "That's all I need to know. Take them away!" Chen Fei didn't mince his words. He waved his right index finger, and immediately, a dozen or so servants from the Supervisors Department quickly hurried forward with iron manacles to arrest the Ovens staff. Seeing this, Bai Xiaochun couldn't help but laugh and say, "Is your Supervisors Department in charge of everything? You can even disqualify us from being able to become Outer Sect disciples? You guys are pretty powerful." Chen Fei couldn't help but think of the recent incident with the flying sword. He held his hand out to stop the other servants, then looked at Bai Xiaochun with narrowed eyes. "Junior Brother Bai, if you're still not convinced of my authority, then answer me another question. Did you Ovens people block the exit of the trial by fire and then sell spots in the Outer Sect? Do you dare to admit that you did such a thing?!" "Of course I admit it!" Bai Xiaochun replied with a calm nod, looking quite charming. He even pointed at Big Fatty Zhang and the others and said, "So do they." "That's right, we all do. So what?!" Big Fatty Zhang said with a hearty laugh. Chen Fei's face flickered. He had never imagined that the Ovens staff would actually admit to the allegations. He had expected them to give in only after a bitter and protracted battle of wits. The way things were playing out seemed strange, and an odd feeling was growing inside of him. Therefore, it was without another word that he growled, "Excellent. Since you admit it, then it saves me having to ask more questions. You're going to come with me to the Hall of Justice. If any of you dare to resist us, then in accord with the sect rules, you'll be immediately expelled!" With that, he flew forward toward Bai Xiaochun, followed by the rest of his group. However, it was at this point that Bai Xiaochun suddenly extended his right hand and performed an incantation gesture. Immediately, a beam of sword light shot out from his sleeve, transforming into a colorful wooden sword. The instant the sword appeared between the two groups, it let off an oppressively cold glow. Chen Fei stopped in his tracks, his face falling. "Bai Xiaochun, how dare you resist arrest!" "Elder Brother Chen, the Supervisors Department might have the right to question us, but where did you get the right to arrest us?" "Hmph! What you admitted to violates sect rules, of course I have the right to arrest you!" "Wait, what sect rule did we violate?" Bai Xiaochun asked with narrowed eyes. Big Fatty Zhang and the others also looked at Chen Fei with narrowed eyes and cold smiles. "You sold a spot into the Outer Sect, which violates sect rule number... wait, huh?" Suddenly, Chen Fei stopped speaking, and his face fell. Beads of sweat popped out on his forehead. It was only at this point that he suddenly realized that there was actually no sect rule specifically forbidding people from selling spots into the Outer Sect while on the path of the trial by fire.... After all, not many people would think to do such a thing, and even if they did, they would likely not have the gumption to go through with the plan.... "Elder Brother Chen, why are you sweating?" Bai Xiaochun asked, sounding flabbergasted. However, as he spoke, his words grew louder and louder. "Come on, what rule was it that we violated? Just say it. Wait, could it be that we didn't violate any sect rules? Elder Brother Chen, did you trick the Hall of Justice into carrying out your own personal vendetta? Is that why you came here to punish us? Elder Brother Chen, what you are doing is a violation of volume nine statute number eleven of the sect rules! That comes with a heavy punishment!" By the end of his speech, he felt great. "Liar! I..." It wasn't just Chen Fei's face who fell. All of the other servants from the Supervisors Department all realized that a huge mistake had been made. It was at this point that Big Fatty Zhang smiled viciously, lifted up both hands, and cracked his knuckles. Fierce gleams appeared in the eyes of the other fatties as they began to walk toward the group from the Supervisor's Department. "Chen Fei, the Hall of Justice will deal with your violation of sect rules," said Big Fatty Zhang with a vicious grin, his energy surging. "But right now, you had better explain how you're going to compensate for the Ovens' cherished main gate, which was painstakingly forged by the hands of numerous past ancestors who died in the process!" Since they had dared to block the finish line of the trial by fire, they had naturally done so after being fully prepared. Bai Xiaochun had

suggested early on that they research the sect rules before enacting their huge plan. "Charge!" cried Big Fatty Zhang. His mountain-like figure immediately caused Chen Fei and the others to begin to tremble. Instantly, the clashing and clanging sounds of battle rang out in the courtyard. As for Bai Xiaochun, his body flashed through the air as he alighted on his usual spot atop the bamboo fence which surrounded the courtyard. He flicked his sleeve and clasped his hands behind his back. Looking off into the distance, he looked every bit the lonely hero who didn't deign to participate in the fighting. "With the snap of a finger, I, Bai Xiaochun, reduced the Supervisors Department to ash...." 1. In describing Hou Xiaomei, Big Fatty Zhang uses the same characters that make up Bai Xiaochun's name