

# The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation

Mo Xiang Tong Xia



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# Chapter 1: Prologue

“Great news! Wei WuXian has died!”

Less than a day had passed since the siege on Luanzang Hill, and the news spread through the cultivation world as if it sprouted wings, surpassing even the speed of warfare.

For a while, from the most prominent sects to rogue cultivators, everyone was discussing the siege lead by the Four Great Sects and followed by hundreds of smaller ones. “The YiLing Patriarch has died? Who could have killed him?”

“Who other than his shidi, Jiang Cheng, putting an end to his own relative for the greater good. Jiang Cheng led the Four Sects of YunmengJiang, LanlingJin, GusuLan, and QingheNie to destroy his ‘den’—Luanzang Hill.”

“I must say, good riddance!”

“Good riddance indeed! We finally eliminated this scourge.”

“If not for the YunmengJiang Sect adopting and teaching him, he would have only been a hobo living on the streets, let alone causing mayhem as bold as the ones these days. The head of the Jiang Sect raised him as his own child, yet he defected from them and became the enemy of the cultivation world, bringing shame upon the Jiang Sect, even leading to its near-extinction. He is the prime example of biting the hand that feeds him!”

“Jiang Cheng allowed this fellow to live for too long. If I were him, at the time of the defection, I wouldn’t have just stabbed him. In fact, I would have thoroughly examined the disciples of the sect again, so that he couldn’t do those crazy things he did later on. Who cares about the so called ‘considerations’ that he gave to his childhood friend.”

“That’s merely hearsay. Although Jiang Cheng was one of the main forces, he did not give Wei WuXian the final blow. Since he cultivated the Dark Path, Wei WuXian’s powers backfired and he was ripped to pieces.”

“Hahahaha... That’s karma! The ghost soldiers that he created are like unleashed dogs, biting everyone that they come across. It serves him right to be chewed to death!”

“But, if not for Jiang Cheng making a plan that aimed at Wei WuXian’s weaknesses, the siege might not have succeeded. Should I remind you folks of the item that Wei WuXian possessed? Did you forget about the day that three thousand skilled cultivators were completely annihilated?”

“I heard that it was more than three thousand, possibly five thousand.” “He was most certainly out of his mind.”

“It’s a good thing that he destroyed that evil weapon before he died. Otherwise, if it was left in this world to harm humankind, his sins would have been worse.”

“Oh well... You know, back then, Wei WuXian was one of the most promising cultivators, coming from a highly distinguished sect and finding success at a young age. How on Earth did he end up where he was?”

“This proves that one can only cultivate by following the right path. Using these dishonest practices only seems beneficial at first glance. Look what happened in the end. Not even a whole corpse was left of him.”

“Not everything was because of his cultivation path. Wei WuXian’s personality was quite immoral. One’s deeds will be paid, one way or another—what goes around always comes around.”

After Wei WuXian’s death, the era was focussed on the topic. The discussions of the people were mostly the same, with a few unconventional opinions being brought down immediately.

However, the elephant in the room stayed in the back of everyone’s mind.

Nobody could summon Wei WuXian’s soul, which meant that his soul had disappeared. It might have been torn apart by the millions of ghosts that devoured him.

Or, it might have escaped.

If it was the first, then all was well. Then again, nobody doubted the fact that the YiLing Patriarch had the power to move mountains and empty seas. If it was the last, his soul would eventually return to revive in his body. When the day came, the cultivation world, or even all of mortal land, would be faced with the most insane damnation and revenge, sinking into nothing but chaos and despair.

The various sects set one hundred and twenty stone beasts on top of Luanzang Hill and initiated frequent soul-summoning rituals, followed by heightened vigilance and searches for strange occurrences from all over the world.

In the first year, nothing happened.

In the second year, nothing happened. In the third year, nothing happened.

...

In the thirteenth year, nothing happened either.

More and more people were starting to believe that, perhaps, the YiLing Patriarch actually perished.

Even if he was capable of turning the world upside down, it was finally his turn to be toppled over.

Nobody would remain at the top for all of eternity—legends were only legends.

## Chapter 2: Reincarnation

Wei WuXian received a kick just as he opened his eyes. A voice thundered beside his ear, “Stop playing dead!”

The kick threw him backward, head first onto the ground. Fighting the urge to vomit, a thought formed in his head—that’s quite a lot of courage you have to kick me, the Patriarch. It was his first time hearing a human voice in quite a few years, let alone such a loud, fierce shriek. His head swirled and ears buzzed with the echoes of the voice, “Whose land do you think you’re living on? Whose rice are you eating? Whose money are you spending? What’s wrong with taking a few of your belongings? Everything you own should be mine, anyways!”

Aside from this adolescent, duck-like voice, there were also the clunks of ransacking chests and smashing objects. His eyes gradually cleared up.

A dimly-lit ceiling appeared in his sight, followed by a slant-browed person with a sickly composition, drenching him with spittle, “How dare you tell Father and Mother? Did you really think that anybody in this house is going to listen to you? You actually thought I was scared of you!”

A few servant-like hunks shifted over, “Young Master, everything has been smashed!” The young master asked, “How did you finish it so quickly?”

A manservant replied, “There’s nothing much inside this shack anyways.”

The young master seemed to be quite pleased, poking Wei WuXian forcefully on the nose, “You dared to tell on me, and look at you now, playing dead on the ground! For whom? As if anyone actually wants these piles of junk! Now that I’ve smashed everything, let’s see how you’re gonna tell on me in the future! Are you proud of yourself just because you’ve studied cultivation for a few years? Well, how does it feel when you’ve been kicked back home like a stray dog?”

Wei WuXian thought wearily.

I’m not pretending to be dead at all, since I’ve actually been dead for a couple of years. Who is this?

Where am I?

When did I do something as immoral as stealing another’s body?

The young master let out enough anger by kicking the person and wrecking the house, and strutted out with his two manservants, slamming the door with a “bang”. He shouted his orders, “Watch carefully. Don’t let him outside anytime this month, or he’ll make a fool of himself again!”

As the group went away, silence fell upon the room. Wei WuXian thought about getting up. Despite his effort, his limbs failed to uphold themselves, so he lay down again. He turned on his side, staring dizzily at the strange environment and the mess on the ground.

A bronze mirror rested on the side, probably thrown onto the ground. Wei WuXian grabbed it and looked into the mirror, only to see a ghastly pale face, with two asymmetrical piles of red on each side of his cheek. Add a blood-red tongue onto the features, and he would look like a hanged ghost. He tossed the mirror to the side and wiped his face, finding his hand covered in a white powder.

Fortunately, the body wasn’t born this way—it was only one of the owner’s penchants. He was no-doubt a man, yet he was covered with makeup (not to mention, badly applied makeup). How unbearable!

Taken back by the shock, some energy came back to him, and he finally sat up, noticing the circular array beneath him.

The array was scarlet in color and crooked in shape, appearing to have been drawn by hand, using blood as a medium, still damp and emitting a strong scent. The array was filled with warped scribbled incantations, which were somewhat smudged by his body, but came across as gruesome nonetheless.

After all, Wei WuXian was known as the Supreme Leader and the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation, so he was most certainly accustomed to vile-looking arrays such as this one.

It turned out that, in fact, he did not seize the body of another—he was offered one.

It was an ancient, forbidden technique. Compared to an array, it resembled a curse more. The caster of the array would injure themselves by creating incisions on their body, then draw the array, writing incantations using their own blood and finishing by sitting in the center of the

array. They could then summon an extremely villainous ghoul and ask for it to complete their wish. The price to pay was to offer their body to the evil spirit, with their own soul returning back to Earth.

This was the forbidden technique opposite to stealing another's body—offering one's body. Due to the grave sacrifices, only a few people were brave enough to put it into effect. After all, there were hardly any wishes strong enough for a living person to willingly sacrifice everything that they owned. Over thousands of years, only three or four examples had been proven to be true and recorded by history. Without exception, the people's wishes were the same—to take revenge.

Wei WuXian refused to accept this.

Why would he be put into the category of “extremely villainous ghouls”?

Although his reputation wasn't great and died in a horrifying way, he neither haunted the living nor sought vengeance. He could swear that one couldn't find another wandering ghost as harmless as him.

The difficult part was that, as soon as the evil spirit had taken over the body of the caster, the contract was sealed by default. The evil spirit must grant their wish, or else the curse would cause a backlash. The spirit in possession of the body would be completely annihilated, never to be born again!

Wei WuXian raised his hands to find that, unsurprisingly, both of his wrists were crisscrossed with multiple cuts. He proceeded to take off his belt. Under the black clothes, his chest and stomach areas were also covered with what seemed to be lacerations from a sharp tool. Although the bleeding had stopped, Wei WuXian knew that these weren't normal wounds. If he didn't fulfil the wish of the body's owner, the wounds would not be able to heal. It would worsen as time went on, and if the time limit ended, both his soul and this body would be ripped apart.

Wei WuXian confirmed his situation several times, repeating, “How can this happen to me?” in his heart even more times, and could finally stand upright, leaning against the wall. Even though the house was large in size, it was empty and shabby, with sheets and blankets looking like they hadn't been changed in a long while. There was a bamboo basket in the corner. It was supposed to be for storing trash, but, having been kicked over earlier, the scraps all tumbled out onto the ground. Wei WuXian scanned around the room and picked up a crumpled

piece of paper. He unfolded it and was surprised to see it crammed with words. He hurriedly gathered all of the paper.

The words on the papers must have been written by the owner of this body to vent when he felt stressed. Some sentences were incoherent and disordered, and anxiety leapt off of the page through the distorted handwriting. Wei WuXian read through every single piece of paper, and began to notice that something was wrong.

He took a few guesses and roughly understood the state of things.

It turned out to be that the owner of this body was named Mo XuanYu. His location was called Mo Village.

Mo XuanYu's grandfather was from a rich family of the area. His family was few in number, and, although he tried for a son, he only had two daughters. Their names were not mentioned, but the elder one was the daughter of his principal wife, looking for a husband to marry into the family, while the younger one was the daughter of a servant. The Mo family originally wanted to hastily give her to someone, but an adventure awaited her. When she was sixteen, the leader of a well-known cultivation family passed by the area, and fell in love with her at first sight.

Everyone admired cultivators. Cultivation families, in the eyes of common folk, were like people favored by God, mysterious yet noble. In the beginning, the people of Mo Village regarded the topic with contempt, but because the Sect Leader often helped out, the Mo family received plenty of advantages. And so, the direction of the discussions changed, and the Mo family took pride in the matter, while everyone else also envied the opportunity. The second-lady of Mo bore one son for the leader—Mo XuanYu.

But, not for long, since the Sect Leader was only involved with her to experiment with something new, he grew tired of it in a few years. After Mo XuanYu turned four, his father never came back again.

Gradually, the opinions of the Mo Village's people changed again. The original contempt and scorn returned, alongside with disdainful pity.

The second-lady of Mo did not want to accept this. She firmly believed that the sect leader would not turn a deaf ear to his own son. Sure enough, when Mo XuanYu turned fourteen, the Sect Leader took him back.

The second-lady stuck her nose up in the air again, and told everyone that her son would most certainly become an Immortal as fast as he could, bringing glory to his ancestors.

However, before Mo XuanYu achieved success in cultivation and inherited his father's position, he was driven back.

On top of that, he was driven back shamefully.

Mo XuanYu was homosexual, and had enough nerve to harass the other disciples. The scandal was revealed to the public and, as he had few achievements in terms of cultivation, there were no reasons for him to stay in the sect.

Like adding frost to snow, aside from the event itself, when Mo XuanYu returned, he often behaved in a crazy manner, almost as if his life was scared out of him.

The story was almost too complex to be put into words. Wei WuXian's eyebrows twitched. Not only a lunatic, a homosexual lunatic as well.

That explained why there were enough rouge and powder on his face to make him look like a hanged ghost, and also why nobody was surprised at the large, bloody array on the ground. Even if Mo XuanYu painted the whole room red with blood, from the tiles on the ground to the walls to the ceiling, the others wouldn't be overly surprised. After all, everyone knew that his head had a screw loose!

After he went back home dejectedly, he was bombarded with ridicule. The situation seemed like it was beyond redemption, and the second-lady of Mo, unable to withstand the blow, shortly choked to death due to the trauma.

At this time, Mo XuanYu's grandfather had already passed away. The first-lady of Mo was in charge of the family, but, ever since a young age, she had been unable to stand her younger sister, including her sister's son. She had only one child, Mo ZiYuan, who happened to be the person who ransacked the place earlier. When Mo XuanYu was taken away by his father, the first-lady was jealous, and wanted to have even the slightest relationship with a cultivation sect.

She hoped that the cultivator who came would take Mo ZiYuan to cultivate as well.

Of course, she was refused, or rather, ignored.

This was most certainly not a case of selling cabbage. One simply couldn't bargain, much less buy one and get another for free.

Strangely confident, this family all held the thought that Mo ZiYuan had a lot of potential and talent. They believed that if, back then, he was sent instead, he would have won recognition from the sect, unlike his disappointing cousin. Although, when Mo XuanYu left, Mo ZiYuan was still young, he was repeatedly instilled with nonsense such as this, and believed in them wholeheartedly. Every two or three days, he would find Mo XuanYu and humiliate him, cursing him for snatching his road to cultivation. At the same time, he found great interest in the talismans, elixirs, and magical tools, regarding all of them as his possessions and doing whatever he wanted with them.

Although Mo XuanYu often switched in and out of being a maniac, he did understand that he was degraded by others. He tolerated it, but Mo ZiYuan further intensified his behavior, almost emptying Mo XuanYu's whole room. His patience had finally drained out and he complained to his aunt and uncle, causing Mo ZiYuan's commotion from this morning.

The words on the paper were small and compact, hurting Wei WuXian's eyes. He thought to himself, "How fucked up is this person's life?"

No wonder Mo XuanYu would rather use the forbidden technique to sacrifice his body and ask villainous ghouls to take revenge.

The pain from his eyes transferred to his head. Supposedly, to use the forbidden technique, the caster would chant their wish silently. As the evil spirit being summoned, Wei WuXian should have been able to hear his specific requirements.

However, it was likely that Mo XuanYu secretly copied fragmented excerpts of the technique, resulting in him skipping this step. Wei WuXian guessed that he wanted to take revenge on the Mo family, but how should he do it? To what extent? To retrieve the items that were taken from him? Or to beat up everyone of the Mo surname?

Or... to wipe out the entire family?

In all likelihood, it was probably to wipe out the entire family. After all, anyone who touched upon the cultivation world would know what phrases were used most often to describe him— ungrateful, eccentric, indifferent to his own relatives, intolerable by the rule of Heaven, and other spectacular terms. Was there anyone else more "villainous" than him? If Mo XuanYu had dared to summon him specifically, the wish was most likely not an easily fulfilled one.

Wei WuXian couldn't help but sigh, "You've got the wrong person..."

## Translator's Notes

Array: A magical formation drawn on the ground to cast spells and such.

Sect leader: The leader of an organization dedicated towards the practice of cultivation.

Immortal: Humans who gained immortality from cultivational practices.

# Chapter 3: Aggression—Part One

Wei WuXian wanted to wash his face so that he could gaze upon the face of his body's owner, but there wasn't any water in the room, not even for drinking or washing. The only basin-like container was probably, he suspected, for lavatory purposes instead of cleansing. He pushed the door, but it was fastened with a latch, most likely to prevent him from wandering outside. None of these things made him feel the joy of reincarnation at all!

He figured that he might as well sit in the Lotus position and get used to his new home. Time flew by, and the day had passed. When he opened his eyes, sunlight seeped inside from the gaps of the door and windows. Although he could stand up and walk around, his still felt lightheaded.

Wei WuXian was puzzled, Mo XuanYu's amount of spiritual power is so insignificant that it could be ignored, so there shouldn't be a reason as to why I can't control this body properly. Why doesn't it work?

Then, a noise came from his stomach, and he realized that this wasn't related to his spiritual powers at all. In fact, it was because this body had not practiced inedia and felt hunger. If he didn't scavenge for food, he might become the first villainous ghoul who starved to death upon arrival.

Wei WuXian lifted his foot and was about to kick the door open, when, suddenly, the sound of footsteps approached. Someone stomped on the door and grunted, "It's mealtime!"

Nonetheless, there was no indication of the door being opened. Wei WuXian lowered his head and saw a miniature door with a small bowl set in front of it on the bottom of this one opening.

The servant outside shouted again, "Chop-chop! What are you waiting for? Take the bowl out after you finish!"

The door was slightly smaller than the kind for dogs to crawl through. It didn't allow the passage of humans, but bowls could be easily pushed inside. There were two dishes and one serving of rice, which looked quite unpleasant.

Wei WuXian played with the pair of chopsticks that were stuck into the rice, feeling quite bitter.

The YiLing Patriarch had just returned to the mortal world, but the first things he came upon were a kick and a scolding, not to mention the leftovers that served as his welcoming-meal.

Where were the blood and gore? The ruthless slaughter? The absolute destruction? Who would have believed him? He was like the tiger in a flatland, the dragon in shallow water, the phoenix without feathers, losing his advantage and belittled by those weaker than him. Then, the servant outside spoke again, but with laughter this time, "A-Ding! Come here!" The sweet voice of a girl answered from a distance, "A-Tong, are you delivering the meal to the one in there again?"

A-Tong clicked his tongue, "Why else would I come to this ominous courtyard?"

A-Ding's voice sounded closer, as if she was in front of the door, "You just deliver one meal a day, and nobody cares if you're lazy. This is such an idle task, yet you think it's ominous. Look at me. I'm so busy, to the point that I can't even go outside to play."

A-Tong complained, "Delivering his meal is not the only work I do! How can you dare to go outside these days? With so many walking corpses out there, everyone's locking themselves in their houses."

Wei WuXian squatted by the door and listened as he ate.

It appeared to be that, ever since a while ago, the Mo Village hadn't been peaceful. Walking corpses, like their name, were dead people who could move, a type of low-level altered

corpse. Unless the deceased person held strong resentment, they were usually dull-eyed and sluggish.

They weren't overly dangerous, but they were enough to alarm the average person, especially with their vomit-inducing stench.

However, to Wei WuXian, they were the most obeying puppets. When he heard them being mentioned, he even felt a sense of familiarity.

A-Tong seemed to be making a face, "If you want to go outside, you'll have to take me so that I can protect you..."

A-Ding replied, "You? Protect me? Stop bragging. Are you sure you can defeat those things?" A-Tong said bitterly, "If I can't defeat them, other people can't either."

A-Ding laughed, "How do you know that other people can't defeat them? Let me tell you—today, some cultivators came to Mo Village. I heard that they were from a very prominent sect! The madame is talking to them in the main hall, and everyone in town is watching. Can't you

hear the noise? I don't have time to play around with you; they might give me more work afterwards."

Wei WuXian listened attentively. Sure enough, the faint bustling sounds of people came from the east. He pondered for a moment, stood up, and kicked on the door. It cracked with a clank.

At that moment, the two servants, A-Ding and A-Tong, were flirting with each other, and they screamed as the door suddenly flung open. Wei WuXian threw away his bowl and walked outside, flinching from the glare of the sunlight. He brought his hand to the tip of his brow and closed his eyes for a moment. Just now, A-Tong screamed even louder than A-Ding, but as he took a closer look and realized that it was Mo XuanYu, the person whom everyone could humiliate, his courage came back to him. He figured that he probably lost face in front of A-Ding, and wanted to make up for it, so he jumped over and waved his hands like he was reproaching a dog, "Shoo! Shoo! Go away! Why did you come out?"

A-Tong treated him even worse than treating a beggar or a fly. Most of the time, all of the Mo family's servants treated Mo XuanYu like this because he never resisted. Wei WuXian gave A-Tong a light kick, knocking him over, and laughed, "How daring of a mere errand-running child to humiliate others like this."

With that, he headed toward the commotion in the east. Quite a lot of people crowded in and around the East Hall. Just as Wei WuXian stepped into the courtyard, a woman spoke in a voice a few pitches louder than the others', "A member from the younger generations of our family used to be a cultivator as well..."

It must have been Madame Mo trying to make connections with the cultivation family again. Wei WuXian didn't wait for her to finish speaking, and quickly hustled through the crowd, into the hall, and grinned, "I'm coming, I'm coming. Right here!"

A middle-aged lady sat in the hall, with well-maintained health and wearing extravagant clothing. She was Madame Mo. Her husband sat below her, and the opposite side sat a few white-robed boys. Because of how an unkempt freak just appeared from within the crowd, all of the chatter came to a halt. Despite this, Wei WuXian spoke shamelessly, as if he did not notice

the motionless atmosphere at all, "Who was calling me earlier? I am the only one who used to be a cultivator!"

There was too much powder on his face, and as he smiled, the powder sprinkled off. A younger cultivator was on the brink of laughing, letting out a pfft sound. His face grew serious again as another one, seemingly the leader of the group, gave him a disapproving look.

Wei WuXian followed the voice and scanned the hall. He thought that the servants were being ignorant and exaggerated the situation, but he was surprised to see that they were really disciples of a “prominent sect”.

Wearing drifting sleeves and flowing belts, the boys were doubtlessly a treat to the eyes. Looking at the uniform, it was obvious that they were from the GusuLan Sect. They must have also been younger generations of blood-relationship to the Lan Clan, as they all wore white forehead ribbons of around a finger’s width, with a cloud motif sewn onto them.

The motto of the GusuLan Sect was “righteousness”. The forehead ribbon implied for the disciples to “conduct oneself well”, and the cloud motif was the official motif of the Lan clan, of which cultivators who came from other clans did not have the right to wear. Wei WuXian got toothaches whenever he saw anybody from the Lan Sect. In his past life, he had always thought of that sect’s uniform as “mourning clothes”, which was why he would never mistake it.

Madame Mo hadn’t seen this nephew of hers in a while and only got over her dismay after a long time, after she realized who the heavily-makeuped person was. She was furious, but she didn’t want to lose her temper and discompose herself, so she lowered her voice at her husband, “Who let him out? Get him back in there!”

Her husband promptly smiled to calm her and walked over with an irksome look, ready to pull him out of here. However, Wei WuXian suddenly dropped to the ground, his limbs tightly clinging to the floor. Nobody could get him up, even after more servants were called to help.

As Madame Mo’s face darkened bit by bit, her husband was also sweating. He scolded, “...You... damn madman! If you don’t go back now, wait and see how I’ll punish you!”

Although everyone in the Mo Village knew that the Mo family had a young master who lost his marbles, Mo XuanYu had already hidden in that dark room for a couple of years, scared to come outside. After seeing how both his face and actions were like those of a monster’s, the people whispered among themselves, looking forward to a good show.

Wei WuXian spoke, “I could go back if you want me to,” he pointed at Mo ZiYuan, “but tell him to return the things he stole from me first.”

Mo ZiYuan did not expect that the good-for-nothing lunatic had the guts to cause trouble here, even after his disciplining yesterday. His face grew pale, “That’s nonsense! When did I ever steal your things? W-would I need to steal anything from you?”

Wei WuXian said, “Yeah, yeah. You didn’t steal; you robbed!”

Madame Mo didn’t say anything yet, but Mo ZiYuan was furious, raising his foot to kick him. However, a white-robed boy carrying a sword moved his finger slightly, and Mo ZiYuan slipped, falling to the ground with his foot only scraping him. Even so, Wei WuXian still rolled on the ground, as if he really had been kicked over, and pulled open the front of his robe, showing the footprint that Mo ZiYuan made yesterday.

The others thought that, obviously, Mo XuanYu couldn’t have kicked himself. Along with the fact that Mo ZiYuan had always been imprudent and arrogant, who else could have done it? No matter what, the Mo family was being too ruthless to their own blood relative. It was plain to see that, when he first came back, he wasn’t this insane, and so it must have been worsened by the people of this family. Nevertheless, all was well as long as there was a good show to watch. This one was much more interesting than the cultivators!

Before this, Madame Mo ignored him, as she didn’t bother to argue with a sick person. She ordered the others to take him out. Now, she knew—Mo XuanYu had definitely come prepared. His head was completely clear and he disgraced them on purpose. She felt both shock and hatred, “You’re making the scene on purpose, aren’t you?”

Wei WuXian replied blankly, “He stole my belongings, and I’m here to retrieve them. Does that also count as making a scene?”

With so many pairs of eyes staring, Madame Mo could neither hit him nor throw him out. Anger welled up deep inside her, and she could only forcefully compromise the two sides, “Stealing?

Robbing? That’s a bit disrespectful, if you ask me. We are all part of one family, and he only wanted to take a look at them. A-Yuan is your younger brother, so what’s wrong with taking a few of your things? As an older brother, you shouldn’t be reluctant to lend one or two playthings, it’s not as if he won’t return them.”

The boys from the Lan Sect stared speechlessly at one another. These young boys grew up in a cultivation clan, exposed to splendor and that only. They had probably never seen farces like this before or even heard of this kind of logic. Wei WuXian laughed hysterically in his mind, and extended his hand, “Then, return them.”

Of course, it was impossible for Mo ZiYuan to return anything, having either thrown them out or disassembled them. Even if he were able to return them, his pride wouldn’t have allowed it. His face turned purple with anger and he shouted, “... Mom!” His glare raged, Are you really allowing him to treat me like this?

Madame Mo glowered at him, signaling for him to not worsen the situation. However, Wei WuXian spoke again, “Not only should he not have stolen my belongings, he shouldn’t have stolen them in the middle of the night. Everyone knows that I am into men. Even if he wasn’t ashamed, I know to not look suspicious.”

Madame Mo gasped and shouted, “What are you talking about, in front of the villagers? How shameless—A-Yuan is your cousin!”

In terms of running wild, Wei WuXian was definitely a master. In the past, if he wanted to run wild, he would have had to keep his status in mind. But, now, he was a lunatic anyway, which meant that he could do whatever he wanted to whichever way he wanted. He stiffened his neck and argued defiantly, “Even though he knew that I was his cousin, he chose to not avoid me, so who was more shameless? I don’t care about your reputation, but don’t ruin my innocence! I still want to find a good man!”

Mo ZiYuan let out a loud scream and started to swing a chair at him. As soon as Wei WuXian saw that his anger finally went out of control, he rolled over and climbed up, dodging so that the chair only smashed on the ground, falling apart in the process. The people in the East Hall were originally gloating at the disgrace of the Mo family, but, after the fight started, they’d all fled away. Wei WuXian bolted toward the group of boys from the Lan Clan, who all gaped at the scene, and yelled, “Did everyone see that? Did you? The burglar is also beating someone up!

How heartless!”

Mo ZiYuan chased him and came close to pouncing on him when the leader of the boys hurriedly stopped him, “Please calm down. Words are more powerful than weapons.”

Madame Mo saw that the boy was deliberately protecting the lunatic, and pulled a wary smile, “This is my younger sister’s son. He’s not so bright up here; everyone from the Mo Village knows that he is a lunatic, and often speaks strange words that shouldn’t be taken seriously.

Cultivator, please...”

Before she finished her sentence, Wei WuXian’s head peeked from behind the boy’s back and glared, “Who said that my words shouldn’t be taken seriously? Next time, try stealing anything from me again. You steal once, and I cut off one of your hands!”

Mo ZiYuan was originally held down by his father, but, after hearing this, he was close to losing his temper again. Wei WuXian lept outside quickly, and the boy blocked the entrance at once, switching to another topic in a serious tone, “Then, we will borrow the West Courtyard for the night. Please remember the things that I’ve talked about—after nightfall, close all of the windows, don’t come outside, or worse, walk toward the courtyard.”

Madame Mo was shaking from anger, “Yes, yes, please...”

Mo ZiYuan found it beyond belief, “Mom! The lunatic insulted me in front of so many people, and that’s it? You told me before; you told me that he was only a...”

Madame Mo commanded, “Be quiet. Can’t you wait until we go back?”

Mo ZiYuan had never been at such a disadvantage or been disgraced like this before, with his mother’s scolding making the situation worse. He was full of hatred, and thought, this lunatic is going down tonight!

After Wei WuXian finished flipping out, he walked out the door of the Mo family’s place and showed his face around the Mo village. Although he surprised countless people, he was, in fact, loving every second of it, and finally realized the delight of being a lunatic. He was even starting to approve of the makeup that resembled a hanged ghost, almost unwilling to wash it away. He fixed his hair and looked at his wrists. The cuts didn’t seem like they were healing at all, which meant that a slight revenge like this was not approved by the forbidden technique.

Would he really have to eliminate the Mo family? To be honest, it wouldn’t be too difficult of a task. Wei WuXian strolled back to the Mo family’s West Courtyard. The disciples of the Lan Clan were standing on top of the roofs and walls, discussing with solemn looks on their faces.

Although the GusuLan Sect contributed greatly during the siege on him, at that time, these juniors were either not born yet or still young children. He shouldn’t direct his hate towards them, so Wei WuXian decided to linger around and observe what they were going to do. After a while, he felt like something was wrong.

Why did the fluttering black flags on top of the roofs and walls look so familiar to him? These types of flags were called the “Phantom Attraction Flags”. If one was set on a living person, it would attract all of the spirits, ghosts, moving corpses, or evil beings within a certain area, so that they would only attack that person. Since the flag-bearing person would have been turned into a living target, it was also called the “Target Flag.” It could also be set on a house, but the house needed to have living humans inside of it. Then, the attack range expanded to include everyone inside the house. Due to how there would always be a sinister energy that surrounded the area in which the flag was set in, as if there was a swirling black wind, they were

also called “Black Wind Flags”. Arranging the flag formation in the West Courtyard and not allowing anyone to approach them must have meant that they wanted to lead the Walking Corpses here and capture them in one go.

As for why they looked familiar... How could they have not come across as familiar? The creator of the Phantom Attraction Flags was none other than the YiLing Patriarch!

It seemed that, although the cultivation world hated him on the surface, they still used the inventions that he came up with.

A disciple standing on the roof saw him lingering around and spoke, “Please go back. This is not a place someone like you should come.”

Although he was being driven away, it was out of kindness, and the tone also differed from those of the servants in the Mo family. Wei WuXian caught him off guard and quickly hopped up, grabbing one of the flags.

The disciple was startled and jumped down to chase him, “Do not move. That is not something you should take.”

Wei WuXian yelled as he ran away, looking like a real lunatic, with his hair disheveled and limbs flinging about, “I’m not giving it back; I’m not giving it back! I want this thing! I want this!” The disciple caught up to him in a few strides and grabbed his arm, “If you are not going to give it back, I am going to hit you!”

Wei WuXian held onto the flag, unwilling to let go of it. The leader of the boys was setting up the flag formation, and lightly hopped off the roof when he heard of the ruckus, “JingYi, cut it out. Do not make a fuss about it and just take the flag.”

Lan JingYi complained, “SiZhui, I did not actually hit him! Look at him, messing up the flag formation!”

During the tug-of-war, Wei WuXian had already checked over the Phantom Attraction Flag in his hands. The motifs were drawn correctly and the incantations were complete. There weren’t any errors, so nothing would go wrong while using them. However, the person who drew on the flag was lacking in experience, so it would only attract evil beings and moving corpses from within twenty-five hundred meters. That should be enough, though. There shouldn’t be any malicious creatures in a place as small as the Mo Village.

Lan SiZhui smiled at him, “Young Master Mo, the sky is growing dark, and we are going to start capturing the walking corpses soon. It will be dangerous at night time, so it would be best for you to return to your room.”

Wei WuXian looked him over. He was fair and refined, with a dignified appearance and smiling faintly. Wei WuXian silently approved of him. The flag formation was set in an organized way, and his mannerisms were also respectful, making him a disciple with astonishing potential. He didn’t know, within a conservative clan such as the Lan Clan, who on Earth brought up such a junior.

Lan SiZhui spoke again, “This flag...”

Before he finished, Wei WuXian threw the Phantom Attraction Flag onto the ground and humped, “It’s just a flag, so what’s the big deal? I can draw way better than this!”

He sprinted off the moment he threw the flag away. The boys who stood on the roof to watch the bustle almost fell off from their laughter, after hearing his ridiculous words. Lan JingYi also chuckled from the anger and picked up the Phantom Attraction Flag, “What a maniac!”

Wei WuXian continued to roam around, doing nothing, and finally moved back to the small courtyard that belonged to Mo XuanYu.

He ignored the broken bolt and the mess on the ground, picked a relatively clean spot, and sat in the lotus position again.

However, before daylight came, he was pulled out of meditation by noise from the outside. A series of chaotic footsteps quickly approached, along with cries and screams. Wei WuXian heard a few phrases being repeated, “... Barge in and drag him out!”

“Notify the officers!”

“What do you mean ‘notify the officers’? Beat him to death!”

He opened his eyes to see that a few servants had already come in.

The whole courtyard was set alight with fire. Someone cried out, “Drag the insane murderer to the Main Hall and make him pay for it with his life!”

## Translator’s Notes

Lotus position: A cross-legged position for meditation purposes.

A-Ding: The prefix “A” (pronounced “ah”) can often be found in front of the names of children or servants.

Altered corpse: a corpse that had become alive, usually due to human interference.

Boys: In this case, the word “boys” refers to older youths in their teenage years.

Sect: A sect is an organization for cultivation that may or may not be related by blood, while a clan is a cultivation family related by blood. This means that GusuLan is a sect, with the Lan clan being the leaders of the sect. This is what Wei WuXian referred to as he was talking about the uniforms of the disciples who came—only those part of the clan are allowed to wear cloud patterns, excluding the common members of the sect.

## Chapter 4: Aggression—Part Two

Wei WuXian's first thought was that something went wrong with the flag formation that the boys set up.

His inventions needed to be used extremely carefully, or else disasters could happen. This was also why he went to check if there was anything wrong with the motifs that were drawn. As a few pairs of big hands came to drag him outside, Wei WuXian straightened his body and allowed them to do so without difficulty, so that he wouldn't have to walk by himself. The East Hall was bustling with people, almost more crowded than when the villagers of Mo Village gathered here.

All of the servants and relatives were present. Some were still in their undergarments and didn't yet have the time to brush their hair, but everyone looked terrified. Madame Mo was collapsed in her seat, as if she had just woken up from a swoon. The streaks of tears could be seen on her cheeks, and tears still lingered in her eyes. But, as Wei WuXian was dragged inside, her sorrowful gaze immediately became hateful.

A human-shaped object lay on the ground, with its body covered by a white cloth and only the head being revealed. Lan SiZhui and the other boys wore heavy expressions, bending down to check the situation and talking in soft voices. The conversation leaked into Wei WuXian's ears.

“... Less than three minutes had passed since the body was discovered?”

“After subduing the walking corpse, we hurried from the West Courtyard to the East Courtyard, and found the corpse by the hallway.”

The human-shaped thing was, apparently, Mo ZiYuan. Wei WuXian took one glance at it, and couldn't help but to look again.

The corpse looked like Mo ZiYuan in some ways, but unlike him in other ways. Although the features were clearly that of his petty cousin, the cheekbones were deeply sunken, eyes bulging, and skin wrinkled. Compared to the youthful Mo ZiYuan before this, it was as if he aged twenty years. It also seemed like his blood and flesh were sucked from him, turning him into a skeleton with only a thin layer of skin on the outside. If, before this, Mo ZiYuan was just ugly, now, his corpse was both old and ugly.

As Wei WuXian was scrutinizing the corpse, Madame Mo suddenly rushed towards him, with a gleaming dagger in her hand. Being light on his feet, Lan SiZhui quickly knocked the dagger

away. Before he had a chance to talk, Madame Mo shrieked at him, “My son died a tragic death, so I am only avenging him! What are you stopping me for?”

Wei WuXian hid behind Lan SiZhui's back again, and spoke while squatting, “How does your son's tragic death concern me?”

During the day, Lan SiZhui saw Wei WuXian make a scene in the East Hall, and, afterwards, he also heard a lot of exaggerated rumours from other people. He felt extremely sympathetic to the invalid, and couldn't help but to take his side, “Madame Mo, seeing from your son's condition, his flesh and essence have been drawn out of him, which means that he was killed by evil beings, not him.”

Madame Mo's chest heaved, “You know nothing! The lunatic's father was a cultivator. He must have learned a lot of demonic spells from him!”

Lan SiZhui turned around to look at the seemingly dull-witted Wei WuXian, and spoke again, “Uhm, Madame, there is a lack of evidence, so...”

“The evidence is on my son!” Madame Mo pointed at the corpse on the ground, “Look for yourselves! A-Yuan's remains already told me who murdered him!”

Not needing other people to do it, Wei WuXian lifted the white cloth by himself, from the head down to the feet. There was something missing from Mo ZiYuan's dead body. His left arm, severed from below his shoulder, had disappeared!

Madame Mo spoke, "Do you see this? Everyone who was here heard what the lunatic said, right? He said that, if A-Yuan touched his belongings again, he would cut off his hand!"

After the burst of emotion, she covered her face and sobbed, "...My poor A-Yuan... Although he didn't do anything to him at all, he was not only framed, but also killed as well... The lunatic is out of his mind..."

Out of his mind!

It had been a few years since he last heard the phrase being used to describe him, so it was quite cordial. Wei WuXian pointed at himself, but no words came to him. He didn't know if he was the ill one or if it was Madame Mo. When he was younger, he talked quite a lot about exterminating entire clans and sects, killing millions of people, creating rivers of blood, and other cruel actions. But, most of the time, they were empty words. If he could actually do the

things that he said, he would have long been dominating the cultivation world. Madame Mo's true intention wasn't to avenge for him, but to find someone to let out her resentment on.

Wu WuXian didn't want to be bothered with her. He thought for a moment, and stuck his hand into Mo ZiYuan's sleeve. He fished around for a moment and pulled something out, unfolding it in front of him. Surprisingly, it was a Phantom Attraction Flag.

Instantly, he realized what was going on, and uttered under his breath, he had it coming!

When Lan SiZhui and the others saw what was taken out of Mo ZiYuan's sleeve, they also understood the situation. Associating this with the farce that happened today, the cause was easy to guess. During the day, Mo ZiYuan lost face because of Mo XuanYu's crazy behavior and loathed him, still wanting to square up with him. However, Mo XuanYu wandered outside for a long while, so Mo ZiYuan planned to sneak up on him at night, when he would be returning.

When night had fallen, he secretly went outside, and was passing the West Courtyard when he saw the Phantom Attraction Flags on the walls. Although he was repeatedly told not to go outside or near the West Courtyard at night, and especially to stay away from these black flags, Mo ZiYuan thought that he was told to do so because they were scared of people stealing the valuable weapons. He had no idea about the dangerous effects of these Phantom Attraction Flags, or that if he held it, he would be turned into a living target. He got addicted to stealing his cousin's talismans and magic tools, and he would always itch to take odd items like this, not giving up until he obtained it. Therefore, when the owners of the flags were subduing walking corpses in the West Courtyard, he quietly took one.

The flag formation utilized six flags, of which five were set in the West Courtyard, with the boys from the Lan family as baits. However, they were all carrying countless magic tools on them, and, although Mo ZiYuan only took a single flag, he didn't have any tools for protection on him. It was common sense to pick on the weak, so the evil beings would naturally be attracted to him. If there were only walking corpses, then it wouldn't matter too much. Even if he was bitten, he wouldn't die immediately and could still be saved. Unfortunately, the Phantom Attraction Flag accidentally attracted something worse than a walking corpse. The unknown being was what killed Mo ZiYuan and took his arm!

Wei WuXian raised his wrist. Sure enough, one of the cuts on his right hand had healed. It looked like that he had scored a lucky hit—the sacrificial contract had already deemed the death of Mo ZiYuan as his doing.

Madame Mo was well aware of her son's foibles, but she wasn't willing to admit that Mo ZiYuan caused his own death. Due to impatience and rage, she grabbed a teacup and threw it in

the direction of Wei WuXian's head, "If you didn't frame him in front of so many people yesterday, would he go out in the middle of the night? It's all your fault, you son of a bitch!" Wei WuXian saw it coming, and dodged to the side. Madame Mo turned toward Lan SiZhui and screeched, "And you! You bunch of useless fools! You cultivate and ward off evil spirits, but you can't even protect him! A-Yuan was still a child\*!"

\*The actual word used here meant "from ten-years-old to nineteen-years-old", but, although they say "in one's twenties", people don't say "in one's tens", so the word was replaced by "a child" instead.

The boys were still young. They hadn't been outside much and were too inexperienced to find anything wrong with the area, which was why they felt sorry for not detecting an evil being as fierce as this one. Nonetheless, after Madame Mo's senseless scolding, they all looked blue in the face. After all, they grew up in a prominent family, so nobody dared to treat them like this. The GusuLan Sect was extremely strict to its disciples, forbidding violence against the powerless everymen, not even allowing disrespect. Therefore, even if they felt displeased, they had to keep everything down with dark expressions.

However, Wei WuXian couldn't stand it any longer, and thought, it has been so many years, but the Lan Clan's values are still the same. What's the use their so-called "self-restraint"? Watch me do this the right way!

He spat loudly and spoke, "Who do you think you're taking out your anger on? Did you really see them as your servants? They travelled far and wide to come here and exorcise evil spirits for you without taking a penny. Do they owe you anything? How old is your son? He should be at least seventeen, and so, how is he still a 'child'? How young of a child does he have to be to not understand basic human language? Did they or did they not repeatedly instruct him to not touch anything in the formation and not approach the West Courtyard? Your son snuck outside at night on his own. Is it my fault? Or is it his?"

Lan JingYi and the others let out a breath of air, faces not so dark anymore. Madame Mo was both extremely mournful and resentful, and all she could think about was the word "death". Not her own death so that she could be with her son, but the deaths of everyone in the world, especially the ones in front of her right now. She had a habit of ordering her husband to do everything, and so she knocked him, "Call everyone! Call everyone inside!"

Even so, her husband was in a trance. Possibly because of the trauma from his only child passing away, he went as far as to backhandedly push her. It caught Madame Mo by surprise, and she fell onto the ground.

In the past, Madame Mo didn't even need to push him. If she just raised her voice, he would comply immediately. How could he dare to strike back today?

The servants were all scared out of their wits from her expression. A-Ding helped her up while quivering. Madame Mo clutched her chest and spoke in a trembling voice, "You... You... You, get out of here as well!"

Her husband seemed like he didn't hear anything. A-Ding gave a few looks to A-Tong, and A-Tong hurriedly helped his master to walk outside. The East Hall was in chaos. As Wei WuXian saw that the family had finally been silenced, he intended to examine the corpse again. However, before he took another look at it, another high-pitched scream pierced through the air. It was from the courtyard.

The people in the hall all rushed outside. On the ground of the East Courtyard, there were two twitching bodies. The first was that of A-Tong's, still alive, collapsed on the ground. The other fallen body was wrinkled and withered, as if the blood and the flesh had been emptied dry. The left arm was already gone, but no blood came out of the wound. The condition of the corpse was the same as Mo ZiYuan's.

Madame Mo brushed off A-Ding's supporting hand a second ago, but as she saw the corpse on the ground, her eyes widened, and she was finally out of energy to throw another fit. As she fainted, Wei WuXian happened to be next to her, and gave her a hand, passing her to A-

Ding, who came running. He looked at his right hand to see that another one of the cuts were also gone.

It was merely a few seconds before they walked over the threshold of the hall, not even past the East Courtyard yet, and saw Madame Mo's husband die distressingly. Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the others also grew pale in the face. Lan SiZhui was the first to calm down and asked A-Tong, who lay on the ground, "Did you see what it was?"

A-Tong was almost scared to death, unable to open his mouth. Even after a few moments of asking, A-Tong still couldn't answer, and only shook his head repeatedly. Lan SiZhui was burning with anxiety. He asked another disciple to take him back inside, and turned to Lan JingYi, "Did you send the signal?"

Lan JingYi answered, "I did, but if there are no seniors who can assist us in the area, it would take at least an hour for our people to come here. What should we do now? We don't even know what it was."

Of course, it would be impossible for them to leave. If the disciples of a sect only cared about their own well-being when facing evil spirits, it would not only be bringing disgrace upon the

sect, they themselves would also be ashamed to face others. The frightened people of the Mo family couldn't go either, because it was likely that the evil being was among them, so nothing would be gained from going away.

Lan SiZhui gritted his teeth, "Wait here, for the reinforcement!"

Now that the signal for help had been sent, other cultivators would come to aid them within a short period of time. To prevent things from getting out of hand, Wei WuXian should withdraw and keep away from the situation. If the persons who came happened to know him or fought with him before, it would be hard to say what was going to happen next.

However, with the curse, he couldn't leave Mo Village anytime soon. In addition, the being that was attracted here had taken the lives of two people within such a short amount of time, which meant that it must have been extremely vicious. If Wei WuXian left now, when the helpers arrived, the streets of Mo Village might be packed with corpses who lost their left arms, including a few disciples of blood relations to the GusuLan Sect as well.

After pondering for a moment, Wei WuXian told himself, finish it quickly.

## Chapter 5: Aggression—Part Three

The boys on the side were all young and inexperienced. However, although they all looked nervous, they strictly stuck to their positions and protected the Mo family's house, fixing talismans onto the walls. The servant named A-Tong was already carried into the hall. Lan SiZhui felt his pulse with his left hand and supported Madame Mo's back with his right. He couldn't save both of them at once, and was in a terrible fix when A-Tong crawled up from the ground.

A-Ding exclaimed, "A-Tong, you're awake!"

Before her face had the time to light up, A-Tong raised his left hand and clutched his own neck.

Seeing this, Lan SiZhui tapped on a few of his acupoints for three times. Wei WuXian knew that, although they looked gentle, the people from the Lan Clan had arm strength that were the opposite of gentle. With a force like this, it would be hard for anyone to move. However, A-Tong seemed like he didn't feel anything, and the grip of his left hand tightened, his expressions looking more painful and twisted. Lan JingYi proceeded to grab his left hand, but it was like breaking off a chunk of iron, having no effect at all. After a moment, a crack came from his neck, and A-Tong's head drooped down. His neck was already broken.

He actually strangled himself in front everyone's eyes!

Seeing the situation, A-Ding's voice wavered, "... A ghost! There's an invisible ghost here. It made A-Tong strangle himself!"

Her tone was sharp and her voice was shrill, making everyone's blood run cold, and so they believed it effortlessly. Wei WuXian's judgement happened to be the opposite—it wasn't a ferocious ghost.

He had examined the talismans that the boys chose; all of them were spirit-fending ones, and the East Hall was literally covered with them. If it really was a ferocious ghost, then, as it went into the East Hall, the talismans would have incinerated green flames. Yet, nothing was happening right now.

It was not the group of kids' faults for reacting too slow, but the creature was indeed cruel. The cultivation world had a strict definition for the category of "ferocious ghosts"—they had to kill at least one person a month and continue the behavior for at least three months. The criterion was set by Wei WuXian himself, and it was probably still being used. He was the best at dealing with this kind. To him, killing one person in seven days would be considered as a ferocious ghost who

killed frequently. This thing killed three people at once, and within such a short period of time. It would be hard for even a capable cultivator to think of a solution immediately, let alone these juniors who had just started their careers.

As he was thinking, the candlelight flickered. A sinister wind passed, and all of the lanterns and candles in the courtyard and the East Hall died out.

The moment the lights were extinguished, screams came from everywhere. Everyone pushed and pulled, wanting to escape as fast as they could, stumbling and falling in the process. Lan JingYi shouted, "Stay where you are and don't run! I'm gonna catch whoever runs!"

He wasn't merely saying this to alarm the people. In fact, evil beings loved to cause trouble in the dark and make profits in times of trouble. The worse the crying and chaos, the more likely it was to unknowingly attract danger. At times like this, being isolated or becoming nervous was extremely unsafe. However, everyone was frightened to death, so how could they still have ears for words like this? After a while, the East Hall grew quiet, with only a few light breaths and faint sobs. It was likely that only a few people were left.

Amidst the dark, a fire lit up suddenly. Lan SiZhui ignited a Flame Talisman.

The fire from the Flame Talisman would not be extinguished by sinister winds. He used the talisman to light up the candle again, and the rest of the boys went to comfort the others. Under the light, Wei WuXian casually looked at his wrists. Another cut had healed.

After looking, he suddenly realized that there was something wrong about the number of cuts.

Originally, he had two cuts on each of his wrists. One healed when Mo ZiYuan died, and another healed when Mo ZiYuan's father died. The death of the servant, A-Tong, healed one more of the cuts. Adding it up, only three cuts should have healed, with the last cut being the deepest and most hate-filled one.

But, right now, no cuts remained on his wrists.

Wei WuXian knew that Madame Mo was definitely one of Mo XuanYu's targets of vengeance. The longest and deepest cut was probably saved for her. Yet, it had disappeared. Did Mo XuanYu suddenly reach a point of epiphany and let go of his hate? That'd be impossible. His soul had already been sacrificed as the price for summoning Wei WuXian. Only the death of Madame Mo could heal the wound.

His gaze slowly moved towards the pale-faced Madame Mo, who recently woke up and was surrounded by everyone.

Unless, she was already dead.

Wei WuXian was sure that something was already possessing Madame Mo's body. If the being wasn't a spirit, then what was it?

Suddenly, A-Ding cried, "Hand... His hand! A-Tong's hand!"

Lan SiZhui moved the Flame Talisman to above A-Tong's body. Sure enough, his left hand had disappeared as well.

Left hand!

With lightning speed, Wei WuXian's mind became clear, with the being that was wreaking havoc and the missing left arms finally completing the puzzle. He promptly bursted out laughing.

Lan JingYi snapped, "You idiot! How can you still laugh in a situation like this?"

But, after a second thought, he knew that he was an idiot anyways, so what's the use of haggling over him?

Wei WuXian tugged at his sleeve, "No, no!"

Lan JingYi was annoyed, pulling his sleeve back, "What 'no'? You're not an idiot? Stop fooling around! Nobody has the time to pay attention to you."

Wei WuXian pointed at the corpses of Mo ZiYuan's father and A-Tong, which lay on the ground, and spoke, "These are not them."

Lan SiZhui stopped the fuming Lan JingYi and asked, "What do you mean by 'these are not them'?"

Wei WuXian stated solemnly, "This is not Mo ZiYuan's dad, and this is not A-Tong either."

With his makeup-covered face, the more solemn he looked, the more he seemed like an actual lunatic. Yet, surrounded by the dim candlelight, his words sent chills up everyone's backs. Lan SiZhui stared for a second, and asked in spite of himself, "Why?"

Wei WuXian exclaimed proudly, "Their hands. None of them were left-handed. I'm sure of this, because they'd always hit me with their right hands."

Lan JingYi spat, running out of patience, "What are you being proud for? Look at how complacent you are!"

However, Lan SiZhui broke into a sweat. Thinking back, A-Tong had used his left hand to strangle himself, and Madame Mo's husband also used his left hand to push his wife.

But, during the day, when Mo XuanYu was causing trouble in the East Hall, the two were rushing to get him out of there, both using their right hands. It was impossible for them to suddenly turn left-handed before they died.

Although he didn't know why, in order to figure out what the creature was, they had to think in the direction of "left hands." After Lan SiZhui realized this, he felt surprised and looked at Wei WuXian. He couldn't help but to think, suddenly saying this... It doesn't seem like a coincidence.

Wei WuXian only smiled. He knew that the hint was too deliberate, but he couldn't have helped it. The good thing was that Lan SiZhui didn't think too much about it either, and thought, anyways, if Young Master Mo was willing to remind me of it, he probably didn't mean any harm. His eyes moved away from him, passing A-Ding, who fainted from crying too much, and landed on Madame Mo.

His gaze travelled from her face down to her hands. Her arms were hanging down and were mostly hidden inside her sleeves, with only half of the fingers showing. Her right hand had fair, thin fingers, undoubtedly those of a woman who lived comfortably and never worked. However, the fingers on her left hand were much longer than the ones on her right. They were also thicker. The knuckles were bent, full of power.

The hand isn't that of a woman's—it was a man's hand! Lan SiZhui commanded, "Take hold of her!"

A few boys grabbed Madame Mo. Lan SiZhui said "excuse me" and was prepared to slap down a talisman when Madame Mo's left hand suddenly twisted in an absurd way, aiming for his throat.

Unless one's bones had been broken, it was impossible for a living person to twist their arm like this. She attacked quickly, and was extremely close to grabbing onto his neck, when at the same

time, Lan JingYi shouted "hey" and threw himself in front of Lan SiZhui, blocking the hand for him.

A flash passed, and as soon as the arm grabbed Lan JingYi's shoulder, green flames ignited on his arm, making it loosen its grip. Lan SiZhui escaped death, and was about to thank Lan JingYi for it, when he saw that half of the latter's uniform had already been burnt to ashes, looking quite awkward. Lan JingYi took off the other half of his uniform and scolded, fuming with rage, "Why did you kick me, you lunatic? Did you want to kill me?"

Wei WuXian scampered away like a frightened rat, "It wasn't me!"

It was him. Inside of the Lan Sect's uniform jacket, there were compact stitchings of incantations using thin threads of the same color, included for protection. However, against strong ones like this, it could only be used once before it became invalid. During the emergency, he could only kick Lan JingYi and use his body to protect Lan SiZhui's neck. Lan JingYi wanted to scold him again, but Madame Mo fell onto the ground, with all of the blood and flesh on her face being drained until only a thin layer of skin was left on the skull. The male arm that didn't belong to her had fallen off her shoulders. Its fingers bent freely, as if it was stretching or exercising, and the throbs of its veins were clearly visible.

This was the evil being that the Phantom Attraction Flag had attracted.

Being dismembered was a classic example of a distressing death. It was only somewhat more dignified than the way Wei WuXian died. Unlike the situation of being crushed to powder, the limbs and parts of the corpse would be tainted with some of the resentment of the person who died, and it would want to reunite with the other parts and die with a whole corpse. Therefore, it would come up with strategies to find the other parts of the body. If it found it, it might be satisfied and rest in peace, or it might stir up more trouble. If it couldn't find it, the body part would have to put up with the second-best option.

What would the second-best option be? It would have to make do with the bodies of living humans.

It was like this left hand—eat the left hand of a living person, and replace it. After draining all of the person's blood and energy, it would abandon the body and find another container for parasitism, until it finally collected all of the other parts of its corpse.

As soon as the arm had possessed a person, they would die immediately. But, before all of the flesh had been eaten, they would still be able to walk around, under its control, as if the person was still alive. After it was attracted, the first container that it found was Mo ZiYuan. The second

one was Mo ZiYuan's father. When Madame Mo told her husband to go away, he acted out of the norm and pushed her. Wei WuXian originally thought that it was because he was grieving his son's death and also tired of his wife's arrogance. Now that he thought about it again, it wasn't what a father who had just lost his son should look like. It wasn't the indifference from feeling hopeless. It was a deadly tranquility—the tranquility coming from an already-deceased person.

The third container was A-Tong, and the fourth one was Madame Mo. During the chaos from when the lights suddenly went out, the ghost hand had transferred onto her body. When Madame Mo died, the last cut on Wei WuXian's wrists also disappeared.

The boys from the Lan Clan saw that, although talismans didn't work, clothing did, and all took off their coats to cover the left hand. The layers of clothing looked like a white cocoon. After a second, the ball of white clothes ignited with a whoosh, creating a green, abnormal inferno.

Although it would take care of the moment, after a while, when the uniforms were completely burnt, the hand would emerge from within the ashes. While nobody was looking, Wei WuXian ran towards the West Courtyard.

The ten-or-so walking corpses that were subdued by the boys stood silently in the courtyard, sealed by the incantations drawn on the ground. Wei WuXian kicked one of the symbols, destroying the entire formation. He clapped twice. Suddenly, with a jolt, the whites of the walking corpses' eyes all turned upward, as if they were woken up by a bolt of thunder.

Wei WuXian spoke, "Wake up. It's time to work!"

He usually didn't need complex incantations to control these corpse puppets—a straightforward command would do as well. The walking corpses in front of him moved a few quivering steps. But, as they approached Wei WuXian, their legs grew weak and they collapsed onto the ground, as if they were real humans.

Wei WuXian found it both funny and annoying. He clapped his hands again, this time lighter. However, these walking corpses were probably born in Mo Village and died here as well, not having experienced life fully. They instinctively followed the summoner's commands, but were also horrified at the summoner, lying on the ground and afraid to get up.

The crueler the being was, the better Wei WuXian could control it. These walking corpses hadn't been trained by him and couldn't withstand direct manipulations from him. He didn't have any materials on him, which meant that he couldn't immediately make tools to ease the walking corpses. He couldn't even muddle and assemble bits and pieces. The soaring green flames in the East Courtyard gradually grew dimmer. Suddenly, Wei WuXian found a solution.

Why would he need to come outside and find a dead person with strong resentment and a cruel personality?

There were not only one, but multiple corpses in the East Hall!

He ran back to the East Courtyard. As Lan SiZhui's first solution failed, he found a second one. The disciples pulled out their swords and stuck them into the ground, making a sword fence. The ghost hand crashed into the fence, and they spent all their energy compressing their hilts so that it didn't break out, paying no attention to who was entering and leaving.

Wei WuXian strode into the East Hall and grabbed Madame Mo and Mo ZiYuan's corpses, one on each hand, and spoke in a low voice, "Wake up!"

In a split second, Madame Mo and Mo ZiYuan's eye whites turned up, and started making the shrill and powerful shrieks that ferocious ghosts made after they came back to life.

Amidst the shrieks, another corpse trembled and crawled up, making the lowest and faintest shriek. It was Madame Mo's husband.

The shrieks were loud enough and the resentment was strong enough. Wei WuXian smiled, feeling quite satisfied, "Do you recognize the hand outside?"

He commanded, "Tear it apart."

The three members of the Mo family whipped out like three clouds of black wind.

The left arm fractured one of the swords, and was about to break out, when three cruel corpses without left arms came at it.

Aside from being unable to defy Wei WuXian's command, the family also loathed the creature that killed them, and let out their anger on the ghost hand. The main attacker was undoubtedly Madame Mo. Since female corpses were often especially fierce after they were modified, her hair was loose and her eyes were bloodshot. With nails that multiplied in length, foam gathering at the corners of her mouth, and shrieks that were enough to uplift the ceiling, she looked extremely insane. Behind her followed Mo ZiYuan, who cooperated with her and used both his teeth and his hands. His father was at the end, covering for the gaps between the attacks of the other two corpses. The struggling boys were stricken dumb with amazement.

They had only seen these battles between multiple fierce corpses in books and hearsay, and they all gaped as they saw the gore-splattered scene for the first time, unable to avert their gazes.

They all thought that it was...absolutely thrilling!

The three corpses and the hand were in the middle of a tough battle, when Mo ZiYuan abruptly moved out of the way. His abdomen area was attacked by the hand, causing a few chunks of his intestines to spill out. As Madame Mo saw this, she screamed incessantly and shielded her son behind herself. Her attacks were more violent, the strength of her fingers almost comparable to that of steel and iron weapons. But, Wei WuXian knew that she was gradually being overpowered.

Even three cruel corpses who recently died couldn't subdue this single arm!

Wei WuXian was watching the battle attentively. His tongue was slightly curled, suppressing a sharp whistle inside of his lips, preparing it to be let out. The whistle would be able to evoke even more hostility in the cruel corpses, which might turn the tables. Then, however, it would be difficult to ensure that nobody knew that it was his doing. In the blink of an eye, the hand moved like lightning, ruthlessly and precisely breaking Madame Mo's neck. Watching as the Mo family grew closer to defeat, Wei WuXian prepared to blow the whistle that he suppressed under his tongue. At the same time, the echoes of two strums on a stringed instrument came from far away.

The sound seemed to have been played by a human. The timbre was ethereal and clear, carrying the bleak chills of windswept pines. The creatures battling in the courtyard all stiffened as they heard the sound.

Instantaneously, the boys from the GusuLan Sect started beaming, as if they were born again. Lan SiZhui wiped the blood off his face and raised his head, happily exclaiming, "HanGuang- Jun!"

As soon as he heard the two faraway strums of the zither, Wei WuXian turned around and began to leave.

The sound of another strum came. This time, the pitch was higher, piercing through the sky with a few degrees of bitterness. The three cruel corpses backed off and covered one ear with their right hands. However, it was impossible to block out the Eradication Tone of the GusuLan Sect by means such as this. They had just retreated a few steps, and slight bursting sounds came from within their skulls.

Since the arm had just endured a tough fight, after hearing the sound of the strings again, it instantly fell onto the ground. Although the fingers were still flinching, the arm was unable to move.

After a short moment of silence, the boys couldn't help but to cheer loudly, celebrating the joy of surviving the incident. They had struggled through the exhilarating night, and their sect's reinforcement had finally come. Even if they'd be punished because of reasons such as "being discourteous and making noise that was harmful to the sect's reputation," they didn't care.

After waving towards the moon, Lan SiZhui suddenly realized that someone had disappeared. He tugged Lan JingYi, "Where is he?"

Lan JingYi was absorbed in the act of rejoicing, "Who? Which one?" Lan SiZhui replied, "Young Master Mo."

Lan JingYi said, "Hmm? Why are you looking for that lunatic? Who knows where he ran off to? He's probably frightened by my threats to hit him."

"..." Lan SiZhui knew that Lan JingYi had always been careless and straightforward, not thinking twice about anything or suspecting anyone. He thought, I'll wait for HanGuang-Jun to come, and then tell him about everything.

Mo Village was still asleep, but it was difficult to tell whether it was a real slumber or a faked one. Although the corpse fight was a mass of blood and gore, the villagers didn't wake up during the early morning to watch. After all, even bystanders needed to choose which events to show up at. One that involved lots of screaming was definitely not the safest type. Wei WuXian eliminated all evidence of the sacrificial formation in Mo XuanYu's room as fast as he could, and ran out the door.

Unfortunately, the person who came happened to be from the Lan Clan, but even more unfortunately, he happened to be Lan WangJi!

This was one of the people who had fought with him before, so he should retreat quickly. He was in a hurry to find a mount, as he passed a courtyard and saw a big millstone inside. A donkey was tied to the handle, chewing on its mouth. When it saw him run over rashly, it seemed like it was surprised, and eyed him sideways as if it was a real person. Wei WuXian made eye contact with him for one second, and was immediately touched by the minuscule amount of contempt in its eyes.

He tried to grab onto the rope and pull it out, but the donkey complained by making a few loud noises. Therefore, Wei WuXian had to use both his words and his strength to deceive it and get it onto the road. As dawn came over the horizon, they went off onto the main path.

#### Translator's Notes

Seal: This does not mean to seal a piece of paper. It means to "apply a sort of power to an object/person so that they cannot use one or more of their usual powers" ("Baidu Baike").

The bleak chills of windswept pines: Here, the author makes reference to a poem by Liu ChangQing. The translation of this phrase used chinesepoems.blogspot.ca as a reference.

HanGuang-Jun: HanGuang-Jun is the seme's "alternative name" or "hao". An alternative name is usually a title given to a person by themselves or others. In this case, the "-Jun" suffix at the end directly translates to "gentleman" or "a man of noble character". Interesting enough, the "- kun" suffix in Japanese derived from this, although the two are used differently.

Zither: Here, the zither refers to the Chinese zither.

Eradication Tone: The literal meaning is "sounds that can overcome obstacles". It is often used while attacking.

## Chapter 6: Arrogance—Part One

Only a few days passed, and Wei WuXian realized that he might have made a wrong choice. The donkey that he conveniently picked up was too hard to please.

Although it was only a donkey, it would exclusively eat fresh, young grass with dewdrops still hanging off them. If the tip of the grass had a streak of yellow, it wouldn't eat it. Passing a farm, Wei WuXian stole some wheat straws to feed it, but after chewing them, it spit it out with a ptoo, even louder than that of its human counterparts. If it didn't eat high-quality food, it wouldn't

budge, and it'd lose its temper and kick around. For multiple times, Wei WuXian was almost kicked by it. Aside from that, it's brays also sounded extremely horrible to the ear.

It was useless, no matter as a mount or a pet!

Wei WuXian couldn't help but to think of his sword. The sword was probably collected by the leader of a prominent clan and would have hanged on a wall as a trophy that they could show other people.

After pushing and pulling along for a few blocks, the road reached a vast farmland of some village. Under the scorching sun, there was a large pagoda tree and thick, green grass underneath it. Beside the tree, there was an old well, with a barrel and a dipper on the side, placed there by the farmers for any passersby to quench their thirst. The donkey ran over there and nothing could make it leave. Wei WuXian hopped down and slapped its honoured buttocks, "You're definitely destined for wealth, even harder to please than me."

The donkey spat at him.

While they fooled around aimlessly, a group of people approached from within the fields. The people carried handmade bamboo baskets, and wore cotton clothes and straw sandals, emitting the rustic airs of rural villagers. In the group, there was a young girl with a round face

that could be considered delicate. Possibly because of walking for too long under the sun, they also wanted to come over to rest by the shade and have some water. However, seeing that there was a wild donkey tied to the tree and a lunatic with heavy makeup and dishevelled hair, they were reluctant to go over.

Wei WuXian had always thought of himself as one who was courteous towards women, so he moved over, emptying some space, and went to struggle with the donkey. After realizing that he was harmless, the people were finally at ease to come over. All of them were drenched in sweat and had ruddy cheeks; some were fanning themselves and some fetching water. The girl sat by the well and smiled at Wei WuXian, as if she knew that he purposely moved away.

One of the people held a compass in his hand. He looked into the distance, and then lowered his head questioningly, "We're already at the foot of Dafan Mountain, so why hasn't the pointer started moving yet?"

The designs and pointer on the compass looked strange, indicating that it wasn't a normal compass. It wasn't one that showed the North, South, East, and West, but one that showed the directions malicious creatures, also known as a "Compass of Evil." Wei WuXian realized that

this was probably a poor cultivation clan from the countryside. Aside from highbrow, affluent clans, there were also smaller clans like this, who closed their doors and cultivated on their own. Wei WuXian thought that they might have left their village to either find a clan whom they were distant relatives to, or to go night-hunting.

The middle-aged man leading the group called for people to take a drink and replied, "Your compass might be broken; I'll get you a new one later. Dafan Mountain is less than ten miles ahead of us, which means that we cannot rest for too long. We have struggled through

the whole journey, and if we relax now and fall behind, with other people beating us to it, it wouldn't have been worth it."

As expected, it was a night-hunt. A lot of refined cultivation clans called travelling to places and exorcising evil beings "hunting." Because of how these creatures often appear at night, it was also called "night-hunting." There were countless cultivation clans, but only a few were distinguished. Without the contributions from its ancestors, if an average clan wanted to become famous and receive respect in the cultivation world, it would have to show its abilities. Only if a clan captured a fierce monster or a terrorizing being, could it have then been treated seriously.

This was originally Wei WuXian's specialty area. However, during the days of travelling, he destroyed a few graves, but only found small ghosts. He happened to need a ghost soldier to do evil for him, and decided to go to Rice Mountain to try his luck. If he found a good one, he'd capture it and put it to use.

After the group of people finished resting, they prepared to move on. Before they left, the round-faced girl took a small, partly-ripened apple out of her basket and handed it to him, "Here you go."

Wei WuXian extended his hand to receive it, grinning broadly, but the donkey also opened its mouth and bit at it. Wei WuXian quickly took the apple away. Seeing that the donkey craved the apple so much, he thought of a good idea. He gathered a long stick and a fishing thread, hanged the apple on one end, and dangled it in front of the donkey. The donkey smelled the apple's refreshing scent from in front of him and wanted to eat it, chasing the apple which was always a centimeter away from him. Its speed was faster than the best horses Wei WuXian had ever seen, leaving only dust behind it.

Without stopping, Wei WuXian arrived at Dafan Shan before dark. Upon arriving at the foot of the mountain, he finally realized that the "fan" wasn't the one he thought it was. It got its name because, looking from far away, the mountain looked like a kind, chubby buddha. There was a small town below the mountain, named Buddha's Feet.

The number of cultivators who gathered here were far more than what he had expected. Everything was a jumble, with people from different sects and clans walking down the streets, all in uniforms of different colors, almost blinding to the eye. For some reason, all of them wore distressed expressions. Nobody bothered to laugh at him even though they saw his strange appearance.

In the center of the long street, a group of cultivators gathered, talking in serious tones. It seemed as if their opinions differed greatly. Even from afar, Wei WuXian could hear them talking. In the beginning, everything was fine, but they suddenly became agitated.

"... I think that there are no soul-consuming beasts or spirits in the area at all. It's clear that none of the Compasses of Evil showed anything."

"If there isn't, then how did the seven people lose their souls? They couldn't have all attained the same disease, could they? I, for one, haven't heard of this disease at all!"

"Even if the Compass of Evil is not showing anything, does it mean that there's nothing in the area? It can only point out an approximate direction, without any specifics, so it shouldn't be fully trusted. Maybe there's something here that can interfere with the pointer's direction."

"Do you remember who created the Compass of Evil? I've never heard of anything that can interfere with its pointer's direction."

"What do you mean? Are you implying anything with that tone of yours? Of course, I know that Wei Ying created the Compass of Evil. But, it's not as if his creations are flawless. Aren't we allowed the option of doubt, at least?"

"I never said that you can't doubt it, much less his creations are flawless, so why accuse me?"

And so, their argument had turned to another direction. Wei WuXian passed them on his donkey, giggling and laughing. He didn't expect that, after so many years had passed, he was still alive in the cultivators' conversations. This was the so-called "much ado about Wei." If there was ever a poll to find out whose popularity was the most lasting in the cultivation world, the winner would be no other than Wei WuXian.

To be honest, the cultivator wasn't wrong. The Compasses of Evil in use today was the first version that he made, and were, indeed, not specific enough. He was in the middle of making improvements when his "den" was destroyed, so he had to put everyone through the inconvenience of using the imprecise version one.

Anyways, creatures that ate blood and flesh were usually low in level, such as walking corpses. Only the more refined high-level monsters or ghosts were capable of eating and digesting souls. This one ate seven at once—no wonder so many clans had gathered here. Since the prey was by no means a trivial matter, it was inevitable for the Compasses of Evil to make mistakes.

Wei WuXian reined in the rope and hopped off the donkey's back, holding the apple, which had been ahead of it for the whole journey, in front of its mouth, "One bite. One bite only... Hmph, are you trying to eat my whole hand with that bite of yours?"

He ate a few bites from the other side of the apple, and stuffed it back into the donkey's mouth, pondering upon how he came down to the point of sharing an apple with a donkey, when, suddenly, someone bumped into his back. He turned around to see a girl. Although she bumped into him, she didn't acknowledge him at all. Her eyes were dull and she had a smile on her face, staring into the distance without blinking.

Wei WuXian followed her gaze, and saw the dense mountaintop of Dafan Mountain. All of a sudden, the girl started dancing in front of him without saying anything.

The dance was wild, with her arms flinging about savagely. Wei WuXian was watching the performance with keen pleasure when a woman ran over, lifting her dress slightly. She embraced the girl and cried, "A-Yan, let's go back, let's go back!"

A-Yan brushed her off with force, her smile still unfaded, creating a terrifying sort of affection, and continued to dance. The woman had to chase her down the street, sobbing while running. A street vendor on the side spoke, "How awful. A-Yan from Blacksmith Zheng's family has escaped again."

"It must be horrible for her mom. A-Yan, A-Yan's husband, and her husband... All of them were..."

Wei WuXian wandered around, piecing together the strange event that happened here from picking up on different people's conversations.

On Dafan Mountain, there was a burial ground. Most of the ancestors of the townspeople from Buddha's Feet were buried here and, sometimes, unidentifiable corpses would also receive a spot and a wooden plaque here. A few months ago, in a dark and stormy night, the wind and the rain caused a piece of land on Dafan Mountain to slide and collapse, which happened to be the burial ground. Many older graves were destroyed, and a few coffins were exposed to the air and struck by lightning, causing both the corpses and the coffins to be charred black.

The townspeople of Buddha's Feet were extremely uneasy. After a few rounds of prayers, they rebuilt the burial ground again, assuming that everything would be just fine. However, ever since then, people in the town started to lose their souls.

The first one was a slaggard. He was a poor wretch, loafing about and doing no work at all. Because he loved to hike on the mountain and catch birds, he happened to be stuck in the mountain during the night of the landslide. He was frightened to death, but, luckily, he was safe. The peculiar thing was that, after a few days, he suddenly married someone. His wedding was quite large, and he said that he wanted to be charitable from now on and settle down.

On the night of the wedding, he was completely drunken, having never woken up ever since he lay on the bed. The bride didn't receive an answer as she called him. Only when she pushed him over did she realize that the groom had dreary eyes and a cold body. Aside from being able to breathe, he was no different from a dead person. After a few days of lying on the bed, not eating or drinking anything, he was finally buried. Unfortunately, the bride had become a widow shortly after she married.

The second one was A-Yan, from Blacksmith Zheng's family. The young girl had just received an engagement when her future husband was killed by a wolf on the second day, while he was hunting in the mountains. After she got the news, she also became like the sluggard. Luckily, after some time, her soul-losing disease was cured on its own. However, after this, she went crazy, cheerfully dancing to other people when she was outside.

The third one was A-Yan's father, Blacksmith Zheng. Until now, this had happened to seven people.

Wei WuXian considered the situation, and figured that it was most likely a soul-consuming spirit, not a soul-consuming beast.

Although only one word was different between the two, they were completely different beings. A spirit was a ghost, while a beast was a monster. To him, it was likely that the landslide had destroyed an ancient tomb, and, with lightning splitting the coffin open, a resting spirit had been let out. If he looked at the type of coffin and the presence of any seals on it, he could figure out whether or not this was the case. However, the townsfolk of Buddha's Feet had already buried the charred coffins somewhere else and laid the corpses to rest again, which meant that there wouldn't be a great deal of evidence left.

To go up the mountain, one had to hike up trail that started in the town. Wei WuXian sat on his donkey and rode up the hill slowly. After a while, a few people walked down with ominous expressions on their faces.

Some of them had scars on their faces, and they were talking all at once. With the darkening sky, they all jumped as they saw a person who looked like a hanged ghost approaching them. After cursing, they walked around him quickly. Wei WuXian turned his head around and thought, maybe they were frustrated because it was a strong prey? He didn't think too much about it and slapped the donkey's buttocks, making it jog faster up the mountain.

Coincidentally, he missed the group's whining, which happened shortly afterward. "I haven't seen anyone like this!"

"Would the leader of a big clan like that need to fight over a soul-consuming spirit with us? He probably killed tons of them when he was young."

"What can we do? He's a sect leader. No matter which clan you choose to offend, you shouldn't offend the Jiang clan, and no matter which person you choose to offend, you shouldn't offend Jiang Cheng. Let's just pack up, leave, and feel sorry for ourselves!"

#### Translator's Notes

Compass of Evil: The literal translation is "Wind-evil Compass".

Rice Mountain: The "fan" in "Dafan Mountain" means "relating to Buddhism," but it also sounds similar to "rice," so Wei WuXian mistakenly thought that it means "big rice mountain."

Wei Ying: This is Wei WuXian's birth name. In Ancient China, people usually don't call others by their birth names, unless they were of the same age and close acquaintances with each other. It was considered disrespectful to even mention an elder's birth name. The common name, or the "zi," was another name given to the person by their parents, which other people can freely mention. In this case, by referring to Wei WuXian by his birth name, the speaker is showing his disregard for him.

## Chapter 7: Arrogance—Part Two

If it was darker, then one would need a torch to move freely about in the mountain's forest. Wei WuXian walked for a while, but he didn't meet many cultivators. He was quite surprised, is it possible that half of the clans who came were in Buddha's Feet arguing and talking empty words, while the other half could only come back defeated, like the group of people who just passed by?

Suddenly, cries for help came from in front of him. "Is anyone there?"

"Help us!"

Both male and female voices could be heard, and all sounded panicked, probably not faked. Cries for help from desolate mountains were usually the works of evil creatures, to lure ignorant people into traps. Yet, Wei WuXian was extremely happy.

The eviler the creature was, the better it was for him!

He directed the donkey toward the direction of the voices, but couldn't find anything around him. As he looked upward, instead of spirits or monsters, it was the rural clan that he met by the field earlier on, hung on the trees by a huge, golden web.

The middle-aged man was originally patrolling and scouting in the forest with a few others. However, rather than meeting the prey that they had hoped for, they stepped into a net trap, probably set up by some wealthy clan, which was why they were hanging on the trees, complaining and calling for help. After seeing that someone approached, they immediately brightened up, but the hope faded as they saw that it was a lunatic who came. Although the threads of the deity-binding net were thin, the material was fine in quality, making them difficult to break. No matter human, god, demon, spirit, or monster, it would take a long while for the intruder to struggle out since it could only be broken by a superior magical tool. The lunatic probably didn't even know what it was, much less how to get them out of it.

He was about to call others to come help him when the crisp sounds of parting branches and stepping on leaves approached. A boy wearing a light-colored robe emerged from within the dark forest.

The boy had a vermillion mark in between his eyebrows, his features delicate yet sharp. He was quite young, around the same age as Lan SiZhui—still in his adolescence. He carried a bamboo

canister of feathered arrows and a luminous sword on his back, holding a longbow in his hand. The embroidery on his clothes was extremely delicate, forming a magnificent white peony in front of his chest. The golden threads glistened against the dark nighttime shades surrounding him.

Wei WuXian silently exclaimed, "How wealthy!"

This must have been a young master studying in the LanlingJin Sect, since the sect was the only one with a white peony as the clan pattern, using the king of all flowers to suggest that they were the king of all cultivators. The vermillion mark implied the meaning of "opening the doors toward wisdom and aspiration; illuminating the world with the vermillion light."

The young master already had an arrow on his bow and was preparing to shoot it, when he realized that the deity-binding nets only caught humans. After an initial moment of disappointment, he quickly became annoyed, "I find you idiots every single time. There are more than four hundred deity-binding nets in the mountain, but you guys have already broken ten or so, and I haven't even seen the prey yet!"

Wei WuXian thought, again, "How wealthy!"

A single deity-binding net was already expensive, yet he had set up four hundred all at once. A smaller clan would've become bankrupt after buying so many, but then, of course, this was the LanlingJin Sect. However, wasting deity-binding webs like this and not caring

about what they caught shouldn't be considered night-hunting at all. In fact, it was almost as if they were chasing people away, not allowing others the chance of contributing to the process. It seemed that the cultivators who retreated earlier didn't do it because the prey was difficult, but rather because this sect was one that shouldn't be angered.

After a few days of traveling slowly and listening to the intriguing conversations at Buddha's Feet, Wei WuXian gathered a lot of information about the changes to the cultivation world. As the final winner of the hundred-year-long cultivation disruption, the LanlingJin Sect was the head of all clans and sects—its leader was even referred to as the “commander” of all cultivators. Even before this, the Jin Clan was arrogant, admirers of extravagant splendor. After the years of being at the top and while strengthening the sect, it had trained all of its disciples to do whatever they wanted to. Even a slightly weaker clan would have to submit to their humiliation, much less a small, rural clan such as this one. This was why, although the people trapped in the nets were red with fury, because of the mean words of the boy, they could not talk back. The middle-aged man spoke with tolerance, “Please, Young Master, do us a small favor and let us down.”

The boy was restless with the anxiety of his prey still not arriving, and it was convenient for him to direct his anger toward the country bumpkins. He crossed his arms, “You guys should just stay here, in case you mess around and get in my way again! I'll let you down after I catch the spirit-consuming beast, that is, if I still remember you.”

If they really stayed on the trees for the whole night and happened to bump into the creature that haunted Dafan Mountain, being unable to move, all they could do would be to wait for their souls to be sucked dry. The round-faced girl who gave an apple to Wei WuXian felt scared and started crying. Wei WuXian was originally cross-legged on the donkey, but as it heard the sob, his long ears quivered, and it suddenly leapt forward.

Following the leap came a long bray. If not for how horrible the bray sounded, its unstoppable vigour could almost pass for a purebred horse. Unprepared for this, Wei WuXian was thrown off of its back, almost injuring his head as he fell. The donkey ran head-first toward the boy as if it believed that it could knock him off his feet with its head. The boy's arrow was still poised on the bow, conveniently drawing the bow toward its direction. Wei WuXian didn't want to find a new mount so soon, so he quickly yanked on its reins. The boy took a look at him, a look of shock to suddenly appear on his face. After a second, the shock turned into disdain. His mouth twitched, “So, it's you.”

The tone was made of twenty percent surprise and eighty percent disgust, making Wei WuXian blink. The boy spoke again, “Did you lose your marbles after you were thrown back to your village? How could they let you outside when you looked as freaky as this?”

Did he really just hear something of such significance?

Might it be, Wei WuXian suddenly realized, that Mo XuanYu's father isn't the head of some small sect, but the famous Jin GuangShan?

Jin GuangShan was the last leader of the LanlingJin Sect, having already passed away. On the topic of this man, one sentence could not tell the whole story. He had a fierce wife from a prominent family and, in fact, he was known for being scared of her. However, even if he was scared, it never stopped him from going to other women. No matter how fierce Madame Jin was, it was impossible for her to follow him twenty-four hours a day. Therefore, from ladies of distinguished statuses to prostitutes in rural areas, if he could get his hands on one, he wouldn't miss the chance. And, although he enjoyed casual relationships and flirted everywhere, having an uncountable amount of illegitimate children, it was extremely easy for him to get bored. After he grew tired a woman, he would forget about her completely, without any responsibility or whatsoever. Among all of his illegitimate children, there was only one who proved to be exceptionally talented and ended up being taken back—the current leader of the LanlingJin Sect,

Jin GuangYao. Moreover, Jin GuangShan didn't die honourably either. He believed that he was old but vigorous, and wanted to challenge himself, fooling around with a group of women.

However, unfortunately, he failed and passed away during the act. This was too humiliating, and so, the LanlingJin Sect told the public that the old leader died from overworking himself. All of the other clans decided to keep silent about the matter and pretended that they didn't know anything. Anyways, those were the real reasons behind his "fame."

During the siege in Luanzang Hill, aside from Jiang Cheng, Jin GuangShan was the second-greatest contributor. And now, Wei WuXian had taken over the body of his own illegitimate son. He really didn't know if they were even with each other.

Seeing that he was spacing out, the boy grew even more annoyed, "Get out of here! It's disgusting just looking at you, you damn gay!"

In terms of his generation, it was highly possible for Mo XuanYu to be an elder to the boy, maybe an uncle. After being humiliated by a junior like this, Wei WuXian thought that even if not for his own sake, he needed to return the humiliation for Mo XuanYu's body, "What an attitude! I suppose that you didn't have a mother to teach you?"

Hearing his words, two raging flames sparked in the boy's eyes. He unsheathed the sword on his back and threatened, "What... Did you say?"

The blade of the sword shone a golden light. It was a rare sword of high quality—most clans probably couldn't get a small piece of it even if they spent their whole lives saving for it. Wei WuXian examined it attentively, somehow thinking that the sword seemed familiar to him. Then again, he had seen his share of gold, top-notch swords. He didn't think too much about it and began to spin a tiny cloth bag that he held in his hand.

It was a makeshift "spirit-locking bag" that he had created a few days ago, using the scraps and pieces of things. As the boy wielded the sword and came toward him, he fished a piece of human-shaped paper out of the spirit-locking bag. He shifted to the side, avoiding the attack, and slapped the paper onto his opponent's back.

The boy's movements were already fast, but Wei WuXian had done a lot of "tripping someone while slapping a talisman onto their back", which meant that he was faster. The boy suddenly felt his torso become numb, his back weakening, and he unwillingly collapsed onto the ground, with his sword also falling to the side with a clunk. He couldn't get up no matter how hard he tried, as if a mountain was on top of him. On his back, there was a ghost who had died from gluttony, crushing him to the point that he couldn't even breathe. Although the ghost was weak, it was completely capable of dealing with brats like this one. Wei WuXian picked up his sword,

weighed it in his hands, and swung toward the direction of the deity-binding net, splitting it in half.

The family fell to the ground in an awkward way, but they sprinted off without saying anything. The round-faced girl seemed as if she wanted to thank him, but she was pulled away by an elder, who was scared that Young Master Jin would hate them even more. The boy on the ground was fuming, "You damn gay! Good for you, taking this sort of wrong path because you didn't have enough spiritual powers to do anything! Watch out for your life! Do you know who came today? Today, I..."

Although the cultivation method that he used in the past was often criticized and, in the long term, it harmed the cultivator's health, it could be mastered quickly. It was also especially attractive because there were no limitations as to the cultivator's spiritual powers or talent, making it so that there were always people who secretly practiced it to find a shortcut. The boy presumed that, after being chased from the LanlingJin Sect, Mo XuanYu had chosen the dishonourable path, which was a reasonable conclusion to draw, saving Wei WuXian from a lot of unnecessary trouble.

The boy pushed on the ground, but couldn't get up even after a few tries. His face was scarlet and he gritted his teeth, "If you don't stop, I'm gonna tell my uncle, and you're gonna wait for your death!"

Wei WuXian wondered, "Why is it your uncle, not your dad? Who's your uncle, again?" A voice suddenly came from behind him, a mixture of being bitter and cold.

"I am his uncle. Do you have any last words?"

Hearing the voice, all of the blood from Wei WuXian's body travelled to his head and drained away a moment later. The good thing was that his face was already a pile of white. A shade whiter wouldn't make too much of a difference.

A violet-clothed youth approached in confident steps, his jianxiu robe flowing smoothly and his hand pressing on the hilt of his sword. A silver bell hung by his waist, although it made no sound as he walked.

The young man had thin brows and almond eyes. His features were handsome in a sharp way, and his eyes held a composed vigour, with a slight intention of attack, appearing to be two bolts of lightning as he stared. He stood ten steps away from Wei WuXian, his expression resembling

a honed arrow on the bow, ready to be released at any moment. Even his posture emitted an air of arrogance and overconfidence.

He frowned, "Jin Ling, why did you linger for so long? Do you really need me to come and pick you up? Look at what a terrible situation you're in right now, and get up!"

After the initial numbing of his head, Wei WuXian quickly realized what was going on. He curled a finger inside his sleeve and made the piece of paper retreat. Jin Ling felt his back lighten and immediately rolled up, grabbing his sword in the process. He shifted near Jiang Cheng and pointed at Wei WuXian accusingly, "I'm gonna break your legs!"

With the pair of uncle and nephew standing beside each other, it was clear that they shared a close resemblance, probably able to pass for brothers. Jiang Cheng moved his finger, and the paper doll swiftly flew out of Wei WuXian's hand and into his own. After taking one look at it, hostility came over his face. He pressured his fingers, and the paper was ignited, burning to dust with the screams of dark spirits.

Jiang Cheng spoke grimly, "Break his legs? Haven't I told you? If you see this sort of evil and crooked practice, kill the cultivator and feed him to your dogs!"

Wei WuXian couldn't even attempt to grab his donkey, backing away at rapid speed. He thought that, after so many years, no matter how much hatred Jiang Cheng had held for him, it would have disappeared long ago. He didn't expect that not only did it not disappear, it became richer, as if it was a jar of aged alcohol. At the present time, his hatred had grown to affect even people who cultivated like him!

With someone backing him up, Jin Ling's attacks became more aggressive. Wei WuXian slid two fingers into the spirit-locking bag, about to take something out, when suddenly, the blue glare of a sword slashed out like lightning. It collided with Jin Ling's sword, breaking the powerful sword's golden rays in an instant.

It wasn't because of the quality of the swords, but rather the great disparity in the strengths of the persons using the swords. Wei WuXian had originally calculated the timing, but his movements were suddenly interrupted by the sword's glare, causing him to trip. He fell toward the ground, right on top of a pair of snow-white boots. After pausing for a moment, he slowly lifted his head.

What first came into his sight was a long, slender blade, crystalline and translucent, as if it was made of ice.

In the cultivation world, this sword was one of the most famous ones. Wei WuXian had experienced its powers countless times, including both battles fought beside it and against it. The hilt of the sword was forged from pure silver that had been refined with secret techniques. The blade of the sword was extremely thin, almost transparent, sending forth

the cold breaths of ice and snow. However, at the same time, it could cut through iron like cutting through mud. This was why, although the sword looked light, as if it could fly away any instant, it was actually quite heavy, unable to be wielded by the average person.

Its name was "Bichen."

The blade turned, and the clank of the sword being inserted back into the scabbard sounded from above Wei WuXian. At the same time, Jiang Cheng's voice came from afar, "And I was wondering who it was. So, it is you, Second Young Master Lan."

The pair of white boots passed around Wei WuXian and calmly walked three steps forward. Wei WuXian raised his head and got up. As he walked past the former, slightly brushing their shoulders, he made eye contact with him for a short moment, pretending that it was unintentional.

He had an aura of smooth moonlight. The seven-stringed zither that he carried on his back was narrower than most. Its body was black, made using wood of soft color.

The man wore a forehead ribbon with cloud patterns. His skin was fair, features both refined and elegant, as if he was a piece of polished jade. The color of his eyes was especially light, like they were made of colored glass, causing his gaze to be overly distant. His expression held the traces of frost and snow, stern to the degree of being stiff, unwavering even as he saw Wei WuXian's ridiculous face.

There wasn't a single speck of dust or wrinkled spot on him, from his head to his feet. It was impossible to find any fault with his appearance. Even so, two capitalized words jumped into Wei WuXian's mind.

Mourning clothes!

Mourning clothes, indeed. Although all of the clans in the cultivation world used extravagant words to describe the GusuLan Sect's uniform as the best-looking uniform and Lan WangJi as an incomparable beauty who only appeared once in a blue moon, nothing could help the bitter facial expression that made him look as though his wife had passed away.

In an unlucky year, enemies would often find their paths to cross; good news always traveled alone, but one disaster always followed the next... Thus, the situation right now.

Lan WangJi was silent, staring straight ahead, standing motionlessly in front of Jiang Cheng. Jiang Cheng was already exceptionally handsome, but as they stood face to face with each other, he still seemed a few degrees inferior. He raised one brow and spoke, "HanGuang-Jun, you sure live up to your reputation of 'being wherever the chaos is'. So, you had time to come to this remote area today?"

Powerful cultivators from prominent clans usually didn't care to pay attention to lower-level preys. However, Lan WangJi was an exception. He never cared for the prey of a night-hunt, and wouldn't refuse to go just because the creature was not threatening enough to increase his fame. If anyone wanted help, he would be there. He had been like this ever since he was young. "Being wherever the chaos is" was the comment that the public gave him for his night-hunts and, also, praise for his moral character. Right now, Jiang Cheng really didn't seem too polite as he said the words in such a tone. Even the juniors who came following Lan WangJi didn't seem comfortable hearing it. Lan JingYi spoke straightforwardly, "Isn't Sect Leader Jiang here as well?"

Jiang Cheng replied grimly, "Tsk, do you really think that you should butt in when your seniors are conversing? The GusuLan Sect has always been known for its respectful conduct. Is this really how it teaches its disciples?"

Lan WangJi seemed as if he didn't want to engage in conversation, throwing Lan SiZhui a look. The latter understood and told the juniors to speak among themselves. Afterward, he spoke to Jin Ling, "Young Master Jin, night-hunts have always been fair competitions amongst the different clans and sects. However, to set up nets all over Dafan Mountain is

clearly hindering the cultivators, causing them to fall into the traps. Is this or is this not against the rules of night-hunting?"

Jin Ling's grim expression was exactly the same as his uncle's, "What can I do? It was their own fault for stepping into the traps. I'll solve everything after I finish capturing the prey." Lan WangJi frowned. Jin Ling was about to speak again, but he suddenly realized that, shockingly, he could neither open his mouth nor make any sounds. Seeing that Jin Ling's upper and lower lips became inseparable as if they were glued together, anger appeared on Jiang Cheng's face. The sloppy manners that he upheld before this were all gotten rid of, "You, with the Lan surname! What do you mean by this? It's not your turn to discipline Jin Ling yet, so release the spell, now!"

The silence spell was used by the Lan Sect to reprimand its disciples. Wei WuXian had suffered a ton from this little trick. Although it wasn't anything too complicated or obscure, only people of the Lan Clan could release the spell. If one wanted to forcibly speak, it would result in either their lips being ripped bloody or a hoarse throat for a couple of days. The only solution was to stay silent and reflect upon the wrongdoings until the time limit of the punishment was over. Lan SiZhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, there is no need for anger. As long as he does not break the spell forcefully, it would release on its own, after thirty minutes."

Before Jiang Cheng opened his mouth to speak, a purple-clothed man in the Jiang Sect's uniform ran toward them from within the forest. He shouted, "Sect Leader!" However, after seeing Lan WangJi's presence, he hesitated. Jiang Cheng spoke satirically, "Talk. Is there more bad news?"

The man spoke in a low voice, "Not long ago, a blue sword flew over and destroyed the deity-binding nets that you had set up."

Jiang Cheng glanced at Lan WangJi harshly, his displease plastered all over his face, "How many were broken?"

The man replied carefully, "... All of them..."

That's more than four hundred!

Jiang Cheng seethed with anger.

He didn't expect the journey to be this unlucky. Originally, he came to help Jin Ling out. Jin Ling would be turning fifteen this year, the age of which he should already be making his debut and starting to compete with the juniors of other clans. Jiang Cheng considered the decision carefully before choosing Dafan Mountain as the location of the hunt. He also set up nets everywhere and threatened the cultivators of other clans, showing them the consequences so that they would retreat, in order to let Jin Ling, take the top prize without anyone fighting against him. Although four hundred deity-binding nets were a whopping price, it wasn't too much for the YunmengJiang Sect. Nonetheless, losing the nets were a small matter, but losing face was not.

With Lan WangJi's actions, Jiang Cheng felt a whirlpool of anger at the bottom of his heart, rising higher by every second. He narrowed his eyes, his left hand casually stroking the ring on his right hand's index finger.

This was a dangerous sign.

Everyone knew that the ring was a menacing, strong magical weapon. Whenever Clan Leader Jiang started touching it, it meant that he had the intent to kill.

## Translator's Notes

Vermillion mark: In the past, vermilion marks were drawn on children to “pierce through ignorance” in hope of them being good students later on in life, thus what the implied meaning referred to.

Young Master: Although the man wasn’t the boy’s servant, in Ancient China, one should still refer to the young master of any family as “Young Master”, especially if the family was of higher status than the speaker’s.

Jianxiu: This is a type clothing with sleeves that are wider on the shoulder end and becomes quite narrow by the time it reaches the wrist. However, this really doesn’t matter, because most fanart show him dressed in other ways.

Jar: In Ancient China, alcohol was stored in large jars made of clay.

Bichen: The name means “to avoid dust.” However, please do not pronounce it like bitchin’. The correct pronunciation is bee-chen, with the en sounding like the en in enough.

## Chapter 8: Arrogance—Part Three

However, after stroking it for a while, Jiang Cheng compelled himself to restrain his hostility.

Although he was displeased, as the leader of a sect, he needed to take more things into consideration, which meant that he couldn't be as impulsive as Jin Ling. After the fall of the QingheNie Sect, among the Three Great Sects, the LanlingJin Sect and the GusuLan Sect were quite close due to the personal relationship between the two leaders. By leading the YunmengJiang Sect alone, he was already in an isolated situation among the three. HanGuang- Jun, or Lan WangJi, was quite a prestigious cultivator, while his elder brother ZeWu-Jun, or Lan XiChen, was the leader of the GusuLan Sect. The two brothers had always been on good terms with each other. It was best to not openly dispute with Lan WangJi.

Also, Jiang Cheng's sword, "Sandu," had never made actual contact with Lan WangJi's sword, "Bichen," and it was not yet decidable whose hands would the deer die on. Although he owned the powerful ring, "Zidian," a family heirloom of his, Lan WangJi's zither, "Wangji", was also known for its abilities. The thing that Jiang Cheng hated the most was to be disadvantageous during a fight. Without complete confidence in his success, he would not consider fighting with Lan WangJi.

Jiang Cheng slowly took away his left hand, ceasing to stroke his ring. It seemed as if Lan WangJi was determined to take part in this matter, so it wouldn't help if he continued to play the antagonist. Jiang Cheng made the decision to, for the time being, owe him a favour, and turned around to see Jin Ling still covering his mouth angrily, "HanGuang-Jun wants to punish you, so just let him do it for this one time. It's not easy for him, either, to discipline juniors from other clans."

His tone was sarcastic, but it wasn't clear who he was mocking. Lan WangJi never fought to win his way with words, and looked as if he didn't hear anything. Jiang Cheng turned again, his words covered with thorns, "Why are you still standing there? Waiting for the prey to come and throw itself onto your sword? If, today, you don't catch the creature hunting Dafan Mountain, don't come to me ever again!"

Jin Ling threw Wei WuXian a tough look, but was too scared to look at Lan WangJi, the person who had silenced him. He put his sword back into its scabbard, saluted the two seniors, and retreated with the bow in his hand. Lan SiZhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, the GusuLan Sect will return the exact number of spirit-binding nets that had been destroyed." Jiang Cheng sneered, "No need." He chose the opposite direction and walked down calmly. The man who had came from the forest followed behind him, pulling a long face because he knew that it'd be impossible to escape a lecture when he returned.

After their figures disappeared, Lan JingYi spoke, "How could the Sect Leader Jiang act like this?" Only afterward, did he remember the Lan Clan's rule of not talking behind others' backs. He looked meekly at HanGuang-Jun and shut his mouth. Lan SiZhui smiled softly toward Wei WuXian, "Young Master Mo, we meet again."

As Wei WuXian pulled the corners of his mouth, Lan WangJi spoke again, "Do your tasks." The command was simplistic and clear, without any fancy vocabulary for decoration.

The juniors finally remembered the reason behind why they came to Dafan Mountain. They gathered their thoughts and respectfully waited for further instructions. After a moment, Lan WangJi spoke again, "Do what you can. Don't force anything."

The voice was deep and alluring. If one was too near, the tip of their heart would tremble. The juniors replied mannerly, afraid to linger for too long, and walked into the depths of the forest. Wei WuXian thought that, undeniably, Jiang Cheng and Lan Zhan were extremely different from each other. Even their advice for juniors were the complete

opposite. While thinking, he suddenly saw Lan WangJi give an almost unnoticeable nod to him. He was quite surprised.

Ever since a young age, Lan WangJi had been so prim and proper that it was painful to watch. He had always been solemn and stiff, as if he had never been lively before. He couldn't let a single grain of sand appear in his eyes, which was why he had never approved of Wei WuXian cultivating the dark path. Lan SiZhui had probably informed Lan WangJi of his suspicious behaviour in Mo Village already. Even so, he had nodded in acknowledgement, probably thanking him for helping out the juniors from the Lan Sect. Without thinking, Wei WuXian immediately returned a salute. When he looked up again, Lan WangJi had already disappeared.

After pausing for a second, he turned around to travel down the mountain.

No matter what prey haunted Dafan Mountain, he couldn't take it. Wei WuXian could fight for it against anyone, except for Jin Ling.

Why did it turn out to be Jin Ling?

With so many disciples in the Jin Sect, he really didn't expect that the person he met happened to be Jin Ling. If he knew, he definitely wouldn't mock Jin Ling for "having no mother to teach him." If someone else had said the same words to Jin Ling, he would teach them about what it

means to bring misfortune upon oneself with careless talk. Yet, the person who had said so turned out to be himself. After standing still for a moment, Wei WuXian raised his hand and gave himself a slap on the face.

The slap was both loud and hard, causing his right cheek to sting. Suddenly, shuffling sounds came from a thicket on the side, and Wei WuXian saw a donkey emerge from within. As he dropped his hand, the donkey actually approached on its own, unlike other times. Wei WuXian pulled on its long ears and forced a smile, "You wanted to save the damsel in distress, but asked me to be the hero to the rescue."

The donkey whined, just as a wave of cultivators approached from the bottom of the hill. After the four-hundred-or-so spirit-binding nets were destroyed by Lan WangJi's sword, the hesitant cultivators in Buddha's Feet all rushed up again. Everyone here was probably Jin Ling's opponent. Wei WuXian considered for a moment, about whether or not to make them retreat again with force. But, after thinking about it, he ended up silently walking out of the way, letting them pass. The disciples from different sects, wearing differently colored uniforms, complained as they walked, "Both the Jin Sect and the Jiang Sect spoil Young Master Jin too much. He's still so young, but he's already this arrogant and rude. If they let him have the LanlingJin Sect, who knows what chaos would happen? I don't think we'd even survive."

Wei WuXian slowed his pace. A soft-hearted female cultivator sighed, "How can they not spoil him? He lost both his parents at such a young age." "Shimei, that's not how it works. So, what, if both his parents died? There are tons who lost both of their parents. If everyone acted like him, then what would happen?"

"I'm surprised that Wei WuXian was cruel enough to harm her. Jin Ling's mother was Jiang Cheng's elder sister from birth—the shijie who brought him up."

"It really was too bad for Jiang YanLi, bringing up a wolf that bites the owner's hand. Jin ZiXuan had it even worse. Just because he had something to do with Wei WuXian, he ended up like that." "Why does Wei WuXian have something to do with everyone..."

"Indeed. Have you heard him being close with anyone other than the mad dogs that he raised? His enemies were everywhere, and he did wrong to everyone. Even with HanGuang-Jun, they were like fire and water, hating each other." "Speaking of it, today, if it wasn't for HanGuang-Jun..."

After walking for a while, the gurgling sounds of a running stream came into Wei WuXian's ears.

He didn't hear this when he came up. Wei WuXian finally realized that he walked the wrong path down the mountain, and onto another one that forked off.

Holding the reins of the donkey, he stood beside the running water. The moon could be seen high in the sky. With no branches or leaves on the banks of the stream, fragments of white reflected over the surface. In the reflection, Wei WuXian saw a face, ever-changing from the flow of the water.

He slammed his palm into the water, dissolving the ridiculous features. He lifted his dripping wet palms and wiped away the powder on his face.

A handsome, graceful youth appeared in the reflections of the water. He looked as pure as if he had been cleansed by moonlight, with smooth brows, bright eyes, and lips curving slightly upward. Yet, as he lowered his head to stare at himself, the drops of water hanging from his lashes rolled off, as if they were drops of tears.

It was a young and unfamiliar face, not the YiLing Patriarch who had overturned the world and killed thousands—Wei WuXian.

After taking a few more looks at this face, Wei WuXian wiped his face again and rubbed his eyes. He sat beside the stream with a thud.

It wasn't as if he couldn't withstand the words of attack. After all, back when he made the decision, he fully understood the situations that he had to face. Ever since then, he had reminded himself of the YunmengJiang Sect's motto—do it even if it was impossible.

However, although he thought that his heart was like a stone, in the end, he was still human, not some emotionless grass or plant.

The donkey seemed as if it knew that he wasn't in a great mood, and for once, it wasn't being loud out of impatience. A moment of silence passed, and it turned around to leave. Wei WuXian sat by the stream, not responding at all. It turned around to look, throwing its hooves onto the ground, but Wei WuXian still paid no attention to it. The donkey had to come back sulkily, biting and tugging on the corner of Wei WuXian's collar.

He could choose to go, and he could choose to not go. Seeing that the donkey had went as far as to use his mouth, Wei WuXian decided to follow him. The donkey took him to a few trees and circled around an area of grass. In the grass, there lay a qiankun bag, with a ragged golden net hanging above it. It probably fell off as an unlucky cultivator struggled their way out. Wei WuXian picked up the bag and opened it. There were quite a few items in it, such as gourds of medicinal liquor, talismans, miniature demon-reflecting mirrors, and so on. He fished around for some time and happened to pull out a talisman. Immediately, a ball of fire appeared in his hand. The burning item was a gloom-burning talisman, which, like its name, used dark energy as fuel. It would burn automatically if it made contact with dark energy. The more energy there was, the stronger the flame was. It lit up as soon as it was taken out, meaning that there was a spirit not far away from Wei WuXian. Seeing the light of the fire, Wei WuXian held it to detect the spirit's direction, watching attentively. When he turned to the east, the fire weakened; when he turned to the west, the fire suddenly intensified. He walked a few steps toward the direction, and saw a white, stooping figure appear under a tree. The talisman had finished burning, and the ashes fell from his fingertips. An old man was sitting with his back to him, speaking in faint murmurs. Wei WuXian slowly approached. The words that the old man murmured became clear. "It hurts, it hurts." Wei WuXian asked, "Where does it hurt?" The old man answered, "Head. My head." Wei WuXian replied, "Let me take a look at it." He walked a few steps to the side of the old man, and saw a bloodied, large hole on his forehead. This was a ghost, probably killed with a weapon which was smashed onto his head. He was dressed in a burial robe made with fine material and craftsmanship, meaning that he had already been encoffined and buried properly. This wasn't the soul that a living human had lost.

However, ghosts like this shouldn't have appeared on Dafan Mountain.

Wei WuXian did not find an explanation to this implausible scenario. Feeling quite worried, he jumped onto the donkey's back, slapped it with a shout, and rode toward the direction of where Jin Ling came up the mountain.

Around the area of the ancient tombs, there were a lot of cultivators who wandered around, in hope of a hare crashing into the tree trunk. Somebody dared to hold a spirit-attraction flag, but only attracted a bunch of dark spirits who wept despairingly. Wei WuXian pulled on the reins, scanned around, and asked in a loud, clear voice, "Excuse me and sorry for the interruption, but where did the young masters from the Jin Clan and the Lan Clan go?"

Sure enough, after washing his face, people actually acknowledged him. One cultivator answered, "They left here, for Goddess Temple."

Wei WuXian spoke, "Goddess Temple?"

The rural clan from back then had sneaked up the mountain again and joined the group of night-hunters, after hearing that all of the deity-binding nets were destroyed. The middle-aged man recognized his clothing and the grimacing donkey, realizing that he was lunatic who'd saved them earlier. He felt quite awkward, and pretended that nothing had happened. Nonetheless, the round-faced girl showed him the path, "Over there. It's a divine temple in a cave on the mountain."

Wei WuXian inquired again, "Which deity is the temple built for?"

The round-faced girl spoke, "I, I think it's a natural stone statue of a goddess." Wei WuXian nodded, "Thank you."

After the conversation, he immediately ran toward the direction of Goddess Temple.

The slaggard's marriage, lightning that destroyed coffins, the fiance eaten by wolves, the father and daughter losing their souls, the extravagant burial clothes... It was as if a string was being pulled through all of the beads, tying everything into one perfect strand. No wonder the

compasses of evil didn't pick up anything, and the spirit-atraction flags didn't work either. Everyone had underestimated the creature in Dafan Mountain.

It wasn't at all what they thought it was!

## Translator's Notes

Sandu: This literally translates to "three types of poison".

Whose hands would the deer die on: This proverb means that it is impossible to determine who's more powerful and who will win, if a match happens between the two of them.

Zidian: This literally translates to "purple lightning".

Wangji: The two Chinese characters of the zither's name are exactly the same as Lan WangJi's name. The term is a Daoist phrase that means to "get rid of a heart of deceit". It usually refers to finding pleasure in tranquility, forgetting about material matters, and being at peace with the world. The name does, indeed, reflect WangJi's personality (that is, until the uke starts flirting with him).

Lan Zhan: This is Lan WangJi's birth name. The "Lan" surname means the color blue, and "Zhan" is an adjective that is often used to describe an azure blue. This also implies that, by calling him with his birth name, Wei WuXian used to be very close with him.

Qiankun bag: Qiankun means "Heaven and Earth". A qiankun bag is basically a dimensional bag, holding a lot of items although it looks tiny.

Gourds: Ancient Chinese people liked to carry everything around in gourds, from the average liquor to level-enhancing elixirs that help with cultivation.

A hare crashing into the tree trunk: This proverb originated from a story of a farmer who didn't want to do actual work and waited for a rabbit to kill itself by crashing into a tree. It describes the act of waiting.

## Chapter 9: Arrogance—Part Four

On the other hand, Lan SiZhui and the other disciples did not find anything in the area of the ancient tombs, and had moved on to search for clues in Goddess Temple.

In Dafan Mountain, aside from the tombs of the Buddha's Feet ancestors, there was also the Goddess Temple. The being of worship was neither Buddha nor GuanYin, but the statue of a "dancing goddess."

A few hundred years ago, a hunter from Buddha's Feet ventured into the mountains, and found an extraordinary stone in a cave. It was around three meters in height, formed naturally, and appeared strangely like a human, with four limbs making a dancing pose. The more peculiar thing was that human features could vaguely be seen on the statue, appearing to be that of a smiling lady.

The townspeople of Buddha's Feet were all astonished, and thought that it was a magical stone formed by gathering the energy of Heaven and Earth, making up a series of legends about it.

Some told the story of an immortal falling in love with the Goddess of the Nine Heavens, and carved a stone statue from the goddess's appearance to convey the hardships of being lovesick. After discovering this, the goddess was furious, so the unfinished statue had to be left alone.

Others told the story of the Jade Emperor and his beloved daughter who died young. The emperor's longing for his daughter had, supposedly, turned into this statue.

Anyhow, there were all sorts of myths, able to make anyone gawk. In the end, the townspeople themselves also started to believe in these legends which came out of their own mouths. Hence, someone turned the stone cave into a temple, and the stone platform into a holy seat. The statue was named "Dancing Goddess," and there were worshippers all year round.

The inside of the cave was spacious, similar to the size of an erjin temple, with the statue of the goddess set in the center. At first sight, it did indeed look like a human—the maiden's waist could even be considered lithe and graceful. However, after taking a closer look at it, it would seem rougher. Then again, a naturally-formed statue being so similar to an actual human was enough to make most people gasp in awe.

Lan JingYi lifted and lowered the compass of evil, but its pointer still didn't move. A thick layer of incense ashes covered the table for offerings, and disordered candles lay on there as well. A sickly-sweet scent came from the plates for holding fruits. Most of the people from the GusuLan Sect had some degree of minor mysophobia. He fanned at the air in front of his nose and spoke, "The locals said that it is quite effective to pray at Goddess Temple, but how can it be this ruined? They should at least come and clean once in a while."

Lan SiZhui spoke, "There has already been seven people who lost their souls. Everyone is saying that lightning has let out a fierce creature from the ancient graves of Buddha's Feet, so would anybody dare to come up the mountain? There is no attendance at the temple and so, naturally, there is nobody to clean the place."

A disdainful voice came from outside of the cave, "It's only a stupid rock, given the title of a goddess by who-knows who, and people dare to put it here, accepting incense and worship!"

Jin Ling came inside, with his hands crossed behind his back. The time limit for the silence spell was not long, so his mouth could already open. However, nothing nice came out of that mouth of his, as he looked at the goddess statue and humped, "These rural villagers don't work hard when they face difficulties, but instead pray to the Buddha and other things every day. There are thousands and millions of people in the world, but gods and buddhas are already hands-full with their own matters, so who would care about them? Let alone a powerless goddess without status, like this one. If it's really that effective, then I'm

gonna pray for the soul-consuming creature in Dafan Mountain to appear in front of me right now. Can the statue do it?"

A few cultivators from smaller clans came in behind him, and everyone laughed right after hearing him, agreeing with his words. The originally quiet temple became bustling with noise, after the group of people had rushed forth, and the space also seemed more cramped. Lan SiZhui silently shook his head, turning around and glancing without any aim. His gaze landed on the head of the goddess statue; the features of a compassionately smiling face could vaguely be seen.

Yet, he felt a strange sense of familiarity toward the smile, as if he had seen it somewhere before this.

Where on Earth had he seen it before?

Lan SiZhui thought that it must be a very important matter, and couldn't help but to approach the statue, wanting to examine the goddess's features carefully. At the same time, someone bumped into him.

A cultivator who was originally standing behind him had fallen down without any noise. The others were alert with surprise. Jin Ling spoke in a vigilant tone, "What happened to him?"

Lan SiZhui held his sword and bent down to examine it. There was nothing wrong with the cultivator's breathing, like he had just suddenly fallen asleep. Yet, no matter how hard he was pushed or called, he would not wake up. Lan SiZhui stood up, "He seems as if..."

Before he finished his sentence, the dark cave abruptly lit up. The cave was suddenly covered in a red light, as if a waterfall of blood was rolling off its walls. The candles on the platform for offerings and in the corners of the cave had ignited on their own.

With a few shings, everyone in the cave had either drawn their swords or taken out their talismans. At the same time, a person suddenly burst in from outside the temple, holding a gourd of medicinal alcohol. He threw it toward the stone statue, and raging flames sprouted from it, illuminating the stone cave so that it could even pass for daytime.

Wei WuXian used up all of the items he had found in the qiankun bag. He threw it away and shouted, "Everyone, go back outside! Be cautious of the soul-consuming goddess on the inside!"

Someone yelled in surprise, "The goddess's pose had changed!"

Before, the statute clearly had one foot lifted and both of its arms raised upward, of which one was pointing directly at the sky, its form graceful. However, amid the crimson and yellow flames, it had lowered both its arms and its foot. There was no doubt—it definitely wasn't a mistake of the eye!

The next moment, the statue lifted one foot again, and stepped out of the fire! Wei WuXian shouted, "Run, run, run! Stop slashing around! It won't work!"

Most of the cultivators ignored him. The soul-consuming monster that they had tried so hard to find had finally appeared, so why would they miss out on the chance? However, even with so many swords chopping and stabbing, and so many talismans and magical tools being thrown at it, the statue's advance didn't stop at all. It was around three meters tall, resembling a titan as it moved, giving off a strong sense of oppression. It picked up two cultivators and lifted them in front of its face. The stone mouth seemed like it opened and closed, and the swords in the cultivators' hands dropped to the ground with two clanks. Their heads drooped. Their souls were sucked away.

With no attack methods working properly, the others were finally willing to listen to Wei WuXian's words. Everyone gushed outside, scattering in all directions as fast as they could. With so many people and faces, the more anxious Wei WuXian became, the longer it took to find Jin Ling. Wei WuXian rode on the donkey and ran into a bamboo forest, encountering the juniors from the Lan Clan as he turned around. Wei WuXian called for them, "Children!"

Lan SiZhui replied, "Who are your children? Do you know which sect we are from? Did you really think that you would be considered a senior just because you washed your face?" Wei WuXian spoke, "Okay, okay, okay, gege-s. Send a signal and get your clan's... HanGuang- Jun up here!"

The juniors nodded a few times, and ran around while searching for signals. Lan SiZhui spoke, "The signal firelights... were all used up during the night at Mo Village."

Wei WuXian was shocked, "You guys didn't restock afterwards?"

The signal firelights were usually only needed once in over eight hundred years. Lan SiZhui replied bashfully, "We forgot."

Wei WuXian tried to scare them, "Is this a matter that you should forget about? If HanGuang- Jun knew about this, he's going to make you sorry."

Lan JingYi's face was pale with terror, "It's over. This time, we are gonna be punished to death by HanGuang-Jun..."

Wei WuXian, "Indeed, he should punish you! Without punishment, you wouldn't remember the next time."

Lan SiZhui, "Young Master Mo, Young Master Mo! How did you know that it was not a spirit- consuming spirit or beast, but the goddess statue instead?"

Wei WuXian searched for Jin Ling as he ran, "How did I know? I saw."

Lan JingYi also caught up. They each ran on one side of him, "What did you see? We also saw lots of things."

"You saw, so what happens next? What things were in the area of the ancient tombs?"

"What else could there be? There were only dead souls."

"Correct, there were dead souls. This is why it can't be a soul-consuming spirit or beast. It's simple—if it was either of these two, with so many dead spirits in the area, would it have chosen to not eat them? No, it wouldn't have."

This time, there were more than one person who asked, "Why?"

"Just what can I say about your GusuLan Sect..." Wei WuXian could not tolerate it anymore, "Why can't you teach less annoying, lengthy nonsense like cultivational etiquette, family trees, and history which requires memorization, and teach more practical things? How is this hard to understand? Dead souls are a lot easier to absorb than living souls. The physical body of a living person is like a shield, and if it wants to eat a live soul, it would have to break the shield. For example," He looked at the donkey, which panted while running, rolling its eyes, "For example, if an apple is put in front of you, and another one is put inside a locked box, which one would you choose to eat? Of course, it would be the one in front of you. This creature only eats living souls, and knows of a way to obtain them. It is both powerful and selective in terms of food."

Lan JingYi was astonished, "So that's how it works? It makes a lot of sense! Wait, so you're really not a lunatic?"

Lan SiZhui explained as he ran, "We all thought that, because the landslide and lightning led to the series of events, it must be a soul-consuming spirit."

Wei WuXian spoke, "Wrong." "What is wrong?"

"The order and the correlation are wrong. Let me ask you—for the landslide and the soul-consuming events, which ones were the first and second, the cause and effect?"

Lan SiZhui answered without thinking twice, "The landslide was the first, and the soul-consumption was the second. The first was the cause, and the latter was the effect."

Wei WuXian spoke, "Completely wrong. The soul-consumption was first, and the landslide was second. The soul-consumption was the cause, and the landslide was the effect! During the night of the landslide, a storm suddenly started, and a streak of lightning broke a coffin— remember this. This first person to lose their soul, the slaggard, was trapped in the mountains for the whole night, and married a few days later."

Lan JingYi asked, "Where is it wrong?"

Wei WuXian replied, "It is all wrong! Where would a good-for-nothing and penniless person obtain the money to form such a grand wedding?"

The boys were rendered speechless. But it couldn't have been helped, since the GusuLan Sect was a sect that did not need to worry about matters of wealth. Wei WuXian spoke again, "Did

you take a look at all of the dead souls floating in Dafan Mountain? There was an old man who died from a hit to the head, wearing burial clothes that were made with fine craftsmanship and fabric. With such extravagant burial clothes, his coffin couldn't have been empty, and there must have been a few burial items to protect it. The coffin that was broken by the lightning was most likely his. Yet, the people who came to retrieve the corpse did not find any burial items, which meant that they were definitely taken away by the sluggard, explaining why he suddenly became rich. The sluggard suddenly decided to marry someone after the night of the landslide, so something unusual must have happened during the night. On that evening, there was a harsh storm and he took cover in the mountain. Where on Dafan Mountain is it possible to take cover from the rain? Goddess Temple. And, when most people go into a temple, there is one thing that they would do."

Lan SiZhui asked, "Pray?"

"That's right. For example, he would pray for himself to be lucky, to become wealthy, to have enough money to marry, and so on. The goddess fulfilled his wish with the lightning that split open the grave, letting him see the treasures in the coffin. His prayers came true and, as the sacrifice, the goddess came to him on the evening of his marriage, and took his soul away!"

Lan JingYi, "All of these are just your guesses, right?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes, they are guesses. But, following this train of logic, all of the things that happened afterward could be explained."

Lan SiZhui, "How can this explain what happened with the girl, A-Yan?"

Wei WuXian, "Great question. You guys probably asked around before you came up the mountain. A-Yan had just got engaged during those days. All recently-engaged girls will definitely have the same wish."

Lan JingYi was befuddled, "What wish?"

Wei WuXian replied, "None other than something that goes like, 'I wish my husband would love me and care for me for his whole life, attracted to only myself'."

The boys were at a loss, "Would a wish like this really be able to be granted?"

Wei WuXian held his palms out, "It's simple. If her husband's 'whole life' immediately ended, wouldn't it count as 'loving only one person for his entire life'?"

Lan JingYi finally understood and shouted excitedly, "Oh, oh! So, so, so, the reason behind her husband being eaten by wolves the day after her engagement was that it was highly possible for A-Yan to have been to Goddess Temple to pray!"

Wei WuXian struck while the iron was still hot, "It was hard to say whether he was attacked by a wolf or something else. There is another factor that is unique to A-Yan: why is that, out of all of the victims, only A-Yan's soul returned? How is she different from everyone else? The difference is that she has a relative who also lost his soul. Or, in other words, a relative replaced her! Blacksmith Zheng is A-Yan's father, especially one who loved his daughter. So, when he saw that his daughter lost her soul, and there were no ways to deal with it, what was the only thing that he could do?"

This time, Lan SiZhui was quick to reply, "He could only entrust his hope to the Heavens. Therefore, he also went to Goddess Temple to pray, the wish being 'I wish my daughter A-Yan's soul can be found'!"

Wei WuXian spoke with appraise, "This is why only A-Yan's soul came back, and also the reason behind Blacksmith Zheng losing his soul. However, although A-Yan's soul was given

back, it was still slightly fractured. After her soul returned, she had unconsciously started to imitate the goddess statue's dance and even its smile."

The similarity of the people who lost their souls was that, most likely, they had all prayed in front of the goddess statue. The prices to pay for their wishes were their souls.

The goddess statue was originally just an average rock which happened to look like a person. Having accepted a few hundred years' worth of worship without any reason, it had gained some powers. Yet, because it was greedy and its thoughts ventured off the wrong path, it had wanted to quickly increase its powers by eating souls. These were souls that it obtained by means of swapping wishes, and could be considered as the voluntarily sacrificed souls of the people who prayed. The two sides had a fair deal, one wish for another, and it seemed to be just and moral.

This was why the pointers of the compasses of evil did not move, why the spirit-attraction flags did not work, and why the powers of the swords and talismans were all nullified—the creature in Dafan Mountain wasn't any sprite, demon, ghost, or monster, but a goddess! This was an untitled goddess born from the hundreds of years of incense. Using the items used to deal with evil spirits and beasts to deal with it would be like using fire to distinguish fire!

Lan JingYi shouted loudly, "Wait! Before this, in the temple, someone's soul was also taken away, but we didn't hear him wish!"

Wei WuXian's heart suddenly jumped. He stopped his footsteps, "Someone's soul was taken away in the temple? Describe to me everything that happened earlier, without missing a single word."

Lan SiZhu repeated the scenario both clearly and quickly. When he heard Jin Ling's talk of "if it's really that effective, then I'm gonna pray for the soul-consuming creature in Dafan Mountain appear in front of me right now. Can the statue do it?", Wei WuXian spoke, "How is this not wishing? It most definitely is a wish!"

The others agreed with Jin Ling, so it was accepted that they had all wished the same thing. At the time, the soul-consuming goddess was right in front of them, so the wish was granted. Then, it was time to seize the sacrifice!

Suddenly, the donkey halted, and ran toward the opposite direction. Wei WuXian was, again, swung off unpreparedly, but grabbed on to the rope no matter what. However, in the bushes in front of him, there came a noise of chewing, complete with crunches and slurps. An immense figure was crawling in the bush, its huge head on the ground and moving using its stomach.

Hearing the noise, it immediately lifted its head. Their eyes met.

In the beginning, the soul-consuming goddess's features were vague, and there were only the shapes of eyes, nose, mouth, and ears on its face, but after it had eaten the souls of a few cultivators all at once, it could already form clear features. It was the face of a smiling woman, with blood dripping down the corners of its mouth, munching on an arm that had been torn off.

Everyone, following the donkey, ran in the other direction.

Lan SiZhu was breaking down, "That is not supposed to happen! The YiLing Patriarch had said before, that high-level ones eat souls, and only low-level ones eat flesh!"

Wei WuXian couldn't help but to comment, "Why are you blindly worshipping him? Even his own inventions were a mess! No rules stay the same in all situations. You can think of it as an infant—when it lacks teeth, it can only eat congee and soup, but when it grows up, it would, of course, also want to eat meat using its teeth. Her powers had just risen greatly, so naturally she'd want to taste something new!"

The soul-consuming goddess stood up from the ground. Her body was tall. She used her arms and her legs to dance with uncontrollable excitement, seeming like she was extremely

pleased. Out of the blue, an arrow came with a whoosh and pierced her forehead, the arrowhead appearing out of the back of her head.

Hearing the sound of the bow's release, Wei WuXian's looked toward its direction. Jin Ling stood atop a tall hill, not far away, and already had his second feathered arrow on the bow. He pulled to the maximum, and another head-penetrating arrow was released, the strength causing the soul-consuming goddess to stagger a few steps backward.

Lan SiZhui yelled, "Young Master Jin! Send off the signal on you!"

Jin Ling turned a deaf ear to his words, determined to kill the monster. With a solemn face, he set three arrows onto the bow at once. Although she was shot in the head twice, the soul-consuming goddess was not angered, and advanced toward Jin Ling with the same smile plastered on her face. Although she danced while walking, her speed was terrifyingly fast, decreasing the distance between them by half in just a few moments. A few cultivators appeared from the side and fought with her, hindering her strides. Jin Ling shot each arrow as the goddess took each step, probably intending to use up all of the feathered arrows first, before fighting in a closer range with the soul-consuming goddess. His arm was quite steady, and his shots were accurate, but all magical weapons were useless against it!

Both Jiang Cheng and Lan WangJi were at Buddha's Feet, waiting for any news, so who knows how long it would take for them to realize that something was wrong and come up here. To extinguish fire, water was needed. Therefore, if magical weapons didn't work, what about dark sorcery?

Wei WuXian unsheathed the sword on Lan SiZhui's waist and chopped off a piece of a thin bamboo, swiftly making it into a flute. He lifted it up in front of his lips and took a deep breath. The shrill timbre of the flute was like an arrow, slicing through the night sky and shooting into the clouds.

This should have been a last resort for him, but however, with the situation already like this, it didn't matter what he summoned. It'd be fine as long as the dark energy was strong enough and the killing intent was keen enough, so that it could rip the soul-consuming goddess into pieces!

Lan SiZhui was shocked to the point that he couldn't even move, while Lan JingYi covered his ears, "Look at what situation we are in, and you are still playing the flute? It sounds horrible!"

In the battle, three or four of the cultivators who were fighting with the soul-consuming goddess had lost their souls. Jin Ling pulled out his sword. He was already less than two zhang away from the soul-consuming goddess. His heart thumped like crazy and all of the blood in his body went toward his head, if I can't slice off her head with this blow, I will die here—death it is, then!

At the same time, from within the forests of Dafan Mountain, a tinkling sound appeared. Tinkle tinkle, tinkle tinkle. It was sometimes faster, sometimes slower; sometimes pausing, sometimes continuing. It echoed in the silent woods, resembling the sound of iron chains colliding and being dragged on the ground. It came closer, and became louder.

For some reason, the sound gave the people an uneasy sense of threat. Even the soul-consuming goddess stopped dancing. It raised it arms, blankly staring into the dark of which the sound came from.

Wei WuXian put away his flute and carefully looked into the direction.

The ominous feeling that he felt became stronger and stronger, but because it was willing to come due to the summoning, it would at least be something that listened to him.

Then, all of a sudden, the noise stopped. A figure emerged from within the darkness.

After having a clear view of the figure and the face, the cultivators' expressions became twisted.

Even when facing the goddess statue that could suck away their souls at any minute, the group did not cower or show any fear, but however, their shouting voices right now were filled with terror that they could not conceal.

“... The ‘Ghost General’, it’s the ‘Ghost General’, it’s Wen Ning!”

The title of the “Ghost General” was as infamous as that of the YiLing Patriarch’s. Most of the time, the two appeared together.

The word only referred one person—the right-hand man of the YiLing Patriarch Wei Ying, who had helped with the tyrant’s crimes, stirred up wind and waves, played the jackal to the tiger, overturned the world with him, and most of all, was a fierce corpse who should have been turned into ashes a long time ago—Wen Ning!

Word Cou

#### Translator’s Notes

GuanYin: This is the most famous goddess in the traditional religion of China. She originated from a male Bodhisattva in Buddhism—when the religion was passed through the Silk Road, she somehow ended up becoming a female goddess.

Immortal: An immortal is a heavenly being or someone from the heavens. They can either be born an immortal or become an immortal through practices such as cultivation. All cultivators aim to become an immortal.

Goddess of the Nine Heavens: This is the goddess of war, sexuality, and longevity (“Wikipedia”).

Jade Emperor: He is the monarch of all deities in heaven, from the Daoist religion or just Chinese folklore in general.

Erjin temple: This is a type of temple which is usually set in remote mountains or forests, with monks living in them and few visitors. Because of its nature, erjin temples are usually quite large in size.

Gege: This means “older brother”.

Struck while the iron was still hot: This proverb means to grab onto a good chance/opportunity when it comes

Zhang: One zhang is around 3.3 meters.

## Chapter 10: Arrogance—Part Five

Wen Ning's head was slightly lowered and his arms hung down, as if he was a marionette waiting for the orders of his master.

His face was pale and delicate, and could be considered handsome in a melancholy sort of way. However, there were no pupils in his eyes, but only a flat cloud of white, along with a number of black, cracking lines which climbed up his face from his neck, so the melancholy turned into a frightening gloom. The lower hem and sleeves of his robe were ragged and torn, showing a pair of wrists that were the same ashen shade as his face, with black cuffs and chains on both his wrists and ankles. The tinkling sound was produced when he dragged the iron chains on the ground. If he stopped moving, everything would be silent again.

It wasn't hard to guess why all of the cultivators were scared out of their wits. Wei WuXian wasn't any calmer than any of them either. In fact, the storm in his chest had already crashed over the top of his head.

It wasn't that Wen Ning shouldn't be here, but that Wen Ning shouldn't be in this world at all. He was turned into ashes even before the siege at Luanzang Hill.

Hearing the others call Wen Ning's name, Jin Ling's blade, which originally pointed at the direction of the soul-consuming goddess, couldn't help but to turn toward another direction. Seeing that he was distracted, the soul-consuming goddess gladly extended her arm and picked him up.

As Wei WuXian saw her opened mouth approaching Jin Ling, he didn't have time to be surprised. He raised the wooden flute again, hands slightly shaking, and therefore, the notes that he played also trembled. Aside from this, the flute was roughly crafted, so the sound produced could be described as coarse and unpleasant to the ear. With two notes, Wen Ning started to move.

Within the blink of an eye, he had already shifted in front of the soul-consuming goddess. Wen Ning used the side of his palm and gave a blow. The soul-consuming goddess's neck cracked, and although her body didn't move, her head was twisted around because of the force. She faced the direction of which her back originally faced, but kept on smiling. Wen Ning gave another blow with his hand, and the soul-consuming goddess's right hand, which was holding Jin Ling, was cleanly cut off.

She bowed her head to look at the wrist which broke off sharply. Instead of turning her head toward the correct direction, her entire body turned around, so that she was facing Wen Ning

with her face and her back. Wei WuXian didn't dare to relax. He took a deep breath and commanded Wen Ning to fight. However, not long had passed, and he became even more shocked.

Low-level corpses were unable to think on their own and needed his orders to lead them. Powerful fierce corpses, on the other hand, were usually delirious or unconscious. Yet, Wen Ning's case was different—he was created by Wei WuXian, which meant that he could easily be called the strongest fierce corpse in the current world. He was the only one who was capable of thought. Aside from not fearing injuries, fire, the cold, poison, and whatever living humans feared, he was the same as a one.

However, at that moment, Wen Ning clearly wasn't conscious!

He was both shocked and doubtful as a few cries of alarm came threshing from the crowd. Using both his arms and legs, Wen Ning had secured the soul-consuming goddess on the ground. He picked up a rock which lay on the side, taller than the height of humans, and lifted it above the soul-consuming goddess. He started to slam it onto her with great force. Each strike sounded as loud as thunder, continuing until the stone body of the soul-consuming goddess was pounded to pieces!

Amid the white pile of rocks scattered on the ground, a marble-sized sphere rolled out, radiating a circle of light in the color of snow. It was the core that condensed in the soul-consuming goddess after she devoured the souls of ten-or-so living people. If it was brought back and handled carefully, some people, who had their souls eaten recently, could be restored back to life. However, at the moment, nobody made any effort to pick up the sphere. The blades which were aimed at the soul-consuming goddess all turned around.

One cultivator shouted at the top of his lungs, "Close in on him!"

Some people replied hesitantly, but more people were indecisive, walking backward slowly. The cultivator shouted again, "Fellow cultivators, we have to block him so that he doesn't escape."

This is Wen Ning we're facing!"

These words convinced the crowd. What was a mere soul-consuming monster compared to the Ghost General? Although the reason as to his appearance was unknown, it was obvious that killing one thousand soul-consuming spirits couldn't even compare to capturing one single Wen Ning. After all, this was the most obeying mad dog under the YiLing Patriarch, which bit people without making any noise. If it was captured, they would surely become famous in the cultivation world and quickly rise to success! Their original goal from attending the Dafan Mountain night-hunt was to fight for fairies, beasts, and evil spirits to add to their experiences.

With the shouts, it was certain that some people were interested. Yet, the older cultivators who saw with their own eyes how wild Wen Ning was when he broke out were still cautious to make a move. Hence, the person shouted once more, "What are you scared of? It's not as if the YiLing Patriarch is here right now."

After another thought, the words made sense to them. What was there to be scared of? His master was already in pieces!

With these remarks, the ring of swords which circled around Wen Ning had suddenly decreased in size. Wen Ning waved his arm, and the black iron chains swept past heavily, hitting the swords so that the directions of their blades slanted off to the side. Right afterward, he took a stride forward and gripped the neck of the person closest to him. With a light pull, he was lifted off the ground. Seeing the situation, Wei WuXian knew that the flute notes were too hurried and abrupt, causing him to develop a killing intent. To stifle it, Wei WuXian calmed his feelings and assuredly played another melody.

The melody had drifted over his mind naturally. It was relaxed and tranquil, contrasting with the bizarre and ear-piercing one from before. Hearing the sound, Wen Ning froze, and slowly turned toward the direction of which the melody came from. Wei WuXian stood in the same spot, staring into his pupil-less eyes.

After a moment, Wen Ning released his hand, throwing the cultivator on the ground. He let down his arms and walked toward Wei WuXian at a slow pace.

His head was lowered and he dragged a large amount of iron chains, even seeming as if he looked dejected. Wei WuXian retreated while playing the flute, guiding him to follow. Walking like this for a short distance, they moved into the forest, when suddenly, Wei WuXian caught the chilly scent of sandalwood.

Immediately after, his back bumped into someone. With an abrupt pain on his wrist, the flute melody had stopped. Wei WuXian thought, oh no, and turned around to look. His sight collided with Lan WangJi's eyes. They were light-colored to the point of appearing to be physically cold.

The situation looked unpromising. Lan WangJi had seen him use the flute to control corpses with his own eyes.

Lan WangJi used one hand to steadily grip Wei WuXian. Wen Ning stood still at about two zhang away from them, slowly looking around as if he was searching for the flute melody that had suddenly disappeared. From far into the forest, the light of flames and sound of

human voices were spreading. Wei WuXian thought quickly and made his decision at once—so what, if

Lan WangJi had seen him do this before? There were tens of thousands of people who knew how to play the flute, and the number of people who imitated the YiLing Patriarch's method of using it to control corpses could form a sect on their own. He wouldn't confess no matter what!

He decisively ignored the hand that gripped him and raised his arm to continue playing. This time, the tempo was faster, as if it was urging or scolding. His air was not steady and each note cracked at the end, sounding shrill and harsh. Suddenly, Lan WangJi's hand tightened, almost causing his wrist to break. Wei WuXian's fingers loosened from the pain and the wooden flute dropped to the ground.

Fortunately, his orders were clear enough. Wen Ning retreated quickly, disappearing into the dark and gloomy forest without a sound. Wei WuXian feared that Lan WangJi would chase after Wen Ning, so he backhandedly grabbed him instead. But, surprisingly, Lan WangJi never even looked at Wen Ning once, but stared at Wei WuXian the whole time. The two stood face to face, gripping each other's arms, and stared.

At the same time, Jiang Cheng arrived.

He maintained his patience and waited for the results in Buddha's Feet, but before he finished a single cup of tea, a disciple ran from the mountain hastily and told him about how powerful and cruel the thing in Dafan Mountain was. Hearing this, his heart jumped and he rushed up here again. He shouted, "A-Ling!"

Jin Ling almost had his soul taken away a moment ago, but he was fine now, and stood on the ground properly, "Uncle!"

Seeing that Jin Ling was safe, Jiang Cheng finally calmed down. Quickly afterward, he scolded angrily, "Didn't you bring signal firelights with you? Don't you know to use them when you meet something like this? What are you pretending to be strong for? Scram over here!"

Jin Ling was also angered from not capturing the soul-consuming goddess, "Weren't you the one who told me that I have to catch it? And, if I don't catch it, I shouldn't go see you?"

Jiang Cheng seriously wanted to slap the rotten brat so hard that he went back inside his mother's stomach. However, he really did say so himself, and he shouldn't prove himself wrong. He could only turn to the cultivators who lay collapsed on the ground, speaking with satire, "What on Earth could it be, beating you up in such a dignified way?"

Among the cultivators who wore differently-colored clothing, a bunch were the disguised disciples of the YunmengJiang Sect, ordered by Jiang Cheng to secretly assist Jin Ling, in case

he couldn't overcome the challenge. He was quite the responsible elder, going to such great lengths. One cultivator still hadn't overcome the shock, "Sect, Sect Leader, it's... It's Wen Ning..."

Jiang Cheng thought that he had misheard, "What did you say?" The person replied, "Wen Ning is back!"

In an instant, shock, disgust, anger, and disbelief all crossed Jiang Cheng's face.

After a long while passed, he finally spoke bitterly, "The thing was ground to dust in front of everyone long ago, so how can it come back?"

The disciple spoke, "It really is Wen Ning! There's no way for it to be wrong! My eyes couldn't have mislooked!" He suddenly pointed to the side, "... He was the one who summoned him!"

Wei WuXian was still in a stalemate with Lan WangJi. Instantly, they were the center of everyone's attention. Jiang Cheng's lightning-like gaze also moved toward where he stood.

After a moment, the corners of Jiang Cheng's lips pulled into a twisted smile. His left hand started to unconsciously stroke the ring again. He spoke softly, "... Well, well. So, you're back?"

He let go of his left hand, and a long whip dangled from it.

The whip was extremely slender. Like its name, it was a streak of purple lightning which sizzled, as if it had just been taken away from a sky full of storm clouds. He held one side of it in his grip. As it was brandished, it seemed to let out rapid slashes of lightning!

Before Wei WuXian moved, Lan WangJi had already placed his zither in front of him. With an assured stroke, it was as if a rock had created thousands of waves in water. The sound of the zither had created countless ripples in the air, colliding with Zidian. The latter waned, and the former waxed.

Jiang Cheng's considerations of "not rashly fighting with him" and "not displeasing the Lan Clan" were as if they were eaten by dogs. The night sky above Dafan Mountain's forest was sometimes surging with purple light, and sometimes as bright as daytime; there were sometimes deafening roars of thunder, and sometimes waves of the zither's notes. The rest of the cultivators quickly retreated into a safe distance away from the scene, standing on the side and watching.

They were both frightened to death and staring in awe. After all, rarely did one have the chance to watch two famous cultivators of prominent families combat directly, which was why everyone

hoped that the fight was more violent and intense. Among these thoughts, there were also some unspeakable hopes for the relationship between the Lan Clan and the Jiang Clan to fall apart, creating an interesting scenario. On the other hand, Wei WuXian waited for his chance, and suddenly sprinted off.

The crowd was extremely surprised. He hadn't been hit by the whip yet only because Lan WangJi acted as a barricade in front of him. For him, running away like this was the same as seeking his own death!

Sure enough, as if eyes grew on his back, Jiang Cheng saw that he went outside Lan WangJi's area of protection, and was determined to grasp the chance. With a slanting crack of his whip, Zidian slashed out with the semblance of a poisonous dragon, precisely landing on the center of his back!

Wei WuXian was almost flung away from the attack of the whip. If not for the donkey blocking him, he would have directly crashed into a tree. However, after the blow, both Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng stopped, looking quite stunned.

Wei WuXian massaged the back side of his waist, and crawled up with the support of the donkey. He hid behind it and yelled angrily, "How amazing! You really can do anything when you're from a powerful clan, can't you? You can even beat up anyone you want! Tsk tsk!"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Jiang Cheng, "..."

He was both shocked and enraged, "What is going on?"

One unique power of "Zidian" was that, if it hit someone who seized another's body, their soul and physical form would immediately separate. Without any exceptions, the person's soul would be whipped away from the body. Yet, Wei WuXian was still moving properly and running about after he was hit. The only explanation was that he did not seize this body.

Wei WuXian thought, of course Zidian couldn't whip out my soul. I didn't seize anyone's body, but was forcibly given one!

Bewilderment could be seen on Jiang Cheng's face as he prepared to whip again, when Lan JingYi suddenly shouted, "Sect Leader Jiang, this should be enough, right? It was Zidian!"

It was absolutely impossible for the first strike to fail and the second to succeed, for a magical weapon of such high level like Zidian. If nothing was taken out, nothing would be taken out; if it wasn't the seizing of a body, it wouldn't be the seizing of a body. In fact, the shout made Jiang Cheng, who cared about maintaining his reputation above anything else, unable to make another move.

However, if it wasn't Wei WuXian, who else could have summoned and controlled Wen Ning?

Even after thinking it over multiple times, Jiang Cheng still couldn't accept the fact. He pointed at Wei WuXian and scowled, "Who on Earth are you?"

Finally, a meddlesome bystander added a word to the conversation. He coughed, "Sect Leader Jiang, you might have not paid attention to these things so didn't know about this. Mo XuanYu was the LanlingJin Sect's... Ahem, he used to be a foreign disciple of the Jin Sect. But, because his spiritual powers were low and he didn't work hard in his studies, and also had that... He harassed a peer and was thrown out of the LanlingJin Sect. I've also heard that he lost his marbles? In my opinion, he was probably bitter from being unable to cultivate using the correct method, he ventured off onto the wrong path. It might not be... the YiLing Patriarch seizing this body."

Jiang Cheng asked, "That? Which?" "That... As in that..."

Someone couldn't help but to comment, "The cut-sleeve penchant!"

Jiang Cheng's eyebrows twitched. His eyes which stared at Wei WuXian seemed more disgusted than before. There were more comments on the matter, but nobody dared to say them in front of Jiang Cheng.

Although he was infamous, people had to admit that, before the YiLing Patriarch Wei WuXian had betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect, he was known for being a handsome young man and a refined cultivator skilled in the six arts. He ranked the fourth among all of the young masters in the cultivation world, being described as lively and cheerful. On the other hand, the ill-tempered Sect Leader Jiang ranked five, surpassed by him, so most people weren't so bold as to mention the matter. Wei Ying was a frivolous and wanton person who loved to have tangled ties with pretty girls. Nobody knew how many female cultivators he had troubled with his charms, but it was yet unheard of that he was also attracted to men. Even if he wanted to steal a body and seek revenge... according to Wei Ying's taste, he definitely wouldn't have chosen a lunatic cut-sleeve who rode a donkey while eating fruits and painted his face to resemble a hanged ghost!

Someone else muttered, "It's not him no matter how you look at it... The flute was also played horribly... This is definitely a case of blind imitation, hearing how inferior it sounded."

During the "Sunshot Campaign," the YiLing Patriarch stood on the battlefield and played his flute throughout the whole night, controlling the ghost soldiers as if they were a living army. He swept away all obstacles—whether a human or god was standing in front of him, he had defeated them. The sound of his flute was as if it was played by an immortal, absolutely incomparable to the terrible moans made by the abandoned son of the Jin Clan. No matter how horrible Wei WuXian's character was, it was too insulting to compare them like this.

Wei WuXian felt somewhat offended, ... Why don't you try playing a few notes after ten-or-so years of not practicing, using a lousy flute made with just a few slices and cuts? If it sounds pleasant, I'll kneel in front of you!

A moment ago, Jiang Cheng was certain that this person was Wei WuXian, and all of the blood in his body started to boil. Yet, now, Zidian was clearly telling him that he wasn't. Zidian definitely wouldn't deceive him or make a mistake, so he quickly calmed himself and thought,

this doesn't mean anything. I should first find an excuse to take him back and use every possible method to get information out of him. It's impossible for him to not confess anything or give himself away. I've done things like this in the past anyways. After thinking it through, he made a gesture. The disciples understood his intention and came over.

Wei WuXian hurriedly jumped behind Lan WangJi with the donkey, and exclaimed while holding a hand over his chest, "Ah! What are you going to do to me?"

Lan WangJi gave him a look, putting up with his extremely discourteous, noisy, and exaggerated behaviour.

Seeing that he had no means of moving over, Jiang Cheng spoke, "Second Young Master Lan, are you purposely making it difficult for me?"

Everyone in the cultivation world knew that the young leader of the Jiang Clan watched out for Wei WuXian in an almost crazed manner. He would rather catch the wrong person than let go of any possibility, and took anyone who seemed like they held the soul of Wei WuXian away to the YunmengJiang Sect, inflicting severe torture on his victim. If he wanted to take someone back, the opposition would surely lose half of their life. Lan SiZhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang. The evidence is clear—Mo XuanYu's body was not taken. If so, why should you want to trouble an unimportant person such as him?"

Jiang Cheng replied coldly, "Then, why is Second Young Master Lan going to such great lengths to protect an unimportant person such as him?"

Out of the blue, Wei WuXian made a few sounds of suppressed laughter.

He spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, umm, I'll feel very troubled if you keep on bothering me like this."

Jiang Cheng's eyebrow twitched again. His instincts told him that this person would definitely not say anything that pleased him.

Wei WuXian spoke, "Thank you for being so enthusiastic. However, your thoughts are quite off. Even if I am attracted to men, I don't like just any type of man, much less follow anyone who waves at me. For example, I'm not interested in ones like you."

Wei WuXian was purposely trying to disgust him. Jiang Cheng had always hated being defeated while compared with others, no matter how pointless the comparison was. If anyone said that he wasn't as good as someone else, he'd be angered and not think about anything else until he won against the person. As expected, Jiang Cheng's face darkened, "Oh, really? Then, may I ask which type you're interested in?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Which type? Well, I am very much attracted to people like HanGuang- Jun."

Lan WangJi could not tolerate this sort of frivolous and foolish joke at all. If he felt disgusted, he would definitely draw a line between them and keep his distance. Disgusting two people at once—this was killing two birds with one stone!

However, as Lan WangJi heard this, he turned around. His face was emotionless, "Mark your words."

Wei WuXian, "Hmm?"

Lan WangJi turned back, speaking in a mannerly yet resolute way, "I will take this person back to the Lan Sect."

Wei WuXian, "..."

Wei WuXian, "...Huh?"

## Translator's Notes

Fierce corpses: From now on, the term fierce corpse will describe the certain type of moving corpse/live corpse instead of a powerful corpse (with fierce being part of the noun instead of an adjective to corpse).

Fairies: This does not refer the Western fairies that fly around fluttering their minuscule wings. These will be further explained in a few chapters, but for a better understanding of the story, a fairy is formed when a living creature gains consciousness. This is sometimes translated as spirit, such as the kitsune spirit in Japanese and Chinese folklore, but the term fairy will be used here, so that it can be distinguished from the evil spirits that also appears often.

Cut-sleeve: This is another term for homosexuality (male-oriented only), originating from the ancient story of a homosexual emperor. When the emperor woke up, one day, his lover was still asleep, with the emperor's sleeve under him. Therefore, he cut off his sleeve when he left the bed, so that his lover wouldn't be woken up. This has been left like this because the term "homosexuality" sounds too scientific, while the term "gay" doesn't have that romantic or poetic feeling to it, and any other terms are somewhat offensive. This will be used as both noun and adjective.

Six arts: Traditionally, the six arts involved rites, music, archery, chariotering, calligraphy, and mathematics ("Wikipedia"). However, it is fine to not interpret this literally and assume that he was skilled in a lot of areas, in general.

Sunshot Campaign: This does not have anything to do with brand names called "Sunshot." Literally, it means "the campaign to shoot down the sun," but it has been simplified. The nature of this campaign will be explained later in the story.

## Chapter 11: Refinement—Part One

The residence of the Lan Sect was located in a remote mountain outside the city of Gusu. Mist constantly enveloped the white walls and black roofs of the buildings, which stretched along the picturesque garden of the waterside pavilion, as if it was an ocean of clouds in the immortal realm. At dawn, the first rays of the morning sun shone through the hazy billows of mist that drifted far and wide, perfectly complementing its name—the “Cloud Recesses.” In such a tranquil place, one’s heart would be like still water. Only the echoes of the bell tower could be heard vibrating through the air. Although it was incomparable to a holy temple, the cold mountains still send forth a lonesome air of Zen.

However, the ambience was suddenly shattered by a long wail, giving a few shudders down the backs of the disciples who were training or doing their morning readings. They couldn’t help but to glance at the direction of the main entrance, where the sound came from.

Wei WuXian was crying in front of the entrance, clinging onto his donkey. Lan JingYi spoke, “Stop crying! You said that you liked HanGuang-Jun yourself, so what are you waiting for, now that he has taken you back?”

Wei WuXian pulled a long face.

He never had the chance to summon Wen Ning again, after the night at Dafan Mountain. Neither did he have any opportunities to find out why Wen Ning was unconscious or why he had appeared in this world again, before he was carried back by Lan WangJi.

When he was in his early youth, he had come to study at the Lan Sect for three months, along with the disciples of other clans, so he had experienced the GusuLan Sect’s dull, boring atmosphere in person. In fact, he still shuddered at the thought of the three-thousand-or-so sect rules which crammed onto the Wall of Discipline. As he was tugged up the mountain, he passed by the rock wall again, and saw that a thousand more were carved on. Now, there were more than four thousand. Four thousand!

Lan JingYi spoke, “There, there! Stop making a ruckus. Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses.”

He was making loud noises exactly because he didn’t want to enter the Cloud Recesses! If he was dragged inside, it would be extremely difficult for him to come outside again. Back then, when he came to study, all of the disciples were given a jade token for passage. Only with the token, would a person be able to enter and leave freely, or else they couldn’t pass through the protective barrier of the Cloud Recesses. After ten years had passed, the security could only have gotten stricter, instead of looser.

Lan WangJi stood still in front of the entrance, turning a deaf ear to him, and watched the scene with an indifferent look. When Wei WuXian’s voice had somewhat quieted, he spoke, “Let him cry. When he becomes tired, drag him inside.”

Wei WuXian hugged the donkey and cried even harder, bumping his head against it. How unfortunate! He thought that with a whip from Zidian, all of his doubts would be cleared. At the moment, he felt satisfied with himself and, along with his mouthful of teasing words, he offhandedly gave Lan WangJi a few repulsive comments. Yet, who knew that Lan WangJi didn’t follow the routine he had followed before? What was this all about? Was it possible that, after so many years, his level of cultivation had increased, but he became more intolerant?

Wei WuXian spoke, “I’m attracted to men, so with so many beautiful young men in your sect, I’m afraid that I won’t be able to control myself.”

Lan SiZhui tried to reason with him, “Young Master Mo, it was for your sake that HanGuang- Jun brought you here. If you do not follow us, Sect Leader Jiang will not be willing to let the matter go. During these years, there were countless people whom he caught and took back to Lotus Pier, and none of those people were ever let out.”

Lan JingYi spoke, “That is right. You have seen Sect Leader Jiang’s methods, have you not? They are quite cruel...” He paused here, remembering the rule that stated “talking behind other people’s backs” was prohibited, and secretly glanced at Lan WangJi. Seeing that HanGuang-Jun didn’t show any means to chastise him, he was bold enough as to mumble on, “It is all because of the unhealthy trend that the YiLing Patriarch started. There are so many people who copy him and cultivate that foolish method. With Sect Leader Jiang being so suspicious of everyone, is it even possible for him to catch all of them? Just look at you and your flute skills... Heh.”

The heh told more words than what any sentences could describe. Wei WuXian felt like he really needed to defend himself, “Well, actually, you might not believe me, but I usually play the flute quite well...”

Before he finished his defense, a few white-clothed cultivators walked through the door. Each person wore the Lan Sect’s uniform, with flowing, plain robes as white as snow. The man standing in front was tall and slender. Hanging on his waist was a xiao made of white jade, aside from his sword. As Lan WangJi saw them, he slightly bowed his head to show respect, and the person did the same. He looked at Wei WuXian and smiled, “WangJi never brings guests home. This is?”

As the person stood in front of Lan WangJi, it was as if they were mirror images. However, the color of Lan WangJi’s eyes was extremely light, as if they were tinted crystals, while his eyes were of a gentler, darker shade.

This was Lan Huan, the leader of the GusuLan Sect—ZeWu-Jun, Lan XiChen.

Each place brought up the same kind of people. The GusuLan Sect had always been known for nurturing a lot of handsome men, especially the two jades of the clan’s current generation. Even though the two were not twins, they looked extremely similar to each other, which made it difficult to tell who was the superior one. Yet, although their appearances were similar, their personalities were not. Lan XiChen was gentle and benevolent, while Lan WangJi was overly aloof and stern, keeping everyone at an arm’s length and being the opposite of amiable. This was why, in the list of the best-looking young masters in the cultivation world, the former ranked first, and the latter ranked second.

Lan XiChen proved himself worthy of being the leader of a sect. Even as he saw Wei WuXian embracing a donkey, he did not appear to be affected at all. Wei WuXian let go of the donkey with a beaming smile on his face and approached him. The GusuLan Sect placed a lot of regard on the order of seniority. If he talked nonsense to Lan XiChen, he would most definitely be chased off the Cloud Recesses. However, when he just got ready to show his capabilities, Lan WangJi looked at him. Immediately, his lips were sealed close.

Lan WangJi turned around and continued his polite conversation with Lan XiChen, “Brother, are you going to visit LianFang-Zun again?”

Lan XiChen nodded, “To negotiate about the next Discussion Conference at Jinlin Tower.”

Wei WuXian was unable to open his mouth, so he sourly walked back to the donkey.

LianFang-Zun was the current leader of the LanlingJin Sect—Jin GuangYao, the only illegitimate son whom Jin GuangShan approved of. He was Jin Ling’s youngest uncle, being half-blooded brothers with both Jin Ling’s father, Jin ZiXuan, and Mo XuanYu. However, although they were both illegitimate sons, they were extremely different. While Mo XuanYu was in Mo Village, sleeping on the ground and eating leftovers, Jin GuangYao was sitting in the highest seat of the cultivation world, summoning the winds and controlling the rain. If he wanted to talk to Lan XiCheng or initiate a Discussion Conference, he could do so however he wanted to. Then again, no wonder the sect leaders of the Lan and Jin sects personally went along quite well—after all, they were sworn brothers.

Lan XiChen spoke, “Uncle has taken and examined what you brought back from Mo Village.” Hearing the words “Mo Village”, Wei WuXian automatically started to pay attention.

Unexpectedly, he felt his lips part. Lan XiChen had released his silence and spoke to Lan WangJi, “It is not often that you bring somebody home, being in such good spirits. You need to treat your guest with courtesy, unlike this.”

Good spirits? Wei WuXian carefully looked at Lan WangJi’s face.

How could he tell that he was in good spirits?!

After watching Lan XiChen leave, Lan WangJi spoke, “Drag him inside.”

Then, Wei WuXian was, indeed, dragged into a place which he swore not to step inside again.

In the past, only distinguished cultivators had come to visit the Lan Sect, and never had anyone seen a guest like him before. The juniors all crowded around him, interested by this new turn of events. If not for the sect rules being so strict, there would definitely be bouts of laughter along the journey. Lan JingYi asked, “HanGuang-Jun, where should we drag him to?”

Lan WangJi replied, “The jingshi.” “... The jingshi?!”

Wei WuXian didn’t know what was going on. The rest stared among themselves, afraid to make any sound.

It was HanGuang-Jun’s bedroom and study, which he had never invited anyone inside... The furniture in the jingshi was extremely simplistic, without any unnecessary belongings. On the accordion partition, there was a painting of drifting clouds, floating and morphing with its fine brushwork. A guqin table lay horizontally in front of it. On top of the three-legged incense stand in the corner, a hollowed-out incense burner made of white jade emitted soft, lingering smoke, filling the whole room with the chilling scent of sandalwood. Lan WangJi went to see his uncle to discuss serious matters, while Wei WuXian was pushed into the room. Right after Lan WangJi left, Wei WuXian also went outside. He strolled around the Cloud Recesses, and found that, as he had expected, without the jade token for passage, even if he climbed up the white walls of a few zhangs’ height, he would be immediately flung off by the barrier, attracting the attentions of the nearby patrolmen at once.

Wei WuXian could only go back to the jingshi.

He never really worried about anything, no matter what he came across. He walked around the jingshi with his arms behind his back, firmly believing that, sooner or later, there would be a solution. The refreshing scent of the sandalwood was cold and clear. Although it wasn’t sentimental, it had its own way of tugging one’s heartstrings. With nothing to do, he started to think random thoughts, Lan Zhan happened to smell like this scent. His clothes were probably tinged with the fragrance when he was practicing his guqin or meditating here.

After these thoughts, he couldn’t help but to shift closer to the incense stand at the corner. With this shift, he became aware that, beneath his foot, one piece of wood was significantly different from the other places. Wei WuXian bent down and started to knock here and there, due to curiosity. In his past life, he did a lot of digging pits, excavating graves, and finding holes in the ground. After a few moments, he turned a piece of board up.

Finding a secretive space in Lan WangJi’s room was already more than enough to surprise Wei WuXian. However, after he saw what was hidden inside, he was even more surprised.

After flipping the wooden board open, a mellow aroma had filled the air, unnoticeable when it was mixed with the sandalwood scent. Seven or eight black jars were packed into a small, square cellar.

Sure enough, Lan WangJi had changed—he even started to hide liquor!

The Cloud Recesses prohibited liquor. Because of this, the first time they met, they had a small fight. Lan WangJi ended up spilling a jar of the “Emperor’s Smile” which he brought back from the city of Gusu.

After he returned from Gusu to Yunmeng, Wei WuXian never had the chance to drink the “Emperor’s Smile” made exclusively by Gusu’s experts ever again. He had thought about

this for his entire life, always telling himself to come back to taste it if he ever received the opportunity. But the opportunity never came. Hidden in here was no other than the liquor—he didn't even need to open and taste it, and knew that it was an “Emperor's Smile” just by the smell of it. He would never have thought that he would find a liquor-hiding vault in the room of a person as scrupulous and abstinent as Lan WangJi's. Karma really outdid itself with this reincarnation.

As Wei WuXian exclaimed upon the matter, he finished one jar already. He had a high tolerance for alcohol and loved to drink. After he came to the conclusion that Lan WangJi still owed him a jar of Emperor's Smile and it was time to collect his interests, he drank another jar. When he was just starting to get tipsy, a thought suddenly passed his mind. How hard was it to get the jade token? In the Cloud Recesses, there was a cold spring with a lot of miraculous effects, for the

male cultivators to use. It was said to be able to calm down one's heart, clear one's mind, quench one's fire, and so on. When he went into the cold spring, he was bound to take off his clothing. Then, with his clothing already off, there would be no where to put it aside from holding it in his mouth, which was definitely out of question.

Wei WuXian clapped his hands and finished the last gulp in the jar. After searching, he found that there were no places to throw it away, so he filled the empty jars with clear water and sealed the lids again, stuffing them back inside and closing the wooden board. With this done, he ventured out to find the jade token.

Although the Cloud Recesses had been burnt down before the “Sunshot Campaign” happened, the rebuilt structure of the area was the same. Wei WuXian walked through the winding paths from memory, and soon found the cold spring, situated at a quiet and obscure place.

The disciple on duty for watching over the cold spring was quite a distance away. The female cultivators were in another quarter of the Cloud Recesses and didn't come here to use it. Nobody in the Lan Sect did an impudent thing such as coming to the cold spring to watch others bathe, anyway. Therefore, the security wasn't strict at all and it was extremely easy to overcome, making it easy for Wei WuXian to go and shame himself. And, coincidentally, there was a set of white clothes on top of the white rocks behind the crisscrossed eupatorium grasses, meaning that someone had already came.

The set of white clothes was folded extremely neatly, almost making one's hair rise. It looked like a snow-white piece of tofu—even the forehead ribbon was folded without any creases. As Wei WuXian put his hand in and searched for the jade token of passage, he was almost reluctant to mess it up. Afterward, stepping over the bushes of eupatorium grasses, his gaze passed over the spring, and suddenly halted.

The water in the cold spring was freezing. Unlike a hot spring, there wasn't any vapour to shroud one's eyes, so it was possible to take a clear look at the upper half of the person in the spring who stood with his back to him.

The person in the spring was quite tall. His skin was fair and his hair was black, wet and gathered to one side. The lines which outlined his waist and back were smooth, graceful yet holding strength. In simpler terms, he was a beauty.

However, Wei WuXian was definitely not stunned and unable to avert his gaze because he was looking at a bathing beauty. No matter how beautiful he was, he wouldn't actually be attracted to men. Really, it was the things on the person's back that made him unable to avert his gaze.

There were dozens of intersecting scars.

They were the scars from a discipline whip. In the different sects, there was a type of discipline whip to punish disciples of that sect who made significant mistakes. After the torture, the scars would never disappear. Although Wei WuXian had never been hit by a discipline whip before, Jiang Cheng had been. Even after desperately trying, he couldn't

make the disgracing imprint fade one bit. This was why Wei WuXian would never misremember scars like this.

Usually, with only one or two strikes of the discipline whip, it would already be enough of a punishment for the bearer to remember it for their whole life, never to make the same mistake ever again. The number of scars on this person's back accumulated thirty at the least. Just what sort of monstrous crime did he commit for him to be whipped so many times? If it really was a monstrous crime, why didn't they kill him?

At the moment, the person in the spring turned around. Beneath his collarbone and near his heart, there was a clear sear. Seeing the sear, Wei WuXian's shock instantly reached its highest peak.

### Translator's Notes

**Cloud Recesses:** The name of the Lan Sect's residence came from the last phrase of Jia Dao's poem. A very beautiful and accurate translation of this poem can be found here: <http://chinesepoemsinenglish.blogspot.ca/2010/03/jia-dao-visiting-absent-hermit.html>.

**Morning readings:** A common practice in China is for students to read out loud in their morning classes, because it makes them memorize the passages/teachings better.

**Lotus Pier:** The specifics of this place will be explained later. However, this name also came from a poem. It was the name of a poem by the famous poet—Wang Wei. I cannot find the translation of this poem online, but it doesn't matter too much, as this doesn't influence anything in the story.

**Xiao:** This is a vertical flute.

**Lan Huan, ZeWu-Jun, Lan XiChen:** Lan Huan is his birth name, Lan XiChen is his common name, and ZeWu-Jun is his “alternative name” or “hao” (but, in case anyone forgot, a hao is a name given by one to oneself).

**Two jades:** This term refers to two people who are especially good at something, on a generally equal level.

**Summoning the winds and controlling the wind:** There is nothing special to this proverb. It just means that he is very powerful and could do whatever he wanted to do.

**Sworn brothers:** The author of FODC/GDC had stated that everyone in this book, apart from Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, are straight. However, that does nothing to stop the fangirls from shipping practically every character with every other character. Feel free to ship Lan XiChen and Jin GuangYao, or any other characters you're interested in, whichever way you'd like to do so.

**Jingshi:** This literally translates into “quiet room”. As there doesn't seem to be any appropriate terms for this in English, it is kept as pinyin.

**Guqin:** This is the term for the type of zither that Lan WangJi plays. In past chapters, it was referred to as a zither, but the guqin is one specific type of zither, so it has been changed.

**Quench one's fire:** Here, the exact term used is “quench one's evil fire”. Wei WuXian may be referencing Chinese medicine, or he may be making an innuendo (which I happen to know because it is one of the most overused terms to describe the seme's desires in Chinese BL smut). Who knows?

## Chapter 12: Refinement—Part Two

The sear took away all of Wei WuXian's attention, making him doubt that he had mislooked. He couldn't even pay attention to the person's face, and his breaths also stuttered for a few times.

Suddenly, a flash of white appeared before his eyes, as if snow had fallen before him. Quickly afterward, the blue glare of a sword penetrated through the snow, slashing toward him with an arctic blast of wind.

Who didn't know that it was HanGuang-Jun's famous sword—“Bichen”? Crap, it's Lan WangJi!

Wei WuXian was quite adept at running away and dodging swords. With a roll on the ground, he closely avoided the sword. He even had the time to pull off a leaf that stuck to his hair when he rushed out of the cold spring. He ran like a headless fly, right into a few people who were passing by from nightwatching. They grabbed him and scolded, “What are you running around for? Running is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses!”

Wei WuXian, seeing that it was Lan JingYi and the others, were ecstatic, thinking that he could finally be chased down the mountain. He presented himself at once, “I didn't see! I didn't see anything! I'm definitely not here to peep at HanGuang-Jun bathing!”

The juniors were shocked speechless by his impudence. No matter where he was, HanGuang-Jun was a high, holy mountain to behold in awe, especially respected among the junior disciples in the sect. He was near the cold spring to watch HanGuang-Jun bathe! Just thinking about such a thing would be the greatest crime, never to be forgiven. Lan SiZhui was frightened to the point that his voice even changed, “What? HanGuang-Jun? HanGuang-Jun is inside?!?”

Lan JingYi seized him furiously, “You damn cut-sleeve! I-i-is he someone you could peek at?!”

Wei WuXian struck the iron when it was still hot and confirmed his conviction, “I didn't see a single peek of how HanGuang-Jun looks like without his clothes!”

Lan JingYi fumed, “You are saying that three-hundred taels are not buried here! Well, if you did not, why are you sneaking around here? Look at you—you have no face to see anyone!”

Wei WuXian covered his face with his hands, “Don't be so loud... Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses.”

Amid the ruckus, Lan WangJi walked out from behind the layers of eupatorium grasses with his hair down, wearing a white robe. The conversation hadn't even finished yet, and he was already

dressed in an orderly fashion, Bichen still unsheathed. The juniors hurried to greet him. Lan JingYi rushed to speak, “HanGuang-Jun, Mo XuanYu really is awful. You only brought him back seeing that he assisted us at Mo Village, yet he... he...”

Wei WuXian thought that, this time, it would be beyond his endurance and kicked out of the sect. However, Lan WangJi only lightly glimpsed at him. After a moment of silence, he sheathed Bichen with a shing and spoke, “You are dismissed.”

It was only three toneless words, but it was powerful enough for no second option to be allowed. The crowd dispersed immediately, while Lan WangJi calmly held Wei WuXian by the back of his collar and dragged him toward the jingshi. In his past life, the two were of similar height, both somewhat slender and tall. Wei WuXian was only shorter than Lan WangJi by a tiny bit.

When they stood together, the difference of less than one cun between them were almost unnoticeable. However, after waking up in another body, he was more than two cun shorter than Lan WangJi. While being held in his hand, he couldn't even struggle against him. Wei

WuXian staggered, wanting to shout, but Lan WangJi spoke coldly, “Those who make noise will be silenced.”

He would love to be thrown off the mountain, but wouldn’t want to be silenced. Wei WuXian couldn’t understand it at all—since when did the Lan Sect tolerate something as shameless as peeking at one of the Lan Clan’s most distinguished cultivators bathing?!

Lan WangJi carried him to the jingshi, walked straight toward the inner room, and threw him down onto the bed with a thump. Wei WuXian yelled from the pain. He couldn’t get up at the moment, wriggling upright after a while. He originally wanted to whine a few times in a flirtatious manner, so that he would detest him. However, as he raised his head, he saw that Lan WangJi was holding Bichen with one hand, looking down at him commandingly.

He was used to seeing Lan WangJi with his forehead ribbon, neat, long hair, scrupulous to every detail, but had never seen him like this, with his hair a bit loose and wearing thin clothing. Wei WuXian couldn’t help to glance a few more times. After the effort of carrying and throwing him on the bed, Lan WangJi’s collars, which were closed in the beginning, came slightly apart, showing his distinct collarbones and the deep red sear under them.

As he saw the sear, Wei WuXian’s attention was captured again.

When he hadn’t become the YiLing Patriarch yet, he also had a sear like this on his body. And, the sear on Lan WangJi’s body was exactly the same as the one on his body in his past life, no matter the position or the shape, so it was only natural for him to recognize it and become surprised.

Speaking of it, aside from this sear, the thirty-or-so scars of the discipline whip on his back were also surprising.

Lan WangJi became famous at a young age. With his high appraisal, he was one of the most acknowledged cultivators in the cultivation world, and also part of the Two Jades of which the GusuLan Sect was so proud of. Every word and action of his was set as examples of excellence by the elders of each sect for their disciples. Just what unforgivable mistake did he make for him to be punished like this?

Seeing from the thirty-or-so scars of the discipline whip, the executor might as well have killed him. As soon as the discipline whip had been delivered, it wouldn’t disappear for the rest of the bearer’s life, so that they would remember it forever and never make the same mistake again.

Following his gaze, Lan WangJi lowered his eyes. He pulled his collar so that it covered his collarbones and sear, becoming the indifferent HanGuang-Jun once again. At the moment, the deep toll of the bell came from far away.

The Lan Sect had strict sect rules, including a precise schedule of sleeping at nine in the evening and rising at five in the morning. The bell was a reminder for that. Lan WangJi listened attentively to the tolls, and spoke to Wei WuXian, “You will be sleeping here.”

Without giving Wei WuXian a chance to reply, he turned to another compartment of the jingshi, leaving Wei WuXian alone, sprawled on the bed alone and feeling confused.

He did doubt that Lan WangJi might have guessed who he was. However, the doubt was lacking in both sense and reason. As sacrificing one’s body was a prohibited practice, there were probably not a lot of people who knew about it. The scrolls passed down the generations were most likely partial pieces of the entire work, unable to reach their full potential. Things continued like this, and so there were less and less people who believed in it. Mo XuanYu only summoned Wei WuXian by looking at a secret scroll, wherever he found it in the first place. Anyhow, Lan WangJi couldn’t have recognized him just from the awful flute melodies that he played.

He asked himself whether or not he had a heartfelt relationship with Lan WangJi in his past life. Although they had studied with each other, went on adventures, and fought together, all of these experiences were like falling petals and flowing water—coming and

going. Lan WangJi was a disciple of the GusuLan Sect, which meant that he had to be “righteous,” quite incompatible with

Wei WuXian’s personality. Wei WuXian thought that their relationship wasn’t exactly bad, but it wasn’t that good either. The chances were that Lan WangJi’s opinion of him was the same as everyone else’s—being overly wanton and not virtuous enough, it would have been only a matter of time before he caused a disaster. After Wei WuXian betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect and became the YiLing Patriarch, he had a few significant disputes with the Lan Sect, especially during the few months before his death. If Lan WangJi was sure that he was Wei WuXian, they should have already been engaged in a large-scale fight. Yet, he wasn’t sure what to make of the current situation—in the past, no matter what he did, Lan WangJi didn’t tolerate anything, but now, even though he used whatever methods he had up his sleeve, Lan WangJi could still tolerate him. Should he be congratulated because of his progress?!

After a while of staring at nothing, Wei WuXian turned around and went off the bed. He lightly moved to the other chamber.

Lan WangJi lay sideways on the bed, appearing to be already asleep. Without making a sound, Wei WuXian approached him.

He was still not giving up, hoping to fish the jade token for passage out of him. However, as he just extended his hand, Lan WangJi’s long lashes fluttered, and he opened his eyes.

Wei WuXian quickly made up his mind. He threw himself onto the bed.

He remembered that Lan WangJi hated physical contact with other people. In the past, just with one touch and the offender would have been hurled out. If, even like this, he endured it, then the person was definitely not Lan WangJi. He would even doubt that Lan WangJi’s body wastaken!

Wei WuXian’s entire body was above Lan WangJi’s, with legs separated, kneeling with one on each side of his waist. His hands were against the wooden bed, trapping Lan WangJi in between his arms. He gradually lowered his head. The distance between the two faces became closer and closer. Closer and closer. At the point where it became hard for Wei WuXian to breathe, Lan WangJi finally opened his mouth.

He stayed silent for a few moments, “Get off.” Wei WuXian thickened his face, “No.”

A pair of pale-colored eyes looked at Wei WuXian at a very close distance. Lan WangJi stared fixedly at him, and repeated, “... Get off.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “No. If you allowed me to sleep here, you should have known that something like this would happen.”

Lan WangJi spoke, “Are you sure that this is what you want?”

“...” For some reason, Wei WuXian felt that he should carefully consider his reply.

As he was about to curl his lips into a smile, a numbness suddenly came from his waist, and his legs gave out. With a thump, he fell onto Lan WangJi’s body.

The curvature of a half-smile was frozen on his lips. His head was at the right side of Lan WangJi chest and he couldn’t move at all. Lan WangJi’s voice came from above him.

His voice was low and deep. His chest vibrated slightly as he spoke each word. “Then stay like this for the whole night.”

Wei WuXian didn’t expect it to end up like this at all. He shifted around, wanting to get up, but his waist continued to ache and felt limp. He could only be attached to another man in such an awkward situation, feeling a bit befuddled.

Just what in the world happened to Lan Zhan in the past few years, turning him into a person like this?

Was this the same Lan Zhan as before?!

Shouldn’t he have been the person whose body was seized?!?!

Suddenly, as his thoughts were as jumbled as a hurricane, Lan WangJi slightly shifted. Wei WuXian's spirits lifted, assuming that he finally couldn't bear it any more. However, Lan WangJi simply waived his hand.

The lights went out.

#### Translator's Notes

Three-hundred taels are not buried here: This is a very famous proverb in China. It tells the story of a man who buried his money under the ground, and added a sign that said something along the lines of "three-hundred taels are not buried here". This is an example of someone conspicuously protecting his innocence and making a very poor lie.

Cun: This is pronounced like tswun instead of kahn. Do not mistake the n with an m, or else you will be confused.

Wooden bed: In the past (and in traditional households in the present), beds are hard and made of wood.

Thickened his face: As most of you probably know already, to lose face means to embarrass oneself. To thicken one's face, on the other hand, means to be not afraid of losing face, pretty much saying that one has too thick of a face to lose any layers.

## Chapter 13: Refinement—Part Three

At a later time, Wei WuXian pondered upon the reason why his relationship with Lan WangJi wasn't good. Getting to the root of the matter, everything started when he was fifteen, coming to the GusuLan Sect with Jiang Cheng to study for three months.

There was a virtuous and prestigious elder in the GusuLan Sect—Lan QiRen. Everyone in the cultivation world accepted three characteristics which described him: pedantic, stubborn, and a strict teacher who produced outstanding students. Although the first two points kept a lot of people at a respective distance to him, some even to the point of secret dislike, the last one made them try everything they could to send their children to study under him. He had brought up quite a number of excellent disciples of the Lan Sect. As long as they stayed a few years in his classroom, no matter how pathetically useless they were when they first entered, they would at least seem to be decent when they depart, especially in terms of appearance and etiquette. There were plenty of parents who were so excited that tears flowed down their cheeks when they picked up their sons.

To this matter, Wei WuXian declared, "Do I not seem decent enough as of right now?"

Jiang Cheng replied with a great deal of foresight, "You'd definitely be a mark of shame in his entire teaching career."

In that year, aside from the YunmengJiang Sect, there were also the young masters from other clans, sent to study here from parents who heard of the reputation. The young masters were all around fifteen or sixteen. Because the sects all knew the others, although they weren't close, they had seen others' faces before. It was widely known that, although Wei WuXian's surname was not Jiang, he was the leading disciple of the sect leader of the YunmengJiang Sect—Jiang FengMian, and also the son of his friend who had passed away. In fact, the sect leader regarded him as his own child. This, along with how youths were not as concerned with status and ancestry as elders, they were soon friends. Only a few sentences passed, and everyone started to call others older brothers or younger brothers. Somebody asked, "The Lotus Pier of the Jiang Clan is much more fun than here, right?"

Wei WuXian laughed, "Fun or not fun depends on how fun you make it to be. There's definitely less rules than here, and no need to wake up so early."

The GusuLan Sect wakes as five in the morning and rests at nine in the evening, not allowing any delay. Somebody else asked, "When do you guys wake up? What do you do during the day?"

Jiang Cheng humped, "Him? He wakes at nine in the morning and sleeps at one during the night. When he wakes up, he doesn't practice his sword or meditate; he goes boating, swims around, picks lotus seedpods, and hunts for pheasants."

Wei WuXian replied, "No matter how much pheasants I hunt, I'm still number one."

One youth spoke, "Next year, I'm going to Yunmeng to study! Nobody can hold me back!"

A bucket of cold water was thrown on him, "Nobody would hold you back. Your older brother would just break your legs."

The youth drooped at once. This was the second young master of the QingheNie Sect—Nie HuaiSang. His brother, Nie MingJue, was extremely resolute when carrying out orders, quite renowned in the cultivation world. Although the brothers were not born from the same mother, their relationship was quite solid. Nie MingJue had always taught his younger brother with extreme harshness, particularly caring for his studies. This was why, even though Nie HuaiSang respected his older brother, he was the most scared of Nie MingJue mentioning his schoolwork.

Wei WuXian spoke, "To be honest, Gusu is quite fun as well."

Nie HuaiSang spoke, “Wei-xiong, listen to a sincere advice of mine. The Cloud Recesses is nothing like Lotus Pier. On this trip to Gusu, remember that there’s one person whom you shouldn’t provoke.”

Wei WuXian asked, “Who? Lan QiRen?”

Nie HuaiSang replied, “Not that old man. The one you need to be careful of is his proudest disciple, named Lan Zhan.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “The Lan Zhan from the Two Jades of Lan? Lan WangJi?”

The respectable title of the Two Jades of Lan were given to the two sons of the GusuLan Sect’s current sect leader—Lan Huan and Lan Zhan. Just after they passed fourteen, they were deemed by the elders of each sect as exemplary models to compare with their own disciples. They were exceptionally famous among the juniors, so it was only natural that everyone recognized the names. Nie HuaiSang spoke, “What other Lan Zhan is there? Yes, it’s that one. Oh gosh, he’s the same age as you and I, but he has none of the energy of a teen. He’s stiff and strict, even worse than his uncle.”

Wei WuXian made the sound of an oh and asked, “Is he a lad who looks quite pretty?”

Jiang Cheng sneered, “Is there anyone who looks ugly in the GusuLan Sect? His sect doesn’t even accept disciples with unclean features. If you can, find me one who has an average face.”

Wei WuXian emphasized, “Very pretty.” He pointed at his head, “White from top to bottom, wearing a forehead ribbon, and carrying a silver sword on his back. He looked rather handsome, but with his straight face, he looked like he was mourning.”

“...” Nie HuaiSang spoke assuredly, “That’s him!” After a pause, he spoke again, “But he had been doing secluded meditation for the past few days. You just came yesterday; when did you have the chance to see him?

“Yesterday night”

“Yesterday... Yesterday night?!” Jiang Cheng was stunned, “There’s a curfew in the Cloud Recesses. Where did you see him? Why don’t I know about this?”

Wei WuXian pointed, “There.”

He pointed to a the top of a very tall wall.

The others were out of speech. Jiang Cheng even felt his head growing larger and clenched his teeth, “We just came and you got into trouble! What’s the matter about?”

Wei WuXian replied with a grin, “There really isn’t much. When we came, we passed that liquor shop called ‘Emperor’s Smile’, right? Yesterday at night, I was tossing and turning, and couldn’t stand it any longer, so I went down the mountain, into the city, and brought back two jars. Mind you, we don’t have the chance to drink this in Yunmeng.”

Jiang Cheng, “Then, where’s the liquor?”

Wei WuXian, “Well, when I just flipped over the top of the wall, before I even had one leg inside, I was caught by him.”

One youth remarked, “Wei-xiong, you must have struck gold. He probably just got out of seclusion and went on night patrol, and caught you red-handed.”

Jiang Cheng spoke, “Those who return at night won’t be let in before seven in the morning. How come he let you inside?”

Wei WuXian threw up his hands, “So, he didn’t let me in. He wanted me to move back the leg that had already stepped in. You tell me—how would I do that? And then, he came up, as light as a feather, and asked me what I had in my hands.”

Jiang Cheng felt his head start to ache, indicating a foreboding feeling, “What did you say?”

Wei WuXian spoke, “It’s Emperor’s Smile! If I share a jar with you, can you pretend that you never saw me?”

Jiang Cheng sighed, “... Alcohol is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses. That’s a worse crime.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “He said the same thing to me. And I asked, ‘Why don’t you tell me what exactly is not forbidden in your sect?’ He seemed like he was a bit angry and wanted

me to look at the Wall of Rules in front of the mountain. Honestly, there were over three thousand, and everything was written in seal script. Who would read them? Did you read them? Anyways, I didn't. What's angering about this?"

"That's right!" Everyone felt the same way, and all started to complain about the strange, outdated conventions in the Cloud Recesses, regretting that they didn't meet sooner, "Whose sect rules are over three thousand in number, and don't even repeat? Things like 'killing livestock within the area is prohibited, fighting without permission is prohibited, promiscuity is prohibited, venturing at night is prohibited, causing noise is prohibited, running is prohibited' are tolerable, but there're even ones like 'sneering for no reason is prohibited, sitting improperly is prohibited, eating more than three bowls is prohibited'..." Wei WuXian suddenly added, "What? Fighting without permission is also prohibited?"

Jiang Cheng, "... Yes. Don't tell me you fought with him." Wei WuXian, "I did. And we broke a jar of Emperor's Smile." Everyone slapped their legs and exclaimed in regret.

In any case, the situation couldn't have been any worse, causing Jiang Cheng's focus to switch, "Didn't you bring back two jars? Where's the other one?"

"I drank it."

Jiang Cheng, "Where did you drink it?"

"In front of him. I said, 'Okay, if alcohol is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses, then I won't go in. I'll drink it standing on the wall. That wouldn't count as violating the rules, would it?' Then I drank everything in one gulp, right in front of him."

"... And then?"

"And then we started fighting."

"Wei-xiong." Nie HuaiSang blurted out, "You're so smug."

Wei WuXian lifted his brows, "Lan Zhan's skills were quite good."

"You're gonna die, Wei-xiong! Lan Zhan had never been at such a loss before. He's probably after you. You should be careful. Although Lan Zhan doesn't go to classes with us, he's in charge of punishments in the Lan Sect!"

Wei WuXian was not frightened at all, waving his hand, "What's there to be scared of? Didn't everyone say that Lan Zhan had been a prodigy since he was very young? If he's so smart from such an early age, then he probably finished learning everything his uncle taught and do secluded meditation all the time. How would he have time to come after me? I..."

Before his sentence was finished, as the group walked around a wall with a hollowed-out window, they saw a white-clothed boy sitting in a rigidly upright position in the room, with long hair tied up and wearing a forehead ribbon, emitting an aura of ice and frost. He swept a cold look at them.

At once, it was as if the ten-or-so mouths were silenced. They quietly entered the room, quietly picked their seats to sit, and quietly avoided the desks around Lan WangJi.

Jiang Cheng patted Wei WuXian's shoulder and whispered, "He's after you. Hope for the best."

When Wei WuXian turned his head, he could see the side of Lan WangJi's face. His lashes were long, appearing to be extremely delicate and elegant. His posture was also very upright, looking straight ahead. As he was just thinking about starting a conversation with him, Lan QiRen walked into the room.

Lan QiRen was tall and thin, standing with a straight back. Although he had a long, black goatee, he was definitely not old. And, according to the tradition of the GusuLan Sect producing beautiful men each generation, he was definitely not bad-looking either. Yet, unfortunately, with the pedantic and stiff air that surrounded him, nothing would feel wrong if one called him an old

man. He entered with a scroll in one hand. The long scroll of paper rolled all over the ground as soon as he opened it, and he started to talk about the rules of the Lan Sect. The

faces of everyone in the room started to grow dark. As Wei WuXian was bored, his gaze flew everywhere, and landed on the side face of Lan WangJi. He was shocked as he saw concentration and seriousness that were nothing like a facade, “How can he listen so attentively to something so boring?”

Immediately, in the front, Lan QiRen slammed the scroll onto the ground and smiled bitterly, “I am only repeating this one by one because nobody reads it, even though it was carved onto the rock wall. Hence, nobody will be able to violate them using ignorance as an excuse again. Even if I do this, there are still people who do not pay attention. Very well, I will proceed to talk about something else.”

Although his words could be applied to everyone in the room, Wei WuXian’s intuition told him that it was a warning directed at him. As he expected, Lan QiRen spoke, “Wei Ying.”

Wei WuXian answered, “Here.”

“Let me ask you. Are yao, demons, ghosts, and monsters the same things?” Wei WuXian smiled, “No.”

“Why not? How are they differentiated?”

“Yao are formed from living, non-human beings; demons are formed from living humans; ghosts are formed from dead humans; monsters are formed from dead, non-human beings.”

“‘Yao’ and ‘monsters’ are often confused. What is an example that distinguishes the two?”

“That’s easy.” Wei WuXian pointed at the viridian tree outside of the room and replied, “For example, a living tree was tainted with the energy of books, cultivated into a conscious being, and causes mischief, it would be a ‘yao’. If I took an axe and cut it in the middle, so that only a dead tree-stump was left, and then it cultivates into a being, it would be a ‘monster.’”

“What was the profession of the progenitor of the QingheNie Sect?” “A butcher.”

“The heraldry of the LanlingJin Sect is a white peony. Which type of white peony is it?”

“Sparks Amidst Snow.”

“Who was the first in the cultivation world to focus on the rise of his clan rather than his sect?” “The progenitor of the QishanWen Sect, Wen Mao.”

His fluent answers made everyone’s hearts skip a few beats. Although they felt lucky, they all prayed for him to not be stumped by any questions, so that Lan QiRen wouldn’t have the opportunity to pick on other people. Yet, Lan QiRen spoke, “As a disciple of the YunmengJiang Sect, you should have been very familiar with these and known them by heart since long ago, so there is nothing to be proud of even if you answered correctly. Let me ask you again—there is an executioner with parents, a wife, and children, but before he died, he executed more than one hundred people. He suddenly died in the public and, to punish him for his deeds, he was left on the streets for seven days. With the repressed energy of resentment, he started to haunt and kill. What should be done?”

This time, Wei WuXian didn’t answer immediately. The others thought that he was confused, and were all feeling restless. Lan QiRen scolded, “Why are you looking at him? Think about this as well. Don’t open your books!”

The disciples took their hands away from the books that they intended on quickly flipping through. They were confused as well—having died in the public and left on the streets for seven days, it was definitely a fierce ghost and a ferocious corpse, and therefore a question hard to solve. Everyone hoped that the old man Lan wouldn’t pick on them to answer. After a few moments, seeing that Wei WuXian didn’t answer, Lan QiRen seemed like he was thinking, and spoke again, “WangJi, you can tell him what should be done.”

## Translator's Notes

A bucket of cold water was thrown on him: This should be interpreted figuratively instead of literally. It is a common saying to pour or throw a bucket of cold water onto someone, to imply that one's words reduced another's hopes for something.

Wei-xiong: The xiong suffix means “older brother”. However, it doesn't have to be the speaker's actual older brother. It is usually used to indicate respect for someone older than you, as it was impolite to call the names of others (especially older than you) directly.

Secluded meditation: In cultivation, it is common practice to do secluded meditation, or to meditate on your own for a long amount of time in a secluded space. The length of this time period depends on how skilled the cultivator is.

Seal script: This is simply a “font” or type of script which the ancient Chinese used during the Qin Dynasty. In the context of this novel, as it is not based on any specific dynasty or period of history, it implies that the seal script is hard to read and not commonly used by most people in the world.

Slapped their legs: A common reaction that goes after a sudden realization or some other sort of emotion that requires a shout (or a sigh, in some cases) is to slap one's legs.

Sparks Amidst Snow: In fact, this is actually a real type of peony in China. The literal translation of this is Golden Stars/Sparks Amidst Waves of Snow, but the name has been shortened for it to fit better within the translated version.

## Chapter 14: Refinement—Part Four

Lan WangJi did not look at Wei WuXian. He nodded to indicate respect and spoke in a monotonous voice, “First, liberate; second, suppress; third, eliminate. The initial approach is to utilize the gratitude of his relatives and grant his dying wish, set free what he could not let go of. If it fails, suppress it. If the crimes were extremely wrongful, and its energy of resentment does not dissipate, exterminate it completely. The cultivation world should precisely keep to this order of measures. No errors should be allowed.”

Everyone let out a long breath, thanking the Heavens because Lan WangJi was the one the old man selected. Else, if it was their turn, it would be hard to not overlook a few steps or mix up the order. Lan QiRen nodded with satisfaction, “Not a single mistake was made.” With a pause, he spoke again, “No matter in terms of cultivation or as a person, one needs to be as solid as this. If one becomes complacent and proud just because they defeated a few simple mountain beings in their home and hold some empty reputations, one would definitely bring disgrace upon themselves, sooner or later.”

Wei WuXian raised his brows and took a look at the side of Lan WangJi’s face. He thought, so, apparently this old man meant it for me. He called his best pupil to listen with us in order for me to watch.

He spoke, “I have a question.” Lan QiRen replied, “Speak.”

Wei WuXian, “Although ‘liberation’ comes first, it is often impossible. ‘To grant his dying wish’ sounds simple—it would be easy, if the wish was a new piece of clothing, but what if the wish was to kill lots of people for revenge?”

Lan WangJi, “Thus, suppression assists liberation. If it is necessary, elimination would also follow.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Such a waste.” He paused, and continued, “It wasn’t that I didn’t know of this answer, I was only thinking of a fourth path.”

Lan QiRen spoke, “I have never heard of any fourth paths.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “Because the executioner died in such a way, it is only natural that he turned into a ferocious corpse. Since he executed more than one hundred people before he died,

why not dig up the graves of these people, arouse their energy of resentment, collect the heads of those hundred people, and use them to fight with the ferocious corpse...”

Lan WangJi finally turned around to look at him. His brows were knit, still expressionless. Lan QiRen was so angered that his goatee was quivering. He shouted, “How dare you!”

Everyone in the room was stunned. Lan QiRen sprang to his feet, “The essence of exorcising demons and annihilating ghosts is to liberate! You do not study the methods of liberation, and even think about increasing their energy of resentment! You reverse the natural order, and ignore ethics and morality!”

Wei WuXian replied, “There are some things that have no use after liberation, so why not find a way to make use of them? When Yu the Great tamed the flood, obstruction was the inferior method, and redirection was the superior. Suppression is the same as obstruction, so isn’t it inferior...” Lan QiRen hurled a book toward him, but he flinched to the side and avoided it. His expression remained unchanged, and continued to talk nonsense, “Spiritual energy is energy; resentful energy is energy as well. Spiritual energy is stored in the dantian. It can split mountains and fill oceans, available for human use. If so, then why can’t resentful energy also be used by humans?”

Another book came flying from Lan QiRen. He spoke harshly, “Then, let me ask you again! How do you make sure that the resentful energy only listens to you and does not harm others?”

Wei WuXian ducked while speaking, “I haven’t thought of it yet!”

Lan QiRen raged, “If you thought of it, the cultivation world would not allow your existence! Get out!”

Wei WuXian couldn’t be more glad, and quickly went out.

He wandered about the Cloud Recesses for the morning, picking flowers and playing with grasses. After everyone finished the lesson, they finally found him on the roof of a tall wall. Wei WuXian was sitting on the grey tiles of the ledge, holding a piece of grass in his mouth. His right hand was under his cheek, and sat with one leg propped up and the other hanging down, swaying slightly. The disciples down there pointed at him, “Wei-xiong! How admirable of you! He told you to get out, and you really went outside! Hahahaha...”

“After you went out, a long while passed before he finally understood what happened. His face was so purple!”

Wei WuXian chewed on the grass and shouted toward below him, “He asks, and I answer. If he tells me to get out, I will get out. What else does he want me to do?”

Nie HuaiSang spoke, “Why does it seem like old man Lan is especially strict towards you? He always directs his scoldings at you.”

Jiang Cheng humped, “It serves him right. What sort of answer is that? It’s fine if he spouts these nonsense at home, but he dared to say these in front of Lan QiRen. He’s seeking his own death!”

Wei WuXian spoke, “No matter how I answered it, he wouldn’t like me, so I might as well just say what I wanted to say. Anyways, I didn’t try to offend him. I was just answering properly.”

After thinking for a few moments, an expression of envy and yearning appeared on Nie HuaiSang’s face, “To be honest, Wei-xiong’s words were quite interesting. Spiritual energy can only be obtained through cultivation and taking great pains to form a golden core. It would take I-don’t-know-how-many years to do, especially for someone like me, whose talent seems as if it was gnawed by a dog when I was in my mother’s womb. But, resentful energy are from the fierce ghosts. If they can easily be taken and used, it would be beyond wonderful.”

A golden core was a core formed by cultivators after they had cultivated to a certain point. It can store and control spiritual energy. After the core was formed, the cultivator’s level of cultivation would increase at a rapid speed, and become better and better. Else, they would only be a low- end cultivator. If disciple from a prominent clan forms the core at a later age, it would be a disgrace to tell other people of it, yet Nie HuaiSang didn’t feel ashamed at all. Wei WuXian also laughed, “I know, right? No harm comes from using it.”

Jiang Cheng warned, “That’s enough. It’s fine if you talk about it, but don’t actually walk such a crooked path.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Why would I leave the nice, broad road, and walk on a single-plank bridge on a dark, narrow river instead? If it really is that easy, people would have already walked on it. Don’t worry, he was just asking, and I was just answering. Hey, are you guys coming?

Since it’s not curfew yet, hunt for pheasants with me.”

Jiang Cheng scolded, “What do you mean ‘hunt for pheasants’? Why would there be pheasants here?! First, go copy Righteousness. Lan QiRen asked me to tell you to copy the Virtue section of Righteousness for three times, so that you can learn what natural law and morality is.”

Righteousness was the collection of the Lan Sect’s sect rules. The sect rules here was too long, so Lan QiRen revised them into a thick collection. The sections Virtue and Conduct were four fifth of the whole book. Wei WuXian spat out the grass which he held in his mouth and dusted his boots, “Three times? I’d fly up to Heaven if I just copied them once. I’m not from the Lan Sect, and don’t intend to marry into the Lan Clan, so why should I copy the sect rules of his sect? I’m not gonna copy.”

Nie HuaiSang quickly spoke, “I’ll copy for you! I’ll copy for you!”

Wei WuXian, “No good person does favours for others out of the blue. Tell me, what do you want me to do?”

Nie Huai Sang replied, “It’s like this. Wei-xiong, old man Lan has a bad habit. He...”

In the middle of his sentence, he suddenly paused and coughed drily, opening up his fan and shifting to the side. Wei WuXian knew that something was wrong. He turned around and, sure enough, Lan WangJi stood under an ancient, verdant tree and gazed in their direction, carrying the Bichen sword on his back. He looked like a jade tree, reflecting the mottled shadows of leaves and sunlight. However, his stare wasn’t kind at all, as if it could lock them in a cavern made of ice. Everyone knew that their shouts were a bit too loud, and the noise had probably led him over, so they all shut their mouths. Yet, Wei WuXian jumped down and gravitated toward him, “WangJi-xiong!”

Lan WangJi turned around and immediately walked away. Wei WuXian cheerfully went after him and yelled, “WangJi-xiong, wait for me!”

The white clothed figure flashed behind the tree, and suddenly disappeared without a trace, clearly showing that Lan WangJi didn’t want to converse with him. Having received only a view from behind, Wei WuXian turned around and complained to the others, “He ignored me.”

“Yeah,” Nie HuaiSang spoke, “It looks like he really hates you, Wei-xiong. Lan WangJi usually... No, he never does something so impolite.”

Wei WuXian, “He hates me already? I wanted to apologize to him.”

Jiang Cheng sneered, “Apologizing now? Too late! Like his uncle, he surely thinks that you are evil and unruly to the core, and didn’t bother to pay you any attention.”

Wei WuXian thought otherwise. He chuckled, “Who cares if he ignored me? Does he look pretty?” After a thought, he realized that Lan WangJi did look pretty. And so, he happily threw away his desire to twitch his lips.

Only after three days, did Wei WuXian finally know of Lan QiRen’s bad habit.

Lan QiRen’s lessons were not only tediously long, but everything was also tested on. The generational changes of important clans in the cultivation world, the division of their areas of power, famous quotes by famous cultivators, family trees...

Although he didn’t understand a single bit as he listened in class, Nie HuaiSang worked as hard as a slave when the date of the test approached. He copied Virtue two times for Wei WuXian, and begged before the test, “Please, Wei-xiong, if my grade is lower than yi, my brother would really break my legs! Stuff like telling apart direct lineage, collateral lineage, main clan, clan branches... For us disciples from big clans, we can’t even distinguish our relationships with our own relatives, randomly calling everyone who are more than two tiers away from us aunts and uncles. Does anyone have enough capacity in their brain to remember those of other clans?!?”

As a result of cheating notes flying everywhere in the air, Lan WangJi suddenly attacked during the test, and caught a few initiators of the commotion. Lan QiRen exploded with anger, writing letters to the prominent clans to tell on them. He loathed Wei Ying—in the beginning, although these disciples could hardly sit still, at least nobody started anything, and their buttocks were able to stick to their legs. However, now that Wei Ying came, the originally spineless brats were influenced by his encouragement, venturing out at night and drinking alcohol however they pleased. The unhealthy practices grew greater and greater. As he had expected, Wei Ying was one of the biggest threats to humanity!

Jiang FengMian replied, “Ying has always been like this. Please take care to discipline him, Mr. Lan.”

And so, Wei WuXian was punished again.

At first, he didn't think too much of it. It was only copying texts, and he never lacked people who copied for him. Yet, this time, Nie HuaiSang spoke, "Wei-xiong, even if I want to help you, I can't any more. You'd have to endure it on your own."

Wei WuXian asked, "What happened?"

Nie HuaiSang, "Old... Mr. Lan said that you have to copy both Virtue and Conduct."

Conduct was the most complicated section of the twelve sections in the Lan Sect's sect rules. It cited a lot of classics, was terribly long, and had a lot of rarely-used characters. Copy it one time, and one would lose all interest in life. Copy it ten times, and one would fly to Heaven on the spot. Nie HuaiSang added, "He also said that, during the time of the punishment, nobody is allowed to fool around with you or copy them for you."

Wei WuXian wondered, "How would he know if someone copied them for me or not? Surely it doesn't mean that he's making someone watch me."

Jiang Cheng spoke, "That's exactly the case." "... Wei WuXian spoke, "What did you say?" Jiang Cheng, "He told you that you're not allowed to go outside and have to go to the Library Pavilion to copy, and also face the wall and reflect upon your mistakes. Of course, there will be someone to watch you. I don't need to tell you who he is, do I?"

Inside the Library Pavilion—

There was one bamboo seat, one wooden desk, two candlesticks, and two people. One sat in a proper position, but, on the other side, Wei WuXian had already copied Conduct for more than ten pages. His head felt dizzy and his heart felt bored, so he dropped his pen to take a breath and looked across.

When he was still in Yunmeng, there were a lot of girls who envied that he could come and study with Lan WangJi. They said that each generation was full of nice-looking men, especially the brothers part of the Two Jades in the current generation. Before this, Wei WuXian never had the chance to carefully examine the front of his face. Now that he had a look at it, he started to think random thoughts, He looks quite nice indeed. Yet, if only those girls could come and see him with their own eyes. Looking as bitter as if everyone had offended him or his parents died, it wouldn't matter no matter how nice his face looks.

Lan WangJi was recopying ancient books, which were not only old but also unavailable to most others, in the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion. His brushstrokes were slow and steady, and his handwriting was neat yet sharply vigorous. Wei WuXian couldn't help but to compliment him sincerely, "Those are some great characters! They're of the top level."

Lan WangJi remained indifferent.

Wei WuXian rarely kept his mouth shut for such a long amount of time. Feeling suffocated, he thought, I have to sit in front of such a stuffy person for so many hours each day, for a month. Would I even survive?

At this point of thought, he couldn't help but slightly tilted his body forward.

#### Translator's Notes

Yu the Great: This was a famous person in the history of China. He was known for introducing a method of controlling and stopping the floods from destroying villages.

Dantian: This refers to the region in the body where a person's Qi, or energy, is concentrated. It is located three finger widths below and two finger widths behind the navel, where girls' period cramps happen (not really, but you get the idea). The definition comes from <https://immortalmountain.wordpress.com/glossary/wuxia-xianxia-xuanhuan-terms/#world>.

Fly up to Heaven: This is what happens when a cultivator is of such a high level that they finally become an Immortal and fly up to Heaven. This usually happens in high fantasy, but GDC is low fantasy, so nobody actually flies up to Heaven. If you're interested in settings

involving gods and Immortals, check out the author's new work—Heavenly Blessings. No group is translating this yet, but the fanart is quite nice.

Yi: There are four grades—jia, yi, bing, and ding. Yi is the second level, so it is pretty much a B in terms of the American grading system.

Two tiers: This means that there are two levels of relationship between them, such as the cousin of a cousin and so on.

Seat: Seats in Ancient China were made of bamboo weaved together into a flat piece of mat on the ground to sit on.

## Chapter 15: Refinement—Part Five

Wei WuXian was someone who was skilled at finding fun for himself, especially talented in the area of seeking joy amid dull circumstances. Since there wasn't anything else to play with, he could only play with Lan WangJi. He called, "WangJi-xiong."

Lan WangJi remained motionless. Wei WuXian, "WangJi."

He appeared as if he didn't hear anything. Wei WuXian, "Lan WangJi."

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan!"

Lan WangJi finally stopped writing, and looked up at him with a cold gaze. Wei WuXian shifted backward, raising his hands as if he was defending himself, "Don't look at me like this. I only called your name because you didn't answer when I called you WangJi. If you're upset, you can also call me back with my name."

Lan WangJi spoke, "Put your legs down."

Wei WuXian's sitting posture was extremely improper, with a slanted body and legs propped up. Seeing that he finally teased Lan WangJi to the point that he started to talk, the former silently chuckled to himself, as if he finally saw the clouds disperse and the moon appear<sup>[1]</sup>. Listening to Lan WangJi's words, he put his legs down, but his upper body inch ed unnoticeably closer, and he pressed his arms onto the desk. It was still an unacceptable sitting posture. He asked in a serious tone, "Lan Zhan. Let me ask you a question. Do you... really hate me that much?"

Lan WangJi looked down, his lashes casting light shadows onto his jade-like cheeks. Wei WuXian hurriedly added, "Hey, don't be like this, ignoring me again after saying so few words. I want to admit my fault and apologize to you. Look at me."

After a pause, he spoke again, "You don't want to look at me? Sure, then. I'll just start talking. It was my fault during that night. I was wrong. I shouldn't have climbed the wall, I shouldn't have drunk alcohol, and I shouldn't have fought with you. But I swear! It wasn't that I provoked you on purpose—I really didn't look at the sect rules. The sect rules in the Jiang Sect are all told verbally; none of them are written down. Or else, I definitely wouldn't have done that." I

definitely wouldn't have finished the jar of Emperor's Smile in front of you. I would have tucked it away and carried it back into my room, secretly drinking it every day and sharing it with everyone until we all had enough.

Wei WuXian continued, "And, let's be reasonable—which of us attacked first? It was you. If you didn't attack, we could've communicated nicely and cleared everything up. However, if someone hits me, I'd have to hit them back. This isn't all my fault. Lan Zhan, are you listening? Look at me. Young Master Lan?" He snapped his fingers, "Second Brother Lan<sup>[2]</sup>, why don't you do me a favor and look at me?"

Lan WangJi didn't even lift his eyes, "Copy it one additional time."

Wei WuXian's body immediately slanted, "Don't be like this. It's my fault, alright?" Lan WangJi exposed his lie mercilessly, "You do not feel any remorse."

Wei WuXian spoke as if he didn't have any dignity, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I can repeat it however many times you want me to. I can even say it while kneeling down."

Lan WangJi put his brush down. Wei WuXian thought that the other couldn't endure it any longer and finally wanted to beat him up. Just as he got ready to put on a goofy grin, he discovered that his upper and lower lips seemed like they were glued together, so he couldn't laugh.

His face quickly changed. He struggled to talk, "Mmph? Mmph mmph mmph!"

Lan WangJi closed his eyes and let out a faint breath of air. When he opened his eyes, the calm expression returned again. He picked up the brush again, as if nothing had happened. Wei WuXian had been aware of the hated silencing spell of the Lan Sect since long ago, and he refused to believe it. Yet, after making every effort, scratching the corners of his lips red, he still couldn't open his mouth no matter what. And so, he grabbed a piece of paper, wrote as if his brush was flying, and threw the paper over. Lan WangJi glanced at it. "Pathetic," he responded, crumpling it into a ball and tossing it away.

Wei WuXian was so angry that he rolled around on the mat, climbed up, and wrote another one, slamming it in front of Lan WangJi. Again, it was crumpled into a ball and tossed away.

The silencing spell was only removed after he finished copying. The second day, when he came to the Library Pavilion again, the balls of paper which landed everywhere were all taken out.

Wei WuXian had always forgot about the pain after the cut healed [3]. Although, on the first day, he suffered greatly from the silencing spell, after a few moments, his mouth started to itch again. After recklessly speaking a few times, he was silenced once more. He couldn't open his mouth, so he scribbled on paper and pushed them to Lan WangJi, who crumpled it and threw it onto the ground. The same thing happened on the third day.

He was silenced time after time. However, on the last day of him having to "face the wall and reflect," Lan WangJi noticed that Wei WuXian seemed somewhat different.

During his stay at Gusu, he left his sword all around the place, and was never seen carrying it properly. Yet, he took it with him today, loudly slamming it onto the desk. He even went as far as to start writing without a word, contrasting his usual behavior of relentlessly harassing Lan WangJi in every way possible. He was so obedient that it was strange.

Lan WangJi didn't have a reason to silence him, so he took a few more glances at him, as if he didn't believe that Wei WuXian was finally willing to behave himself. As he had expected, after a short while of sitting down, Wei WuXian repeated his past conduct again, giving Lan WangJi a piece of paper for him to see.

Lan WangJi originally thought that it was going to be a mess of lame phrases again, but after a coincidental glimpse, he was surprised to find the drawing of a person, sitting upright and reading by the window, with a vividly realistic expression on his face. It was himself.

Seeing that he didn't avert his gaze at once, Wei WuXian curled his lips, and raised his eyebrow with a wink. No words were needed, since the meaning was plain to see—Does it look like you? Is it good?

Lan WangJi slowly spoke, "You have spare time, yet you scribble instead of copy the text. In my opinion, the day of your release from this punishment will never come."

Wei WuXian blew on the ink which hadn't dried yet and spoke nonchalantly, "I already finished copying, so I won't be coming tomorrow!"

Lan WangJi's slender fingers seemed to have paused before flipping over the next yellow-tinted page. Surprisingly, Wei WuXian wasn't silenced. As he didn't provoke any reaction, Wei WuXian lightly threw the drawing, "It's yours."

The drawing was thrown onto the mat, but Lan WangJi didn't have any intention of picking it up. During these days, the paper which Wei WuXian wrote on to curse him, cajole him, apologize to him, beg him, and other messy scribbles all ended up this way. He was used to it and didn't mind. He suddenly added, "I forgot. I need to add something else."

After his words, he picked up the paper and his brush, and added a few strokes. He glanced at the drawing, then, the actual person, and fell toward the ground in laughter. Lan WangJi put down the book, and saw that Wei WuXian added a flower onto the drawing, where the side of his head was.

The corners of his lip seemed to have twitched. Wei WuXian crawled up and spoke before him, “‘Pathetic’, right? I just know that you’re gonna say pathetic. Can’t you switch to something else? Or add another word to it?”

Lan WangJi replied coldly, “Extremely pathetic.”

Wei WuXian clapped his hands, “So you really added another word to it. Thank you!”

Lan WangJi turned his gaze away, picked up the book which he put on the desk, and opened it again. He only took one look at before he hurled the book away, as if he was burnt by fire.

He was initially reading a Buddhist text, but when he had looked at the page flipped open, he was presented with naked, intertwining figures, intolerable to his eye. The book that he was reading was substituted with a pornographic book, its cover disguised as a Buddhist text.

Even someone without a brain would have guessed who had done the deed. It must have been done when somebody took the opportunity that opened up when his attention turned to the drawing, let alone the fact that Wei WuXian didn’t even bother to cover it up, slapping the table as he laughed hysterically, “Hahahahahahahahahahaha!”

As the book was thrown on the ground, Lan WangJi seemed as if he was escaping from snakes or scorpions, falling back to the corner of the Library Pavilion in less than a second. He roared with rage, “Wei Ying—!”

Wei WuXian almost rolled under the desk from laughter, raising a hand with much difficulty, “Here! I’m here!”

Lan WangJi swiftly drew his sword, Bichen. Ever since they had met, Wei WuXian had never seen him appear so discomposed. He hastily grabbed his own sword. Drawing his sword so that a third of the blade was out, he reminded Lan WangJi, “Manners! Second Young Master Lan!

Watch your manners! I brought my sword today as well. If we start fighting, would your Library Pavilion be fine?” He knew that Lan WangJi would be shamed into anger, so he went out of his

way to carry his sword for self-defence, so that he wouldn’t be accidentally stabbed to death. The blade of Lan WangJi’s sword pointed at him. Fire could almost be seen sprouting from his pair of light-colored eyes, “What sort of person are you!?”

Wei WuXian responded, “What sort of person could I be? A man!” Lan WangJi lashed out “You have no shame!”

Wei WuXian, “Do I need to be ashamed about this? Don’t tell me you’ve never seen something like this before. I don’t believe you.”

Lan WangJi’s weak point was that he didn’t know how to argue. After a moment of silently holding back, he pointed his sword at Wei WuXian. He spoke with a frigid face, “You, go outside. We have fought before.”

Wei WuXian shook his head a couple of times, pretending to be docile, “Nope, nope. Didn’t you know, Young Master Lan? Fighting without permission is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses.” He proceeded to pick up the book which was thrown away, but Lan WangJi went before him, snatching it in his hand. Wei WuXian quickly guessed that he was going to use this as evidence to report him. He deliberately spoke, “Why are you grabbing it? I thought that you didn’t want to read it. Now you do? Actually, even if you want to read it, you don’t have to fight for it. I borrowed it exclusively for you, anyways. Now that you’ve seen my porn, you’ve become my friend. We can continue to exchange opinions, and...”

Lan WangJi’s whole face turned white. He spoke one word at a time, “I. Will. Not. Read. It.”

Wei WuXian continued to distort the facts, “If you won’t read it, why did you grab it? Secretly keeping it? You can’t do that. I borrowed this from someone else, so I’d have to return it after you read it... Hey, hey, hey, don’t come here. You’re too close; I feel nervous. Let’s talk nicely. You’re not gonna hand this in, are you? Hand it in to whom? Old... Your

uncle? Second Young Master Lan, do you think that you can let the elders see this? He'd definitely think that you already read it. With a face as thin as yours, you'd be so ashamed that you'd die..."

Lan WangJi filled his right hand with spiritual energy, and the book broke into thousands of millions of pieces, fluttering downward. As Wei WuXian saw that he successfully provoked Lan WangJi to the point that the evidence was destroyed, he finally felt relieved, and spoke with fake regret, "What a waste!" Then, he picked up a piece of paper which had fallen on his hair, raising it up to show the fuming, pale-faced Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, everything about you is great, except that you like to throw things everywhere. Tell me, how many wads of paper have you thrown onto the ground, in these past few days? Today, you aren't even satisfied with throwing

paper wads anymore, and instead ripped paper. You ripped it, so you clean it up yourself. I'm not gonna help." Of course, he had never helped anyway.

Lan WangJi tried again and again to put up with him, but he couldn't do it anymore. He thundered, "Get lost!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "Well, well, look at you, Lan Zhan. Everyone says that you're a gentleman of excellence, a bright pearl in the world, carrying yourself with incomparable courtesy, so it seems that this is all there is. Didn't you know that causing noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses? And, you actually told me to "get lost." Is this the first time that you used this phrase on somebody..." Lan WangJi drew his sword and went at him. Wei WuXian hurriedly hopped onto the windowsill, "Get lost it is, then. Getting lost is my best skill. It's not necessary for you to see me out!"

He jumped down the Library Pavilion, laughing like a maniac as he barged into the forest. There was already a group of people waiting for him. Nie HuaiSang asked, "How did it go? Did he read it? What was he like?"

Wei WuXian replied, "What was he like? Ha! Didn't you guys hear that loud shout he gave?"

Nie HuaiSang was full of admiration, "I heard it—he told you to get lost! Wei-xiong, it was my first-time hearing Lan WangJi tell someone to 'get lost'! How did you do it?"

Satisfaction was plastered all over Wei WuXian's face, "Good thing that I helped him achieve this 'first'. You all saw it, didn't you? The self-restraint and etiquette that Second Young Master Lan was praised so strongly for were all weak and useless against me."

Jiang Cheng scolded with a darkened expression, "What are you proud of?! What is there to be proud of with this?! Do you think that it's a glorious thing to be told by someone to get lost? You bring so much shame upon our sect!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "I really wanted to apologize to him, but he never paid attention to me. He silenced me for so many days, so what's wrong with me having a little fun with him? I presented him the book with a nice intention. HuaiSang-xiong, what happened to your treasured porn was really a pity. I didn't even get to finish it; it was so good! Lan Zhan definitely doesn't understand proper relationships. I gave it to him, yet he was still unhappy. It's such a waste of that face of his."

Nie HuaiSang blurted, "It's not a pity at all! You can have as many as you want."

Jiang Cheng sneered, "You've seriously offended both Lan WangJi and Lan QiRen. Just waitfor your death tomorrow! Nobody's gonna bury your corpse."

Wei WuXian waved his hands, putting his arm around Jiang Cheng's shoulders, "Who cares, as long as I tease him first? You've already buried my corpse so many times, so what's wrong with once more?"

Jiang Cheng responded with a kick, "Shoo, shoo, shoo! Next time, if you do such a thing, don't let me know! Don't ask me to watch, either!"

## Translator's Notes

To see the clouds, disperse and the moon appear means to finally see results after being patient and waiting for a long time.

The nickname “Second Brother Lan” will appear quite a lot of times in the future. The literal translation is “Second Older Brother Lan”, and is meant to be said in a jokingly way. In China, calling someone an older brother, especially for girls towards guys, is usually meant to be flirtatious. The word meaning “older brother” in Chinese is gege, and people (specifically readers of Heavenly Blessings) often describe it as having a soft, dough-like undertone to it, sounding like a little girl as one speaks. The end of the phrase swishes upwards, as if it’s a smooth, flowing ribbon tugging at one’s heartstrings. In simpler terms, this sounds like oppa in Korean or onii-san in Japanese.

To forget about the pain after the cut heals means that one quickly forgets about the things they should’ve learnt from a punishment.

## Chapter 16: Refinement—Part Six

In order to defend himself if ol' fuddy-duddy and lil' fuddy-duddy came to drag him out of his bed in the middle of the night, Wei WuXian slept while clinging on to his sword. Yet, the night went smoothly. On the second day, Nie HuaiSang came to him with an overjoyed expression, "Wei-xiong, you really struck it lucky. The old man went to our sect's Discussion Conference last night, so we don't have classes for a few days!"

Now that the old one is gone, the young one can be easily taken care of! Wei WuXian quickly climbed up, beaming as he put on his boots, "A lucky strike, indeed, almost as if Heaven is blessing me with its clouds."

Jiang Cheng stood on the side, carefully cleaning his sword, and threw cold water on this notion, "When he comes back, you're still gonna get your punishment."

Wei WuXian responded, "Why would a living person worry about what happens after they die? I'll just live freely as long as possible. Let's go. I refuse to believe that I can't find any pheasants on this mountain of the Lan Sect."

The three walked together, passing through the reception room of the Cloud Recesses. Suddenly, Wei WuXian stopped in his tracks and exclaimed, "There are two lil' fuddy... Lan Zhan-s!"

A few people walked out of the room. Of the two youths at the front, both looked as if they were carved out of ice and jade, both wore the same snow-white robes, and both had sword tassels which swayed in the breeze, alongside ribbons on their clothes. The only differences were their ambiances and facial expressions. Wei WuXian could tell at once that, if the one with a stern face was Lan WangJi, the gentle one must be the other Jade of the Lan Sect—ZeWu-Jun, Lan XiChen.

As Lan WangJi saw Wei WuXian, he scrunched his brows, giving him a glare in an almost "glowering" fashion. As if he would be tainted if he looked a moment longer, he moved his gaze away and stared into the distance. On the other hand, Lan XiChen smiled, "And you are...?"

Jiang Cheng showed his respect with a salute, "Jiang WanYin of Yunmeng." Wei WuXian followed, "Wei WuXian of Yunmeng."

Lan XiChen returned the salute. Nie HuaiSang whispered in the volume of a gnat, "Brother XiChen."

Lan XiChen turned to him, "HuaiSang, a while ago, as I returned from Qinghe, your brother asked of your studies. How is it? This year, will you be able to pass?"

Nie HuaiSang replied, "Generally speaking, yes..." He seemed like a wilted cucumber, looking at Wei WuXian in a helpless way. Wei WuXian grinned, "ZeWu-Jun, what are you two going out for?"

Lan XiChen, "To exterminate a water ghoul. We were short of hands, so I came back to find WangJi."

Lan WangJi spoke coldly, "Brother, we do not need to engage in small talk. This matter permits no delay; it is time for us to depart."

Wei WuXian hurried, "Wait, wait, wait. I know how to catch water ghouls. ZeWu-Jun, why don't you take us along?"

Lan XiChen smiled without words. Lan WangJi declared, "It is against the rules."

Wei WuXian, "How is it against the rules? We used to catch water ghouls all the time in Yunmeng. Besides, we don't have classes these days anyways."

Yunmeng was abundant in lakes and water, so it teemed with water ghouls. It was true that people of the Jiang Sect were adept at this, and Jiang Cheng also wanted to make up for the face which the YunmengJiang Sect lost during this stay at the Lan Sect, "That's right. ZeWu-Jun, we'd definitely be of help."

“It is not necessary. The GusuLan Sect is also...” Before Lan WangJi finished talking, Lan XiChen spoke while smiling, “Sure, then. Many thanks for your help. Do some preparations, and we can depart together. HuaiSang, are you coming as well?”

Nie HuaiSang also wanted to join in, but he had been reminded of his older brother as he met Lan XiChen. Cringing silently, he didn’t dare to have fun, “I’ll pass and go back so that I can review...” With this act, he hoped that Lan XiChen would put in some good words for him to his brother. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng went back to their rooms to prepare.

Lan WangJi looked at them from behind, his brows knitted with confusion, “Brother, why did you decide to bring them? Exterminating ghouls is not suited for joking around.”

Lan XiChen answered, “The head disciple and only son of Sect Leader Jiang are quite well-known in Yunmeng. It is likely that they know more than joking around.”

Although Lan WangJi didn’t express his opinion, the phrase “I beg to differ” was written all over his face.

Lan XiChen spoke again, “And, also, you wish for him to go as well, do you not?” Lan WangJi was stunned.

Lan XiChen, “I only agreed because you looked as if you wanted the head disciple of Sect Leader Jiang to come with you.”

A silence fell upon them, as if the air was frozen solid.

Only after a while did Lan WangJi finally respond, speaking with great difficulty, “There was no such thing.”

He wanted to defend himself further, but Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng already grabbed their swords and headed over, so Lan WangJi had to shut his mouth. The group mounted their swords<sup>[1]</sup> and set off.

The place where the water ghouls haunted was named Caiyi Town, about ten kilometers away from the Cloud Recesses.

Caiyi Town was connected with paths of water. It was either a net of rivers densely covering the town, or dwellings packed on either side of the web-like water paths. The houses had white walls and grey roofs, and the rivers were filled with boats of baskets and people. On the banks, they sold flowers, fruits, bamboo crafts, pastries, tea, and silk.

Gusu was in the Jiangnan area, and all the voices one could hear were soft and gentle. As two boats crashed into each other, and a few jars of rice wine were spilled, even the arguments of the two boatmen sounded like chirps of the oriole. Although Yunmeng had many lakes, there weren’t a lot of small towns with so much water. Wei WuXian found it quite interesting. He bought two jars of rice wine and gave one to Jiang Cheng, “Gusu people talk in such a sugary way. How is this arguing? If they see how Yunmeng people argue, they might be scared to death... Why are you looking at me, Lan Zhan? It’s not that I’m too stingy to buy you any— aren’t people from your sect prohibited from drinking alcohol?”

Having only stayed for a short time, the group boarded ten-or-so narrow boats, and rowed toward where the water ghouls gathered. Gradually, the number of houses on the banks decreased, and

the river path became quieter as well. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng each had a boat, competing who could grow faster while listening to events in the area that concerned water ghouls.

This water path led to a large lake ahead of them, named Biling Lake. Caiyi Town hadn’t been haunted by water ghouls ever since tens of years ago, yet, for the past few months, people had started to fall into this path and Biling Lake. Boats which carried goods also sunk without any reasons. A few days ago, Lan XiChen casted a few nets over this area. He expected to catch one or two water ghouls, but got about a dozen instead. He cleaned the corpses and carried them to a nearby part of the town, only to find that some corpses were

not familiar to any of the local people, and remained unclaimed. Yesterday, he set up the net formation again, and caught quite a few again.

Wei WuXian spoke, "It doesn't seem like that the corpses drowned somewhere else and floated here either. Water ghouls are picky about their area. Most of the time, the only place they settle on is the place they drowned at, and they usually don't leave there."

Lan XiChen nodded, "That is correct. This was why I thought that it was no trivial matter, and asked WangJi to come along, in case something happens."

Wei WuXian asked, "ZeWu-Jun, water ghouls are really clever. If we use the boats and take our time like this, isn't it possible that they'll hide underwater and not come out? Won't we have to keep on searching forever? What if we can't find them?"

Lan WangJi replied, "We will wait until we find them. After all, we do what we must." Wei WuXian, "Just by using nets?"

Lan XiChen, "That is right. Does the YunmengJiang Sect have other methods?"

Wei WuXian smiled but didn't respond. Of course, the YunmengJiang Sect used nets as well. But, because he was a good swimmer, he had always jumped into the river and dragged water ghouls out. However, this method was too dangerous; he definitely couldn't do it in front of the Lan Sect's people. If it travelled into Lan QiRen's ears, he would definitely face another lecture. He switched the topic, "It'd be great if there's something that can attract the water ghouls like a fishing bait. Or something that can point out their directions, like a compass."

Jiang Cheng spoke, "Look down at the water and concentrate on finding them. You're letting your imagination run again."

Wei WuXian, "Cultivation and riding on swords also used to be just imagination!"

As he looked down, he happened to be able to see the bottom of the boat which Lan WangJi was on. An idea flashed across his head, and he shouted, "Lan Zhan, look at me!"

At the moment, Lan WangJi was keeping a sharp lookout. As he heard the words, he looked up, only to see Wei WuXian's bamboo paddle sweep up a splash of water and strike it toward him. With a tap of his foot, Lan WangJi lightly hopped onto another boat, dodging the spray. He was quite angered, thinking to himself that, sure enough, Wei WuXian was here to fool around, "Pathetic!"

However, Wei WuXian kicked the side of the boat which he was standing on, and tipped it over using the bamboo paddle. On the bottom of the boat, there were three water ghouls with swelling faces and ashen skin, tightly clinging onto the wooden boards!

A disciple who stood nearby immediately suppressed the three. Lan XiChen smiled, "Young Master Wei, how did you know that they were below the boats?"

Wei WuXian knocked on the side of the boat, "Simple! The displacement of water was wrong. He was the only person who stood on the boat, yet the displacement was greater than those of boats that carried two people. There must have been something on the bottom."

Lan XiChen praised him, "You are experienced indeed."

Wei WuXian's paddle lightly glided through the water, and the boat's speed quickened, so that he was right next to Lan WangJi's boat. He spoke, "Lan Zhan, I didn't splash water on you on purpose. Water ghouls are really clever. If I said it out loud, they would've heard it and got away. Hey, don't ignore me. Why don't you look at me, Second Young Master Lan?"

Lan WangJi finally condescended and gave him a glance, "Why did you come?"

Wei WuXian spoke with sincerity, "I'm here to apologize to you. Last night was my fault. I was wrong."

Lan WangJi's countenance was slightly dark, most likely because he still didn't forget how Wei WuXian "apologized" to him. Wei WuXian asked although he knew the answer, "Why do you look so gloomy? Don't worry. Today, I'm really here to help."

Jiang Cheng couldn't watch the scene any longer, "If you want to help, then stop chattering and come here!"

A disciple shouted, "The net moved!"

Sure enough, the ropes of the net started to wobble. Wei WuXian beamed, "It's here, it's here!"

Thick, long hair formed veils of black satin, surging and swelling around the boats. Amid them, pairs of ghastly hands gripped onto the sides. Lan WangJi backhandedly drew his sword, Bichen, and severed ten-or-so wrists on the left of the boat, leaving only palms with fingers digging deep into the wood. As he was about to cut the ones on the right, a red light flashed past, and Wei WuXian's sword was already back in its sheath.

The strange shifts of the water had ceased, and the net also became still once more. Although, a few moments ago, Wei WuXian's sword attacked at an extremely fast speed, Lan WangJi could already tell that the sword he carried was of very high quality. He asked with a serious face, "What is the name of this sword?"

Wei WuXian answered, "Suibian<sup>[2]</sup>."

Lan WangJi stared at him. Wei WuXian thought that he didn't hear properly, so he repeated it again, "Suibian."

Lan WangJi frowned and refused, "This sword has a spirit. Calling it as one pleases is disrespectful."

Wei WuXian let out a sigh, "Think outside the box, won't you? I wasn't asking you to call it whatever you wanted to, but the name of my sword just happens to be 'Suibian'. Here, look." As he spoke, he passed the sword over for Lan WangJi to see the characters on the sword.

Surrounded by lines and patterns, two ancient characters were carved onto the sheath. It was "Suibian", indeed.

For a few moments, Lan WangJi was at a loss for words.

Wei WuXian showed his consideration, "You don't need to talk. I know that you definitely want to ask me why it's called this name. Everyone asks if it has some special meaning to it. Actually, there's no special meaning at all. It was just that, when Uncle Jiang gave me the sword and asked me what I wanted to call it, I came up with more than twenty names, but wasn't satisfied with any of them. I thought that I could let Uncle Jiang give it a name, so I answered, 'Whatever!' But, who knew that, after the sword had been forged and taken out, these two characters were on it. Uncle Jiang said, 'If this is the case, then why not let this sword be named Suibian?' To be honest, this name isn't bad either, right?"

Finally, Lan WangJi spoke through his gritted teeth, "... Ridiculous!"

Wei WuXian carried his sword on his shoulder, "You're such a boring person. Don't you see how fun this name is? It's especially good at tricking serious ones like you, and it works every single time. Haha!"

At the same time, from within the virid lake, a long shadow darted around the small boat. After Jiang Cheng finished the water ghouls on his side, he was still watching out for any that they had missed. Seeing the shadow, he immediately yelled, "It's coming again!"

#### Translator's Notes

Cultivators have the ability to use their swords to hover in the air as a way to travel. It usually uses spiritual energy and is one of the things a cultivator learns in their earlier stages. They just stand on the sword (as if it's a skateboard).

The word suibian in Chinese means "whatever".

## Chapter 17: Refinement—Part Seven

A few disciples paddled and used nets to chase after the underwater shadow. Someone shouted from the other side, “There are some here as well!”

On the other side, a mass of black shadows also whooshed past. A number of narrow boats dragged nets and went over, but they didn’t catch anything. Wei WuXian spoke, “That’s strange. The shape of this shadow doesn’t seem like a human. It’s also sometimes long and sometimes short, sometimes large and sometimes small... Lan Zhan, beside your boat!”

Instantly, the Bichen on Lan WangJi’s back unsheathed and stabbed into the water. After a moment, it flew out of the river with a sharp resonance, taking with it a crescent of water. Yet, it didn’t pierce anything.

He held the sword in his hand with a stern expression. As he was about to speak, a disciple on the other side also drew out his sword, thrusting it toward a dark shadow which swiftly swam by in the water.

However, after his sword went underwater, it never came out again. He chanted the sword incantation for a few more times, but nothing was retrieved from the water. It was as if his sword had been devoured by the lake, disappearing without a trace. The disciple looked like he was a youth of similar age as Wei WuXian and the others. Without his sword, his face grew paler and paler. An older disciple beside him spoke, “Su She, right now, we still haven’t determined what the thing inside the water is. Why did you act on your own and make your sword go underwater?”

Su She seemed like he was somewhat flustered, but his expression was relatively calm, “I saw that Second Young Master also...”

He realized, before he even finished speaking, how unsuitable this sentence was. No matter what, the Bichen sword or Lan WangJi were not comparable with others. Lan WangJi could enter his sword into water when the opponent was unknown and be just fine, but it might not be the case for others. An embarrassed shade of red seeped through his pale complexion, as if he had been disgraced. He glimpsed at Lan WangJi, but Lan WangJi didn’t look at him, and instead attentively observed the water. In an instant, Bichen was unsheathed again.

This time, the blade of the sword wasn’t inserted into water, but instead, the tip of the sword jolted, and whisked up a piece of shadow from within the water. A pile of wet, black mess fell onto the floor of the boat with a plop. Wei WuXian went on his toes to have a look. To his surprise, it was a piece of clothing.

Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he almost toppled into the river, “Lan Zhan, you’re so impressive! This is my first time seeing someone remove a water ghoul’s clothing when they’re catching water ghouls.”

Lan WangJi simply examined Bichen’s tip to see if there was anything strange, seeming to have decided to not converse with him. Jiang Cheng spoke, “You should shut up. The thing that swam underwater really wasn’t a water ghoul. There was only a piece of clothing!”

Of course, Wei WuXian also saw it clearly. He just didn’t feel satisfied without teasing Lan WangJi a few times. He spoke, “So, the thing that was sneaking around was just this piece of clothing? Now that’s why the nets couldn’t catch it and swords couldn’t pierce it. Its shape was always different. However, a piece of clothing couldn’t have swallowed up a whole sword. There must be something else inside the water.”

At the moment, the boats already floated toward the center of Biling Lake. The color of the lake was an extremely dark shade of green. Suddenly, Lan WangJi slightly lifted his head, “Go back immediately.”

Lan XiChen asked, “Why?”

Lan WangJi answered, “The underwater beings led the boats to the center of Biling Lake on purpose.”

Just as he finished his words, everyone suddenly felt their boats sinking.

Water immediately started to spread into the boats. Wei WuXian suddenly noticed that the color of Biling Lake’s water wasn’t dark green any more, but almost black. Surrounding the area close to the center, a large whirlpool had formed without anybody realizing. The ten-or-so boats circled around, following the currents of the whirlpool. They sunk as they spun, as if they were going to be sucked inside a gigantic, black mouth!

The clang-s of drawing swords chorused in the air. One after another, everyone mounted their swords and flew upward. Wei WuXian already hovered above. He looked downward, only to see that the disciple who drove his sword underwater, Su She, was already knee-deep inside the water, the board of his boat already engulfed in Biling Lake. Although his face was full of panic, he didn’t call for help, possibly frightened rigid. Without hesitation, Wei WuXian bent down and stretched his arm out, grabbing Su She’s wrist and pulling him up.

Having added another person, the sword under his feet dipped abruptly, but it continued to ascend. However, not long after, a strong force suddenly came from from Su She, almost pulling Wei WuXian off of his sword.

The lower part of Su She’s body was already submerged inside the black whirlpool in the lake. The whirlpool spun faster and faster, and his body also sunk deeper and deeper. There seemed to be something hiding underwater, holding onto his legs and pulling them down. Jiang Cheng originally stood on his Sandu and calmly ascended to about seventy meters above the surface of the lake. As he looked down, he dashed toward them with an annoyed expression, “What are you doing, now?!”

The sucking force of the lake became stronger and stronger. Wei WuXian’s sword was superior in terms of agility, but inferior in terms of strength. He was almost weighed down to the point of hovering right above the surface of the lake. He steadied himself while using both hands to haul Su She, and shouted, “Can somebody come here to help?! If I still can’t pull him up, I’m gonna let go!”

Suddenly, Wei WuXian felt his collar tighten, and he was lifted into the air. He turned around to see Lan WangJi holding the back of his collar with one hand. Although Lan WangJi merely looked into another direction with an indifferent look, he and his sword carried the weight of three people, and fought with the mysterious force of the lake at the same time. Moreover, their position was still rising at a steady pace. Jiang Cheng was rather shocked, If I went down to pull Wei WuXian before him, using Sandu, I probably couldn’t have ascended so quickly and

steadily. Lan WangJi is only around my age...

At this point, Wei WuXian spoke, “Lan Zhan, your sword is quite strong, isn’t it? Thank you, thank you. But why did you pull my collar? Can’t you hold on to me? I don’t feel comfortable if you do this. Why don’t I stretch my hand to you and you can grab it?”

Lan WangJi replied with a cold voice, “I do not have physical contact with others.” Wei WuXian, “We’re already this familiar with each other, so how am I ‘others’?” Lan WangJi, “We are not.”

Wei WuXian pretended to be hurt, “You can’t do this...”

Jiang Cheng really couldn’t hold it any more. He scolded, “You can’t do this!!! Can’t you speak a few sentences less while you’re held in mid-air by your collar?!”

The group travelled on their swords and evacuated Biling Lake as fast as they could. When they landed, Lan WangJi let go of Wei WuXian’s back collar and calmly turned to Lan XiChen, “It is a waterborne abyss.”

Lan XiChen shook his head, “Then, this is going to be difficult.”

As they heard the name “waterborne abyss”, Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng understood immediately. The scariest part about Biling Lake wasn’t water ghouls, but the water which flowed in it.

Because of reasons such as terrain or currents, some rivers or lakes often encountered sinking ships and drowning people. As time went on, the area of water would develop a personality. It was like a spoiled young mistress who couldn’t tolerate a shortage of the luxurious lifestyle. If no boats of goods or living humans sunk into the water as sacrifices, it would stir up trouble and obtain them on its own.

The people of the Caiyi Town area were all familiar with water, so sunken boats and drowning deaths rarely happened. It was impossible for a waterborne abyss to grow out of here. Now that one had appeared here, there was only one possibility—that it had been chased here from somewhere else.

Once a waterborne abyss emerged, it meant that the whole body of water was turned into a monster. It was extremely hard to get rid of, impossible to remove unless every single drop of water was taken out, all of the people and goods which sunk were fished up, and riverbed was exposed to strong sunlight for a few years. Nevertheless, there was a method that could solve the immediate problem at the expensive of others—to chase it to another river or pond and let it wreck somewhere else.

Lan WangJi asked, “Recently, has there been any place which suffered from a waterborne abyss?”

Lan XiChen pointed at the sky.

He was pointing at nothing else but the sun. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng looked at each other, understanding it perfectly, It’s the QishanWen Sect.

Among the cultivation world, there was a countless number of sects and clans, exceeding even the number of stars in the sky. And, among these, there was a titan which stood above the others without a doubt—the QishanWen Sect.

The Wen Clan used the sun as the motif of their clan, signifying that they could “compete with the sun for radiance, match the sun in longevity”. Its sect residence was quite large, almost comparable to a city. It was named the Nightless Sky, also called the Nightless Celestial City, because it was said that there was no nightfall in the city. It could be described as a titan for the fact that no matter in terms of the number of disciples, power, land, or magical tools, there were no other families which could compare to it. A great deal of cultivators took being a foreign disciple to the Wen Sect as a supreme honour. Based on the Wen Sect’s style of doing things, it was highly possible that the waterborne abyss in Caiyi Town was chased here by them.

Although they knew where the waterborne abyss came from, everyone grew silent.

If it was done by people of the Wen Sect, then there would be no result no matter how hard they accused or criticized. First of all, the sect wouldn’t admit it, and second, there wouldn’t be any compensation either.

One disciple complained, “Caiyi Town will be seriously harmed with that sect having chased the waterborne abyss over. If the waterborne abyss grows larger and expands onto the river paths in the town, all those people’s lives would be up to the monster. This is so...”

If it became responsible for the problem passed to them by someone else, the GusuLan Sect would definitely face countless troubles. Lan XiChen sighed, “Let it down. Let it down. Let us go back to the town.”

They boarded new boats at the crossing point and paddled toward an area of town where a lot of people gathered.

After passing the arch bridge and entering the river paths, Wei WuXian started to go at it again.

Abandoning his paddle, he put one foot on the side of his boat and looked into his reflection in the water, examining if his hair was messed up. As if he didn’t just catch tons of water

ghouls and escaped from the mouth of the waterborne abyss, Wei WuXian assuredly threw a series of charming winks at both sides of the path, “Sisters, how much for half a kilogram of loquats?”

His age was young, and his appearance was handsome. With such high spirits, it really was a scene of frivolous peach blossoms pursuing the running stream. One woman lifted her bamboo hat, smiling with her head raised, “Young beau, you needn’t pay. How ‘bout I can give you one for free?”

The Wu dialect was soft, sounding refreshing and sweet. The speaker’s lips moved melodiously, and the listener’s ears would be enveloped in fragrance. Wei WuXian cupped his hands together, “If it’s given to me by Sister, then I definitely want it!”

The woman put her hand into the basket, and threw him a round, golden loquat, “You needn’t be such polite. It’s for how handsome you look!”

The boats moved at a fast speed. As the two boats met, they immediately passed each other.

Wei WuXian turned around, perfectly catching it, and grinned, “Sister looks even prettier!”

As he showed off and flirted on the side, Lan WangJi was staring straight ahead, appearing quite virtuous. Wei WuXian smugly tossed the toquat in his hand, and suddenly pointed at him, “Sisters, do you think that he looks handsome?”

Lan WangJi didn’t expect Wei WuXian to suddenly talk about him at all. Just as he was unsure of how to respond, the women on the river spoke in harmony, “Even more handsome!” Amid this, there seemed to be the laughter of a few men.

Wei WuXian spoke, “Then, does anyone want to give him one? If you only give me and not him, I’m afraid he might be jealous when we go back!”

Chirp-like laughter echoed through the whole river. Another woman came from in front of them, standing on her boat, “Okay, okay, you get two. Heads up, young beau, catch!”

After the second one also landed in his hand, Wei WuXian shouted, “Sister, you’re not only pretty, but you’re nice as well. The next time I come here, I’m gonna buy a whole basket!”

The woman’s voice was vibrant, and she was more daring than the other. She pointed at Lan WangJi, “Get him to come as well. You all can come here and get them!”

Wei WuXian held the loquat in front of Lan WangJi’s eyes. Lan WangJi didn’t move his gaze, “Move.”

And, so, Wei WuXian moved it away, “I knew that you definitely wouldn’t accept it, so I never intended to give it to you. Jiang Cheng, catch!”

Just then, the boat which Jiang Cheng was on whirred past. He caught the loquat with one hand, a slight smile appearing on his face, but immediately snorted, “You’re being all flirty again?”

Wei WuXian smirked, proud of his success, “Get lost!” Then, he turned around and asked, “Lan Zhan, you’re from Gusu, so you know how to speak in this dialect, right? Teach me. How do you swear in the Gusu dialect?”

Lan WangJi threw a “pathetic” at him, and got on another boat. Wei WuXian didn’t expect him to really answer. He just wanted to tease him, after hearing the amusingly soft Gusu dialect and thinking that Lan WangJi undoubtedly also spoke this dialect when he was young. After raising his head to swallow another gulp of the rice wine, he carried the plump, jet-black jar in one hand, picked up the paddle, and charged over to beat up Jiang Cheng.

On the other hand, Lan WangJi stood side by side to Lan XiChen. This time, even their expressions were similar. Both looked as if they were preoccupied by troubles as they thought about things such as how to deal with the waterborne abyss and what to say to the mayor of Caiyi Town.

An extremely heavy boat came from in front of them, filled with buckets of large, golden loquats. Lan WangJi took one glance at it, and continued to look straight ahead.

Yet, Lan XiChen spoke to him, “If you want to eat loquats, should we buy one basket?” “...”

Lan WangJi went off with a flick of his sleeves, “I do not!” He went to stand on another boat.

#### Translator's Notes

Sword incantation: These are what one says to command or summon one's sword.

Sisters: In China, it is respect to refer to someone older than you as Sister or Brother, and Younger Sister or Younger Brother if the person is younger than you.

Frivolous peach blossoms pursuing the running stream: Again, this phrase comes from a poem by the famous poet Du Fu. This scene of blossoms and the stream implies that Wei WuXian is the “frivolous peach blossom” in this case, and flirts with the women in the river without caring about his conduct.

Bamboo hat: As Caiyi Town is a “water town”, much of the residents there wear bamboo hats which form a conic shape, resembling the famous Vietnamese hats. It is also called a conic hat or a rice hat.

Wu dialect: This is one of the many dialects of Chinese. Translator and Editor note:

\*\*\* The next chapter involves 9000 Chinese characters, which would result in around 7000-8000 words in English. Most chapters so far are 2900-5000 characters, so do not be surprised this takes longer than usual to get translated.

## Chapter 18: Refinement—Part Eight

Wei WuXian bought a bunch of quirky gadgets in Caiyi Town and took them back to the Cloud Recesses. After he arrived, everything was shared between the disciples from other sects.

Because Lan QiRen went to Qinghe and there were no classes for a few days, all of the boys played around in complete chaos, rushing into Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng's room to sleep there. All through the nights, they ate, drank, wrestled, gambled, and viewed picture books. During one of the nights, Wei WuXian lost in a game of dice, and was sent to sneak down the mountain and buy jars of Emperor's Smile. This time, everyone finally had the chance to satisfy their taste buds. However, on the second day, before daylight even appeared, someone opened the door of the room, revealing the disciples who spread out on the floor in a tangle, sleeping as if they were a group of corpses.

The noise from opening the door startled a few people. As they saw the stone-faced Lan WangJi at the door through their sleepy eyes, they were instantly waken up. Nie HuaiSang furiously pushed Wei WuXian, who ended up in a position with his legs at the top and head at the bottom, "Wei-xiong! Wei-xiong!"

Having been shoved for a few times, Wei WuXian spoke drowsily, "Who? Is anyone else up for it?! Jiang Cheng? The fight is on—like I'm scared of you!"

Jiang Cheng drank too much last night, and his head still ached as he lay on the ground with his eyes closed. He randomly grabbed something and hurled it at where Wei WuXian's voice came from, "Shut up!"

The object landed on Wei WuXian's chest, its pages flipping open. Nie HuaiSang eyed it, only to find that the item Jiang Cheng used to hit Wei WuXian was one of his treasured out-of-print illustrated pornography books. As he looked up and saw Lan WangJi's frigid gaze, he almost

died on the spot. Wei WuXian mumbled a few sentences, hugging the book to his chest, and went to sleep again. Lan WangJi stepped into the room. He used one hand to grip Wei WuXian's back collar, lifted him up, and dragged him in the direction of the door.

After a few puzzled moments as he was carried by Lan WangJi, he was finally half-awake. He turned around, "Lan Zhan, what are you doing?"

Lan WangJi didn't say any words, continuing to drag him forward. Wei WuXian woke up a bit more, along with the lying corpses on the ground who gained consciousness one after another. Seeing that Wei WuXian was caught by Lan WangJi again, he hurried outside and asked, "What's happening? What are you doing?"

Lan WangJi turned his head, speaking one word at a time, "To receive. His. Punishment." Jiang Cheng had a slow reaction from his sleep and drinking too much, so he just remembered the mess of a floor in the room. Recalling that they broke a countless number of sect rules of the Cloud Recesses last night, his face immediately froze.

Lan WangJi dragged Wei WuXian to the front of the Lan Sect's ancestral hall. There were already a few older disciples of the Lan Sect waiting there, eight in total. Of them, four carried discipline rulers made of sandalwood which were extremely long in length, having numerous square-shaped characters carved onto them. It was a solemn-looking scene, indeed. As Lan WangJi dragged the person over, two of them immediately came up, firmly holding Wei WuXian in place. Wei WuXian half-knelt on the ground, being allowed no room for struggle, "Lan Zhan, are you going to punish me?"

Lan WangJi stared at him coldly, maintaining his silence. Wei WuXian spoke, "I won't accept this."

At this point, the boys who had woken up also rushed over, but they were blocked outside the ancestral hall, not allowed to go in. They scratched their heads, scared speechless from seeing the discipline ruler. Then, however, Lan WangJi lifted the bottom of his white clothes, and knelt down beside Wei WuXian.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian turned pale with fear. He tried to get up, but Lan WangJi commanded, "Strike!"

Wei WuXian gaped with astonishment. He hurriedly spoke, "Wait, wait, I accept this, I accept this, Lan Zhan. I was wrong... Gah!"

The palms and legs of both of them received about a hundred strikes of the discipline ruler. Lan WangJi didn't need anyone to hold him down. His back was upright and his kneeling position stayed proper for the whole duration. On the other hand, Wei WuXian wailed and howled without holding back at all, making the disciples watching the scene cringe from imagining the pain. After the beating finished, Lan WangJi silently stood up and walked outside after saluting toward the the disciples in the ancestral hall, showing no evidence that he had been injured. Wei WuXian was the exact opposite. After he was carried onto Jiang Cheng's back, he groaned for the whole way. The youths all surrounded them, asking, "Wei-xiong, what in the world happened?"

"It's understandable for Lan Zhan to punish you, but why did he himself also get the beating?" Wei WuXian sighed, leaning on Jiang Cheng's back, "What a miscalculation! It's a long story!" Jiang Cheng spoke, "Cut the crap! What on Earth did you do?!"

Wei WuXian answered, "I didn't do anything! Last night, didn't I lose the dice game and go down to buy some Emperor's Smile?"

Jiang Cheng, "... Don't tell me you met him again."

Wei WuXian, "That's actually it. Who knew what was wrong with my luck—when I carried the jars of Emperor's Smile and came up here, he stopped right in front of me again. I'm doubting that maybe he really watches me every single day."

Jiang Cheng, "Not everyone has so much time on their hands. What happened next?"

Wei WuXian, "And then I said hello to him again. I said, 'Lan Zhan! What a coincidence—it's you again!'. Of course, he ignored me again. His hand came at me without any words. I said, 'Hey, what's the use of doing this?' He said that if a guest disciple violates the curfew so many times, they need to go to the Lan Sect's ancestral hall to receive their punishment. And I said, 'There's only the two of us here. If you don't say it, and I don't say it, then nobody would know whether or not I violated the curfew, right? I promise that there's no next time. We're already this familiar with each other, so can't you just do me a small favor?'"

Everyone looked as if they couldn't bear to listen to this any longer.

Wei WuXian continued, "In the end, he said that we weren't familiar with a long face, grabbed his sword, and charged over. He paid no heed to our friendship or whatsoever, so I could only

put down the Emperor's Smile and start passing a few moves. His attacks were fast and chased after me so close that I couldn't even throw him off! Eventually, I really was annoyed from him chasing me. I asked, 'Are you really not gonna let go? Huh?!"

"He still said, 'Take your punishment.'"

The boys were filled with the thrill of the story, and Wei WuXian was enraptured as he spoke. He forgot the fact that he was still on Jiang Cheng's back, and gave Jiang Cheng's shoulder a hard smack, "I said, 'Fine!'. Then, I stopped dodging, threw myself over, clung to him, and plummeted outside the wall of the Cloud Recesses!"

"..."

Wei WuXian, "And so, the two of us fell outside the area of the Cloud Recesses together! It was such a bad fall that I saw stars before my eyes."

Nie HuaiSang was dumbstruck, "... He didn't break free?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Oh, he did try. But with me locking him in my arms and legs, he couldn't break free even though he wanted to, unable to even get up from my body. He was as hard as a board. I said, 'How about this, Lan Zhan? Now, you're also outside the Cloud Recesses. We both broke the curfew, and you can't be harsh toward others and loose toward yourself. If you punish me, you'd have to punish yourself as well. Equal treatment. How does that sound?'"

Wei WuXian, "After he got up, he looked like he really wasn't in a good mood. I sat on the side and told him not to worry, that I won't tell anyone else, and that the only ones who knew about this was the sky, the Earth, and us two. And then, he walked off without saying anything. Who knew that he'd do something like this in the morning... Jiang Cheng, walk slower. You're almost shaking me off."

Jiang Cheng wanted to not only shake him off, but, even more so, to make a few man-shaped dents on the ground by slamming his head down, "Is simply carrying you not up to your standards?!"

Wei WuXian, "I never asked you to carry me, in the beginning."

Jiang Cheng was enraged, "If I don't carry you, you'd probably stay in their ancestral hall and roll on the ground all day long. I don't have that thick of a face to lose! Lan WangJi even had fifty more strikes than you, and he even walked by himself. Yet, you have the nerve to pretend that you're crippled. I don't want to carry you anymore. Get off, now!"

Wei WuXian, "No, I'm wounded."

The group joked around on the narrow path made of white stones. They walked right into a person in white robes, holding a book as he passed by. Lan XiChen stopped with wonder and smiled, "What is going on, here?"

Jiang Cheng felt extremely awkward, not knowing how to reply. Nie HuaiSang answered before him, "XiChen-ge, Wei-xiong was punished with more than a hundred strikes of the ruler. Is there any medicine?!"

The person responsible for punishment in the Cloud Recesses was Lan WangJi. With Wei WuXian's pained cries amid the group which surrounded him, it appeared as if his condition was extremely severe. Lan XiChen immediately came up to them, "Was this done by WangJi? Is Young Master Wei still able to walk? What in the world happened?"

Of course, Jiang Cheng didn't dare to say that Wei WuXian was at fault. Thinking back, it was them who urged Wei WuXian to buy liquor. Each and every one of them should have been punished. He could only speak in a vague way, "It's fine, it's fine; it's not that serious! He can walk. Wei WuXian, why are you still up there?!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "I can't walk." He raised his red palms, which were swollen a few sizes larger, and complained to Lan XiChen, "ZeWu-Jun, your younger brother is so cruel."

Lan XiChen examined his palms, "Yes, the punishment is quite severe, indeed. It is likely that the swelling will not subside until after three or four days."

Jiang Cheng really didn't know that the beating was so severe. He exclaimed, "What? Not after three or four days? His legs and his back were also hit by the discipline rulers. How can Lan WangJi do this?!" He spoke the last sentence with resentment in spite of himself, and only realized it after Wei WuXian secretly smacked him. However, Lan XiChen didn't mind it at all. He smiled, "Nevertheless, it is not severe enough to require medication. Young Master Wei, let me tell you a way for your injuries to be healed in just a few hours."

It was nighttime, at the cold spring of the Cloud Recesses.

Lan WangJi's eyes were closed as he relaxed in the ice-cold water. Suddenly, a voice rang beside his ears, "Lan Zhan."

"..."

Lan WangJi's eyes sprang open. Sure enough, Wei WuXian was lying on his stomach, above the blue stones beside the cold spring, tilting his head and smiling at him.

Lan WangJi blurted out, "How did you come in?!"

Wei WuXian slowly crawled up, and spoke as he took off his sash belt, “ZeWu-Jun told me to come in.”

Lan WangJi, “What are you doing?”

Wei WuXian kicked off his boots while leaving piles of clothing all over the ground, “I already stripped, so what do you think I’m here for? I heard that your sect’s cold spring can cure injuries aside from helping with one’s cultivation. So, your brother told me to come here and bathe with you. Except, it’s really not nice of you to come here to heal alone. Eep! It really is cold. Brr...”

He went into the water, rolling about due to the freezing water of the spring. Lan WangJi quickly distanced himself a few meters away from Wei WuXian, “I came here for cultivation purposes, not to heal... Do not leap around!”

Wei WuXian spoke, “But it’s so cold, it’s so cold...”

This time, he didn’t intend to emphasize or cause trouble. It was true that most people couldn’t become use to the GusuLan Sect’s cold spring in a short amount of time, feeling as if their bodies and blood would freeze if they stayed still for just a few moments. So, he could only jump around, intending to warm his body from the movement. Lan WangJi was originally meditating in peace, but with Wei WuXian jumping about, a few splashes of water was thrown on his face. A few droplets trickled down his long lashes and ink-black hair. It was beyond his endurance, “Do not move!”

As he spoke, he extended an arm, and put his hand on Wei WuXian’s shoulder.

Wei WuXian instantly felt a surge of warmth coming from where their bodies connected. Feeling better, he couldn’t help but to shift closer over there. Lan WangJi was wary of this, “What?”

Wei WuXian replied in an innocent tone, “Nothing. It seems like your side is warmer.”

Lan WangJi firmly kept his arm between the two of them, maintaining the distance. He sternly declared, “It is not.”

Wei WuXian wanted to get closer to Lan WangJi so that it was more convenient for him to flatter the other. Even though he couldn’t go over and was given the cold shoulder, he wasn’t angered at all. He glanced at Lan WangJi’s palms and shoulder. The bruises were still there, meaning that Lan WangJi really wasn’t here to heal. Wei WuXian spoke sincerely, “Lan Zhan, I admire you so much. You really did punish yourself as well, without treating yourself any better. I don’t have anything else to say.”

Lan WangJi shut his eyes again, without any words.

Wei WuXian spoke again, “Really, I’ve never seen someone as prim and proper as you. It’d be impossible for me to do something like this. You’re so cool.”

Lan WangJi still paid him no attention.

After Wei WuXian stopped feeling cold, he started to swim around the cold spring. He swum for a while, but still went near Lan WangJi, “Lan Zhan, didn’t you notice what I was doing when I talked to you?”

Lan WangJi, “I do not know.”

Wei WuXian, “You don’t even know about this? I was complimenting you, trying to become more casual with you.”

Lan WangJi glanced at him, “What do you want to do?”

Wei WuXian, “Lan Zhan, why don’t we become friends? We’re already so familiar.” Lan WangJi, “We are not.”

Wei WuXian slapped the surface of the water, “Now, you’re being boring again. Really. There are lots of benefits if you become friends with me.”

Lan WangJi, “For example?”

Wei WuXian swam near the edge of the spring, and leaned back with his arms on the blue rocks, “I’m always really loyal towards my friends. For example, I’d definitely let you be the first person to look at new porn that I get hold of... Hey, hey, come back! It’s fine if you

don't look at them. Have you been to Yunmeng? Yunmeng is really fun. Yunmeng's food is also good. I don't know if it's Gusu's or the Cloud Recess's problem, but the food in your sect are so bad. If you

come to Lotus Pier, you can eat lots of delicious food. I can take you to pick lotus seed pods and water chestnuts. Lan Zhan, do you wanna come?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Don't answer everything with negative words. You sound so uncaring; girls won't like it. Let me tell you—the girls in Yunmeng look very pretty, different from the sort of pretty in Gusu." He winked his left eye at Lan in a proud way, "You sure you don't wanna come?"

Lan WangJi hesitated, but still replied, "No..."

Wei WuXian, "Rejecting me without giving me any respect—aren't you scared that I'd conveniently take away your clothes when I leave?"

Lan WangJi, "Get lost!!!"

After Lan QiRen left Qinghe and returned to Gusu, he didn't make Wei WuXian go to the Library Pavilion to copy the Lan Sect's sect rules again, but simply gave him a harsh scolding in front of everyone. Without the parts where he quoted ancient scriptures, it all boiled down to how he had never seen someone so unruly and shameless before, so please get lost, as soon and as far as possible. Please don't go near the other pupils, and especially refrain from tainting his favorite one—Lan WangJi.

As he scolded, Wei WuXian only grinned while listening, feeling no humiliation or anger at all. Immediately after Lan QiRen left, Wei WuXian sat down and spoke to Jiang Cheng, "Don't you think that it's a bit too late, telling me to get lost now? He only told me to get lost after I finished tainting his person. It's too late!"

The waterborne abyss in Caiyi Town created a great deal of trouble for the GusuLan Sect. It was impossible to completely destroy it, and the Lan Sect couldn't chase it to somewhere else like the Wen Sect did. The sect leader of the Lan Sect was in secluded meditation most of the time, so Lan QiRen used all of his energy on this matter. With the lessons becoming shorter and shorter, Wei WuXian's time spent with his friends in the mountains became longer and longer.

Today, Wei WuXian intended on going outside with a group of seven or eight people again. As they passed the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion, he looked through the drape of magnolia branches, and he could just about see Lan WangJi sitting alone by the window.

Nie HuaiSang spoke in a puzzled tone, "Is he looking at us? That's strange. We didn't make too much noise, so why does he still look at us like that?"

Wei WuXian, "He's probably thinking of how to find faults with us."

Jiang Cheng interrupted, "Wrong. Not 'us', but 'me'. I think the only person he's watching is you."

Wei WuXian, "Heh. Just let him wait. I'll deal with him after I get back."

Jiang Cheng, "Don't you dislike how he's boring and how he's not fun? Then, you should stop teasing him. This is like pulling whiskers from a tiger's mouth—stop looking for your own death."

Wei WuXian replied, "No. It's exceptionally fun, precisely because of how a living person can be so not fun."

They only returned to the Cloud Recesses when the time almost reached noon. Lan WangJi sat before the desk, organizing the stack of paper which he wrote on, as heard a creaking noise coming from the window. He looked up to see someone hop inside.

Wei WuXian came up by climbing the magnolia tree outside of the Library Pavilion. His face was beaming, "Lan Zhan, I'm back! Did you miss me? Huh? Without me copying texts for these past few days?"

Lan WangJi seemed like an old monk in a state of meditation, seeing everything as nothing. He even continued to organize the pile of books with a numb expression. Wei WuXian deliberately misinterpreted his silence, “I know, even if you don’t say it, that you definitely missed me. Or else, earlier on, why did you look at me through the window?”

Lan WangJi immediately shot him a glance, his eyes full of silent accusations. Wei WuXian sat atop the windowsill, “Look at you, rising to the bait after just a few sentences. You’re so easy to catch. This way, you won’t be able to maintain your composure.”

Lan WangJi, “You, leave.”

Wei WuXian, “If I don’t leave, will you throw me down?”

Looking at Lan WangJi’s face, Wei WuXian suspected that if he spoke one more sentence, Lan WangJi would really abandon the small amount of self-restraint he had left and nail him onto the

window at once. Wei WuXian quickly added, “Don’t be so scary! I’m here to apologize by giving you a present.”

Lan WangJi refused at once, without thinking twice about it, “No.”

Wei WuXian, “Are you sure?” Seeing that a guarded look leaked from Lan WangJi’s eyes, he fished out two rabbits from his arms, as if he was performing a magic trick. As he held onto them by their ears, it seemed like he was holding two round, chubby snowballs. The snowballs even kicked their legs around. He lifted them in front of Lan WangJi’s eyes, “It’s actually quite strange here. There aren’t any pheasants, but there are lots of wild rabbits. They aren’t even scared of people. What do you think? Aren’t they fat? Do you want them?”

Lan WangJi stared at him indifferently.

Wei WuXian, “Fine. If you don’t want them, I’m gonna give them to other people. We aren’t having much flavors in our mouths, anyways.”

After he heard the last sentence, Lan WangJi spoke, “Stop.” Wei WuXian extended his arms, “I’m not going anywhere.” Lan WangJi, “Who are you giving them to?”

Wei WuXian answered, “I’m gonna give them to whoever’s good at roasting rabbit meat.”

Lan WangJi, “Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses. It is the third rule on the Wall of Rules.”

Wei WuXian, “Fine, then. I’ll go down the mountain, kill it outside, and then bring it back to roast it. You don’t want it, anyway, so why do you care so much about it?”

“...” Lan WangJi spoke one word at a time, “Give. It. To. me.”

Wei WuXian grinned on the windowsill, “Now you want it? Look at you—you’re always like this.”

Both of these rabbits were chubby and round, appearing to two balls made of fluffy snowflakes. One had bleary eyes, and lay on its stomach, remaining motionless even after a long while. As it chewed on the lettuce, its pink mouth moved in a leisurely manner. The other one seemed as if it was actually a cricket, constantly hopping up and down. It played around with its companion,

wriggling and leaping nonstop. Wei WuXian tossed over a few pieces of lettuce which he took out of nowhere. He suddenly called, “Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!”

The energetic rabbit had stepped on Lan WangJi’s inkstone and left a line of black footsteps on the desk. Lan WangJi was unsure of what to do, holding a piece of paper and considering different ways to wipe it off. He didn’t want to pay Wei WuXian any attention, but hearing the exaggerated tone, he thought that there might be an issue, “What?”

Wei WuXian, “Look at how one is on top of the other... Are they...?” Lan WangJi, “Both of these are male!”

Wei WuXian, “Male? How weird.” He lifted them by the ears, examined them, and confirmed, “They really are male. Well, then, I didn’t even finish my sentence. Why are you so stern? What were you thinking? Now that I think about it, I was the one who caught

them, and I didn't even notice whether they are male or female, but you even looked at their..."

Lan WangJi finally threw him down the Library Pavilion.

Wei WuXian laughed while in midair, "Hahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

With a bang, Lan WangJi slammed the window close, and stumbled back to the desk.

As he swept a look at the messy piles of rice paper and ink pawprints on the ground, as well as the two white rabbits which rolled around while dragging pieces of lettuce leaves, he closed his eyes and covered his ears.

The clusters of quivering magnolia branches were shut outside the window. Yet, no matter how hard he resisted, he couldn't shut out Wei WuXian's vibrant, unrestrained laughter.

On the second day, Lan WangJi finally stopped having classes with them.

Wei WuXian's seat changed three times. He originally sat beside Jiang Cheng, but Jiang Cheng paid attention to the lessons, and sat in the front row in order look good for the YunmengJiang Sect. This position was too conspicuous, allowing Wei WuXian no room to fool around, so he abandoned Jiang Cheng and sat behind Lan WangJi. When Lan QiRen was teaching in the front, Lan WangJi sat as straight as a wall made of iron. Behind him, Wei WuXian would either sleep like a log or draw scribbles as he pleased. Aside from Lan WangJi occasionally blocking the crumpled pieces of paper he threw toward other people; it was an excellent place to be at.

However, soon afterward, Lan QiRen became aware of this trick, so he switched their seats.

Ever

since then, whenever Wei WuXian's sitting posture became a bit tilted, he could feel a cold, sharp gaze staring at his back. Lan QiRen would also throw him a glowering look. It was extremely uncomfortable for him to be monitored by the old one and the young one all the time. Moreover, after the Pornography Case and the Rabbit Case, Lan QiRen was certain that Wei WuXian was a basin full of jet-black dye, and feared that his favorite pupil would be stained, which was why he hastened to tell Lan WangJi to stop going to lessons. And so, Wei WuXian sat back in his old spot, and half a month of peace followed.

Unfortunately, the good things never lasted long for someone like Wei WuXian.

In the Cloud Recesses, there was a long wall. Every seven steps, there would be a hollowed-out window with intricate designs. All of the designs were different—playing an instrument amid tall mountains, flying in the air on a sword, fighting monsters and beasts, and so on. Lan QiRen explained that the designs of every hollowed-out window on this wall was about the life of each ancestor of the GusuLan Sect. The oldest and most famous four windows told the life of the founder of the Lan Sect, Lan An.

This founder was born in a temple. He grew up listening to the chanting of sutras, and thus became a famous monk at a very young age. At the age of twenty, he used the "Lan" from "qielan" as his last name and resumed the worldly life, becoming a musician. During his path of cultivation, he met the "fated person" he searched for in Gusu, became cultivation partners with her, and founded the Lan Sect. After his partner passed away, he returned to the temple and ended his life there. The four windows were "qielan", "xiyue", "daolu", and "guiji".

During these past few days, the lessons seldomly involved a topic as interesting as this. Although Lan QiRen introduced it with boring timelines, Wei WuXian absorbed the knowledge for once. After class, he laughed, "So, the founder of the Lan Sect was a monk—no wonder! He ventured into the mortal world to meet one person, and, as she went, he went as well, leaving nothing behind on this Earth. But why would a person like him produce such unromantic descendants?"

Since nobody expected the Lan Sect, which was famous for being orthodox, to have such a founder, they started to chat among themselves. As they chatted, the center of the conversation tipped toward the direction of "cultivation partners", and they started to

discuss the cultivation partners of their dreams, evaluating the well-known girls in the different sects. At this point, someone asked, “ZiXuan-xiong, who do you think is the best girl?”

As Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng heard this, they both looked toward a boy in the front rows of the classroom.

The boy had proud, handsome features, with a vermilion mark on his forehead. His collar, cuffs, and sash belt all had the white peony named Sparks Amidst Snow sewn on. This was the young master sent to study in Gusu by the LanlingJin Sect—Jin ZiXuan.

Another person spoke, “It’s best for you to not ask ZiXuan-xiong about this. He’s already got a fiancee, so his answer would definitely be his fiancee.”

Hearing the word “fiancee”, Jin ZiXuan’s lips seemed to twitch, showing a slight expression of displeasure. The disciple who asked was quite oblivious, continuing with a cheerful face, “Really? Which sect is she from? She must be extremely talented!”

Jian ZiXuan raised a brow, “Forget it.”

Wei WuXian suddenly spoke, “What do you mean by ‘forget it’?”

Everyone in the room looked at him with surprise. Usually, Wei WuXian was always grinning. He had never really been angered, even when he was scolded or punished. Yet, at the moment, there was an obvious streak of hostility on his face. Jiang Cheng didn’t criticize Wei WuXian, either, for making trouble out of nothing, as he usually did. He simply sat beside him with a dark face.

Jin ZiXuan spoke in an arrogant tone, “Is the phrase ‘forget it’ too difficult to understand?”

Wei WuXian smiled sardonically, “The phrase isn’t hard to understand. Instead, it’s hard to understand how on Earth you are unsatisfied with my shijie.”

Everyone whispered to one another. They only understood, after the exchange of words, that they had accidentally stirred up a hornets’ nest—Jin ZiXuan’s fiancee just happened to be Jiang YanLi of the YunmengJiang Sect.

Jiang YanLi was the oldest child of Jiang FengMian and Jiang Cheng’s older sister. Her personality was mild, with nothing too notable; her voice was smooth, with nothing too memorable. Her appearance was only above average, and her talents weren’t astonishing either. Amid the girls from the other prominent clans, it was only natural that she seemed a bit average. On the other hand, her fiance, Jin ZiXuan, was the exact opposite. He was the only official son of Jin GuangShan, with outstanding looks and exceptional talents. According to common sense, with Jiang YanLi’s conditions, it was true that they weren’t well-matched with each other. She wasn’t even qualified enough to compete with the other girls. The only reason why Jiang YanLi was able to enter an engagement with Jin ZiXuan was because her mother was from the

MeishanYu Sect, and the MeishanYu Sect was quite friendly with the sect of which Jin ZiXuan’s mother was from. The two madams grew up together, and they had a close relationship.

The ways of the Jin Sect were proud, and Jin ZiXuan inherited every single drop of this. With his high standards, he had been unsatisfied with this engagement since a long time ago. He was not only unsatisfied with the candidate, but even more so with her mother taking the liberty to decide for him, making him grow more and more rebellious at heart. Today, he took the opportunity to break out. Jin ZiXuan asked in reply, “Why don’t you ask me how on Earth can I be satisfied with her?”

Jiang Cheng instantly stood up.

Pushing him to the side, Wei WuXian walked in front of him and sneered, “You sure think that you’re pretty satisfying, don’t you? Where did you get the guts to be all choosy here?”

Because of this engagement, Jin ZiXuan had no positive impressions of the YunmengJiang Sect, and had frowned upon Wei WuXian’s behavior since some time ago. On top of that, he boasted himself to be unrivaled among the juniors, without ever having been looked down

upon like this. All of the blood in his body rose to his head, and he blurted, “If she’s unsatisfied, then tell her to get rid of this engagement! In conclusion, I don’t care for your shijie. If you care for her, ask her father about it! Doesn’t he treat you better than treating his own child or something?”

Hearing the last sentence, Jiang Cheng’s eyes stiffened. With uncontrollable anger, Wei WuXian rushed over and sent out a punch. Although Jin ZiXuan was prepared, he didn’t expect Wei WuXian to attack so quickly, before he even finished his sentence. Having suffered one punch, half of his face numbed. He immediately struck back without speaking a word.

This fight startled both of the two prominent sects. On the same day, Jiang FengMian and Jin GuangShan hastened to Gusu from Yunmeng and Lanling.

After the two sect leaders went to see the two who were punished to kneel, and received a severe scolding from Lan QiRen, they wiped some sweat from their foreheads and started to engage in small talk. Jiang FengMian soon brought up the idea of cancelling the engagement.

He told Jin GuangShan, “A-Li’s mother was the one who insisted on having this engagement, in the first place, and I didn’t agree. Looking at it now, as neither of them are keen, it’s best if we don’t force it.”

Jin GuangShan was shocked. He felt a bit hesitant, as it was never a good thing to end an engagement with another prominent sect, no matter how one looked at it. He responded, “What

do the children know? They can play around however they want to. FengMian-xiong, you and I don’t need to pay them any attention.”

Jiang FengMian, “Jin-xiong, although we can set the engagement for them, we can’t carry out the marriage in place of them. After all, they are the ones who will be spending the rest of their lives together.”

This engagement had never been the intention of Jin GuangShan. If he wanted to strengthen his sect’s power by a marriage with another sect, the YunmengJiang Sect was neither the only choice nor the best choice. It was only that he had never dared to go against Madame Jin.

Anyhow, this was initially proposed by the Jiang Sect. Since the Jin Sect was the husband’s side, they didn’t have as many concerns as the wife’s side, so what was the point of worrying over it? Moreover, he knew that Jin ZiXuan had always been resentful toward Jiang YanLi’s status as his fiancée. After some consideration, Jin GuangShan conjured up the courage and agreed to this matter.

At this time, Wei WuXian still didn’t know what this fight broke up, as he knelt on the stone path that Lan QiRen assigned him to. From a distance, Jiang Cheng approached with a sneer on his face, “Look at how well-behaved you are, kneeling so properly.”

Wei WuXian was gloating, “Of course, I kneel all the time. But Jin ZiXuan is a spoiled brat, so he’s definitely never knelt before. If I don’t make him kneel to the point that he cries for his parents, my last name won’t be Wei anymore.”

Jiang Cheng lowered his head, pausing for a few moments, and spoke in a soft voice, “Father came.”

Wei WuXian, “Shijie didn’t come, did she?”

Jiang Cheng, “Why would she come? To see how you lost face for her? If she did come, would she not come to your side and bring you medicine?”

Wei WuXian sighed, “... It’d be nice if shijie came. It’s fortunate that you didn’t hit him.”

Jiang Cheng, “I was going to. If you didn’t push me, the other side of Jin ZiXuan’s face would also be ruined.”

Wei WuXian, “Nah. He looks uglier right now, with an asymmetrical face. I heard that he values his face a lot, like a peacock. I wonder what he’d think after he looked into a mirror!”

Hahahaha..." After rolling on the ground with laughter, Wei WuXian spoke again, "Actually, I should have let you hit him, and I should have watched on the side. This way, maybe Uncle Jiang wouldn't have come. But there was no choice. I couldn't help it!"

Jiang Cheng humphed lightly, "You wish."

Although it was only Wei WuXian's casual words, he held mixed feelings, because he knew that this wasn't a lie. Jiang FengMian had never hurried to another sect in one day for anything related him, no matter if the issue was good or bad, large or small. Never. As Wei WuXian saw his melancholy face, he thought that he was still annoyed at Jin ZiXuan's words, "You should go. You don't need to stay with me. If Lan WangJi comes again, you'd be caught by him. If you have time, go visit Jin ZiXuan and look at how idiotic he looks kneeling down." Jiang Cheng was somewhat surprised, "Lan WangJi? Why did he come? He still dared to come see you?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Yeah, I also thought that he should be praised for having the courage to come see me. He was probably told by his uncle to come check if I was kneeling properly."

Jiang Cheng instinctively felt a foreboding sensation, "Were you kneeling properly?"

Wei WuXian, "I was kneeling properly. After he was some distance away, I found a stick and started to dig in the dirt. The pile beside your foot. There's an ant hole there that I went through tons of trouble to find. When he turned his head, he saw that my shoulders were shaking, and he definitely thought that I was crying. He even came back to ask me. You really should have seen his expression as he saw the ant hole."

"..." Jiang Cheng spoke, "You should get lost and go back to Yunmeng as soon as possible! I don't think that he wants to see you ever again."

And so, on that night, Wei WuXian packed up his things and returned to Yunmeng with Jiang FengMian.

#### Translator's Notes

Picture books: These most likely refer to those books of erotic illustrations. As this has already appeared a few times in the story, it might be a good idea to check out what they actually look like. This is an example of a cut-sleeve illustration: <https://baike.baidu.com/pic/%E5%BC%A5%E5%AD%90%E7%91%95%E5%A4%B1%E5%A4%AE%AO/534323/0/55e736d12f2eb9383fc59255d7628535e4dd6fe9?fr=lemma&ct=single>.

Note: the Ancient Chinese people have a strange art style, so please click at your own risk.

XiChen-ge: This is the same as "xxx-xiong".

bleary eyes: The literal translation of this is "dead fish eyes". One famous example of this are the eyes of Captain Levi, from Attack on Titan.

hollowed out window: Hollowed out windows are made from carving out parts of the wall into designs. There is no glass because it's Ancient China.

qielan: This comes from the word for "temple" in Sanskrit. This has been left untranslated because the latter three (xiyue, daolu, and guiji) are also left untranslated.

cultivation partners: When two cultivators become a couple, marry, and cultivate together, they become cultivation partners. Some call this "cultivation buddies" because it sounds amusing.

xiyue: Learning music.

daolu: Becoming cultivation partners.

guiji: Returning to nothingness.

my last name won't be Wei anymore: In Chinese, it is a popular saying often said after betting on something. For example, "if that guy's not the criminal, my last name won't be Jia anymore", or "if I can't do this, my last name won't be Yi anymore".

## Chapter 19: Contentment—Part One

Wei WuXian lay on his stomach for the whole night. The first half of the night was spent thinking about what in the world had happened to Lan WangJi during these years, and he only

drifted off during the second half. When he opened his eyes the next morning, Lan WangJi had already disappeared into nowhere. On the other hand, he lay on the bed properly, with his arms placed on the sides of his body in a position that made him seem well-behaved.

Wei WuXian immediately took off the blanket that covered him. He dug the fingers of his right hand into his hair. The unexplainable feeling of absurdity and fright still couldn't be erased from his mind.

At this time, two knocks came from the jingshi's wooden door. Lan SiZhui's voice came from outside, "Young Master Mo? Have you waken?"

Wei WuXian, "Why are you calling me so early in the morning?!" Lan SiZhui, "E-early? ... But it is already nine."

Every one of the Lan Sect rose at five and slept at nine in a very systematic manner. Wei WuXian, on the other hand, rose at nine and slept at one in a similarly systematic manner, precisely four hours later than those the Lan Sect. Because he lay on his front for half of the night, his waist and back were both aching. He spoke in an honest tone, "I can't get up."

Lan SiZhui, "Uhm, what is wrong, this time?"

Wei WuXian, "What is wrong? I got done by your sect's HanGuang-Jun."

Lan JingYi's angry voice also appeared, "If you continue to speak nonsense like this, you will pay for it. Come out!"

Wei WuXian spoke as if he had been wronged, "Really! He did me for the whole night! I can't go out. I don't have the face to see anyone."

A few juniors stared at each other dumbfoundedly outside the door. People couldn't go into HanGuang-Jun's place without permission, so they couldn't just go inside and drag him out. Lan JingYi raged, "You have no shame at all! HanGuang-Jun is not a cut sleeve. He, did you?! I would be more than grateful if you tell me that you did not do him. Get up! Take away that donkey of yours and train it properly. It makes so much noise!"

Hearing his method of transportation being mentioned, Wei WuXian quickly climbed up, "What did you do to my Lil' Apple?! Don't touch it. It's gonna kick you."

Lan JingYi asked, "What is Lil'Apple?"

Wei WuXian, "My donkey!" Exiting the jingshi, he shooed the juniors to take him to his mount. He was led to a field of grass. The donkey was there, crying nonstop and making a lot of noise. The cries were because it wanted to eat grass, but a few dozens of rounds, white pompons gathered on the field, making it so that it couldn't eat.

Wei WuXian was delighted, "So many rabbits! Here, here, let's put them on a stick and start roasting!"

Lan JingYi fumed with anger, "Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses! Make it shut up, right now. The disciples doing early readings have already come to ask a few times! If this keeps up, we will be scolded to death!"

Wei WuXian fed it the apple that was given to him for breakfast. As he expected, the donkey stopped making noise as it chewed on the apple, crunching its teeth together. Wei WuXian stroked the back of its neck as he thought about the passage tokens on these juniors and pointed at the round rabbits all over the ground, "I really can't roast them? If I roast them, would I be chased off the mountain?"

Appearing as if he faced an imminent threat, Lan JingYi hastened to block in front of Wei WuXian with his arms stretched wide, “These are HanGuang-Jun’s. We just occasionally help him look after them. You cannot dare to roast them!”

As Wei WuXian heard this, he laughed so hard that he almost fell on the ground. He thought, what an interesting person Lan Zhan is! In the past, he didn’t even accept them when I gave them out for free, but now, he secretly raised a whole bunch. And he said he didn’t want them. Who was he kidding? Oh please, I bet he actually likes this sort of white, fuzzy things.

HanGuang-Jun, holding a rabbit while keeping up a straight face. My gosh, I’m gonna die... However, as he thought of the situation of him lying on top of Lan WangJi last night, his laughter stopped abruptly.

Suddenly, rings of the bell came from the western side of the Cloud Recesses.

These rings were completely different from the ones that told the time. They were hurried and violent, as if a madman was striking it. With a sudden change in their faces, Lan JingYi and Lan SiZhui both stopped joking around with him, dashing toward the bell at once. Wei WuXian knew that something was wrong and quickly followed.

The sound came from a watchtower.

The watchtower was called the “mingshi”. It was the building the Lan Sect used to summon spirits, with walls made from a special material and incantations carved on them. When the bell of the watchtower started to ring on its own, it only meant one thing—that an accident happened to the people performing the summoning ritual inside.

Outside of the watchtower, more and more of the Lan Sect’s disciples started to crowd around, but nobody dared to go in without careful consideration. The door of the mingshi was black and made of wood. It was tightly locked, only able to be opened from inside. It was not only difficult to violently destroy it from the outside, but it was also forbidden to do so. It was extremely scary for an accident to happen during the spirit summoning ritual, since nobody would know what being it would summon or what would happen if someone broke in. And, ever since the mingshi was built, there were almost no cases where the summoning failed. This made everyone more worried.

Seeing that Lan WangJi didn’t appear, Wei WuXian had a foreboding feeling. If Lan WangJi was still in the Cloud Recesses, he would have hurried over immediately, as he heard the alarming chimes of the bell, unless... Suddenly, the black door bursted open with a bang. A white-clothed disciple rushed outside, staggering and stumbling.

As his legs weren’t steady, he rolled down the stairs as soon as he came out. The door of the mingshi instantly closed again, as if someone angrily slammed it shut.

In confusion, the bystanders quickly helped the disciple up. After he stood up, he immediately fell down again, his face covered in tears beyond his control. He held onto the people around him, “We should have... shouldn’t have summoned...”

Wei WuXian grabbed his hand at once, speaking in a low voice, “Which being’s spirit are you summoning? Who else is inside? Where’s HanGuang-Jun?!?”

It seemed as if the disciple had trouble breathing, “HanGuang-Jun told me to run away...”

Before he finished his sentence, dark-red blood gushed out of his nose and mouth. Wei WuXian pushed him into Lan SiZhui’s arms. With the hastily created bamboo flute still by his waist, he went up the stairs in just a few strides. He kicked the mingshi’s door and commanded, “Open!”

The mingshi’s door opened abruptly, as if it was laughing wildly with a gaping mouth. Wei WuXian entered in a flash, and the door closed right behind him. A few disciples followed him in shock, but the door couldn’t be opened again, no matter what. A guest disciple rushed at the door, shock and anger on his face, and blurted out, “Who on Earth was that person?!?”

Lan SiZhui held the earlier disciple up and spoke through clenched teeth, "... Come help me first. His qiqiao are bleeding!"

As soon as he entered the mingshi, Wei WuXian felt a dark energy coming over him.

The dark energy seemed like a combination of the energies of resentment, anger, and arrogance, almost visible to the human eye. Surrounded by it, one's chest would feel a constricted sense of pain. The inside of the mingshi was about ten meters in both length and width. By its corners, a few people lay motionless on the ground. The object of this summoning was set in the center of the array on the ground.

It was nothing else but an arm—the one taken back from Mo Village!

It stood on the ground, as straight as a stick, with the side where it was cut off on the bottom. Four of its fingers were clenched into a fist, yet its index finger pointed toward the sky, as if it was angrily pointing at someone. The steady flow of dark energy that filled the mingshi was emitted by this.

Everyone participating in this spirit summoning ritual had either ran away or passed out. Lan WangJi was the only one still seated properly, at the main position on the east side. A guqin lay on his side. Although his hand wasn't on the strings, they continued to vibrate on their own. He appeared to be lost in thought or listening to something, only raising his head as he sensed that someone came in.

Since Lan WangJi's face was always placid, Wei WuXian had no idea what he was thinking about. Lan QiRen, who was originally responsible for one section of the mingshi, now lay collapsed and unconscious on the side, his qiqiao bleeding like the disciple who escaped the mingshi. Wei WuXian replaced into his position, turning around and stepping toward the far west, directly across of Lan WangJi. He pulled the bamboo flute from beside his waist, and lifted it to his lips.

During the night at Mo Village, Wei WuXian first used the whistling sound to distract it, then Lan WangJi attacked it from afar with notes of the zither. They only suppressed the arm while unintentionally collaborating like this. Lan WangJi met his gaze, a look of understanding on his face. As he raised his right hand, a melody poured out from the guqin. Wei WuXian quickly joined with the flute.

The song that they played was named "Evocation". It used the corpse, part of the corpse, or loved objected of a deceased person as a medium for the spirit to follow the melody. Usually, only one section was needed for the spirit to appear within the array. Yet, the song had almost ended, but there was no spirit being summoned.

The arm seemed as if it was angered, with veins twitching visibly. The sense of suppression in the air felt heavier. If someone else was guarding the west side, they would have fallen long ago and ended up in the same way as Lan QiRen with their qiqiao bleeding. Wei WuXian was secretly shocked. It was almost impossible that the spirit couldn't be summoned with Lan WangJi and him playing "Evocation" together, unless... Unless the dead person's soul was cut apart alongside with his corpse!

It appeared that this good fellow's death was a bit worse than his. Although his corpse was chomped into more pieces, at least his soul was complete.

Since "Evocation" didn't work, Lan WangJi's fingers shifted, and started playing another tune.

This song had a calm melody, different than the sinister, questioning one from before. Its name was "Rest". Because both of these songs were quite well-known in the cultivation world, it wouldn't be strange for anyone to know how to play them, and Wei WuXian naturally followed him.

The YiLing Patriarch's ghost flute, "Chenqing", was known far and wide. Yet, right now, with his bamboo flute, he purposely played it with many mistakes and short breaths of air, to a point where it was heartbreaking to hear. Lan WangJi had probably never played with someone with such terrible skills before. After a while, he finally couldn't bear to continue

as if nothing was wrong any longer, and raised his head to look at Wei WuXian with an expressionless face.

Wei WuXian thickened his face, pretending that he didn't see anything, his tune venturing even more off. As he turned around to continue playing, something strange happened behind him. He turned around to look, and was shocked as he saw it. Lan QiRen, who had lost consciousness, actually sat upright again. He pointed at Wei WuXian with a trembling hand, his face covered in blood and rage, and shouted in a hoarse voice, "Stop playing! Get out! Get out now! Stop..."

Before he even finished saying what to stop doing, he spat out a mouthful of blood, and fell down in the same place, sinking into the deep coma yet again.

Lan WangJi, "..." Wei WuXian gaped.

He knew what followed Lan QiRen's "stop"— Stop playing! Stop duetting! Stop tainting his favorite disciple WangJi's guqin notes!

Their guqin and flute duet actually angered Lan QiRen so much that he woke up and fainted again. This showed how horrible it sounded...

Yet, even so, the hand still drooped gradually, under the combined forces of the guqin and the flute. Wei WuXian thought shamelessly, although it sounds bad, it doesn't matter as long as it works.

Instantly, after the last echo of the guqin, the doors of the mingshi sprang open, pouring in a flood of sunlight. It was likely that the alarms of the watchtower stopped ringing. All of the disciples who surrounded the mingshi rushed inside, their voices calling "HanGuang-Jun".

Lan WangJi pressed his hand on the guqin, suppressing the residual sound of the strings' vibration, and walked over to Lan QiRen to check his pulse. With him leading, the rest of the people soon calmed down. The older seniors laid the bodies of the bleeding few flat on the ground and started to treat them. As they used needles and medicine, another group of disciples carried a large bell over, intending to cage the arm inside. Although it was a bustling scene, everything unfolded in an orderly fashion. Everyone whispered softly, with nobody making loud noises.

A few people worried, "HanGuang-Jun, neither elixirs nor acupuncture work. What should we do?"

With three fingers still set on Lan QiRen's wrist, Lan WangJi remained silent. Lan QiRen had directed at least eight hundred, if not a thousand, spirit summoning ceremonies before. Of those, a lot included fierce spirits. Seeing even he was harmed by the energy of resentment; it was clear that the amount of resentful energy within this ghost hand was unprecedentedly strong.

Wei WuXian stuck the bamboo flute back beside his waist. He squatted down beside the bronze bell and gently stroked the inscriptions on it. As he was thinking, he suddenly saw a downcast expression on Lan SiZhui's face, "What's wrong?"

Lan SiZhui already knew that he wasn't an ordinary person. After hesitation, he spoke in a low voice, "It is just that I feel slightly guilty."

Wei WuXian asked, "Guilty for what?"

Lan SiZhui, "This hand was coming for us." Wei WuXian smiled, "How do you know?"

Lan SiZhui, "Spirit-attraction flags of different levels are drawn in different ways and have different amounts of power. The spirit-attraction flags we drew at Mo Village had a range of only twenty-five hundred meters in circumference. Yet, this ghost hand has a strong killing intent, feeding on human flesh and bone. If it had been within that range in the beginning, with its level of malice, Mo Village would have been a river of blood since long ago. However, it appeared after we arrived... This means that it must have been set there purposely at that time, by someone with ill intentions."

Wei WuXian responded, "Your academics are quite strong. That was a great analyzation."

Lan SiZhui lowered his head, “If so, for the lives lost at Mo Village, we should... we should also be responsible. And, now, we also involved Lan QiRen and the others in this matter...” After a while of silence, Wei WuXian patted his shoulder, “The one responsible shouldn’t be you guys, but the person who sent out the ghost hand. In this world, there are some things impossible for one to control.”

On the other side, Lan WangJi removed his hand. The people of the Lan Sect hurried to ask, “HanGuang-Jun, how is it?”

Lan WangJi replied, “Trace to its source.”

Wei WuXian, “That’s right. If we trace to its source, find the full corpse of this ghost hand, understand who he really is, then there’d naturally be a way to save them.”

Although Lan JingYi already knew that he definitely wasn’t a lunatic, he still couldn’t help but to speak in a criticizing tone, “You make it sound so simple. The spirit-summoning did not work, and it became this big of a mess. How can we possibly find it?”

Lan WangJi stated, “The northwest.”

Lan SiZhui wondered, “The northwest? HanGuang-Jun, why is it the northwest?” Wei WuXian, “Hasn’t it already been shown to you guys?”

Lan JingYi was puzzled, “Shown to me? Who? Who showed it? HanGuang-Jun did not.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “It.”

The people suddenly realized that what he was pointing at was the ghost hand!

The arm steadily pointed at one direction. As someone changed its position, it stubbornly turned back around, back to where it originally faced. Nobody had ever seen a situation like this before, and all were shocked. Lan JingYi stammered, “It? What... What is it pointing towards?!”

Wei WuXian replied, “What else can it be pointing towards? It’s either the other parts of its corpse, or the murderer who made him this way.”

Hearing this, a few boys who stood in the northwestern direction quickly shuffled aside. Giving him a look, Lan WangJi slowly rose, speaking to the disciples, “Care for Uncle properly.”

The few nodded, “Okay! Are you going to travel down the mountain?”

Lan WangJi gave a slight nod. Wei WuXian had already stealthily shifted behind him, talking to himself in a loud, cheerful way, “Yes, yes, yes, we can finally get off this mountain and elope together!”

Everyone looked as if they couldn’t bear to watch the scene any longer. The expressions of the older disciples were especially scary, but a few of the boys were already used to it. Lan QiRen’s face seemed to twitch again, as he lay unconscious on the ground. The disciples thought, if he spoke a few more sentences, maybe Mr. Lan would be angered awake again...

## Translator’s Notes

Mingshi: This literally translates into “the room of darkness/evil”.

Qiqiao: Qiqiao refers to the seven openings of one’s head, basically eyes, nose, ears, and mouth.

needles: In traditional Chinese medicine, needles and acupuncture are often used to cure sicknesses.

## Chapter 20: Contentment—Part Two

When cultivators from prominent clans went out on night-hunts, there were usually crowds of people who surrounded around them, appearing similar to a parade. Yet, Lan WangJi had always preferred being alone. This arm was quite strange, and could possibly harm other people if it wasn't handled with caution. Therefore, he didn't bring any other disciples of his sect, and took only Wei WuXian, watching him as close as he could.

Wei WuXian originally wanted to sneak away during their expedition off the mountain. However, even though he attempted to run away multiple times, it always ended with Lan WangJi carrying him back with one hand holding the back of his collar. He changed his strategy, sticking to Lan WangJi as hard as he could. At night, especially, he would persistently climb into Lan WangJi's bed, with the intention that Lan WangJi would become disgusted and use his sword to throw him away. Despite this, no matter how hard he messed around, Lan WangJi steadily stood his ground. Whenever Wei WuXian wriggled into his blankets, he would use a light slap to make Wei WuXian's body rigid, and then stuff him into the other set of blankets in a proper position, where he would remain until daylight broke. Wei WuXian suffered a ton of losses and complaint about his sore body after he woke up. He couldn't help but thought, now that he grew up, he also became less fun than before. In the past, he would become shy whenever he was teased, not to mention that he did it in quite an amusing way. But now, not only does he remain unmoving no matter what, he even learned how to counterattack. How can this be?!

Following the left hand's direction, the two went toward the northwest. They duetted Rest every single day, in order to temporarily calm its anger and killing intent. As the travelled near Qinghe, the posture that the arm maintained to show them the way suddenly changed. Its index finger curled back, and it formed a fist.

This meant that what the hand pointed at was just around the area.

They inquired into the matter as they travelled, and arrived at a small city in Qinghe. It was daytime. The streets were crowded with people hurrying to and fro. Wei WuXian was trotting behind Lan WangJi when, suddenly, he was overwhelmed by the pungent fragrance of cosmetics.

As he became used to the mild scent of sandalwood on Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian instantly cringed at the odour. He blurted out, "What are you selling? How does it smell like this?"

The fragrance came from a charlatan, who wore the robes of a cultivator and had the word "deceiving" plastered all over his face. He carried a chest, selling a few items to passerbys.

Seeing that someone asked, he beamed, "I sell everything! The rouge and powder here are both cheap and fine. Young Master, take a look?"

Wei WuXian, "Sure, I'll take a look." The charlatan spoke, "For your wife?"

Wei WuXian gave him a grin, "For myself."

"..." The charlatan's smile froze, thinking to himself, are you joking with me?

Before he lost his temper, another young man turned around and came over. He spoke with an emotionless face, "Do not bother others if you are not going to buy it."

This man was extremely handsome, his robes and forehead ribbon whiter than snow. His eyes were light-coloured and he had a long sword hung by his waist. As the charlatan was a fake cultivator, he knew a few things about the cultivation world. Having recognized the Lan Sect's sect motif, he didn't dare to cause trouble, and ran away carrying his chest. Wei WuXian called after him, "What are you running away for? I really wanted to buy it!"

Lan WangJi spoke, "Do you have the money?"

Wei WuXian replied, "If I don't, you can give me money." As he spoke, he extended his hand to search. He didn't expect to actually find anything, but after a few moments, he did find a delicate, heavy pouch with money in it.

This didn't seem like something Lan WangJi would carry around at all. Then again, during these past few days, Lan WangJi did quite a lot of things that he could never have imagined. Wei WuXian didn't even find it strange anymore and took the pouch at once. As he had expected, he could take anything from Lan WangJi if he wanted to, without the other becoming dissatisfied at all. If it wasn't that he had a tiny bit of knowledge about Lan WangJi's personal integrity and how good HanGuang-Jun's reputation was, he almost doubted that Lan WangJi and Mo XuanYu had been involved in some helpless, chaotic entanglement of a relationship.

Or else, why would Lan WangJi be able to endure it, after him going to such great lengths already?!

After walking for some distance, Wei WuXian unintentionally turned around and looked. Lan WangJi was behind him, still standing at the same place, staring toward his direction. Wei WuXian couldn't help but slowed his footsteps.

He didn't know why, but he vaguely felt that maybe he shouldn't walk so fast, leaving Lan WangJi behind like this.

At this point, someone on the side shouted, "The YiLing Patriarch, five coins for one, ten coins for three!"

Wei WuXian, "Who?!"

He hurried over to look at who was selling him, only to see that it was the fake cultivator. He packed away the low-grade rouge and powder, and now held a stack of paper that had someone even more malicious-looking than door-gods drawn on them. He chattered, "Five coins for one, ten coins for three—such a low price wouldn't cost you anything! I recommend three. One for the door, one for the hall, and stick the last on your bedroom wall. With the strong, dense evil energy, it uses poison to cure poison, making sure that no evil beings can come near you!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "That's some shameless boasting! If it's really that effective, would you still be selling one for five coins?!"

The charlatan replied, "Why is it you again? If you're gonna buy it, then buy it; if you're not gonna buy it, go away. If you want to spend fifty coins on each of these, that's fine with me."

Wei WuXian flipped through the stack of "The YiLing Patriarch's Evil-Suppressing Portraits". He really couldn't accept that the scary-faced, hunky man was himself.

He tried to argue with facts, "Wei WuXian was a man famous for his good looks. What is this that you've drawn?! If you haven't seen the actual person, then don't draw anything. You're gonna mislead the younger generation."

As the charlatan was about to reply, Wei WuXian suddenly felt a gust of wind from behind. He dodged to the side.

Although he avoided the attack, the charlatan was thrown off, crashing into a pinwheel stand beside the street. Some people helped him up, while others gathered the fallen items—the scene was a jumble. The charlatan wanted to curse, but as he saw that the person who kicked him was a young master that sparkled all over, appearing to be either rich or royalty, his imposing attitude immediately dropped. Looking again, he saw that the white peony Sparks Amidst Snow was sewn in front of his chest, and he was deflated at once. Despite this, he couldn't take receiving such a kick without any reason, so he asked feebly, "Why did you kick me?"

The young master just happened to be Jin Ling. Crossing his arms, he spoke coldly, "Kick you? Anyone who dares to mention the words "Wei WuXian" in front of me should be kneeling in gratitude if I don't kill them. Yet, you're shouting right in the middle of the streets. Do you want to die?!"

Wei WuXian didn't expect Jin Ling to appear here at all, much less how arrogant he behaved, thinking to himself, I wonder how did this child's personality turn it this way,

with a poor temper and strong hostility. He learned all of his uncle and father's faults, but none of his mother's

strengths. If I don't do some tinkering with him, he'd definitely suffer great losses in the future. Seeing that Jin Ling seemed as if he was still angered and walked a few more steps toward the man on the ground, Wei WuXian interrupted, "Jin Ling!"

The charlatan didn't dare to make a sound, but his eyes were full of appreciation. Jin Ling turned to Wei WuXian, his words overflowing with contempt, "You still haven't run away yet? Well, you may as well stay."

Wei WuXian laughed, "Huh. Who was it again that was forced down onto the ground, unable to get up?"

Jin Ling sneered and blew a short whistle. Wei WuXian didn't understand the reason behind it, but, after a while, the heavy huffs and puffs of some sort of beast came from afar. As he turned around to look, a black-haired spiritual dog of waist height went out of a corner, dashing straight at him. The cries of fear on the street came closer and closer, louder and louder, "A mad dog's on the loose!"

With an immediate change in his face, Wei WuXian fled as fast as he could.

It had always been hard for him to bring it up, but, although the YiLing Patriarch was known for being ever-so invincible, he'd become a coward whenever he faced a dog. This couldn't be helped, though. When he was still young, before Jiang FengMian had brought him home, he grew up on the streets, often having to fight for food with vicious dogs. After several bites and chases, he gradually became extremely scared of all dogs, no matter the size. Jiang Cheng laughed at him because of this quite a lot of times. If he told others this, it would not only be shameful, but also believed by only a few people, which was why practically nobody knew of it. Wei WuXian almost died from the fright. As he saw a tall, white figure, he quickly shouted at the top of his lungs, "Lan Zhan, save me!"

Finding Lan WangJi after chasing this far, Jin Ling was shocked, why would this lunatic show up alongside him again?! Lan WangJi had a serious personality and never chattered or joked. Even a few disciples of the same generation as him feel nervous when they see him, much less these juniors. His level of intimidation was even worse than Lan QiRen's, back in those days. The dog underwent harsh training. Being different from the average dog, it was quite intelligent. As if it also knew that it couldn't behave rudely in front of this person, it howled a few times, then hid behind Jin Ling with its tail between its legs.

This black-haired spiritual dog was a rare species given to Jin Ling by Jin GuangYao. When most people heard that it was a present from LianFang-Zun, they didn't dare to offend him. However, Lan WangJi was different from most people. He didn't care for who gave it or who owned it, disciplining them all in the same strict way. As Jin Ling was using his dog to chase Wei WuXian down the streets and happened to be caught by Lan WangJi, his heart sank, It's all over. He'd definitely kill the spiritual dog that I took such lengths to train, and then give me a harsh beating!

Yet, Wei WuXian ducked under Lan WangJi's arm and went behind him, seeming as if he wanted to climb up like climbing a pole. Feeling a pair of arms clasp around him, Lan WangJi froze for an instant. Taking this opportunity, Jin Ling blew two more whistles, and ran off with his black-haired spiritual dog.

The charlatan on the side struggled to get up, still in a state of shock, "The moral degeneration of the world is getting worse day by day. How terrifying are the disciples from prominent clans these days! How terrifying!"

As Wei WuXian heard the barks gradually leave, he finally came out from behind Lan WangJi. He put his hands behind him and agreed as if nothing happened, "That's right, it's getting worse day by day. Men are not what they were in the past."

The charlatan looked at him as if he was looking at his saviour, and hurriedly tossed the stack of "The YiLing Patriarch's Evil-Suppressing Portraits" into Wei WuXian's hands like it

was a hot potato, “Brother, thank you so much for what happened earlier! This is a gift for you. If you cut the price and sell one for three coins, you’d still end up earning at least three hundred.”

Lan WangJi took a look at the scary-faced hunk in the portrait and did not comment. Wei WuXian, seeing that his price became lower and lower, didn’t know whether to frown or laugh, “This is to thank me? If you really want to thank me, you can draw him in a prettier way! ...Stop, don’t go yet. There’s something I want to ask you. Doing your business here, have you ever heard of any strange events? Or seen any odd things?”

The charlatan replied, “Strange events? Good thing that you asked me. I stay here most of the year, known as the know-it-all of Qinghe. What sort of strange events are you looking for?”

Wei WuXian, “For example, evil spirits haunting around, cases of dismembered corpses, incidents in which whole clans were destroyed...”

The charlatan, “There’s isn’t any here, but if you go a bit less than two miles ahead, there’s a mountain ridge named Xinglu Ridge. I suggest you don’t go there.”

Wei WuXian asked, “Why is that?”

The charlatan, “The Xinglu Ridge is also called the Man-Eating Ridge. Why do you think that is?”

#### Translator’s Notes

Door-gods: These are a type of god that is supposedly able to protect households. On the lunar new year, people often put up their portraits on their doors to fend off evil spirits.

Spiritual dog: A spiritual dog is a dog which had been trained to gain near-human intelligence.

## Chapter 21: Contentment—Part Three

Wei WuXian replied, “Huh, so there’s an evil being that eats humans there?”

Having heard of at least thousands of legends like this and killed at least hundreds of them with his own hands, he found it somewhat boring. The charlatan continued, his voice rising and falling, “That’s right! It is said that, in the ridge’s forest, there is a ‘man-eating castle’ with monsters that feed on the humans living inside it. The monsters will devour anyone who ventures inside it without leaving a single crumb behind. No corpses could be found—there wasn’t a single exception! It’s scary, isn’t it?”

No wonder that Jin Ling also came here. Unable to suppress the soul-consuming goddess at Dafan Mountain, he definitely came for the monster in the Xinglu Ridge again. Wei WuXian exclaimed, “Scary indeed! But, if nothing was left behind, and no corpses could be found, how can it be known that they were eaten?”

After a pause, the charlatan answered, “Of course someone saw it.”

Wei WuXian expressed his admiration, “But, before this, didn’t you say that anyone who ventures inside it would be devoured without any crumbs being left behind, no exception? Then, who on Earth could have started this legend? How powerful would they have to be, having lived to tell the tale after seeing this kind of scene?”

“...” The charlatan, “That’s how the legend goes. How would I know?”

Wei WuXian, “Then, do you know how many people were eaten in the Xinglu Ridge? When were they eaten? Their ages? Their gender? What their names were? Where they lived?”

The charlatan, “I don’t know.”

Wei WuXian, “Qinghe’s know-it-all? Huh?”

The charlatan picked up his basket in a fury, “The legends didn’t have this kind of information!”

Wei WuXian laughed, “No, no, don’t go yet. Let me ask you something else. Is the Xinglu Ridge a part of the Qinghe region? Isn’t Qinghe the Nie Sect’s area? If there really are monsters roaming around Xinglu Ridge, why are they ignoring it?”

To his surprise, this time, the charlatan didn’t answer “I don’t know” again. Instead, a smudge of disdain appeared on his face, “The Nie Sect? If it were the Nie Sect from back then, it definitely wouldn’t be ignored. Before the second day of the legend’s appearance, the Nie Sect would have raided where the monsters roamed at once, in the most resolute way possible. But, isn’t the sect leader of the Nie Sect now, heh, that ‘head shaker’?”

The leader of the QingheNie Sect used to be ChiFeng-Zun, Nie MingJue. After his father, the last sect leader, was outraged to death by the leader of the QishanWen Sect, Wen RuoHan, he took over the Nie Sect before he even reached twenty, doing everything in a direct, forceful fashion. He was also sworn brothers with ZeWu-Jun, Lan XiChen, and LianFang-Zun, Jin GuangYao. After the Sunshot Campaign, the Nie Sect was quite powerful with him in the lead, its influence almost reaching that of the LanlingJin Sect’s. But, after a qi deviation, he died in front of the public’s eyes, and so, the next person in line for the sect leader position must have been his younger brother, Nie HuaiSang. Wei WuXian inquired, “Why is he called the ‘head shaker’?”

The charlatan, “Don’t you know the story behind it? No matter what other people ask Sect Leader Nie, if he doesn’t know it, he won’t say anything; if he does know it, he’s too scared to say anything. If you ask too harshly and force him, he’d shake his head again and again, saying as he cries, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know, I really don’t know!’ He’d then beg the other to let him go. Isn’t it obvious why he’s called the ‘head shaker’?”

In the past, Wei WuXian and Nie HuaiSang studied together, so there were a few things he could comment about this person. Nie HuaiSang wasn’t an unkind person. It wasn’t that he was not clever, but that his heart was set somewhere else and used his smarts on other

areas, such as painting on fans, searching for birds, skipping classes, and catching fish. Because his talent in terms of cultivation really was poor, he formed his core around eight or nine years later than the other disciples of the same generation as him. When he lived, Nie MingJue was often exasperated by the fact that his brother didn't meet his expectations, so he disciplined him strictly. Despite this, he still didn't improve much. Now, without his older brother protecting and supervising him, under his lead, the QingheNie Sect declined day by day. After he grew up, especially after he became the sect leader, he was often troubled by all kinds of affairs unfamiliar to him and looked for helpers everywhere, mainly his brother's two sworn brothers. One day he'd go to Jinling Tower to complain to Jin GuangYao, and the next day he'd go to the Cloud Recesses to whine to Lan XiChen. With the two leaders of the Jin and Lan Sects supporting him, he still barely managed to settle on the sect leader position. Nowadays, whenever people mentioned Nie HuaiSang, although they didn't say anything on the surface, the same phrase was written on their faces—good-for-nothing.

Remembering the things that happened in the past, he couldn't help but to sigh at it. After Wei WuXian finished asking about the Xinglu Ridge, he still helped the charlatan's business by buying two compacts of rouge. He tucked them into his clothes and walked back to Lan WangJi. The latter still didn't appear to have any intention of asking for the pouch back. In silence, they walked toward the direction that the charlatan pointed at together.

There was a large cedarwood forest on the Xinglu Ridge, with a wide trail amid the shade of the trees. After a while of walking, they didn't meet anything out of the usual. Regardless, in the beginning, they didn't hold high hopes anyway, and only came here just in case. If a frightening legend of any area was true, then there would definitely be detailed information. At Dafan Mountain, where the soul-consuming goddess haunted, it was easy to find out where the victims lived and what their names were—even the nickname of A-Yan's fiance. But, if the charlatan was unsure of the names and details of the victims, it was most likely a case of exaggerated hearsay.

After a bit less than an hour, they finally met a setback. From ahead came seven or eight figures, staggering toward them. Their eyes were white and they wore ragged clothing, appearing as if even a light breeze would be enough to blow them over. With their extremely slow speed, it was easy to see that they were a group of walking corpses of the lowest level possible.

Not only were these types of corpses bullied among their peers, if they met a slightly strong human, one could kick over a row of them; if they met a slightly fast child, they would soon be outrun by a few blocks. Even if the victim was extraordinarily unlucky and had a few gulps of yang energy sucked out of them, they wouldn't die from it anyway. Aside from how awful the corpses looked and smelled; they weren't threatening at all. And thus, if they appeared during a night-hunt, most of the elders simply ignored them and left them for the juniors. This followed the same logic as hunting tigers and panthers instead of rats.

Seeing them walk over, Wei WuXian knew that something was going to go wrong, and ducked back behind Lan WangJi again. As he had expected, when these walking corpses wobbled to about twenty meters ahead of them, as they saw Wei WuXian, they were so terrified that they immediately turned around to retreat, their speed two or three times faster than when they came over. Wei WuXian rubbed his temples, turned around, and spoke in a fearful voice, "Wow, HanGuang-Jun, you're so cool! They were so scared when they saw you that they ran away at once! Haha."

Lan WangJi was speechless.

Wei WuXian pushed him while laughing, "Let's go, let's go. Let's get off this ridge. I don't think that there are any other monsters. The people here are so gossipy that a few useless

walking corpses became ruthless monsters in their mouths. Things like the ‘man-eating castle’ must have been fabricated as well. Such a waste of efforts, don’t you think?”

Lan WangJi only started walking after a few more pushes from him. Before Wei WuXian caught up, a series of wild barks suddenly came from far away in the cedarwood forest.

Wei WuXian’s face changed instantly. He shifted behind Lan WangJi in lightning speed and squatted into a ball, arms hugging the other’s waist.

Lan WangJi, “... It is still far away. What are you hiding for?”

Wei WuXian, “I-I-I-I-I-I’m gonna hide first then see. Where is it? Where is it?!”

Lan WangJi listened intently for a moment, and responded, “It is Jin Ling’s black-haired spiritual dog.”

Hearing Jin Ling’s name, Wei WuXian stood up at once, but squatted back down after hearing a few more barks. Lan WangJi continued, “If a spiritual dog is barking in such a way, something must have happened.”

Wei WuXian groaned a few times, then stood up with effort, his legs still trembling, “Th-th-th-th-th-then let’s go and see!”

Lan WangJi didn’t move at all. Wei WuXian cried, “HanGuang-Jun, why don’t you move? Move! If you don’t move, what do I do?!”

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi replied, “First... let go.”

The two pushed and staggered. Although they followed the barks of the dog, they only circled two times around the cedarwood forest. The spiritual dog’s barks also appeared sometimes near, sometimes far. Having listened to a long while of barking, Wei WuXian finally grew somewhat used to it, at least ceasing to stammer as he spoke, “There’s a maze array here?”

This maze array was definitely created by a person. A while ago, he said that the legends of the ridge were all hearsay, but, now, things were getting interesting.

After about fifteen minutes of barking, the black-haired spiritual dog still wasn’t tired out. The two followed the sound after they found the method to exit the maze array. Not long afterward, the silhouettes of creepy, stone castles appeared amid the cedarwood forest.

The castles were made of greyish-white stones, its surface covered in green vines and fallen leaves. Every one of them was made into strange semi-spheres, appearing as if a few large bowls were turned over on the ground.

Who would have known that there really were such stone castles inside the Xinglu Ridge? It seemed that the legends didn’t appear out of thin air after all. However, it’d be hard to say whether or not this was a “man-eating castle”, and what beings were inside of it.

Jin Ling’s black-haired spiritual dog was outside of the cluster of stone castles. It ran around them, sometimes grunting in a low voice and sometimes barking wildly. Seeing that Lan WangJi approached, it backed off slightly out of fear, but, instead of running away, it barked even louder at them. It then looked toward the stone castles, its front paws restlessly digging into the ground. Wei WuXian hid behind Lan WangJi and spoke in a pained voice, “Why is it still not going away...? Where’s its owner? Why is its owner gone?!” From upon hearing the barks until now, they hadn’t heard anything coming from Jin Ling at all, not even cries for help. This black-haired spiritual dog must have been brought here by him, and it must have been the one who broke the maze array as well. Yet, it seemed as if a living person just disappeared like that.

Lan WangJi spoke, “Let us go inside to see.” Wei WuXian, “How? There’s no door.”

There really wasn’t a door. The grey-white stones were stuck tightly together, without any space for doors or windows. The dog yelped as it leaped. It seemed as if it wanted to bite the corner of Lan WangJi’s robes, but didn’t dare to, so it went around him to bite Wei WuXian’s clothes instead, tugging him in a certain direction.

Wei WuXian’s soul almost flew out of him. He extended his arms toward Lan WangJi, “Lan Zhan... Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan... Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!!!”

The dog dragged Wei WuXian, and Wei WuXian dragged Lan WangJi. The dog lead them halfway around, to the back of the stone castle. To his surprise, there was an entrance about a person's height in the wall. The shape was uneven, and there were fragmented pieces of rocks on the ground, which meant that it had just been violently blasted open with the use of a magical tool. The inside of the entrance was too dark for anything to be seen, aside from a red light that faintly shone. The dog loosened its teeth. It made another series of barks toward the inside, and madly wagged its tail at the two of them.

It was clear that Jin Ling must have broken open the stone castle by force, but something happened to him after he entered.

Bichen unsheathed on its own by an inch. The blade of the sword emitted a cold glow of light blue, illuminating the dark path ahead. Lan WangJi bent down and went inside first. Wei WuXian was almost stirred crazy by the dog, and rushed inside as well, nearly crashing into him. Lan WangJi held his hand to support him, and shook his head, either out of dissatisfaction or unwilling resignation.

The black-haired spiritual dog appeared like it really wanted to follow him, also trying to rush inside, but it seemed as if it was blocked outside by some sort of a force. It couldn't break the barrier no matter how hard it tried, so it could only sit down outside of the entrance, its tail wagging faster and faster. Wei WuXian was so glad that he almost knelt down for it. Taking his hand away, he walked a few steps inside. The distant shade of blue light coming from the sword almost appeared to be white when surrounded in this darkness.

The Xinglu Ridge was covered in a tall, deep forest, so it was quite chilly. And, inside of the stone castle, it was colder than it was outside. Wearing only light clothing, there was wind blowing through Wei WuXian's cuffs and behind his back—the cold sweat due to the dog had already dried. The light at the entrance had disappeared as if it was a candle having been snuff out. The deeper they went inside, the darker and more spacious it became.

The top of the stone castle was spherical. Wei WuXian kicked a few pieces of rocks on the ground. He could hear a slight echo.

He finally couldn't endure it any longer and stopped in his tracks, pressing his right hand on his temple and scrunching his brows.

Lan WangJi turned around to ask, "What happened?" Wei WuXian replied, "... It's so loud." Inside the stone castle, there was only dead silence. It was as quiet as a cemetery. Actually, it itself also seemed similar to a cemetery.

But, in Wei WuXian's ears, right now, they were already surrounded by noise.

#### Translator's Notes

**Head shaker:** The original phrase used for this was a traditional Chinese saying, which pretty much means that Nie HuaiSang answers "I don't know" for every question directed towards him. As an adequate translation has yet to be found, this has been slightly modified to keep the flow of the English.

**Qi deviation:** A qi deviation, or a qigong deviation, refers to a physiological or psychological disorder that happens when someone cultivates using an "improper" method or a flawed technique ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zou\\_huo\\_ru\\_mo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zou_huo_ru_mo)).

**Yang energy:** The "yang" here refers to the "yang" in "yin yang". Yang energy represents life and goodness, while yin energy (also translated as "dark energy" or "evil energy" for a couple of times) represents death and evil.

**Maze array:** A maze array is most likely an array that can be used to confuse people's sense of direction in order to trap them somewhere.

## Chapter 22: Contentment—Part Four

The noise came from all around them.

It was an ocean of whispers, rustles, and giggles, from in front and behind, above and below. The voices involved both male and female, old and young, loud and quiet. Wei WuXian could even hear a few fragmented sentences, but they came and went, not allowing him to catch any specific words.

It really was too loud.

Wei WuXian continued to press on his temple with one hand, and used the other to grab a palm- sized Compass of Evil from the Qiankun Bag. The pointers on the compass shakily spun two times, then started to spin faster and faster. A few moments later, it spun madly around!

Last time, on Dafan Mountain, it had already been strange when the Compass of Evil didn't find the direction. This time, it went as far as to spin all by itself, without pausing for a single moment. This situation was even more unbelievable than the pointers not moving at all!

The foreboding shadow in Wei WuXian's heart grew denser. He called out loud, "Jin Ling!" The two had already walked for a while inside the stone castle, but they hadn't seen anyone. Wei WuXian had shouted a few times, without receiving any reply. The first stone rooms were all empty, but, as they went in deeper, in the center of one of the rooms, there was a black coffin.

It was quite odd for a coffin to appear here. However, the wood used was a deep black, and the shape was also crafted in a skilled way. Seeing this, Wei WuXian had an exceptionally strong affinity toward it. He couldn't help but patted it a few times. The wood was sturdy and the sound was firm. He praised it, "What a nice coffin."

Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian stood on opposite sides of the coffin. After passing a look between them, they extended their arms at the same time and opened the lid.

The moment the lid was opened, the noise around them suddenly multiplied, flooding through Wei WuXian's ears in the manner of tidal water. It was as if, before this, they were secretly watched by countless pairs of eyes—the owners of the eyes silently monitored and discussed every word they spoke, every action they performed, and suddenly became agitated as they saw that the coffin was about to be opened. Wei WuXian thought of a few dozen possibilities, already prepared to fend against strong odours of rancidity, stretching claws of monsters, an overflow of

poisonous water, toxic smoke that dispersed quickly, or attacks from resentful spectres. Of course, his greatest wish was to see Jin Ling. Despite this, nothing happened. Nothing.

Surprisingly, this was an empty coffin.

Wei WuXian was a bit startled, but also a bit disappointed at the fact that Jin Ling wasn't stuck in here. Lan WangJi went slightly nearer. Bichen unsheathed by itself for a few inches, its cold light shining on the bottom of the coffin. Only then, did Wei WuXian notice how it wasn't that the coffin was empty, but that the object inside was a lot smaller than what he had expected, and hid inside the deepest part of the coffin.

Inside the coffin, there lay a long sword.

The sword had no sheath. The hilt seemed to have been casted from gold, appearing to be quite heavy in weight. Its body was slender and its blade shone. Resting on a layer of red cloth at the bottom of the coffin, it reflected a bloody shade of scarlet, emitting a chilling air of destruction.

A sword was put inside a coffin instead of a corpse. There really wasn't anywhere not peculiar about these stone castles in the Xinglu Ridge, revealing mysteries every step they took.

The two closed the coffin lid and continued walking. They found other coffins like this in some other rooms. Looking at the texture of the wood, their ages were all different. And, within every coffin, there was a long sword. Even until they went inside the last room, there still wasn't any trace of Jin Ling. Wei WuXian closed the lid of the coffin, feeling slightly worried.

Seeing his knitted eyebrows, Lan WangJi thought for a moment, put the guqin horizontally on the coffin, and raised his hand. A melody poured from his fingers.

He only played a short excerpt, and then took his right hand away from the guqin. He stared attentively at the still-vibrating strings.

Suddenly, the strings quivered, and one note sounded on its own. Wei WuXian asked, "Inquiry?"

Inquiry was a famous piece composed by an ancestor in the GusuLan Sect. Different from Evocation, it was used when the victim's identity was unknown and there wasn't a medium. The player used notes of the guqin to inquire, asking questions to the victim, while the victim's answers would be transformed into melodies by Inquiry and shown on the strings. If the strings vibrated on their own, it meant that Lan WangJi had already brought a spirit in the castle here. After this, the two would start asking and answering using the language of the guqin.

The language of the guqin was a special skill unique to the GusuLan Sect. Although Wei WuXian knew a wide variety of things, there were still some that he was unable to learn, such as the language of the guqin. He whispered, "HanGuang-Jun, help me ask what is this place, what is it for, and who built it."

As he mastered the language, without any hesitation, Lan WangJi confidently played a few limpid notes. After a few moments, the strings played two notes on their own. Wei WuXian quickly asked, "What did it say?"

Lan WangJi, "I do not know." Wei WuXian, "What?"

Lan WangJi replied in an unhurried manner, "It said, 'I do not know'."

"..." Wei WuXian looked at him, suddenly remembering a conversation about "whatever" a few years ago. Touching his nose, he was at a loss for words, and thought, Lan Zhan is so bright. He even learned how to make me speechless.

With the first question unanswered, Lan WangJi played another sentence. The strings responded again, with the same two notes as before. Wei WuXian could tell that, this time, the answer was "I don't know" as well. He asked, "What did you ask it, this time?"

Lan WangJi, "How it died."

Wei WuXian, "If it was secretly killed when it was not paying attention, then it'd explain why it doesn't know how it died. Why don't you ask it if it knows who killed it?"

Lan WangJi raised his hands to play another phrase. Yet, the answer was the same two notes— "I don't know".

It was a spirit who had been trapped here, yet it didn't know where this was, how it died, and who killed it. This was also Wei WuXian's first time meeting such a deceased person. With a change of thought, he spoke again, "Then, let's ask something else. Ask him whether it's a man or a woman. There's no way that it doesn't know this."

Lan WangJi did as he was told. After he took away his hands, another string sounded in a strong way. Lan WangJi translated, "A man."

Wei WuXian, "We finally know about something, huh? Ask again, whether or not a boy of fifteen or sixteen entered here."

It answered, "Yes."

Wei WuXian asked again, "Then where is he right now?"

The strings paused for a moment, then replied. Wei WuXian hurried to ask, "What did he say?" Lan WangJi's face was solemn, "It said, 'Right here.'"

Wei WuXian was dumbfounded.

“Here” probably referred to this stone castle. But, before this, they searched through the whole place, and hadn’t seen Jin Ling. Wei WuXian spoke, “It can’t lie, right?” Lan WangJi, “I am here, so it cannot.”

Indeed, it couldn’t. The person inquiring was HanGuang-Jun. Under his control, the spirit who came was unable to lie, and had definitely been answering the truth. Wei WuXian proceeded to search around this room, looking for any mechanisms or secret rooms that he had missed. After a thinking for a moment, he played a few more phrases. However, after he received the answer, his expression changed slightly. Seeing this, Wei WuXian asked, “What did you ask this time?”

Lan WangJi, “How old he was; where he was from.”

Both of these questions were attempts to find out the identity of the spirit. Wei WuXian knew that he definitely received some sort of an unconventional answer, “How was it?”

Lan WangJi, “Fifteen, from Lanling.”

Wei WuXian’s expression changed as well.

The soul that “Inquire” had found was Jin Ling?!

He listened intently. Amid the noise that seemed to have bombarded here, there really seemed to be a few weak shouts coming from Jin Ling. They were faint, however, and indistinct.

Lan WangJi continued to ask. Wei WuXian knew that he was asking for the precise location, so he stared fixedly at the strings of the guqin, waiting for Jin Ling’s answer.

This time, the answer came a bit slower. After he finished listening, Lan WangJi spoke to Wei WuXian, “Stand at where you are, face the southwest, and listen to the strings. After each note is played, walk forward one step. When the sound stops, it will be right in front of you.”

Without saying a word, Wei WuXian turned toward the southwest. Behind him came seven notes of the guqin, so he walked seven steps forward. However, nothing had appeared in front of him.

The notes continued, but the pause between them grew longer and longer, and he also walked slower and slower. Another step, and another, and another...

After the sixth step, the guqin finally silenced. No more notes sounded. And, before him, there was only a wall.

The wall was made of grey-white rock bricks, pieced together tightly. Wei WuXian turned around, “... He’s in the wall?!”

Bichen unsheathed. Four streaks of blue light swept past, and a neat pound sign had been carved onto the wall. The two went forward to take apart the bricks. After removing some of them, a large sheet of black dirt was exposed.

It seemed that the stone castle was made to be double-layered, filled with dirt between the two layers of hard rock. Using his bare hands, Wei WuXian dug out a large chunk of dirt. Surrounded by the coal-black dirt, there was a human’s face, eyes tightly shut.

It was the missing Jin Ling!

Having his face enveloped in dirt, as soon as it appeared, air poured into Jin Ling’s mouth and nose. He immediately started to cough and breathe. As Wei WuXian saw that he was still alive, his heart finally calmed. Jin Ling really did almost die. Or else, “Inquiry” wouldn’t have caught the still-alive soul that was about to leave his body. The good thing was that only a short while passed after he was buried into the wall. If it took them any longer, he would have suffocated to death.

The two hastened to dig him out of the wall. However, who knew that, as if dirt clung onto a carrot being pulled out of the ground, the moment Jin Ling’s upper body emerged from the dirt, the sword on his back caught on something else and dragged it out.

It was the ashen bone of a human arm!

Lan WangJi laid Jin Ling flat onto the ground and felt for his pulse. Wei WuXian, on the other hand, took up the sheath of Bichen, and skillfully started to poke around in the dirt, following the length of the bone. After a short while, a complete skeleton appeared before their eyes.

This skeleton was the same as how Jin Ling looked, buried inside the wall in a standing position. With ghastly pale bones and pitch-black dirt—the contrast was distinct yet glaring to the eye.

Wei WuXian dug a bit more through the ground, and broke away a few pieces of bricks on the side. After some more rustling around, sure enough, he found another skeleton nearby. This one hadn't decayed completely yet. There was still some flesh on the bones, and long, messy hair on the skull. From the ragged clothing in the shade of a watered down red, he could tell that this was a woman. However, she wasn't standing, with her skeleton bending down. The reason of this was that there was a third skeleton beside her, squatting down by her feet.

Wei WuXian stopped digging further.

He took a few steps back. The noise in his ears was as wild and turbulent as tidal waves. He could almost be sure of it. The inside of this stone castle's thick walls was packed with human corpses.

Above, below, southeast, northwest; standing, sitting, lying, squatting... Just what on Earth was this place?!

#### Translator's Notes

Sword: Although this was translated as a “sword”, the Chinese character of this is different from that of a sword’s. The character used here means “knife”. The difference between a “sword” and a “knife” is that the first attacks by stabbing, while the second attacks by slicing or chopping.

However, they both look like a “sword” in Western standards.

Inquiry: The literal meaning of this is “to ask a spirit”.

## Chapter 23: Malice—Part One

At this moment, the unconscious Jin Ling suddenly sat up. In front of the two, he clumsily stood up with closed eyes. Wei WuXian wanted to see what he was going to do, so he didn't do anything as Jin Ling slowly walked around him, took one stride, and stepped back into the wall where he stood just a while ago. He placed his arms flat beside his body. Even the position was the same as before.

Wei WuXian pulled him out of the wall again, feeling that the situation was both hilarious and strange. As he was about to tell Lan WangJi that it was best not to stay here for long, he suddenly quivered out of fright, hearing a few barks that came from afar. Ever since they went in, the black-haired spiritual dog behaved itself, wagging its tail as it sat before the entrance. It waited for them to bring back its master in an anxious yet pathetic way, without barking anymore.

However, right now, its barks were fiercer than ever.

Lan WangJi spoke, "Something is wrong outside of the castle."

As he reached out to help Jin Ling, Wei WuXian beat him to it and carried Jin Ling up on his back, "Let's go out and see!"

The two quickly went back the same way they came. Bending down to exit, they saw the spiritual dog face them with its back, growling with the bottom of its throat at a certain direction. Although Wei WuXian managed to come over, he really couldn't bear this type of sound, and involuntarily took a few steps backward. When the dog turned around and saw that he had Jin Ling on his back, it instantly dashed over, causing Wei WuXian to scream. Lan WangJi shifted in front of him just as he was about to throw Jin Ling down.

The spiritual dog immediately stopped, its tail between its legs again. The reason why it didn't stick its tongue out was that it held something inside its mouth. Lan WangJi went forth, bent down, took out a scrap of cloth from between its teeth, and handed it over to Wei WuXian. It seemed like it was part of a piece of clothing. Before this, there must have been someone either roaming or spying around the area, and they must have appeared suspicious, or else the dog's barks wouldn't have been teeming with hostility. Wei WuXian declared, "They haven't gone far yet. Let's go after them!"

Yet, Lan WangJi responded, "That is not necessary. I know who they are."

Wei WuXian, "I also know. It must have been the same group of people who spread rumors of the Xinglu Ridge, let out the walking corpses, set up the maze array, and built the stone castles. And those sabers. But, if we don't catch them now, it'd be a bother to find them later."

Lan WangJi, "I will go after them. What about you and Jin Ling?"

Wei WuXian, "I'll take him down the Xinglu Ridge and settle down somewhere in Qinghe, around where we met that charlatan. Let's meet up there."

The pace of the conversation was extremely fast. Lan WangJi only paused for a moment, and Wei WuXian added, "Go. Any later and the person would have run away. I'll be back!"

Hearing the 'I'll be back', Lan WangJi took one deep look at him and walked off without any more words. The spiritual dog wanted to throw itself over again. Wei WuXian immediately shouted, "W-w-w-wait! Take the dog away! Take it!!!"

Lan WangJi had to come back again. He looked down at the black-haired spiritual dog. Too scared to put up any resistance, it yapped as it trailed behind Lan WangJi, turning around to look at Jin Ling once in awhile. Wei WuXian wiped a few drops of sweat from his forehead. After he looked at the group of white castles once more, he picked up Jin Ling again and went down the Xinglu Ridge.

At the moment, it was already near dusk. With a boy on his back and both of them covered in dirt, they received a lot of attention from passersby. Wei WuXian went back to the street

where Jin Ling used the dog to chase him and found an inn. Using the money, he fished out of Lan WangJi, he bought two new outfits and got a room. He first took off Jin Ling's sect robe, which had been crumpled after it was buried in dirt, then pulled off his boots. Suddenly, his movements came to a halt.

There appeared to be an area of shadow on Jin Ling's lower leg. Squatting down and rolling up the boy's trousers, Wei WuXian discovered that this wasn't a shadow, but a black bruise. And, it wasn't a bruise that came from being injured, it was a Curse Mark.

A Curse Mark was a marking made by an evil being on its prey. If it appeared, it meant that the person had offended something of extreme malice. If it left a mark, it would find you no matter what, possibly after a long time, and possibly tonight. The consequences ranged from having the body part with the marking taken away or just death.

Jin Ling's whole leg had turned black, and the bruise was still stretching upward. Wei WuXian had never seen a Curse Mark in such an intense shade of black and covering such a large area.

The more he looked at it, the sterner his face grew. He put Jin Ling's legs down and undid Jin Ling's undergarment. He only felt relief after he saw that his chest and stomach areas were all clean, not affected by the Curse Mark yet.

At this moment, Jin Ling opened his eyes.

He was confused for quite a while. With his body naked and cold all around, he came to at once. He immediately got up and roared with a flushed face, "Wh-wh-wh-what are you doing?!"

Wei WuXian grinned, "Oh hey, you're awake."

Appearing as if he had encountered a great shock, Jin Ling shut the front of his undergarment and shrunk toward the corner of the bed, "What do you want?! Where are my clothes?! Where's my sword?! Where's my dog?!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "I was just about to put on your clothes for you."

His expression and tone were as kind as those of a grandmother who wanted to put on a jacket for her grandson. Jin Ling leaned against the wall with disheveled hair, "I am not a cut-sleeve!!!"

Wei WuXian beamed, "What a coincidence—I am!!!"

Jin Ling snatched the sword that lay beside the bed in a manner so courageous that it seemed if Wei WuXian walked one more step forward, he would kill him and then commit suicide to prove his innocence. Wei WuXian finally managed to stop laughing, "Why are you so scared? It was only a joke! I spent so much effort to dig you out of the wall, and you don't even thank me."

Amid the ruckus, Jin Ling combed his hand through his messy hair so that it looked a bit more decent, and continued to rage, "If not for this, the fact that y-y-y-you dared to take off my clothes w-w-would've gotten you killed for thousands of times!"

Wei WuXian, "Please don't. Dying once was already painful enough. There, there. Put the sword down."

With a muddled look, Jin Ling did as he was told and put the sword down.

When they played Inquiry, although Jin Ling's soul left his body and he couldn't remember a lot of things, amid the haze, he knew that it was the person in front of him who dug him out and carried him down the mountain. For some time, after he was buried in the wall, he had been conscious for a while, the fear and despair in his heart at their height. Yet, he really didn't expect

that the one who freed him from his fear and despair was this person whom he had hated ever since the first time they met. The color of his face switched back and forth between white and red. He was also both dizzy and embarrassed, his thoughts still fluttering everywhere. Suddenly, his eyes went toward the window and was shocked to see that the sky was already dark, with a few stars scattered here and there. Coincidentally, Wei

WuXian bent down to pick up the new clothes that fell on the ground. Jin Ling hopped off the bed, put on his boots, grabbed his jacket, and sprinted out of the room.

Wei WuXian originally thought that, after going through so much, he would probably stay listless for a while. Who knew that young people were so energetic, as he disappeared into the distance like a gust of wind. Remembering the Curse Mark on his leg that was no trivial matter, he quickly shouted, "What are you running away for?! Come back!"

Jin Ling ran as he put on his soiled, crumpled sect robe, "Don't follow me!" He was light on his feet and stepped out of the inn in a few long strides. After chasing for a few blocks, Wei WuXian actually lost him.

After searching for a while, twilight came, and the people on the streets also lessened. Wei WuXian was quite annoyed, "Damn. How can this child do such a thing?!"

As he was about to give up, the angered voice of a young man came from in front of him, at the far end of the street, "I only said a few things about you, and you disappeared into nowhere. Are you some young mistress? Your temper has been growing worse and worse!"

Jiang Cheng!

Wei WuXian immediately slid into an alleyway. A second later, Jin Ling's voice also appeared, "I already came back with nothing wrong with me, didn't I? Stop nagging!"

It appeared that Jin Ling didn't come to Qinghe alone. Well, no wonder. Last time, at Dafan Mountain, Jiang Cheng had been there to assist him, so why wouldn't he have come this time? However, looking at this now, it seemed that the two had a quarrel in the town of Qinghe, which was why Jin Ling went up the Xinglu Ridge alone. The reason why he hastened to run away was probably that Jiang Cheng threatened to do something to him if he didn't come back before dark or something like that.

Jiang Cheng, "Nothing wrong? You look like you just rolled around in a muddy ditch, and you say there's nothing wrong with you! Don't you think that it's an embarrassment to be wearing your sect's uniform? Hurry back and change into something else! Speak. What did you run into today?"

Jin Ling replied impatiently, "I already said that I didn't run into anything. I tripped, and it was a waste of time. Ow!" He shouted, "Don't tug on me like that! I'm not three-years-old!"

Jiang Cheng spoke in a harsh tone, "Is it that you think I can't discipline you any longer? Let me tell you that, even if you're thirty, I'd still be able to tug you. Next time, if you dare to run around without telling anyone again, the whip waits upon you!"

Jin Ling, "I went alone exactly because I didn't want anyone to help or discipline me."

Wei WuXian considered, I don't know about anything else, but Jiang Cheng was quite right when he scolded that Jin Ling had the temper of a young mistress.

Jiang Cheng, "So, what now? What did you catch? Where's the spiritual dog that your uncle gave you?"

It was chased into some random corner by Lan Zhan. Just as Wei WuXian was thinking, two familiar barks came from the other side of the alley.

Wei WuXian's demeanor changed at once. Legs moving on their own, he rushed outside as if he was chased by poisonous arrows. The black-haired spiritual dog sprinted over from the other end, passed Wei WuXian, and threw itself toward Jin Ling's legs, affectionately brushing him with its tail.

With the dog appearing here, it must have meant that Lan WangJi had already caught whoever was spying near the stone castles and went to point of rendezvous that they settled on earlier. However, at the moment, Wei WuXian had no time to think about these things.

As he ran, he just happened to end up right before Jiang Cheng, Jin Ling, and a bunch of other Jiang Sect's disciples.

After both sides stayed still for a moment, Wei WuXian silently turned around and fled.

Having only managed a short distance, he heard a sizzling noise, and a purple electric current wrapped around his lower leg as if it was a snake. Numbness and pain surged

through his body from bottom to top, and he fell at once, after a pull from behind. Then, someone picked him up with the back of his collar. Wei WuXian immediately tried to find the Spirit-Locking Bag, but the other grabbed it before him.

Jiang Cheng walked a few steps while holding him, entered the nearest shop, and kicked open the wooden bolt that was already half-latched.

The owner was getting ready to close the shop for the night. Suddenly, seeing that a fancy-clothed, dark-faced young man kicked open the door and walked inside with someone in his hand, appearing as if he was going to disembowel the victim right here, the owner was so frightened that he couldn't speak. A disciple went up and whispered a few things in his ear. With some silver pushed into his hands, he quickly fled to the back of the hall and never came out again. Without any further instructions, the Jiang Sect's disciples instantly spread out from the inside to the outside, making it so that nothing could enter or escape the place.

Jin Ling stood on the side, seeming as if he wanted to say a few things, but was too shocked to do so. Jiang Cheng glowered at him, "I'll take care of you later. Stay here!"

From the beginning of his memory until now, Jin Ling had never seen such a look on Jiang Cheng's face before. This uncle of his who led the prominent YunmengJiang Sect ever since a young age had always been cold and dark. When he spoke, he was willing to neither show mercy nor do good. Yet, right now, although he was trying hard to suppress unnecessary facial expressions, his eyes were alarmingly intense.

Although his face had always been clouded, marked with arrogance and satire, it seemed as if every corner of it had come alive. It was difficult to determine whether it was vengeful wrath, fathomless hatred, or raving ecstasy.

## Translator's Notes

Sabers: This was translated as "sword" in the last chapter, but, thanks to a few commenters, it is now changed to saber, a more accurate phrase.

Curse Mark: The literal translation is "evil curse mark/scar".

Undergarment: In the Ancient Chinese style of clothing, a set of undergarments can include a shirt and a pair of trousers, a shirt and a skirt, or a long robe. All pieces are white in color and loose-fitting. The shirt is worn in a wraparound way, like a bathrobe. Although they are called undergarments, they are more like sleeping attire but worn both to sleep and under normal clothing. Yes, people still wear "underwear" under these, so, technically, Wei WuXian is not peeling Jin Ling's underwear off, unlike most of what your fujo brains are thinking at the moment (e.g., "oh nooo WWX is looking at another person's \*\*\*\*\*!")

## Chapter 24: Malice—Part Two

Jiang Cheng added, “Lend me your dog.”

Jin Ling pulled himself out of the daze. He hesitated for a moment and only whistled after Jiang Cheng shot him two lightning-sharp beams from his eyes. The dog dashed over in just a few leaps. Wei WuXian, body as stiff as an iron board, could only be dragged forward, walking one step at a time.

Jiang Cheng found an empty room and threw Wei WuXian inside, closing the door behind him. The dog followed them inside and sat by the door. Wei WuXian had his eyes tightly locked on it, afraid that it would pounce on him at the next possible moment. Remembering how he had been controlled in just a short amount of time, he exclaimed in his heart that Jiang Cheng really knew the best way to deal with him.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng slowly sat down by the table and poured himself a cup of tea. For a moment, no one spoke a word. The cup of tea was still steaming hot. Without having a single sip of it, he hurled it onto the ground.

Jiang Cheng pulled a curt smile on his face, “... Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

Growing up, Jiang Cheng had seen Wei WuXian’s awful state countless times as he ran away from dogs. Others may have believed him if he denied it, but in front of someone who knew him so thoroughly, it’d be impossible to argue. This was an obstacle harder to overcome than Zidian.

With a sincere tone, Wei WuXian replied: “I don’t know what to say to you.” Jiang Cheng whispered: “You really don’t learn, do you?”

Ever since long ago, their conversations had been full of retorting and arguing. Wei WuXian blurted out with thinking: “And you have not made any progress either...”

Jiang Cheng laughed from the anger, “Sure, then let’s see which of us is the one who hasn’t made any progress.”

Remaining seated at the table, he shouted in a commanding way. The dog stood up immediately!

Being in the same room as it already made Wei WuXian sweat in uneasiness. Seeing that the large, snarling dog closed in on him in less than a second, his ears were full of its low howls and

his entire body numbed. He had forgotten about much of his early years of wandering on the streets. The only things he still remembered was the terror he felt as he was chased by dogs and the slicing pain of teeth and claws digging into his flesh. The fear that had been planted deep within his heart couldn’t be overcome or eased no how he tried.

Suddenly, Jiang Cheng glanced sideway at him, “Whose name did you call?”

Wei WuXian was in such a state of distress that he couldn’t remember whether or not he called someone’s name at all. He only managed to pull himself together after Jiang Cheng commanded the dog to back away. After a moment of hesitation, he abruptly turned his head away. On the other hand, Jiang Cheng left his seat. There was a whip attached beside his waist. With one hand on it, he bent down to look at Wei WuXian’s face. After a pause, he straightened up and asked, “Speaking of it, since when have you been so close to Lan WangJi?”

Wei WuXian immediately understood whose name he had unconsciously called out.

Jiang Cheng smiled menacingly, “It really is quite curious how far he went to protect you, back on Dafan Mountain.”

A moment later, he corrected himself, “No. You weren’t necessarily the one whom Lan WangJi was protecting. After all, the GusuLan Sect couldn’t have forgotten what you did with that loyal dog of yours. How could someone so celebrated for his righteousness tolerate the likes of you? Maybe he’s familiar with this body that you stole instead.”

His words were cruel and sinister. Every sentence seemed well-meaning on the surface, but was actually derogatory. Wei WuXian couldn't bear with it any longer, "Watch your language."

Jiang Cheng responded, "I've never cared for such things, don't you remember?" Wei WuXian mocked, "Oh, right."

Jiang Cheng snorted, "So you think that you're qualified to make me watch my language. Do you still remember? Last time, on Dafan Mountain, did you watch your language when talking to Jin Ling?"

Wei WuXian's face stiffened.

Having regained the upper hand in the conversation, Jiang Cheng looked satisfied again. He sneered, "I suppose that you didn't have a mother to teach you.' Now, you really know where it hurts the most, don't you? The person who caused Jin Ling to be criticized behind his back in

such a way is nobody else but you. You're quite the forgetful old man, aren't you? Have you forgotten the things you said and the promises you made? Then, do you still remember how his parents died?!"

Wei WuXian immediately raised his head, "I haven't forgotten! It's just that..." Yet, he just couldn't find the right words to put after it.

Jiang Cheng interrupted, "It's just what? You can't say it? Don't worry, you can go back to Lotus Pier and say your excuses while kneeling in front of my parents' graves."

Wei WuXian calmed himself down and searched as fast as he could for a way out of the situation at hand. Although he had always dreamed of returning to Lotus Pier once more, he didn't want to go back to the tattered one nowadays!

Suddenly, a series of hurried footsteps approached, and the door was pounded on loudly. Jin Ling shouted from outside, "Uncle!"

Jiang Cheng raised his voice, "Didn't I tell you to stay where you were? Why did you come here?"

Jin Ling, "Uncle, I have something really important to tell you."

Jiang Cheng, "If there's something important, why didn't you decide to speak up when I was scolding you?"

"I didn't want to say it exactly because you kept on scolding me! Are you gonna listen or not? If not, I'm just not gonna say it!" Jin Ling replied in an angry voice.

Jiang Cheng opened the door with a fuming look on his face, "Tell me, then get out!"

As soon as the wooden door opened, Jin Ling stepped inside. He had already changed into a new set of the white uniform. "I really did encounter something troublesome today. I think I might have run into Wen Ning!"

Jiang Cheng's brow twitched. With a hostile expression, he placed his hand on his sword at once, "Where? When?!"

Jin Ling told him, "It was this afternoon. There's a worn-down house about a dozen miles south of here. I went because I heard that something strange had happened there, but who could have guessed that there was a fierce corpse hiding inside."

Jing Ling's word sounded quite believable. However, in Wei WuXian's ears, all those sentences were nonsense. He knew precisely where Jin Ling was this afternoon. Moreover, if Wen Ning hid himself, unless he summoned him on purpose, there'd be no way that a junior would find him so easily.

Jiang Cheng, "Why didn't you say so earlier?!"

Jin Ling, "I wasn't certain. The corpse moved at a really fast speed and ran away as soon as I entered. I only saw a blurry figure. But I heard the chain noises he made on Dafan Mountain, which was why I suspected that it might have been him. If you didn't scold me like that, I would have told you right after I came back. If he ran away and you can't catch him, it'd be because of your bad temper, not me." He still wanted to peek inside, but Jiang

Cheng was so angered that he slammed the door right in front of his face. Through the closed door, Jiang Cheng shouted, "I'll deal with you later. Get lost!"

Jin Ling replied with an "oh," and his footsteps faded into the distance. Seeing Jiang Cheng turn around, Wei WuXian immediately pulled a mixed expression of "I'm so shocked," "my secret has been disclosed," and "what do I do now that Wen Ning had been found." Jin Ling was actually quite clever. Knowing that Jiang Cheng hated Wen Ning more than anything, he made up such a smooth lie with the previous knowledge he had. Jiang Cheng knew that the YiLing Patriarch and the Ghost General often appeared together, so he already suspected that Wen Ning was in the area. Having heard Jin Ling's words, he was already mostly convinced, and Wei WuXian's expression convinced him even further. On top of that, he burst into fury whenever he heard the mention of Wen Ning's name. With his eyes blinded by wrath, how could he still have doubted? The hostility that built in his chest was almost making him explode. He flicked his whip, hitting the ground beside Wei WuXian, and spoke through clenched teeth, "You really take this obeying dog of yours everywhere, don't you?!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "He's been dead since a long time ago, and I've died once as well. What else do you want?!"

Jiang Cheng pointed the whip at him, "So what? My hatred would persist, even if he dies thousands of times! He didn't perish back then. Very well! I shall destroy him today, with my own hands. I'm going to burn him right now, and scatter his ashes right in front of your face!"

He slammed the door shut behind him and walked toward the main hall, ordering Jin Ling, "You keep a close eye on him. Don't believe or listen to anything he says! Don't let him make any sound. If he dares to whistle or play his flute, block his mouth first. If it doesn't work, just slice off his hand or cut off his tongue!"

Wei WuXian knew that Jiang Cheng spoke these words especially for him to hear, threatening him against doing anything. The reason why Jiang Cheng didn't bring him along was so that he didn't use the opportunity to control Wen Ning. Jin Ling replied in a nonchalant tone, "I know. Of course, I'll be able to watch him. Uncle, why did you shut yourself inside along with that damn cut-sleeve? What did he do this time?"

Jiang Cheng answered, "This isn't a question you should ask. Remember to watch him properly. If I return to see that he disappeared, I'll break your leg for sure!" After a few more questions about the exact location, he left with half of the disciples and went to chase the nonexistent Wen Ning.

After some time of waiting, Jin Ling's arrogant voice travelled through, "You go stand over there. You, go wait on the side. All of you go stand in front of the main entrance. I'm gonna go inside and meet him."

None of the disciples dared to disobey. In a short while, the door had been opened again and Jin Ling stuck his head in, eyes darting around the room. Wei WuXian sat up straight. Jin Ling put a finger in front of his lips, walked in quietly, put his hand on Zidian, then whispered something.

Zidian could only work if it recognized its owner. Jiang Cheng had probably allowed it to recognize Jin Ling. The electric currents went out at once, and it transformed into a silver ring embedded with a purple crystal, lying on top of Jin Ling's fair-colored palms.

Jin Ling said in a quiet voice, "Let's go."

After the senseless orders, the YunmengJiang Sect's disciples had been scattered all over the place. The two stealthily flipped over the window and the walls. Having left the shop, they sprinted without making any noise. As they entered a forest, Wei WuXian heard something strange coming from behind him. Turning around, he was almost scared to death, "Why is it coming along as well?! Tell it to go away!"

Jin Ling whistled twice, and the dog rolled out its long tongue. Whimpering softly, its pointy ears twitched, and it ran away disheartenedly. Jin Ling sneered in contempt, "Such a loser. Fairy never bites. It just looks scary. It's a spiritual dog trained to only bite evil beings. Did you really think that it's just a regular dog?"

Wei WuXian, "Hold on. What did you call it?" Jin Ling, "Fairy. Its name."

Wei WuXian, "You named a dog something like this?!"

Jing Ling replied assuredly, "What's wrong with this name? When it was younger, it was called Little Fairy. Now that it grew up, I can't keep on calling it that."

Wei WuXian refused, "No. No. No. The point isn't whether it's little or not! ... Who in the world taught you such a way of naming?!" Without doubt, it must have been his uncle. In the past, Jiang Cheng also had a few puppies. The names he chose were things like 'Jasmine', 'Princess', 'Love', and so on, which sounded like the names of expensive girls in brothels. Jin Ling continued, "True men don't care for such trifles. Why are you stressing over such details? Okay! Stop. Now that you offended my uncle, you're already half dead. Now, I'm letting you go. We're even."

Wei WuXian asked, "Do you know why your uncle wants me?" Jin Ling answered, "Yeah. He believes that you're Wei WuXian."

Wei WuXian thought, 'This time, it's not merely 'suspect' anymore. He's got the right person.' He asked again, "Then, what about you? Don't you suspect it as well?"

Jin Ling, "It's not the first time my uncle did such a thing. He has never let any of them go, even if it was possible that he caught the wrong ones. But, if Zidian couldn't draw out your spirit, I'm just gonna trust that you're not. Besides, he wasn't a cut-sleeve, but you even dared to harass..."

With a disgusted look, he stopped before mentioning who Wei WuXian harassed and made a fanning gesture as if he was shooing away flies. "Anyways, from now on, you have nothing to do with the LanlingJin Sect anymore! If you're gonna go at it again, don't find anyone from my sect! Or else, I won't let you off!"

Having finished speaking, Jin Ling spun around to leave. After walking a few steps, he turned to him again, "What are you doing still standing there? Go. Are you waiting for my uncle to come and get you? Let me tell you—don't think that I'll be grateful just because you saved me. Don't expect me to say anything cringe worthy either."

Wei WuXian put his hands behind his back and walked over, "Young man, there are two cringe worthy phrases in one's life that must be said, no matter what."

Jin Ling asked, "Which two?"

Wei WuXian replied, "'Thank you', and 'I'm sorry'."

Jin Ling taunted, "What can anybody do to me if I don't say them?" Wei WuXian, "Someday, you'll say those words in tears."

Jin Ling made a spitting noise, just as Wei WuXian suddenly spoke to him, "I'm sorry." Jin Ling paused, "What?"

Wei WuXian, "I'm sorry for the words I said to you on Dafan Mountain."

It wasn't the first time that Jin Ling was told he had 'no mother to teach him', but it was the first time someone apologized to him in such a serious way. With an 'I'm sorry' shoved right into his face, he didn't know why, but he suddenly felt a bit uneasy.

He wildly waved his arms around, "It's nothing. You weren't the first person to say so, anyways. It's true that I had no mother to teach me. However, I won't be inferior to anyone because of this! In fact, I'm gonna open your eyes and make you see that I am a lot stronger than all of you!"

Wei WuXian smiled. As he was about to speak, his expression suddenly changed, "Jiang Cheng? You!"

Jin Ling was already feeling guilty since he stole Zidian and let Wei WuXian go. Hearing the name, he whirled around to look. Using the chance, Wei WuXian hit Jin Ling's neck,

forming a blade with his hand. He laid Jin Ling flat on the ground, rolled up the bottom of his trousers, and examined the Curse Mark on his leg. He tried a few methods, but none of them made it fade.

After a moment, he sighed, knowing that it'd be difficult.

However, although there were some curse marks that he was unable to remove, he could transfer them to his own body.

Jin Ling slowly woke up after a while. Putting his hand to his neck, some pain could still be felt. He was so angry that he jumped up and unsheathed his sword at once, "How dare you hit me!"

My uncle hadn't even hit me before!"

Wei WuXian exclaimed, "Really? Doesn't he say that he'll break your legs all the time?"

Jin Ling fumed, "He's only saying that! You damn cut-sleeve, what on Earth do you want? I..." Wei WuXian covered his face and shouted toward behind Jin Ling, "Ah! HanGuang-Jun!"

Jin Ling was more scared of Lan WangJi than he was of his uncle. After all, his uncle was from his own clan, but HanGuang-Jun was from someone else's. Frightened, he fled at once, shouting as he ran, "You damn cut-sleeve! Disgusting maniac! I'll remember you! This is not over yet!"

Behind him, Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he couldn't breathe. After Jin Ling disappeared into the distance, his chest itched in a stuffy way, and finally managed to stop the laughter after a while of coughing. Only then, did he have time to think.

Wei WuXian was taken home by Jiang FengMian when he was nine.

Most memories from back then were already blurred. Yet, Jin Ling's mother, Jiang YanLi, remembered all of them, and even told him quite a few.

She said that, after his father heard of the news that his parents both died in battle, he had always dedicated himself to finding the child that these past friends had left behind. After searching for a while, he finally found the child in Yiling. The first time they met, Wei WuXian was kneeling on the ground, eating the fruit peels that somebody tossed on the ground.

Yiling's winter and spring were quite cold, yet the child only wore thin layers. His knees were already tattered, and on his feet were two different shoes that didn't fit at all. As he was looking down, searching for fruit peels, Jiang FengMian called him. He still remembered that there was a "Ying" in his name, so he lifted his head. Although his cheeks were both red and chapped from the cold, he still wore a smile.

Jiang YanLi said that he was born with a smiling look. No matter what unfortunate thing happened, he wouldn't cling on to them; no matter what situation he was in, he would be happy. Although it sounded a bit heartless, it really wasn't bad.

Jiang FengMian fed him a piece of melon, and he let Jiang FengMian carry him back. Back then, Jiang Cheng was also around eight or nine. He kept a few puppies to play with him in Lotus Pier. Finding out that Wei WuXian was extremely scared of dogs, Jiang FengMian suggested for Jiang Cheng to send the dogs away. Jiang Cheng was really unwilling. After throwing a tantrum of breaking things, pouting, and bawling his eyes out, he finally sent the dogs away.

Although, because of this, he held hostility toward Wei WuXian for a long time, after the two grew familiar, they had begun to cause mischief together. Whenever he ran into dogs, Jiang Cheng would always chase them away, then have a good laugh at Wei WuXian, who jumped onto a tree.

He had always thought that Jiang Cheng would be on his side, and Lan WangJi on the side opposite to him. He could never have imagined that things would turn out so differently.

Wei WuXian walked toward the rendezvous point that he and Lan WangJi were supposed to meet at. Nobody walked among the sparse lights that flickered in the night. Without

having to look around, the white-robed figure stood at the end of the street, standing motionless with his head hung low.

Before Wei WuXian made any sound, Lan WangJi looked up and saw him. After some hesitation, he walked over with a darkened expression.

Wei WuXian didn't know why, but he involuntarily took a step backward.

He could almost see scarlet streaks of blood by the corners of Lan WangJi's eyes. He had to admit... Lan WangJi's face really did look quite scary.

#### Translator's Notes

Surprise! There are none!

## Chapter 25: Malice—Part Three

However, having taken only one step back, his ankle twisted, and he seemed as if he almost collapsed on the ground. With a change in expression, Lan WangJi hurried over and tightly gripped his wrist like what he did last time, back in Dafan Mountain. After Wei WuXian had been steadied, Lan WangJi knelt down on one knee to examine his leg. Wei WuXian was rather shocked, “N-n-no, HanGuang-Jun. You don’t have to do this.”

Lan WangJi raised his head slightly, the pair of light-colored eyes boring into him, then looked down again and continued to roll up the leg of his trousers. Still under his grip, Wei WuXian could do nothing except to look up at the sky.

His entire leg was covered with the black bruise of the Curse Mark.

After staring at it for a while, Lan WangJi spoke in a bitter voice, “... I only left for a few hours.”

Wei WuXian shrugged, “A few hours is a long time. Anything could have happened. There, there. Straighten up.”

He backhandedly pulled Lan WangJi up, “It’s only the average Curse Mark. We can just kill it when it comes to find me. HanGuang-Jun, you’ll need to help me. If you don’t, I won’t be able to handle it. Have you caught the person? Is it him? Where is he now?”

Lan WangJi looked in the direction of a signboard that stood in front of a shop far down the street. Wei WuXian continued, “Let’s deal with the stone castle issue first.” He then walked toward the shop. He didn’t notice before, but his leg felt a bit numb, probably from Zidian. It was a good thing that Jiang Cheng controlled Zidian’s force so that he wasn’t made into a scorched corpse that had been struck by lightning.

Lan WangJi stood behind him. He suddenly called out, “Wei Ying.”

Wei WuXian’s figure paused. A second later, he pretended as if he didn’t hear the name, and answered, “What?”

Lan WangJi, “This was transferred from Jin Ling’s body, was it not.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement.

Wei WuXian didn’t say anything. Lan WangJi spoke again, “You met Jiang WanYin.”

It wasn’t hard to figure out due to the mark that Zidian left on top of the Curse Mark. Wei WuXian turned around, “As long as both of us are alive in this world, we’d meet for sure, sooner or later.”

Lan WangJi, “Do not go...”

Wei WuXian, “If I don’t go, how am I supposed to leave? Are you gonna carry me on your back or something?”

“...” Lan WangJi looked at him in silence. Wei WuXian’s smile froze on his face, just as a foreboding feeling crossed his mind.

If it were the Lan Zhan from back then, he would definitely be shocked speechless by these words, and either leave with a cold face or completely ignore him. However, it’d be hard to say how the Lan Zhan now would respond. As he had expected, hearing these words, Lan WangJi walked in front of him, as if he really was going to bend down, kneel, and carry Wei WuXian on his back, despite his honorable status. Shock came upon Wei WuXian once more, “Stop, stop. I wasn’t being serious. It’s only numb because I got hit by Zidian a few times, not that it broke.”

It’d look bad for a full-grown man like me to be carried on somebody else’s back.” Lan WangJi asked, “Would it look bad?”

Wei WuXian replied, “Would it look good?”

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi responded, “But you have also carried me on your back before.”

Wei WuXian, “Did such a thing ever happen? Why don’t I remember?”

Lan WangJi answered in an indifferent tone, “You never remember such things.”

Wei WuXian, "Everyone says that I have a bad memory. Alright, fine. Anyways, I'm not letting you carry me on your back."

Lan WangJi, "Are you sure?"

Wei WuXian replied in a resolute manner, "I'm sure."

The two stayed silent for a while. Suddenly, one of Lan WangJi's arms wrapped around his back and, as Lan WangJi bent down slightly, another went toward the back of his knees.

Wei WuXian was both shorter and lighter than him. Therefore, he was picked up easily, his body was embraced in a pair of firm arms. Wei WuXian didn't expect his answer to lead to this at all. Both in his past and current lives, it was the first time that he had been treated like this by anyone. He was horrified, "Lan Zhan!!!"

Carrying him, Lan WangJi both walked and replied to him steadily, "You said that you didn't want to be carried on my back."

Wei WuXian, "I didn't say that I wanted to be carried like this either."

Fortunately, it was already late into the night. There weren't any people walking on the streets, so it wasn't that embarrassing. Wei WuXian wasn't someone with a thin face either. Having been carried for a few steps, he quickly relaxed. He grinned as he played with the front of Lan WangJi's clothes, pretending to tug at it, "So you want to see whose face is thicker?"

The cold scent of sandalwood enveloped him. Without paying him attention, Lan WangJi looked straight forward and made no reaction, maintaining the righteous, serious expression. Seeing that nothing could affect him, Wei WuXian thought to himself as he continued to play with Lan WangJi's clothes, It seems that Lan Zhan's heart for revenge is actually quite strong. He's going to make me pay for however many times I've teased him in the past and take the fun away. This is such an improvement. Not only has his level of cultivation improved, his face also improved.

Wei WuXian asked, "Lan Zhan, you've known that it was me ever since we were at Dafan Mountain, right?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian wondered, "How could you tell?"

Lan WangJi looked down at him, "You want to know?" Wei WuXian declared, "Yes."

Lan WangJi, "You told me yourself."

Wei WuXian, "Myself? Because of Jin Ling? Because I summoned Wen Ning? None of these, right?"

It seemed as if something had sent ripples through Lan WangJi's eyes. Yet, the slight waves faded immediately, and his eyes were a still pool of water again.

He spoke in a serious tone, "Think."

Wei WuXian replied, "I only asked you because I can't think of the reason."

This time, no matter how he asked, Lan WangJi refused to answer. With Wei WuXian in his arms, he stepped into an inn. Aside from the front desk clerk who choked on some water, none of the bystanders acted strangely. As they arrived at the door of the room, Wei WuXian spoke, "Okay. We're here. It's time for you to let me down. You don't have a third hand to open the door..."

Before he finished his words, Lan WangJi did something that was extremely impolite. It was possibly the first time in his whole life that he had ever done such a rude act.

Carrying Wei WuXian, he kicked the door open.

The two doors sprang open, and the person who sat nervously inside instantly wailed, "HanGuang-Jun, I don't know, I don't know, I..."

After he realized in what posture the two of them came inside, he stared blankly at them, barely managing to finish the last sentence, "... I really don't know."

It really was the "Head Shaker".

Acting as if he didn't see anything, Lan WangJi carried Wei WuXian inside and put him on the bamboo mat. Nie HuaiSang's seemed as if he couldn't bear to look at the scene, and immediately opened his fan, covering his face with it. Wei WuXian walked around the fan to examine him.

Even after so many years, his past classmate didn't bear many changes. He looked the same as he did back then. Although he was born with an elegant, attractive face, his expression made him seem as if one could do anything to him. His stylish outfit showed a fine taste in clothing, which meant that he definitely put plenty of thought into it. Compared to the leader of a sect, he further resembled a wealthy idler. Even if he wore an imperial robe, he wouldn't seem like a prince; even if he held a saber, he wouldn't seem like a cultivator.

He denied it no matter what, so Lan WangJi put the piece of fabric that the spiritual dog had bitten off onto the table. Nie HuaiSang felt for his sleeve that lacked a certain scrap, then replied miserably, "I just happened to pass by. I really don't know anything."

Wei WuXian, "If you don't know, I'll talk. As you listen to me, maybe you'll figure that you do know some things after all."

Nie HuaiSang opened and closed his mouth a few times, unable to provide a response. Wei WuXian proceeded, "In the area of Qinghe's Xinglu Ridge, there have been rumors of the 'Man-Eating Ridge' and 'Man-Eating Castle', but there haven't been any actual victims, which is why it's mere hearsay. The hearsay would make it so that normal people avoid the Xinglu Ridge.

Thus, its real function is to act as a defense line—the first one, in fact.

"If there's a first, there must be a second. The second defense line is the walking corpses on the Xinglu Ridge. Even if someone who's not scared of the Man-Eating Castle rumors either purposely or accidentally went inside the ridge, after they see the walking dead, they will definitely flee. However, these walking corpses are small in number and weak in terms of power, so they won't cause any real harm.

"The third defense line is the maze array by the stone castle. The first two are to defend against normal people; only this one is to defend against cultivators. But, nevertheless, it only works against average cultivators. If a cultivator who holds a spiritual weapon or dog and specializes in maze arrays comes, or a cultivator as powerful as HanGuang-Jun, this defense line will have to be broken.

"The three defense measures exist in order for the stone castle on the Xinglu Ridge to remain hidden from the public. The identity of the people who built the stone castle is quite clear. This is the Nie Sect's area. Aside from the Nie Sect, nobody else is capable of easily setting up these three obstacles in Qinghe. And, moreover, you happened to appear near the stone castle and leave evidence."

"What exactly is the Qinghe Nie Sect's goal of building the Man-Eating Castle on the Xinglu Ridge? Where did the corpses in the wall come from? Were they eaten? Sect Leader Nie, if you don't give us a proper explanation here, I'm afraid that, after the secret is exposed, all of the sects and clans come here to interrogate you. When the time comes, even if you want to explain things, there won't be anyone to listen to or believe in you."

Nie HuaiSang replied desperately, as if he had given up, "... It isn't a Man-Eating Castle at all. It's... It's just my sect's ancestral burial ground!"

Wei WuXian questioned, "Ancestral burial ground? Whose ancestral burial ground buries sabers instead of corpses?"

Nie HuaiSang responded with a sullen face, "HanGuang-Jun, before I explain things, can you promise me something? Seeing that our two sects have known each other for long and that our older brothers have sworn, no matter what I say after this, you... and the one beside you, must not tell anyone. If the secret is exposed in the future, I'd greatly appreciate it if the two of you can say a few good things as witnesses. You've always been true to your words. If you promise, I'll believe you."

Lan WangJi, “As you wish.”

Wei WuXian asked, “You said that it’s not a Man-Eating Castle after all, so does it mean that it hasn’t eaten anyone?”

Nie HuaiSang clenched his teeth and answered obediently, “... It has.” Wei WuXian, “Wow.”

Nie HuaiSang immediately added, “But it was only once! And the one at fault wasn’t our sect, and it was dozens of years ago! The rumors of the Man-Eating Castle on the Xinglu Ridge also started since then. I... I only fanned the flames and magnified the rumors.”

#### Translator’s Notes

Wei Ying: In case anyone has forgotten (aka people like Addis the Editor), Wei Ying is Wei WuXian’s birth name. One’s birth name could only be called by a close friend/family member, or else it would have been considered rude. Lan WangJi calls Wei WuXian Wei Ying because they were classmates once.

## Chapter 26: Malice—Part Four

Lan WangJi, “The details, please.”

Sitting down, his polite words were almost as powerful as a threat. Nie HuaiSang finally started his explanation.

He began, “HanGuang-Jun, you know that we, the Nie Sect, are different from the other sects. Because our sect’s founder was a butcher, the other sects cultivate using swords, while our sect, on the other hand, cultivates using sabers.”

This was known by everyone and was by no means a secret. Even the sect motif of the QingheNie Sect was the vicious head of a beast that resembled a dog or a pig. Nie HuaiSang continued, “Because our cultivation method was different from those of the other sects’ and our founder was originally a butcher, it was only natural for blood to be shed. The sabers of our past sect leaders were all heavy with hostile energy and killing intent. Almost every single sect leader met a sudden death from a qi deviation explosion. Their irritable tempers also had a lot to do with this.”

Wei WuXian raised a brow, “Now, this is getting quite close to demonic cultivation.”

Nie HuaiSang quickly defended, “It’s different! Demonic cultivation is only demonic cultivation because it uses human lives. But, instead of human lives, our sect’s sabers use the lives of those evil spirits and beasts. Throughout their whole lives, they’ve been killing such things, so if they aren’t able to kill them any longer, they’d cause trouble and disrupt the sect. A saber spirit only deems one person as its master, allowing nobody else to use it. It’s not like we later generations can melt the sabers. First, it’d be disrespectful to the ancestors; second, it’s possible that even melting them won’t solve the problem.”

Wei WuXian commented, “Quite full of themselves, aren’t they?” Nie HuaiSang, “Indeed. The sabers who fought and cultivated alongside our ancestors are indeed in a position to be full of themselves.”

He continued, “As the generations went on, the sect leaders had higher levels of cultivation, and the problem also worsened. That is, until the sixth sect leader came up with a solution.”

Wei WuXian asked, “To build the Man-Eating Castle?”

Nie HuaiSang, “No, no. Although they are connected, this solution only appeared later. The sixth sect leader did this: he built two coffins for his father’s and his grandfather’s sabers, then dug a tomb. Inside the tomb, instead of any valuable treasures, he put hundreds of corpses that were about to transform.”

Lan WangJi frowned slightly. Nie HuaiSang immediately blurted, “HanGuang-Jun, I can explain! They weren’t killed by our sect’s people! We had to gather them from place to place! We also bought a bunch of them at high prices. The sixth sect leader said that, if the saber spirits wanted to fight with evil beings, then give them evil beings for them to fight forever. The pre- transformation corpses were buried along with the sword-containing coffins, like they were burial goods for the saber spirits. The saber spirits would suppress the transformation of the corpses and, at the same time, the corpses would calm the sword spirits’ desire and fury. The situation would go on as they were, with the two sides keeping each other in check. Only by this method did the future generations attain peace.”

Wei WuXian asked again, “Then why was a stone castle built afterward? Why were the corpses buried inside the walls? And, didn’t you say that it did eat a few people?”

Nie HuaiSang answered, “These questions are actually the same question. I guess... you can say that it did eat people. But it wasn’t on purpose!!! Our sixth sect leader constructed the saber tomb in such a way that it looked like the average tomb, and the future generations followed how he did it. But, about fifty years ago, the tomb was dug up by some grave robbers.”

Wei WuXian made an “oh” sound. He silently exclaimed, What a case of waking the sleeping lion.

Nie HuaiSang, “For an event as big as building a tomb, no matter how cautious and discreet one can be, it’s impossible for everything to stay hidden. The grave robbers pried into the matter and firmly believed that there was a huge tomb from past dynasties in the Xinglu Ridge. They planned this out a long time ago and came prepared. Among the unruly group of people, there were actually one or two who had true skills, allowing the mob to locate the orientation, pass the maze array, and find our saber tomb. They’ve seen enough dead people in their lives, so, after digging a hole and entering the tomb, they weren’t really scared of the corpses. But they searched everywhere for gold and treasures, breathing next to the corpses, and, even worse, they were youthful men in the prime of their lives, filled with yang energy. Remember, the corpses lying inside were all about to transform!

“It wasn’t hard to figure out what happened. Ten-or-so corpses transformed immediately. However, these grave robbers weren’t average people. With a complete set of tools, they actually managed to somehow kill the walking corpses once more. After the fight, there was flesh and blood all over the ground. They finally realized that the tomb was dangerous and got ready to leave. But just as they were leaving, they were eaten!

“The number of corpses put in the tomb was strictly controlled. It was neither more, neither less, just enough to be at a balance with the saber spirits. It would’ve been fine if the grave robbers caused just the transformation, since, after they left, the saber spirits would’ve suppressed the transformation again. But, with the chaos they caused, the corpses were all cut to pieces, and so there were suddenly a few less corpses than it began with. For the saber tomb to ensure that there were enough fierce corpses and sword spirits to suppress each other, it... it could only... close itself off and trap them inside the tomb for the group to make up for the shortage they had caused.

“Since the saber tomb was destroyed, the sect leader at that time began to think of different methods. He chose another spot on the Xinglu Ridge and built a saber hall instead of a saber tomb. In case grave robbers came again, he hid the corpses inside the walls in disguise.

“The sword hall was the rumored ‘Man-Eating Castle’. When the grave robbers came to Qinghe, they pretended to be hunters. They never returned after going into the Xinglu Ridge and left no corpses behind, so people started to say that they were devoured by a monster in the ridge. Then, after the stone castles were built, before the new maze array was set up, a passerby accidentally came upon it again. Luckily, no doors were built on the castles, so he couldn’t venture inside.

But, after leaving the ridge, he told everyone that there were a group of strange, white castles in the Xinglu Ridge and that the man-eating monster must have dwelled there. We thought that it’d be beneficial for the rumors to spread so that nobody dared to go near the area, so we exaggerated a bit and created the legend of the ‘Man-Eating Castle’. But it really can eat humans!”

Nie HuaiSang took out a handkerchief and a white stone the size of a garlic head from within his sleeves. He used the handkerchief to wipe away sweat and passed the white stone over, “The two of you can take a look at this.”

Wei WuXian took the stone. After having a better look at it, he found something white that protruded from the stone. It looked like... the bone of a human’s finger.

He immediately realized what was going on. Nie HuaiSang finished wiping his sweat and continued, “That... Young Master Jin... somehow made an explosion that created a hole in the wall. To be able to break such a thick wall must have meant that he also carried a lot of spiritual tools on him—but wait, that’s not the point... What I’m saying is that the area he blew up just happened to be the earliest saber hall we built in the Xinglu Ridge. Back then, we didn’t think of using stone bricks on the both sides and filling the center with soil to prevent yang energy from going in, so that they can’t easily transform. We simply put the corpses inside. So, when Young Master Jin made the opening, he didn’t realize that he also

destroyed a skeleton that was buried inside. Before long, he was sucked into the walls of the castle, in place of the corpse that he blew up... Every so often, I go to the Xinglu Ridge to check things out. Today, when I went, I found this. Just as I picked up the stone, a dog came after me. Ah... The sword hall is pretty much our ancestral tomb. I really..."

The more Nie HuaiSang talked, the more miserable he felt, "Most cultivators know that this is our area, so they'd never night-hunt around Qinghe. Who knew that...?"

Who knew that he had such bad luck? First, the disobedient Jin Ling had his mind set on the Xinglu Ridge, and then the two in search of where the ghost hand pointed, Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian, came as well. He spoke again, "HanGuang-Jun and you... I already said that you mustn't tell anyone else about this. Or else..."

Or else, seeing from the QingheNie Sect's half-dead situation right now, if this was released to the public, Nie HuaiSang would become a sinner, a disgrace to his ancestors even if he died. It was only natural that he'd rather be the secret laughingstock of all the sects instead of focusing on cultivation or daring to sharpen his saber's blade. If his cultivation reached a certain level, he would gradually become more irritable and, in the end, die with anger the same way that his brother and ancestors died. Even after his death, his sword would haunt the living and disrupt the peace of the whole sect. If so, being a worthless person even seemed better.

It was quite an unsolvable problem. Ever since the founder of the Nie Sect, this had been the same. Surely it didn't mean that the future generations would have to deny the path and basis that the founder forged? All of the cultivation sects were skilled in different areas. Similar to how the GusuLan Sect was skilled at music, the violence and power of the QingheNie Sect's saber spirits were how it outshone the other sects. If it abandoned its founder's ideal and started anew in search of a different path, who knew how many years it'd take, or if it'd even succeed or not.

Moreover, Nie HuaiSang would never dare to betray the Nie Sect and cultivate a different path. Because of this, his only choice was to be a good-for-nothing.

If he weren't a sect leader and spent his whole life the same way as he did back in the Cloud Recesses, fooling around for entire days, he'd certainly be in a more comfortable position than he was now. But, since his brother had passed away already, no matter how hard it was for him, he'd still have to take the responsibility on his shoulders and stumble forward. Nie HuaiSang left after telling them again and again not to say anything, and Wei WuXian blanked out for a while. Suddenly, he felt Lan WangJi walk over. Lan WangJi kneeled with a single leg in front of him, then proceeded to roll up his trousers with an earnest face. He hurriedly spoke, "Wait, again?" Lan WangJi, "We will remove the Curse Mark first."

Within one day, HanGuang-Jun had kneeled in such a way so many times in front of him. Although Lan WangJi looked quite serious, he really couldn't bear to look at the scene. Wei WuXian spoke, "I'll do it myself." Quickly rolling up the trouser legs, he could see that the Curse Mark covered the entire lower half of his leg, passed his knees, and climbed onto the upper half. Wei WuXian took a glance at it, "It's already passed my thighs."

Lan WangJi turned his head away and did not answer. Wei WuXian found it quite odd, "Lan Zhan?"

#### Translator's Notes

Transform: This refers to the turning of a normal corpse to a "walking corpse" or "fierce corpse". If anyone calls this process "zombify" or these corpses "zombies" (such as the translator of Daomu Biji), I will send knives to their house.

Sleeves: In Ancient Chinese clothing, there were openings inside of sleeves for storing things.

## Chapter 27: Malice—Part Five

Only then did Lan WangJi turn to the front again, gaze still slightly off to the side. Seeing this, Wei WuXian blinked his eyes, wanting to make fun of him for some reason. Just as he was about to tease Lan WangJi, a shattering sound suddenly came from by the desk.

They both stood up to look. The teacups and teapot broke to pieces on the ground. A Qiankun Pouch lay amid the white shards of porcelain and the tea that spilled out. The surface of the bag went up and down, as if something was trapped inside, eager to come out.

Although the Qiankun Pouch was only the size of a fist, it was specially made to store things. Complex incantations were also sewn on both the inside and the outside, adding a few more sealing layers. Lan WangJi originally sealed the arm inside the pouch and put it under a teacup on the table. Now, seeing its agitation, they finally remembered that it was time to perform Rest. If not for the short nightly duets they perform to calm it, no matter how strong the Qiankun Pouch's power of suppression was, it couldn't trap the ghost hand alone.

Wei WuXian felt for the bamboo flute that had been by his waist, but he found nothing. Turning around, he saw that Lan WangJi already had the flute in his hands. Lan WangJi's head tilted slightly downward. He only handed the flute back after carving on it for a while, in a dedicated manner. Taking the flute back, Wei WuXian noticed that, after it had been adjusted, even rough details such as the finger holes were much finer.

Lan WangJi, "Play it properly."

Remembering the horrible duet, they played in the Mingshi that angered Lan QiRen to the point of waking up from a coma and fainting again, Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he almost fell on the ground, thinking to himself, it must have been tough for him these few days, tolerating this for so long. He stopped himself from fooling around any longer and, with a serious expression, raised the flute to his lips. However, having only played a few notes, the Qiankun Pouch suddenly multiplied in size and stood upright on the ground!

A note cracked with a "tut". Wei WuXian commented, "Has it gotten too used to the bad playing? I'm playing properly for once, and it doesn't even like it."

As if replying him, the Qiankun Pouch flung itself at Wei WuXian. Lan WangJi's melody took a sharp turn. With one smooth gesture, the seven strings vibrated at once, emitting a noise so strong that it almost seemed like an avalanche. After the sound, the Qiankun Pouch fell backward to the ground again. As if nothing had happened, Wei WuXian continued playing. Lan

WangJi's wrist softened. Following the tune of Rest, the guqin's melody became calm once more, and gradually blended with the flute's.

The song finished, and the Qiankun Pouch finally shrunk to the size it had been, remaining motionless. Wei WuXian stuck the flute back by his waist, "In these few days, it's never looked as impatient as this before. It seems as if it was provoked by something."

Lan WangJi nodded and turned to him, "And, it was something on you."

Wei WuXian immediately looked downward at himself. Today, there was only one thing on him that was different—the Curse Mark that had been transferred to him from Jin Ling.

Jin Ling's Curse Mark was left on him when he was at the stone castles of the Xinglu Ridge. Seeing how strongly the ghost hand reacted to the Curse Mark, did it mean that...

Wei WuXian, "Do you mean that another part of his body might be within the walls of the Nie Sect's Saber Hall?"

On the next morning, the two departed again, heading back to the Xinglu Ridge.

Yesterday, Nie HuaiSang had been caught and confessed everything. Over the night, he called for all of the sect's reliable disciples to clean up the mess that the intruders created. When Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked over, the piece of wall that Wei WuXian dug

Jin Ling out of had just been filled and a new corpse was already put inside. Watching the white bricks stack up neatly, he wiped some sweat off his brows. However, as he turned around, his legs almost gave out. He pulled a cringing smile onto his face, “HanGuang-Jun...and you...”

Wei WuXian waved his hands as he grinned, “Sect Leader Nie, you’re building the walls?” Nie HuaiSang wiped sweat away with his handkerchief, rubbing so many times that he almost took a layer of skin away, “Yes, yes...”

Wei WuXian said in a voice filled with much empathy and a dash of timidity, “My apologies. I’m really sorry for the inconvenience, but you might need to build the wall again afterwards.”

Nie HuaiSang, “Yes, yes... What?! Wait!”

Before he could finish his sentence, Bichen unsheathed. Nie HuaiSang gaped as he watched the brick wall, which he repaired mere moment ago, crack open again.

Destruction was always easier than restoration. Wei WuXian’s speed at taking bricks down was countless times faster than their speed at stacking bricks. Nie HuaiSang trembled as he tightly gripped his fan, feeling so wronged that he was on the verge of bursting into tears. Yet, since HanGuang-Jun stood on the side and commented nothing, he didn’t dare to say anything either. After Lan WangJi explained the situation to him in a concise manner, he immediately swore to the Heavens and Earth, “Nonsense! That’s utter nonsense! The corpses that our Saber Hall uses are all complete with each limb attached. It’s impossible for there to be some armless male corpse. If you don’t believe me, I’ll take apart the wall with you and prove my innocence. But afterwards you must put them back as soon as possible, without any delay. After all, this is our ancestral burial ground...”

A few disciples of the Nie Sect also joined them. Now that there were other people doing the work, Wei WuXian backed off and stood on the side, waiting for results. After an hour, the stone bricks on the wall that Jin Ling had been buried in were mostly taken off. Some disciples put on face masks while others swallowed special red-colored pills, so that the breathing and human energy didn’t cause corpse transformations. Among the black dirt, an ashen hand or a vein-laced foot sometimes poked out, in addition to the tangled, grimey hair plastered everywhere. Each and every male corpse was hastily cleaned and set row-by-row on the ground.

The corpses came in all shapes and sizes—some were already skeletons, some were in the process of rotting, some were still quite fresh. However, every single one of them had a complete body. They didn’t find any male corpse that was missing a left arm.

Nie HuaiSang spoke warily, “Taking apart this one wall is enough, isn’t it? Does any more need to be taken down? Probably not, right?”

It was indeed enough. The Curse Mark on Jin Ling’s body was extremely dark in color, so the being that created it was most likely buried nearby him and the range would definitely not exceed this wall. Wei WuXian squatted down by a row of corpses. After pondering for a few moments, he turned to Lan WangJi, “Should we get the Qiankun Pouch?”

Taking the left hand out of the Qiankun Pouch for it to identify the body on its own wouldn’t be a bad idea. However, if it was too close to the other limbs of the corpse, it’d be hard not to agitate it and trigger worse situations. And, due to the abundance of dark energy in this special location, the level of danger multiplied. This was why they carefully chose to come during daytime. Wei WuXian shook his head and thought to himself, this doesn’t mean that the arm doesn’t belong to a man, does it? No, that’d be impossible. I can tell whether a hand belongs to a man or a woman at first sight... Then, would it mean that the owner has three arms?!

Just as he was about to laugh at his own thought, Lan WangJi spoke again, “The legs.”

With his reminder, Wei WuXian finally remembered. He overlooked the fact that the Curse Mark didn't spread any further than his legs. He quickly called, "Take off the pants! Take off the pants!"

Nie HuaiSang was shocked to death, "Why would you say such a shameful thing in front of HanGuang-Jun?"

Wei WuXian responded, "How was it shameful? We're all men, anyways. Help me take off all of the corpses' pants. Only the male corpses! This has nothing to do with the female ones." As he spoke, he started reaching out toward the belt sashes of the corpses on the ground. It really was unfortunate for Nie HuaiSang. He didn't expect at all that, after confessing everything yesterday, today, he needed to take off the corpses' pants right inside the Saber Hall of his ancestors.

Moreover, they were male corpses. With a face full of tears, he thought that, for sure, after he died, he would be slapped once on the face by every ancestor in the QingheNie Sect and end up injured so badly that he'd be handicapped even after he reincarnated. Luckily, Wei WuXian's act was stopped by Lan WangJi. Just as Nie HuaiSang was about to praise how worthy of his title HanGuang-Jun was, he heard him speak, "I will do it."

Wei WuXian, "You'll do it? You're really going to do such a thing?"

The corners of Lan WangJi's brows seemed to be twitching slightly, as if he was holding something back. He repeated, "Do not move. I will do it."

This was the worst of all the shocks Nie HuaiSang experienced today.

Of course, Lan WangJi wouldn't actually use his hands to pull on the corpses' pants. He simply used Bichen and lightly sliced open the clothing on the corpses, revealing the skin inside. This wasn't needed for some of the corpses, as the clothes were already quite ragged. A few moments later, he spoke up, "I found it."

Everyone immediately looked toward the ground. On both thighs of the corpse beside Lan WangJi's white boots, there were two light, circular marks. The stitches of the flesh-colored threads were tightly sewn around. There was a faint difference between the colors of the skin above and below the stitches. Clearly, the legs and upper body of the corpse didn't belong to the same person.

This pair of legs was sewn on by someone!

Nie HuaiSang was already shocked speechless. Wei WuXian inquired, "Who chooses the corpses that the Nie Sect uses for the Saber Hall?"

Nie HuaiSang replied with a glazed expression, "Usually, the past sect leaders chose and stored them when they were still alive. My brother passed away at an earlier age. He didn't have enough, so I also helped him choose some... I kept whichever corpses that were complete with all limbs. I don't know about anything other than this..."

It'd be impossible to get anything out of him as to who exactly sneaked the corpse inside. From the people who provided the corpses to the disciples of the Nie Sect, there were countless suspects. It was likely that the truth would be revealed only if they found all body parts and pieced the corpse and soul together.

Finally, having managed to separate the pair of legs and the other half of the male corpse, Wei WuXian put them inside a new Qiankun Pouch as he spoke to Lan WangJi, "Looks like our dear friend here was cut to pieces. And, not only that, the parts were scattered all over the place—one piece here, one piece there. Just how much hatred did the murderer hold for him? We can only hope that the pieces aren't too tiny."

Although Nie HuaiSang still said "see you" when they set off, judging from his frightened face, he most likely didn't want to see them ever again for the rest of his life. The two left the Xinglu Ridge and returned to the inn. Upon arriving at the relatively safe place, they took out the three limbs and started to examine them. As they had expected, the pair of legs were of the same color as the severed arm. And, if they were put close together, they would react strongly, vibrating nonstop as if they wanted to join together. But the efforts were

useless, as there was still one part of the body between them that was missing. It was certain that they belonged to the same person.

Aside from the fact that this was a man with a tall physique, long limbs, a muscular body, and a high level of cultivation, they knew nothing else about the mysterious corpse. Fortunately, the ghost hand soon pointed at where the next step would take place—the Southwest.

Following its direction, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi made their way to Yueyang.

#### Translator's Notes

Qiankun Pouch: This was called the Qiankun Bag in past chapters, but now it has been changed to Qiankun Pouch because it is more suitable for its size.

## Chapter 28: Dew—Part One

After entering the city, the two walked side-by-side through the bustling crowd. All of a sudden, Lan WangJi asked, “How is the Curse Mark?”

Wei WuXian, “Jin Ling was buried too close to our dear friend and got stained with quite a lot of resentful energy. It faded a bit, but it’s not completely gone. The chances are we can only find a way to remove it after we find the whole corpse or at least the head. It doesn’t really cause much trouble anyways.”

The “dear friend” was none other than the man that had been cut to pieces. Since they didn’t know who he was, Wei WuXian suggested that they referred to him as a “dear friend”. Lan WangJi didn’t say anything after hearing it, but he didn’t object to it either, which could be interpreted as a silent approval. Of course, he himself wouldn’t ever use the word.

Lan WangJi, “How much is ‘a bit’?”

Wei WuXian indicated with his hands, “A bit is just a bit. How do I explain it? Should I take my clothes off and show you?”

Lan WangJi’s brows shifted slightly, as if he was actually worried that Wei WuXian would strip right here and right now. He replied with an indifferent tone, “Take them off after we return.”

Wei WuXian laughed, whirled around, and walked a few steps facing backward. Before, in order to escape as soon as possible, he desperately tried to disgust others, from feigning madness to purposely losing face. Now that his identity was revealed, if he were anyone else, he would’ve felt extremely ashamed remembering all those things he did. Only someone with a face as thick as Wei WuXian would carry on as if he wasn’t involved in anything. Speaking of it, if he were anyone else with at least some face, he would never have done ridiculous things such as climbing into someone’s bed at night, insisting on sharing a bathtub together, and asking if he looked pretty after putting on makeup. Since he pretended that he didn’t remember anything, Lan WangJi naturally refrained from bringing up the subject, the two acting as if nothing had happened. Today was the first time he made such a joke again after his identity was no longer a secret. When he finished laughing, Wei WuXian immediately put on a serious face, “HanGuang- Jun, do you think that the people who set our dear friend’s hand in Mo Village and made it attack your juniors, and the people who sewed his legs on another corpse and buried them in the wall, are the same group of people?”

Both in the past and the present, in his mind, he directly called Lan WangJi by his first name, but he got used to the last few days of calling him by his title. Besides, him calling this name created a tone of exaggerated seriousness, sounding unexplainably funny. Thus, when they were outside, he continued to call him in such a semi-earnest way.

Lan WangJi, “There are two groups.”

Wei WuXian, “Well, I agree. Taking such pains to sew the legs to another corpse and hide them in a wall obviously meant that they didn’t want the limbs to be discovered. If so, they wouldn’t have purposely tossed out the left hand to attack the GusuLan Sect’s people, since it would definitely have caused attention and investigation. One went to great lengths to hide everything, while the other attacked rashly, almost as if it wanted to be discovered. They’re probably not the same group of people.”

Everything that needed to be said had been said. Lan WangJi seemed like he didn’t have anything else to say anymore, but responded with an approving “mnn” anyway.

Wei WuXian turned around, speaking as he walked, “The people who hid the legs knew about the QingheNie Sect’s Saber Hall tradition, while the people who let the left hand loose knew about the GusuLan Sect’s plans. I don’t think any of them have simple intents. There are more and more secrets.”

Lan WangJi, "One step at a time."

Wei WuXian, "How did you recognize me?" Lan WangJi, "Think for yourself."

Questions and answers passed quickly between them, without even a moment of rest. Wei WuXian originally wanted to wait until Lan WangJi was not paying attention and make him blurt out the answer to the last question. Even though he still didn't succeed, he wasn't discouraged at all and continued to switch the topics of their conversation at a quick pace, "I've never been to Yueyang. Before, I've always had other people to inquire about things for me. This time, I'm gonna take a break and you can go ask around. Would you mind, HanGuang-Jun?"

Lan WangJi turned around and got going at once. Wei WuXian immediately interrupted, "Wait. HanGuang-Jun, may I ask where you're going?"

Lan WangJi looked back, "To find the cultivational sect of this area."

Wei WuXian tugged at his sword tassel and dragged him in the opposite direction, "Why would you find them? This is their area; even if they know, they wouldn't tell you. They either couldn't deal with it and hid it so that they didn't lose face, or tried as hard as they could since they didn't want other people to meddle with things. My honorable HanGuang-Jun, it isn't that I want to purposely shame you, but you really can't do without me when handling things outside. If you ask around in such a manner, I'd be surprised if you actually managed to get results."

Although these words were a bit rude, tenderness pooled within Lan WangJi's eyes. Again, he spoke in a low voice, "Mnn."

Wei WuXian laughed, "What did you 'mnn' for? That's not how you should've responded." Meanwhile, in his heart, he commented gleefully, "Mnn" is the only thing he knows to say. He's still so stuffy!

Lan WangJi, "Then, how should I ask?"

Wei WuXian pointed to the side, "Go over there, of course."

He pointed toward a wide street. Bright red banners of all shapes and sizes hung on both sides of the street, fluttering in the wind. Every single shop opened its doors widely, with round, black jars placed from within to outside the entrance. There were also waiters holding trays of small liquor bowls, recommending their shops to the passerby.

The strong scent of liquor drifted throughout the street. No wonder Wei WuXian walked slower and slower. He stopped altogether when they arrived at the next street corner, and even dragged Lan WangJi to a halt.

Wei WuXian put on a serious face, "The waiters here are usually young and hardworking. With so many customers a day and so many mouths spreading gossip, nothing strange going on around the area would escape their ears and eyes."

Lan WangJi replied with a "mnn", but it was written all over his face that "you just want to have a few drinks, don't you?"

Wei WuXian pretended as if he couldn't understand Lan WangJi's expression. Continuing to pull on the other's sword tassel, he stepped into the street of liquor shops with beaming eyes. At once, the waiters from five or six different shops came over, each more enthusiastic than the next, "Would you like a taste? The He family's liquor is well-known all around the area!" "Young Master, have a taste of this. You don't have to pay. If you enjoyed the liquor, then come to our shop." "This one doesn't smell strong, but wait until you drink it up!" "If you can still stand after you finish this, I'll adopt your surname!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian responded, "Very well!" He took over the liquor bowl that waiter held, drank it up, and showed him the emptied bowl with a grin, "Adopt my surname?"

Surprisingly, the waiter wasn't scared. Sticking his chin up, he looked even more confident, "I meant if you drink a whole jar!" Wei WuXian, "Then, give me... three jars."

The waiter was more than delighted and rushed back inside the shop. Wei WuXian turned to Lan WangJi, "We're doing business here, aren't we? First, we help their business, then we talk about other things. After we pay, it'll be easy to get them talking."

Lan WangJi took out money to pay.

The two walked inside the shop. Inside, there were wooden tables and chairs for the customers to rest and chat. One of the other waiters in the shop saw how Lan WangJi looked and figured that he wasn't the average person. Not daring to slight him, he only directed them to a table after he wiped the table and chairs for a long while. With two jars by his foot and another in his hand, Wei WuXian chatted with the waiter for a few moments, then cut to the chase, asking again for any strange things that had happened in the area. The waiter was also a talkative person. He rubbed his hands together, "What sort of strange things?"

"Haunted houses, deserted cemeteries, corpses that were cut apart and so on."

The waiter's eyes darted back and forth between them, "Hmm... What do you do for a living? You and him." Wei WuXian, "Haven't you guessed it already?"

The waiter understood, "Of course. It's easy to guess. You two must be one of those cultivators who fly around in the clouds and Heavens. Especially the one next to you. Among average folks, I've never seen such a... such a..." Wei WuXian grinned, "Such a pretty person." The waiter laughed, "If you say this, the young master next to you will be displeased. Strange things, wasn't it? They did happen. Not now, but ten years ago. Walk in this direction. After you leave the city, walk for around two miles, and you'd see quite a lovely residence. I don't know if their signboard is still there or not. It's the Chang Clan's residence." Wei WuXian, "What's wrong with the residence?"

"The entire clan died!" The waiter said, "You asked for strange things, so of course I'm telling you the strangest of things. The entire clan was wiped out, and I heard that they were frightened to death!"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi was absorbed in thought, appearing as if he remembered something. On the other hand, Wei WuXian didn't notice anything, "Is there any cultivation sects stationed around the area?" It must have been an extremely cruel being if it was able to frighten all members of an entire clan to death. Not every sect was like the QingheNie Sect, having difficulties that it couldn't mention. Most sects would never tolerate the appearance of something like this in their area. The waiter replied, "Yes. Of course there is."

Wei WuXian, "Then how did they deal with the situation?"

"Deal with the situation?" The waiter swung the cleaning rag onto his shoulder and also sat down, revealing the secret that he had been keeping in for so long, "Young Master, do you know what the surname of the cultivation sect in Yueyang was? It was Chang. The clan who died was their clan! If everyone died, who would there be to deal with the situation?"

The Chang Clan that was wiped out had been the cultivation sect stationed in this area?! Wei WuXian had never heard of some YueyangChang Sect before, meaning that it definitely wasn't a prominent sect, but the fact that a whole clan had been wiped out was definitely a significant event. He immediately asked, "How was the Chang Clan wiped out?"

The waiter, "This is what I've heard. One night, the noise of slamming on doors suddenly came from the Chang Clan's residence."

Wei WuXian, "The noise of slamming on doors?"

"That's right! The slamming was so loud that it almost reached the Heavens. In it, there came screams and cries as if everyone was locked inside, unable to come out. Strange, isn't it? The

door was bolted from within, so if you were on the inside and you wanted to get out, you could've just opened it. Why would you slam on the doors? Even if you slam on them,

the people outside wouldn't be able to get you out. Besides, if you couldn't get out from the doors, couldn't you climb over the walls?

"The people outside were quite confused. Everyone knew that the Chang Clan was very powerful in the area because the people there cultivated. The head of their clan, Chang Ping, I think, had a sword that could fly and have him stand on it as it flew! Say, something really happened inside and even his own clan couldn't take care of it, if ordinary people went over, wouldn't they have been searching for their own deaths? This was why nobody built any ladders or climbed over the walls to peek inside. Just like this, the night passed, and the wailing inside grew quieter and quieter. On the next day, as the sun came out, the doors of the Chang Clan opened on their own.

"Within the house, among the men and women, ten-or-so masters, and a few dozens of servants, some sat, some lay, vomiting their bladders out. All of them were frightened to death."

The owner of the liquor shop turned around and scolded, "You're gonna die! Why are you not doing work and telling old tales about people dying?"

Wei WuXian, "Five more jars, please."

Lan WangJi paid the price for ten jars. The owner beamed at once, warning the waiter, "Look after the customers properly. Don't go running around!"

Wei WuXian, "You can continue."

Without anything else to worry about, the waiter tried as hard as he could and continued the story in an animated voice, "After then, for a long time, anyone who walked by the Chang Residence at night could hear the noises of slamming on walls coming from the inside! Think about it. People like them who fly in the skies have seen countless ghosts and monsters before, yet they were frightened to death. How frightening would that have had to be? If you're often out at night, you'd definitely bump into some ghosts. Even after they were buried, you can hear them slamming on their coffins! Although the head of their clan, Chang Ping, was away from home and survived..."

Wei WuXian, "Didn't you say that the whole clan died?"

#### Translator's Notes

**Bathtub:** The bathtub here refers to a large, wooden bucket that was used in Ancient China for bathing purposes. It'd be quite cramped in there if two people bathe together.

**Title:** This used to be called an "alternative name". It will now be changed to "title" as it seems more suitable.

**Sword tassel:** Sword tassels are tassels hung on the swords' hilts, mostly for decorative purposes. They come in all kinds of color, but Lan WangJi's is probably white.

**Mnn:** When reading out loud in your head, do not imagine a moaning sound. This serves a similar purpose as "mhm/uh-huh".

**Liquor bowls:** They look flatter and are shallower than the average cups. This image shows common sizes of liquor bowls:

[https://cubo1.alicdn.com/img/ibank/2014/633/677/1834776336\\_1727173324.jpg](https://cubo1.alicdn.com/img/ibank/2014/633/677/1834776336_1727173324.jpg) (from left to right: 50 ml, 75 ml 100 ml, and 150 ml). Also, a small jar of liquor holds around a half to one whole liter, while a large jar can hold up to five liters. In this case, the shop is most likely selling smaller jars.

**Clan:** To recap (in case anyone forgot), a clan is the family descending from the founder of the sect. In this case, "clan" is used instead of "sect" because the Chang Clan is quite small in size, which meant that it probably didn't have any outer disciples/disciples from foreign sects.

## Chapter 29: Dew—Part Two

The waiter, “Take it easy. I was just about to mention that. Everyone did die. Although I said that he survived, it was only for a short while. After a few years, the clan’s head, Chang Ping, died as well. This time, the death was even more horrifying. He was killed by lingchi with a sword! I don’t need to tell you what lingchi is, do I? It’s when the flesh on someone’s body is piece by piece sliced off with a saber or a sword for three thousand and six hundred times, until all of the flesh is gone and there’s only a skeleton left...”

Of course, it was impossible for Wei WuXian not to know what lingchi was. If somebody wanted a book called A Thousand Ways to Die Agonizing Deaths, he’d have been the person who was most qualified to write it. He raised a hand, “I understand. Then, do you know why the Chang Clan was wiped out?”

The waiter, “I heard that it was planned by another cultivation sect. That’s for sure, right? Or else, why did a bunch of people who could cultivate fail to escape? They were definitely trapped inside by something or someone.”

In case the conversation wasn’t going well, the owner of the shop even brought over two side dishes of peanuts and sunflower seeds. Wei WuXian nodded in acknowledgement, and continued while eating sunflower seeds, “Did anyone find out what exactly the something or someone was?”

The waiter laughed, “Young Master, now you’re just joking. How could we ordinary people who are just trying to get through life know anything about those who fly around in the skies?

Logically, you guys should know more than me since you all cultivate. I’ve only heard some vague talk of how they offended someone whom they shouldn’t have! Anyways, after that, nobody was left in charge of the evil beings around Yueyang.”

Wei WuXian pondered, “Somebody whom they shouldn’t have offended?”

“That’s right.” The waiter ate two peanuts, “These sects or whatever indeed hold grudges against the others. I’m thinking that the Chang Clan must have been targeted by the other cultivators.

Isn’t killing people for the sake of treasures common or something? Those books all said so. Tales and legends as well. Although I don’t know who exactly did it, it was apparently related to a very famous villain.”

Wei WuXian smiled as he lifted the liquor bowl to his lips, glancing sideways at him, “Let me guess. You’re gonna say that you don’t know who the villain was?”

The waiter cracked up, “Guess again. I definitely know this one. He was called something along the lines of ‘peculiar’... Right, ‘patriarch’. The YiLing Patriarch!”

Wei WuXian choked, letting out a series of bubbles into the liquor bowl with a splash, “What?” Him again?!

The waiter confirmed, “Yep, that’s right! His surname was Wei. He’s called Wei WuQian, I think. People sound both hateful and scared when they mention him.”

“...”

Wei WuXian thought over it and determined two things—One: He had never been to Yueyang before, and two: Among all of the people he had killed, none of them died by lingchi. He felt that this was a bit absurd and looked over at Lan WangJi, as if he wanted an explanation. Lan WangJi had been waiting for this look since quite a while ago. He replied, “We are leaving.”

Wei WuXian immediately understood. Lan WangJi had something to say to him and it couldn’t be said in the liquor shop, under everyone’s noses. He stood up, “Then let’s leave. How much... Right, it’s been paid already. I’m leaving the liquor here for now. I’ll continue

drinking after we finish.” He added, half-jokingly, “Make sure it’s still here when I get back.”

Having already finished more than half of the plate of peanuts, the waiter responded, “Of course! Our shop is honest to everyone, from the old to the young. Leave ‘em here and don’t worry.

We’ll wait until you come back to close our shop. Hey, Young Masters, are you going to the Chang Residence right now? Whoa, now that’s pretty cool—I’m from the area and I haven’t even been there! I’ve only dared to sneak a few looks at it from far away. Are you two going inside? What are you going to do?”

Wei WuXian, “We’re also just gonna sneak a few looks, from far away.”

The young waiter had an outgoing personality, getting friendly with strangers a bit too quickly. Although they only chatted for a short while, he was already treating Wei WuXian as if they were friends. He came over to put his arm around Wei WuXian’s shoulder, “Is the work that you two do hard? Do you earn lots of money? Probably a ton, right? What a respectable job. Let me ask you something—is it difficult to get started? I...”

As he babbled, he suddenly shut his mouth, nervously looking to the side. He whispered, “Young Master, why is the one beside you... staring at me?”

Wei WuXian followed his gaze just to see Lan WangJi turn around, stand up, and walk outside the liquor shop, “Oh, him. This friend of mine was brought up strictly. He absolutely hates it when other people are being too comfortable with each other in front of him. Isn’t that strange?”

The waiter awkwardly took away his arm, replying in a hushed voice, “Strange indeed. The way he looked over, you’d think that I was putting my arm around his wife...”

With Lan WangJi’s hearing ability, it was impossible for him to not catch something just because it was with a lowered voice. Imagining how he’d feel right now, Wei WuXian tried so hard not to laugh that his stomach hurted. He quickly said to the waiter, “I finished a jar.”

The waiter, “I’m sorry?”

Wei WuXian pointed at himself, “I’m standing.”

Finally recalling the “if you can still stand after you finish this, I’ll adopt your surname” that he said earlier, he blurted out, “Oh... Ohhh! Uhm... Wow! I’m not kidding, but this is my first time seeing someone who can still stand and speak properly after downing a jar. Young Master, what’s your surname?”

Wei WuXian, “My surname...” Suddenly remembering the “Wei WuQian” that the waiter mentioned, the corners of his lips twitched. He smoothly transitioned, “Is Lan.”

The waiter was also someone with a thick face, announcing without any change of expression, “Yes. From today on, my surname will be Lan!”

Under the bright-red banners of the liquor shop, it seemed as if, for one second, Lan WangJi’s figure stumbled ever so slightly. With a mischievous smile on his face, Wei WuXian walked over with his hands behind his back and patted his shoulder, “HanGuang-Jun, to thank you for paying the bill, I made him adopt your surname.”

After they left the city, the two walked in the direction of where the waiter pointed at. The number of people gradually decreased, while the number of trees increased. Wei WuXian asked, “Back then, why did you not let me continue asking him?”

Lan WangJi, “I suddenly remembered hearing about what happened in Yueyang. There was no need to continue asking.”

Wei WuXian, “Before you tell me, let me ask you something. Confirm for me that the, uh, wiping out of the Chang Clan wasn’t done by me, was it?”

Other than how he died ten years ago and his soul had been fairly stable, it was impossible that he killed an entire clan and didn’t remember anything!

Lan WangJi, “No.” Wei WuXian, “Oh.”

It was as if he returned to those days, before he died, of being even worse than a sewer rat, despised by everyone. He played a role in everything; he was to be blamed for everything. Even if one's neighbor's grandson didn't eat properly and lost five pounds, it was because the child was frightened by stories of the YiLing Patriarch commanding the Ghost General to murder people.

However, Lan WangJi spoke again, "The killing was not done by you, but it was related to you." Wei WuXian, "What's the relationship?"

Lan WangJi, "There are two relationships. First, one of the people who were connected to it shared a past with your mother."

Wei WuXian stopped in his tracks.

He didn't know what he was feeling at the moment or how his face looked. Pausing for a moment, he spoke, "... My mother?"

Wei WuXian was the son of Wei ChangZe, a servant of the YunmengJiang Sect, and ZangSe SanRen, a rogue cultivator. Both Jiang FengMian and his wife, Yu ZiYuan, were quite familiar with Wei WuXian's parents. Despite this, Jiang FengMian never reminisced about his old friend in front of Wei WuXian and, moreover, Yu ZiYuan never spoke properly to Wei WuXian at all. It was lucky for him if she didn't give him a few whips and send him to kneel in the ancestral hall so that he'd keep his distance from Jiang Cheng. Other people told him most of the things he knew about his parents. He really didn't know much more than what everyone else knew.

Lan WangJi also halted, turning around to look at him, "Have you heard of the name 'Xiao XingChen'?"

Wei WuXian searched through his memories, "No."

Lan WangJi, "'No' is correct. He was well-known when he left the mountain twelve years ago. Now, nobody mentions him."

Twelve years ago, just happened to be one year after the siege at YiLing's LuanZang Hill, which meant that he only just missed it. Wei WuXian asked, "What's the mountain? Who taught him?"

Lan WangJi, "I do not know which mountain it was. His was taught by a cultivator. Xiao XingChen was a pupil of BaoShan SanRen."

Wei WuXian finally understood why Lan WangJi said that this person shared a past with his mother, "So, that mean's Xiao XingChen is my shishu."

ZangSe SanRen was also a pupil of BaoShan SanRen.

BaoShan SanRen was a cultivator who lived secluded from the rest of the world, rumored to be of the same generation as Wen Mao and Lan An. Most of the heroes from that generation had already returned to dust, yet BaoShan SanRen was said to have still remained unfallen. If it really was so, then she must be hundreds of years old and have quite a high level of cultivation. Back then, with the lead of Wen Mao, the cultivation world focused on the rise of clans instead of sects, and cultivation forces connected by blood ties rose as if they were bamboo shoots after a spring rain. Without exception, every cultivator who was slightly famous chose to found a sect. Yet, this cultivator decided to retire into solitude, living in a mountain under the cultivation name of BaoShan SanRen. Nobody knows, though, which mountain she was embracing.

Speaking of it, it was only called retiring into solitude because nobody knew. If after one retired into solitude, they could still be found easily, it wouldn't be called retiring into solitude anymore.

She lived in an unknown celestial mountain and would often secretly take abandoned children up the mountain to be her pupils. However, all of the pupils had to vow that they would devote their whole lives to cultivation, never leaving the mountain or entering human society. Or else, no matter what the reason was, they were never to go back again.

They'd need to depend on themselves to survive in the mortal world, cutting all ties with their teacher.

Everyone spoke highly of BaoShan SanRen for her foresight in setting this rule. This was because, during the few hundreds of years, only three of her pupils left the mountain—YanLing DaoRen, ZangSe SanRen, and Xiao XingChen. Of these three pupils, none died a peaceful death.

Wei WuXian knew about the fates of the first and second pupils ever since he was young, so no further explanations were needed. Thus, Lan WangJi told him the stories of the last pupil, his shishu.

When Xiao XingChen left the mountain, he was only seventeen. Lan WangJi had never met him in person, but he had heard about Xiao XingChen's talent from others.

At that time, the Sunshot Campaign only finished a few years ago and the siege at Yiling's LuanZang Hill had just ended. All of the prominent sects were recruiting qualified cultivators from all around to be part of them. Xiao XingChen left the mountain in hopes of saving the world. With his excellent talent and capable teacher, during his first night-hunt, he held a horsetail whisk in one hand and a long sword in the other, entering the mountain alone and claiming first place—he became famous overnight.

As the sects saw such a bright, gifted cultivator at such a young age, they all invited him to their sects. Yet, Xiao XingChen turned down all of the offers. He said that he didn't want to depend on any sects, but he wanted to build a new sect with a close friend that didn't value a bloodline.

He had a soft personality but a solid heart, gentle on the outside but determined on the inside. Whenever someone had a difficult matter at hand, the first thing they thought of was to find him for help. As a person of moral integrity, he never refused either, which was why people often spoke of him with appraisal.

That was around when the wiping out of the Yueyang Clan happened.

## Translator's Notes

Wei WuQian: WuXian means “no envies”, while WuQian means “no money”.

Rogue cultivator: A rogue cultivator is a cultivator who doesn't belong to any sects and cultivates alone.

SanRen: This pretty much means “rogue cultivator”, but it has been kept as pinyin to maintain the flow of the story.

Shishu: Similar to shidi and shijie, shishu is used by someone to refer to their “disciple uncle”, their mother's shidi.

Cultivational name: This is just another type of name. It's not important at all, so don't panic because of how “oh my god they already have three to four names and here comes another”.

BaoShan: This literally translates as “to embrace a mountain”.

Celestial mountain: This refers to a mountain, but more celestial/spiritual there, allowing cultivators to absorb more of the energy there and reach higher levels faster.

DaoRen: Similar to SanRen, this just means “cultivator”.

Horsetail whisk: A horsetail whisk is often used by cultivators or Daoists in general. It has a variety of meanings and those meanings will not be important. Just understanding that it's probably white in color and makes Xiao XingChen look like a white lotus should be enough.

## Chapter 30: Dew—Part Three

One day, the Yueyang Clan's leader went out night-hunting with a few family members for about half a month. In the middle of the night, without any warning, they received the bad news and immediately hurried back. After the mourning, they only found out that someone purposely destroyed their protective array and let in a group of powerful evil spirits. Other than that, they knew nothing.

In most cases, only few people knew about the tragedies that happened in smaller clans, but the circumstances back then were different. The Sunshot Campaign finished long ago, while the siege at Luanzang Hill only just ended. On the surface, the situation seemed rather stable. With the sudden disclosure of this event, the entire cultivation world was bubbling with discussion, some even exaggerating that it was the revenge of the revived YiLing Patriarch, Wei WuXian. However, there wasn't any evidence, so it had been impossible to find the killer. Of course, Xiao XingChen didn't sit back and do nothing. He volunteered to be responsible for the matter and find out the truth for Chang Ping. After a month, the murderer was finally discovered. The murderer's name was Xue Yang.

Xue Yang was even younger than Xiao XingChen, nothing more than just a boy. Despite this, he definitely didn't tone down on his cruelty just because he was young. Ever since the age of fifteen, he had been a delinquent in the area of Kuizhou, known far and wide for his radiant smile, inhumane means, and merciless personality. Everyone's expressions changed whenever he was brought up in a conversation. When he was a child dwelling in the streets, it was said that he developed a hatred that lasted for years toward Chang Ping's father. He committed this crime in vengeance and for some other reasons.

After Xiao XingChen found out the truth, he went across three provinces and Xue Yang was still happily picking fights with others. Taking advantage of the Discussion Conference that was happening at the Jinling Tower of the LanlingJin Sect's residence, when the most prominent sects met up and discussed cultivation methods, Xiao XingChen brought him over, explained the situation, and demanded severe punishment.

With his straightforward list of evidence, most sects didn't have any objections, except for one—the LanlingJin Sect.

Wei WuXian, "Objecting in such a situation would be placing itself against the entire world. Could it be that Xue Yang was a favorite with Jin GuangShan?"

Lan WangJi, "A guest disciple."

Wei WuXian, "He was a foreign disciple? Back then, the LanlingJin Sect was already one of the four most prominent sects, right? Why would they have invited a delinquent to be a guest disciple?"

Lan WangJi, "This is the second connection."

He stared into Wei WuXian's eyes, "Because of the Stygian Tiger Seal." Wei WuXian's heart immediately skipped a beat.

The phrase was definitely not a stranger to him. On the contrary, nobody was more familiar to those three words than him.

Among all of the spiritual weapons he had forged when he was still alive, this was the scariest and most famous one.

When Wei WuXian first created it, he didn't think too much about it. Single-handedly controlling corpses and spirits, of course he'd occasionally grow tired. Remembering a rare piece of iron ore, he happened to have seen in a beast's stomach, he used it to cast a Tiger Seal.

But, after the Tiger Seal had been created, Wei WuXian only used it once before finding out that it did more harm than good.

The Stygian Tiger Seal's powers were considerably greater than what he had imagined. He originally wanted to use it to assist him, but its powers were almost exceeding him, its

creator. Moreover, it didn't settle on one single master. This meant that if someone got hold of it, no matter who they were, whether they were good or bad, friend or foe, they were able to use it.

After the seal had been forged, it wasn't that Wei WuXian never thought about destroying it, but since the seal was created with much difficulty, it would've been extremely hard to destroy, costing him both time and energy. And, back then, he had already vaguely understood that he wasn't in a good situation and would be hated by everyone sooner or later. With a weapon as appalling as the Stygian Tiger Seal, others didn't dare to act rashly, so he temporarily kept it. He separated the seal into two halves, making it so that they could only be of use when they were put together, and never used without careful consideration.

He had only used it two times before, and both times caused great bloodshed. The first time was during the Sunshot Campaign. After using it for the second time, he finally decided to destroy

one half of the seal. Before he could completely destroy the other half, the siege at LuanZang Hill happened, and it had since then been beyond his capabilities.

Toward his own creation, Wei WuXian was confident to say that even if the sect that got hold of it, made a temple for it, and offered it incense every single day, the remaining half of the Tiger Seal was just a piece of scrap iron. However, Lan WangJi told him something shocking—it appeared that Xue Yang could rebuild the other half of the seal!

Although Xue Yang was young, he was also quite clever, a bizarre eccentric. The LanlingJin Sect discovered that he could use the remaining half of the seal to roughly piece together the other half. Even though the recreated version wasn't as powerful and couldn't be used for as long, it could already result in terrible catastrophes.

Wei WuXian understood, "The LanlingJin needed to keep Xue Yang so that he could continue to restore the Stygian Tiger Seal, so they had to protect him."

Perhaps, Xue Yang destroying the Chang Clan wasn't entirely to avenge what they did to him when he was young. He might have been testing on this clan of live humans what exactly was the extent of the restored Stygian Tiger Seal's powers!

No wonder the rumors connected the case to him. Wei WuXian could almost imagine those cultivators clenching their teeth, "That Wei WuXian! If he didn't make this, our world wouldn't have encountered so many disasters!!!"

Returning to the original thread of conversation, they continued about what happened at the Jinling Tower.

Although the LanlingJin Sect was determined on protecting Xue Yang, Xiao XingChen didn't waver either. As the stalemate continued, they finally startled ChiFeng-Zun, Nie MingJue, who didn't intend on participating in the Discussion Conference. He hurried over to Jinling Tower from far away.

In spite of Nie MingJue being a junior to Jin GuangShan, he conducted himself in a strict manner and refused to tolerate Xue Yang no matter what. With an angry lecture, Jin GuangShan was left with no words and a great deal of embarrassment. Nie MingJue, as the irritable person he was, unsheathed his saber on the spot with the intention of killing Xue Yang. Even when his sworn younger brother LianFang-Zun, Jin GuangYao, attempted to ease the situation, he ordered him to leave. After a harsh scolding, Jin GuangYao hid behind Lan XiChen, not daring to say anything else. In the end, the LanlingJin Sect could only give in.

Ever since Xue Yang was brought to Jinling Tower by Xiao XingChen, he hadn't been scared at all. Even when Nie MingJue's saber was pressed against his neck, he still had a grin on his face. Before he was taken away, he spoke affectionately to Xiao XingChen, "Daozhang, you wouldn't forget me, would you? Let's wait and see."

At this point, Wei WuXian knew that the “wait and see” would make Xiao XingChen pay an agonizing price.

The LanlingJin Sect was indeed the sect with the thickest face. Although, on Jinling Tower, it promised in front of all of the sects that Xue Yang would be executed, when it left Nie MingJue’s sight, it immediately shut Xue Yang into the dungeons and changed the original decision to a life sentence. Hearing about the matter, Nie MingJue was enraged and pressed on them again. The LanlingJin Sect rambled about, refusing to give him Xue Yang no matter how hard he tried. All of the other sects watched them from the sidelines, but, shortly afterward, Nie MingJue passed away from Qi deviation.

He cultivated at a faster speed than any other past leader of the Nie Sect, and also died sooner than any of them.

Now that the person who was most difficult to deal with was gone, the LanlingJin Sect became more and more reckless and started to think of worse ideas. Jin GuangShan started to try as hard as he could to get Xue Yang out of the dungeons so that he could continue to restore and examine the Stygian Tiger Seal.

However, this wasn’t exactly something to be proud of. It was impossible for him to save the murderer of an entire clan from the dungeons without a valid reason.

So, they turned their attention to Chang Ping.

From coercion to harassment, in the end, the LanlingJin Sect finally pressured Chang Ping into correcting his words, invalidating all of his past speeches. He announced that the wiping out of the Chang Clan had nothing to do with Xue Yang.

Hearing the news, Xiao XingChen visited him to inquire upon the matter. Chang Ping responded helplessly, “What can I do aside from this? If I don’t tolerate it, the rest of our clan’s people wouldn’t be safe for long. I’m really grateful, Daozhang, but... please don’t help me anymore.

Now, helping me would be harming me. I don’t want the YueyangChang Sect to end yet.” And thus, the tiger had been set free back to the mountains.

Wei WuXian stayed silent.

If he were Chang Ping, he wouldn’t have cared how prominent or powerful the LanlingJin Sect was, or how much glory the road ahead offered him, and he wouldn’t have let the matter go.

Instead, he would’ve went to the dungeons on his own, cut Xue Yang up so that he was nothing more than a puddle of flesh on the ground, and summoned his soul back to repeat the process to the point that he regretted ever being born in this world.

But not everyone was like him, preferring to perish together with his enemy. Some of the Chang Clan’s people were still alive. Chang Ping was also still young, single, and childless, having just took his first few steps on the path of cultivation. No matter if he was threatened with the lives of his remaining family members or his own future and cultivation, he had to think carefully.

Of course, he wasn’t Chang Ping himself. He couldn’t be angered or worried in place of Chang Ping, and he couldn’t bear Chang Ping’s share of mental and physical torment.

After Xue Yang had been released, he started to take revenge again. However, this time, the revenge wasn’t on Xiao XingChen himself.

Xiao XingChen left the mountain alone and had no family. He only had a friend that he met afterward, named Song Lan. Song Lan was also a cultivator of the time. He was a righteous, determined person and had a fair amount of appraisal. Both of them wanted to build a sect that valued common ideals instead of blood ties, which made them the closest and most like-minded of friends. The people of the time described them as such—Xiao XingChen the bright moon and gentle breeze; Song ZiChen the distant snow and cold frost.

Xue Yang put his hands to this side. Repeating his past technique, he wiped out the Baixue Temple where Song Lan grew up and studied at, and used poison to blind Song Lan’s eyes.

This time, with his experience of wiping out a sect, he made sure to not leave any evidence. Although everybody knew that he was the one who did it, what would be the use of that? There wasn't any evidence. And, with Jin GuangShan's deliberate protection and the death of the violent ChiFeng-Zun, nobody could do anything about him.

Wei WuXian found this a bit strange. Although Lan WangJi looked as if he didn't care about anything, from Wei WuXian's past experiences with him, he absolutely couldn't stand wrongdoings, possibly even more than Nie HuaiSang's brother. Back then, the LanlingJin Sect had some dishonest ways of doing things, and Lan WangJi never bothered to be subtle about them. Even until now, he always refused to go to their sect's Discussion Conferences. If two cruel massacres happened, the news would've probably spread over the entire cultivational world

and Lan WangJi definitely wouldn't have turned a blind eye to them. Why did he not go and give Xue Yang what he deserved?

Just as he was about to ask, he remembered the scars that the discipline whip gave him. One lash of the discipline whip would already be quite severe. If Lan WangJi made some sort of a grave mistake and received so many lashes, he had probably been grounded for a few years. It was likely that he was either going through his punishment or waiting for his wounds to heal during the years when the incidents happened. No wonder he said had only "heard" about what happened.

For some reason, in his heart, Wei WuXian cared quite a lot about those scars. However, it was inconvenient for him to ask directly, so he had to hold his thoughts for now, "Then, what happened to the Daozhang Xiao XingChen afterwards?"

What happened afterward was certainly a tragic ending. When he left the mountain and his teacher, Xiao XingChen vowed that he would never go back again. He was a man of his words, but since Song Lan was not only blind but also badly injured, he broke his vow and carried Song Lan back to BaoShan SanRen's residence, asking her to save his friend.

For the sake that they were once teacher and pupil, BaoShan SanRen agreed. Thus, Xiao XingChen left the mountain once more, and he was never seen again.

A year later, Song Lan also left the mountain. To everyone's surprise, his eyes, which were completely blinded, saw light again. However, it wasn't that BaoShan SanRen's medical skills created a miracle, but that Xiao XingChen... dug his own eyes out and gave them to Song Lan, who was only involved in this because of him.

Song Lan originally wanted to seek revenge on Xue Yang. At this time, Jin GuangShan had already passed away. Jin GuangYao took over the LanlingJin Sect and the position of Sect Leader. To show that things were going to be different, the first thing he did after he came to power was to get rid of Xue Yang. Aside from never mentioning the Stygian Tiger Seal again, he also made amends to restore the sect's reputation, suppressing the rumors. Song Lan went to search for his past friend's whereabouts. At first, people still heard talk about where he traveled to. After some time, he also disappeared. Moreover, the YueyangChang Sect was a small clan that was generally unheard of. And thus, a lot of things gradually faded away.

Having finished listening to the long story, Wei WuXian sighed softly. A feeling of regret sprouted inside him, meeting such an end because of something not related to him at all, it really was... If Xiao XingChen was born a few years earlier or if I died a few years later, things

wouldn't have had to be like this. If I was alive, how would I have not taken part in the matter? How would I have not made friends with such a person?

Immediately afterward, he laughed at himself bitterly, I would've done something? What could I have done? If I was still alive back then, perhaps the YueyangChang Sect's case didn't even need to be investigated before everyone decided that I did it. If the Daozhang

Xiao XingChen bumped into me on the streets and I chatted with him, invite him to drink together, it's likely that he'd hit me with his horsetail whisk, haha.

They had already walked past the Chang Residence, toward a cemetery nearby. Wei WuXian saw the dark-red character of "Chang" on the pailou and asked, "Then, why did Chang Ping die afterward? Who killed the remaining members of his clan?"

Before Lan WangJi could answer, a series of bangs came from amid the blue-tinted dusk. The noise sounded a lot like slamming on doors, but it wasn't. The bangs were carried out with force and at a fast pace, without a moment of rest. They sounded somewhat muffled, as if there was something separating them from the outside world.

Their faces immediately changed.

The fifty-or-so people of the YueyangChang Sect were currently lying in their coffins, slamming on their coffin lids from the inside. It was at night they were frightened to death—they madly slammed on the doors, but there wasn't anyone to let them out.

This was the slamming on coffins in the Chang Clan's cemetery that the liquor shop's waiter talked about!

However, the waiter said that the haunting was ten years ago and stopped long before now. Why would the slamming happen to start again when they came?

Without passing any words between them, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi both softened their breathing, stealthily moving without making a sound.

Propping themselves against the pillars of the pailou, they both saw that, in the center of the cemetery, there was a hole amid the tombstones.

It was a deep, recently-created hole with piles of dirt surrounding it. Faint noises came from within the hole.

Someone was digging out a grave.

The two of them held their breaths, attentively waiting for the person in the hole to come out on their own.

Before an hour passed, two people hopped up from inside the opened grave.

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi could tell that these were two people only because they had good vision. These two appeared as if they were conjoined twins. One carrying the other on their back, they were tightly connected together. With both of them wearing entirely black clothes, it was extremely hard to tell the two apart.

The person that hopped up had long legs and long arms, standing with his back toward them. The one that he carried seemed lifeless, their head and limbs hanging down. This was only natural.

Since the person was dug out from a grave, then it must have been dead. Lifeless was what should've been expected of it.

As he thought, the gravedigger suddenly spun around and saw them.

There was a mass of thick, black mist over the man's face, making it so that nobody could see how their face and features looked!

Wei WuXian knew that he must have casted some sort of strange spell to block his face. Lan WangJi had already unsheathed Bichen, darted into the cemetery, and started the fight. The gravedigger's reaction was extremely quick. Seeing the attack of Bichen's blue sword glare, he made a hand seal and also summoned a sword glare. The sword glare was the same as his face, surrounded by dense mist, and made it so that it was impossible to see what its color and style was. With a corpse on his back, the gravedigger fought in a strange way. The two sword glares clashed a few times. Lan WangJi summoned Bichen back and held it in his hand, a layer of frost climbing over his face.

Wei WuXian knew why his face suddenly turned cold. It was because, during the fight, even an outsider like him could tell that the gravedigger was extremely familiar with Lan WangJi's sword moves!

Lan WangJi said nothing. Bichen's attacks were deeper and deeper, attacking with tremendous force. The gravedigger fell back a few times. As if he knew that, with a dead person on his back, he wouldn't be able to win against Lan WangJi and, if they continued to fight, he'd be captured alive, he suddenly fished out a dark-blue talisman from his waist.

#### A Transportation Talisman!

This type of talisman could instantly transport someone to hundreds of miles away, but it also expended a great amount of spiritual energy. It would take a long time for the user to regain their energy. Those with spiritual energy that wasn't powerful enough wouldn't be able to use them. Thus, although they were of very high quality, it was rare for anybody to use them. Seeing that he was about to escape, Wei WuXian hurriedly clapped twice, got down on one knee, and slammed his fist on the ground.

The strength of his punch passed through layers of dirt, reached the depths of the soil, and penetrated the thick coffin lids, provoking the corpses trapped inside. With crackling noises, four bloodied arms shot up from the ground, grabbing both of the gravedigger's legs!

The gravedigger seemed as if he didn't care at all. He poured his spiritual energy toward the bottom of his legs, blasting the four corpse hands away. Wei WuXian pulled out his bamboo flute. A shrill, piercing melody ripped open the curtain of darkness that had fallen. Two human heads emerged from the ground along with their bodies, climbing upward from the gravedigger's legs and winding around his body as if they were snakes. Opening their mouths, they prepared to bite down at his neck and arms.

The gravedigger snorted with disdain, as if he was saying "what a petty trick", and sent spiritual energy throughout his body. Yet, this time, only after he released his energy did he realize that he had been fooled.

He sent the corpse that he carried on his back flying off as well!

Wei WuXian laughed uncontrollably as he smacked the tombstone, while Lan WangJi caught the flaccid corpse with one hand and attacked with Bichen using the other. Seeing that what he had just dug out had been snatched away, that he couldn't even win solo against Lan WangJi, let alone the mischief of another person, he didn't dare to stay any longer. He hurling the Transportation Talisman on the ground. After a loud noise, blue flames surged up toward his sky. His figure disappeared into the fire.

Wei WuXian knew that the gravedigger had a Transportation Talisman on him, which meant that, even if they caught him, he could find an opportunity to escape. The corpse that he dug out was already a clue, so he didn't have any regrets. He walked over to Lan WangJi, "Let's see who he dug out."

As he glanced at it, he was somewhat surprised. The head of the corpse had already been split open. From within the cut, there wasn't any blood or brains leaking out, but wads of blackened cotton.

Wei WuXian easily jerked the corpse's head off. With the delicately-crafted dummy head, he sope, "What is this supposed to mean? There's a fake corpse made of cotton and rags buried in the Chang Clan's cemetery?"

Having had weighed the corpse in his hands when he took it, Lan WangJi knew what was wrong, "Not all of it is fake."

Wei WuXian felt the corpse from head to toe and discovered that, aside from its drooping limbs, only its chest and abdomen felt firm and real. After he tore off the clothes, as he expected, he found that only the torso was real. All of the other body parts were fake.

The head and limbs made from cotton were to "deceive" the torso, so that it still thought it was attached to its owner's body. Seeing from the skin tone and the part where the left shoulder cut off, this must be the torso of the dear friend. The gravedigger was here for this. Wei WuXian straightened up, "It looks like that the person who hid the corpse already noticed that we're investigating the issue and came to transfer the torso somewhere else in

case we find it. To come early isn't as good as to come in time. We just happened to bump into him, haha.

But," with a change of tone, he continued, "Why was the mist-faced gravedigger so familiar with your sect's sword style?"

It was obvious that Lan WangJi was also thinking about this matter, the coldness on his face yet to fade. Wei WuXian spoke again, "His cultivation is quite high, enough to support the energy used for one Transportation Talisman. He casted spells on both his face and sword. It's understandable that he casted a spell on his face—after all, he wouldn't have wanted to be seen. But most lesser-known cultivators wouldn't have needed to cast a spell on their sword to cover it, unless, of course, it was either somewhat or very famous in the cultivation world. He'd then have had to cover it, because if everyone could recognize his sword glare, his identity would be revealed as soon as his sword was revealed."

Wei WuXian asked suggestively, "HanGuang-Jun, from your fight before, do you think that he's someone you know really well?"

It'd be inconvenient for him to be more specific, such as Lan XiChen or Lan QiRen. Lan WangJi answered assuredly, "No."

Wei WuXian was quite confident in Lan WangJi's answer. To him, Lan WangJi wasn't the kind of person who'd hide or run away from the truth. If he denied it, that meant it must have been wrong. He didn't like to lie, either. In Wei WuXian's opinion, if someone asked Lan WangJi to lie, he'd rather silence himself and not talk at all. Thus, Wei WuXian immediately excluded the possibility of the gravedigger being these two.

Lan WangJi put the torso into another double-layered Qiankun Pouch and put it away properly. The two walked around for a while and wandered back to the street of the liquor shop.

The young waiter was true to his words. Most of the other liquor shops on this street had closed already, but their banner was still up and their lights were still on. The waiter was outside, eating from a large bowl. Seeing them, he beamed, "You're back! We kept our word, didn't we? Did you two see anything?"

Wei WuXian laughed as he answered. With Lan WangJi, he walked back to the table they sat during the day.

With liquor jars crowding on the table and by his feet, he spoke, "Right, what were we talking about? Suddenly interrupted by the gravedigger, I still don't know how Chang Ping died."

Lan WangJi continued the explanation with simple, direct words.

Xue Yang, Xiao XingChen, and Song Lan left one by one. Some disappearing, some passing away. Quite a few years after the incident passed, one day, Chang Ping and the remainder of his clan's members died overnight due to lingchi. Moreover, Chang Ping's eyes were dug out.

This time, nobody could find out who the murderer was. After all, everyone apart of it had vanished. However, there was one thing that could be determined.

From the wounds, it could be verified that the sword that was used to lingchi them had been Xiao XingChen's sword, Shuanghua.

The bowl of liquor that Wei WuXian was holding stopped in front of his mouth. He was shocked by this turn of events, "He was lingchi-ed by Xiao XingChen's sword? Then was he the one who did it?"

Lan WangJi, "Xiao XingChen had disappeared. There were no conclusive evidence." Wei WuXian, "If he couldn't be found alive, then has anyone tried soul-summoning?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes. Nothing was found."

Nothing was found. He either didn't die, or his soul had dissolved. As a someone who specialized in the area, Wei WuXian had to comment on the matter, "Things like soul-summoning, you can't rely on them too much. Time, place, and person all play a part in it,

so of course it'd sometimes go wrong. I'm guessing that a lot of people think that it was Xiao XingChen's revenge? HanGuang-Jun, what about you? What do you think? Lan WangJi slowly shook his head, "One should not comment without understanding the whole picture."

Wei WuXian admired his attitude and principles a lot. Grinning as he drank another gulp of liquor, he heard Lan WangJi speak again, "What about you?"

Wei WuXian, "Lingchi is a type of torture. Its meaning involves "punishment", anyways. Digging out the eyes also makes it quite hard not to associate it with Xiao XingChen, who also dug out his eyes. Thus, there's nothing wrong with these people guessing that it was Xiao XingChen's revenge. However," he thought about how to phrase it, "I think that, in the beginning, Xiao XingChen never asked for Chang Ping's gratitude when he first stepped in. I..."

Before he finished thinking of what should follow the "I", the waiter eagerly brought over two dishes of peanuts. Having been interrupted, Wei WuXian didn't need to continue anymore. He looked up at Lan WangJi and smiled, "HanGuang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? I'm not saying anything. Just like you, I don't understand the whole picture, so I'm not going to comment either. You're right. Before knowing all of the turns and twists, causes and effects, nobody should presume anything about anything. I only ordered five jars, but you bought five more jars for me, so I'm afraid I won't be able to finish all of them by myself. How about if you drink with me? This isn't the Cloud Recesses, so it doesn't violate anything, right?"

He had already prepared himself to be bluntly rejected, but who knew that Lan WangJi replied, "I will drink."

Wei WuXian clicked his tongue, "HanGuang-Jun, you really have changed. Before, I drank a tiny jar in front of you, and you got so mad. You even threw me off the wall and hit me. Now, though, you're hiding jars of Emperor's Smile in your room and secretly drinking." Fixing his collars, he answered in a calm voice, "I did not touch any jar of Emperor's Smile." Wei WuXian, "Why did you hide them if you're not drinking anything? Saving them for me? Fine, fine. You didn't touch them. I'll believe you, okay? Let's talk about something else. Come. I really need to see just how many cups would it take to make an abstinent disciple of the GusuLan Sect drunk."

He poured a bowl for Lan WangJi. Without any thought, Lan WangJi took it over and drank up. Wei WuXian was unusually excited, staring at his face to see when it would turn red. Yet, even after he stared for a while, neither Lan WangJi's face color or expression changed, staring at him calmly with light-colored eyes. There wasn't any change at all!

Wei WuXian was extremely disappointed. As he was about to urge him for another jar, suddenly, Lan WangJi frowned and lightly rubbed at between his brows. After a few moments, with a hand supporting his forehead, he closed his eyes.

... He fell asleep?

... He fell asleep!

After most people drank so much liquor, they should become drunk first, and then sleep. How could Lan WangJi skip the step of getting drunk and go to sleep immediately?!

"Drunken" was the part that he wanted to see!

Wei WuXian waved at Lan WangJi, whose face remained serious even after he was asleep, then clapped beside his ears. There was no reaction.

Lan WangJi was surprisingly the type who collapses after just one bowl.

Wei WuXian didn't expect this sort of situation to happen at all. Thinking as he shook his legs, he put Lan WangJi's right arm around his arm, and dragged him out of the liquor shop.

He had already familiarized himself with the action of fishing things from Lan WangJi. After taking out the pouch containing money, he found an inn and asked for two rooms. He

carried Lan WangJi to one of the rooms, took off his boots, tucked him in, and slipped into the night.

Stopping at a desolated area, Wei WuXian took out his flute by his waist, placed it by his lips, and played a melody. After this, he waited silently.

In these past few days, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi spent their days and nights together. He didn't have any alone time, so he couldn't summon Wen Ning. Aside from hiding his identity in the beginning, there was another reason.

Wen Ning had killed the GusuLan Sect's people before. Even if Lan WangJi treated Wei WuXian well, he couldn't summon Wen Ning right in front of him. Or, perhaps, it was because Lan WangJi treated him well that he didn't have the face to summon Wen Ning in front of him. No matter how thick his face was, this wasn't the time to have a thick face.

Before he knew it, the eerie jingling noises sounded again.

With his head lowered, Wen Ning's figure appeared from the shadows of the city wall ahead.

He wore all black, melting into the darkness surrounding him. Only his pupil-less eyes were a glaring, hideous white.

Wei WuXian put his hands behind him and slowly paced around Wen Ning.

Wen Ning shifted, as if wanting to follow his steps and walk in circles as well. Wei WuXian commanded, "Stand properly."

He complied and stopped moving. It seemed as if his delicate features appeared even more dejected.

Wei WuXian, "Hand."

Wen Ning extended his right arm. Wei WuXian grabbed his wrist and lifted it up, closely examining the iron cuff and chain locked onto it.

This wasn't an ordinary chain. When Wen Ning flipped out, he became extremely violent, capable of twisting iron into sludge, so he wouldn't have let it drag around like this. It was likely that this was a set of chains created especially to restrain Wen Ning.

Turned to ashes?

Trying as hard as they could to restore a damaged piece of Stygian Tiger Seal, of course some sects salivated at the Ghost General as well. How would they have been willing to turn him to ashes?

With a bitter laugh, he stood by Wen Ning's side. After considering for a moment, he started to press his fingers into Wen Ning's hair.

The person who kept and restrained Wen Ning must have prevented him from thinking on his own. To make him listen to other people's orders, Wen Ning's sanity must have been destroyed, which meant that they must've planted something inside his head. As he had expected, after pushing around a few times, Wei WuXian found a hard nib on an acupoint of the right side of his head. He put his other hand on the left side of Wen Ning's head and found the same thing, resembling the end of a needle.

Wei WuXian pinched both needle ends at the same time and gradually pulled two black, long nails from within Wen Ning's skull.

The two nails buried deep inside of Wen Ning were around an inch long and as thick as the red strings used for jade pendants. As soon as the nails left his head, Wen Ning's features quivered faintly. A layer of black lines that resembled strands of blood climbed across the whites of Wen Ning's eyes. It seemed as if he was trying hard to endure the pain.

How strange was it that, although he had died, he could still experience feelings of "pain".

Judging from the intricate, complex lines carved onto the nails, it must have come from a unique source. Their creator was fairly skilled. It'd take quite some time for Wen Ning to heal completely. Putting them away, Wei WuXian looked down at the chains on Wen Ning's wrists and ankles, thinking to himself that it'd be a bit inconvenient for them to hang around and make noise. He'd need to use a cultivation sword to cut them off.

The first that he thought of was, of course, Lan WangJi's Bichen. Although it somewhat unbefitting to use the sword of someone from the Lan Sect to cut off Wen Ning's chains, it was the best cultivational sword that he could get his hands on. He really couldn't let Wen Ning drag so many burdensome things behind him.

Wei WuXian thought to himself, Okay. I'll go back to the inn first. If Lan Zhan is awake, then I won't do anything. If Lan Zhan is still asleep, I'll quickly borrow Bichen for a while. Having made his decision, he turned around. However, what he didn't expect was that Lan WangJi was standing right behind him.

### Translator's Notes

Tiger Seal: A tiger seal is a seal shaped like a tiger, traditionally used when commanding troops, with one half in the emperor's hands and the other in the general's. Only when both of them are put together can the general command the troops.

Daozhang: This is an honorific used to address Daoist priests or simply cultivators in general. The character dao means "path", the same character from the word Daoist, while zhang means "leader". Interesting fact: Daozhang sounds best when the seme is younger than the uke, in which case, Xue Yang just so happens to be. This was one of the first reasons why a lot of people started to ship the two.

ZiChen: Song Lan is his birth name (which was what Xiao XingChen called him by—they were close), while Song ZiChen is his common name. Don't worry. I know that you're all thinking "it can't possibly get any more complicated", but it does. Luckily, there's a character and sect guide to prevent memory loss! As the evil person I am, I refuse to provide the link because I think you should exercise your brains in preparation for what happens later in the story. Angry/sad because it's inconvenient? You should exercise your hearts too, since I'm not sure if you can handle what's about to come.

Pailou: A pailou is simply Chinese-style archway. Since "links don't work", search it up on Google ;) Don't worry, I believe in you.

Hand seal: Yes. Pretty much those things in Naruto (wait, you thought they were from Japan?). The hand seal, in this case, is used to command the gravedigger's sword.

## Chapter 31: Dew—Part Four

After he summoned Wen Ning, Wei WuXian's state of mind was somewhat confused, so it was hard for him to be continuously alert. And, if Lan WangJi didn't want someone to notice his arrival, he could do it without any difficulty. Thus, as he turned around and saw the even colder face under the moonlight, his heart almost skipped a beat.

He didn't know how long Lan WangJi had been here for or if he had seen and heard what he was doing. If Lan WangJi had never been drunk in the beginning and followed him all the way here, the situation would be even more awkward, especially with him not saying anything to Lan WangJi's face and sneaking out to summon Wen Ning after Lan WangJi fell asleep.

Lan WangJi crossed his arms in front of him and held Bichen in them. His expression was particularly stiff. Wei WuXian had never seen him with such an obviously displeased expression on his face before. He felt that he needed to speak first and explain the situation, ease the atmosphere, "Ahem, HanGuang-Jun."

Lan WangJi did not reply.

Standing in front of Wen Ning, Wei WuXian stared across at Lan WangJi. He touched his chin and, for some reason, felt exceptionally guilty.

Lan WangJi finally let down the hands that held Bichen and walked a few steps forward. Seeing that he went toward Wen Ning with a sword in his hand, Wei WuXian thought that he was going to kill Wen Ning, Oh no. Don't tell me that Lan Zhan really pretended to be drunk so that he could kill Wen Ning after I summon him. Of course. Nobody actually gets drunk after just a bowl.

He blurted, "HanGuang-Jun, listen to me..." With a loud smack, Lan WangJi hit Wen Ning. Although it sounded quite strong, it didn't actually do any damage. Wen Ning only staggered a few steps backward after the blow. He wobbled a bit and regained his balance, standing properly again with a blank face.

Wen Ning wasn't in a state as easily angered as when he flipped out in the past, but his temper wasn't too good either. During the night at Dafan Mountain, nobody could lay a sword on him before everyone was knocked down—he even held someone by his neck. If Wei WuXian didn't stop him, he would've strangled every single one of the people at the scene. Yet, although Lan WangJi smacked him once, his head was still lowered, appearing as if he didn't dare to resist.

Wei WuXian thought that this was a bit strange, but he nevertheless felt relieved. If Wen Ning returned the strike and the two started fighting, it'd be even harder to intervene.

As if he didn't think one smack was enough to express his rage, Lan WangJi pushed Wen Ning to about thirty feet away.

He spoke to Wen Ning in an annoyed voice, "Go away." Wei WuXian finally noticed that something was wrong.

Both the smack and the push, both his speech and actions were unusually... childish.

After he pushed Wen Ning so that he was far away enough, Lan WangJi seemed as if he was finally satisfied. He turned around walked over to Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian looked at him scrutinizingly.

There wasn't anything wrong with Lan WangJi's face and expression. He was even more serious, proper, flawless than usual. His face wasn't flushed, his breathing wasn't short. He walked around steadily with confidence. It looked like that he was still the calm, righteous cultivator, HanGuang-Jun.

But, as he looked down, he found that Lan WangJi's boots were put on the wrong feet.

Before he left, he took Lan WangJi's boots off and tossed them beside the bed. And, now, Lan WangJi's left boot was on his right foot, while his right boot was on his left foot.

HanGuang-Ju, the prominent cultivator who valued manners greatly, would never have went outside with his clothes like this.

Wei WuXian asked tentatively, "HanGuang-Jun, what number is this?"

He made the number two with his fingers. Lan WangJi didn't answer and reached his hands out. With one on the left and one on the right, he solemnly wrapped his hands around both of Wei WuXian's fingers.

With a clang, Bichen fell to the ground due to its master's negligence. Wei WuXian, "..."

This definitely wasn't the normal Lan Zhan! Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, are you drunk?" Lan WangJi, "No."

Drunk people usually didn't admit that they were drunk. Wei WuXian took his fingers back. Lan WangJi attentively maintained his gesture of how he grasped Wei WuXian's fingers, with both of his hands in loose fists. Wei WuXian was utterly speechless. Standing amid the chilly night breeze, he removed his gaze from Lan WangJi, and looked up at the moon.

Most people became drunk before they slept, while Lan WangJi slept before he became drunk. And, when he was drunk, he looked no different from how he usually was, which was why it was hard to tell.

In the past, Wei WuXian had countless friends to drink with. He had seen hundreds and thousands of ways people acted when they were drunk. Some wailed loudly, others giggled idiotically, some flounced about, others collapsed immediately, some were determined in taking their own lives, others whimpered, "Why are you leaving me?" However, this was his first time seeing someone like Lan WangJi, who didn't make any noise, looked decent, yet acted strangely.

The corners of his lips twitched. Trying not to laugh, he picked up Bichen from the ground and carried into onto his back, "Okay. Let's go back."

He definitely couldn't let Lan WangJi roam around outside like this. Who knew what else he could do?

Luckily, it seemed that Lan WangJi was also quite easy-going when he was drunk. With an elegant nod, they went off. If someone passed by, they would've thought that these were two good friends strolling in the night and praised the refined act.

Behind them, Wen Ning silently followed. Just as Wei WuXian was about to speak to him, Lan WangJi whirled around and angrily smacked him once more. This time, it was on Wen Ning's head.

Wen Ning's head was even more lowered due to the smack. Even though his facial muscles were rigid and couldn't make any sort of expressions, even though his eye whites couldn't make any sort of gazes, for some reason, he still looked as if he had been wronged. Not knowing whether to frown or laugh, Wei WuXian grabbed Lan WangJi's arm, "What are you hitting him for?"

Lan WangJi spoke to Wen Ning in a threatening tone that he definitely wouldn't have used if he was awake, "Go away!"

Wei WuXian knew that he shouldn't disobey someone who was drunk. He hurried, "Okay, okay. It's up to you. I'll make him go away if that's what you want." As he spoke, he took out his bamboo flute. But, before he even placed the flute to his lips, Lan WangJi quickly grabbed it, "Do not play for him."

Wei WuXian teased, "Why are you so pushy?"

Lan WangJi repeated angrily, "Do not play for him!"

Wei WuXian discovered that, although people who were drunk often had a lot of things to say, as Lan WangJi usually didn't like to speak, he would repeatedly say the same words after he drank. Seeing that Lan WangJi had never been too fond of demonic techniques, he

might have not liked how he used his flute to control Wen Ning. Anyway, he had to pet him in the direction of his fur, of course, "Alright. I'm only going to play for you, okay?"

Lan WangJi announced his satisfaction with a mnn, but continued to play with the flute in his hands, unwilling to return it.

Wei WuXian could only whistle. He spoke to Wen Ning, "Keep on hiding. Make sure nobody finds you."

Wen Ning seemed as if he really wanted to follow, but having received his commands and being scared that Lan WangJi would hit him a few more times, he slowly turned around. Dragging the chains behind him, he walked away dejectedly.

Wei WuXian turned to Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, now that you're drunk, why doesn't your face flush at all?"

Since Lan WangJi looked too normal, almost even more normal than Wei WuXian, he couldn't help but to talk to him as if he was talking to an ordinary person. Yet, unexpectedly, after Lan WangJi heard this, he reached out, grabbed his shoulder, and pulled him into his arms.

Caught off guard, Wei WuXian's head was slammed right into his chest.

As he recovered from the dizziness, Lan WangJi's voice came from above, "The heartbeats." "What?"

Lan WangJi, "The face doesn't show anything. Listen to the heartbeats."

As he spoke, his chest vibrated from the low voice. A heart pulsated steadily and continuously. Thump, thump. It was a bit fast. Wei WuXian understood and looked up again, "I won't be able to tell from your face, only if I listen to your heartbeat?"

Lan WangJi answered sincerely, "Mnn." Wei WuXian bent over in laughter.

Was Lan WangJi's face so thick that the blush couldn't even be seen? He wasn't this sort of person, was he?

And, Lan WangJi was so honest after he was drunk. His actions and comments were also... bolder!

Since this was a rare occasion to see such an honest, open Lan WangJi, it would've been impossible for Wei WuXian to treat him with respect and not play any tricks.

He hurried Lan WangJi back to the inn. Entering the room, he held him down on the bed and took off the boots that were put on wrong. Guessing that he probably didn't know how to wash his own face in such a state, he took off Lan WangJi's forehead ribbon, and brought in a basin of hot water along with a towel. Wringing the towel out, he folded it into a square and gently rubbed Lan WangJi's face.

During the process, Lan WangJi didn't resist at all, obediently allowing his face to be kneaded in all kinds of directions. Aside from squinting when the towel went near his eyes, he stared at Wei WuXian without even blinking. Wei WuXian had a ton of amusing ideas inside his head. Seeing his clear gaze, he couldn't help brushing a finger against Lan WangJi's chin. He laughed, "Why are you looking at me? Am I good-looking?"

He just happened to have finished cleansing. Before Lan WangJi could answer, Wei WuXian tossed the towel into the basin, "Your face is clean now. Do you want to have some water first?"

Having heard no answer from behind him, he turned around only to see Lan WangJi holding the basin in his hands, his face already buried inside.

Wei WuXian almost paled from the shock. He grabbed the basin and moved it away at once, "I didn't mean the water in here!"

Lan WangJi raised his head calmly. Transparent droplets of water rolled down his jaw, seeping into the front of his collars. Looking at him, Wei WuXian wasn't sure how to describe what he was feeling right now, ... Did he drink the water or did he not? Hopefully Lan Zhan doesn't remember anything after he wakes up. Or else, for the rest of his life, he wouldn't be able to face anyone.

Wei WuXian used his sleeves to wipe off the drops of water on Lan WangJi's jaw and put his arms around him, "HanGuang-Jun. Now, are you going to do whatever I tell you to do?" Lan WangJi, "Mnn."

Wei WuXian, "You'll answer whatever I ask you?"

Wei WuXian put one knee on the bed and smirked, "Okay. Let me ask you. Have you... secretly tasted the Emperor's Smile you hid in your room?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Do you like rabbits?" Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "Have you ever violated any rules before?" Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "Have you ever liked anyone?" Lan WangJi, "Yes."

All of Wei WuXian's questions were just for the sake of them, not that he really wanted to find out about Lan WangJi's private matters. He simply wanted to know whether or not Lan WangJi would really answer whatever he asked. He continued, "How about Jiang Cheng?"

A frown, "Hmph."

Wei WuXian, "How about Wen Ning?" Indifference, "Huh."

Wei WuXian grinned and pointed at himself, "How about this one?" Lan WangJi, "Mine."

"..."

Lan WangJi stared at him, slowly and articulately stating, "Mine." Wei WuXian suddenly understood.

He took Bichen off his back, thinking to himself, When I pointed at myself, Lan Zhan probably thought that "this one" meant Bichen.

He got off the bed and walked around the room with Bichen in his hand, from the left to the right, from the East to the West. As he had expected, Lan WangJi's gaze closely followed wherever he walked, ever so sincere and straightforward, ever so blunt and bare.

Wei WuXian's legs almost gave out under Lan WangJi's heated gaze. He lifted Bichen in front of his eyes, "Do you want it?"

Lan WangJi, "I want it."

As if he thought that this wasn't enough to prove his desire, Lan WangJi grasped the hand that Wei WuXian held Bichen with and stared into his eyes with those light-colored pupils. Taking in a soft breath, he repeated his words, emphasizing every syllable, "... I want it."

Wei WuXian knew that Lan WangJi was desperately drunk, that it wasn't directed at him, yet those three words still crashed into him, taking away the strength in his arms and legs. He thought to himself, Lan Zhan, what a person... If he's so sincere, enthusiastic towards a girl, then what a man he'd be!

Recovering from the blow, Wei WuXian asked again, "How did you recognize me? Why did you help me?"

Lan WangJi opened his mouth. Wei WuXian shifted a bit closer, wanting to hear his answer. However, Lan WangJi's expression suddenly changed. With a shove, he pushed Wei WuXian onto the bed.

The candlelight was snuffed out with a wave of his hand. Bichen was thrown onto the ground by its master again.

Wei WuXian's sight spun dizzily from the shove. He thought that Lan WangJi woke up, "Lan Zhan?!"

A familiar place behind his back was tapped once. His entire body felt sore and numb and he couldn't move at all, similar to the first night at the Cloud Recesses. Lan WangJi took his hand away, lay down beside him, and put the blanket over them, carefully tucking in the blanket corner on Wei WuXian's side, "It is nine. Rest."

So, after all, it was the scary bedtime routine of the Lan Sect.

With the interrogation having been cut off, Wei WuXian stared at the ceiling, "Can't we rest and chat at the same time?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

... Oh well. Someday, there'd be a chance to get Lan WangJi drunk again. The answer would be revealed sooner or later.

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan. Remove it. I got us two rooms. We don't need to be crammed in the same bed."

After pausing for a moment, Lan WangJi's hand came over and, after fumbling around in the blanket for a while, started to slowly untie the ribbons holding his clothes together. Wei WuXian exclaimed, "Okay! Enough! I didn't mean for you to remove it in this sense!!! Alright!!! Sure!"

I'm lying down and I'm sleeping!!!" A dead silence filled the darkness.

After keeping quiet for a while, Wei WuXian spoke again, "I finally understand why your sect prohibits liquor. You collapse after just one bowl and can't tell good liquor from bad liquor. If everyone from the Lan Sect is like this when they're drunk, you deserve to be prohibited from drinking. Anyone who drinks should be beaten up."

With closed eyes, Lan WangJi raised his hand and covered Wei WuXian's mouth. He shushed, "Shh."

The breath that Wei WuXian was about to take got stuck between his chest and his mouth, unable to come up or go down.

It seemed that, ever since he came back, whenever he decided to tease Lan WangJi like how he did in the past, he always suffered from his own actions.

This shouldn't have been the case! Where exactly did he go wrong?!

## Translator's Notes

Here's a hilarious comment that I found, favored by the author herself:

Speaking of it, the name of Wei Ying's (Wei WuXian's) friend who weeps and asks "why are you leaving me?" when drunk is Luo BingHe, isn't he?

(Confused, much? Check out the author's first work, The Scum Villain's Self-Saving System)

## Chapter 32: Dew—Part Five

This time, throughout the night, Wei WuXian didn't shut his eyelids even once. With opened eyes, he managed to hold out until the second morning. After feeling the numbness pass and that his limbs were able to move again, he calmly took off his shirt inside the blanket and threw it under the bed.

Then, he pulled off Lan WangJi's sash belt and succeeded in yanking his shirt half-off. He originally wanted to completely take off his shirt, but after seeing the sear under Lan WangJi's collarbone, Wei WuXian paused for a moment and stopped. Also remembering the Discipline Whip's scars on his back, he knew that he shouldn't go further and wanted to pull Lan WangJi's clothes back again. Due to the delay, Lan WangJi seemed as if he felt cold. Shifting slightly, he opened his eyes with a frown on his face.

As soon as his eyes were opened, he tumbled off the bed.

It really wasn't the elegant HanGuang-Jun's fault that he was not elegant at all after the shock. Any man who woke up with a hangover the morning after, saw another man lying beside him wearing nothing and that his own shirt was only half-on, and found that both of them were skin- to-skin snuggling in the same bedsheets, wouldn't have paid attention to be elegant.

Wei WuXian partially covered his chest with the blanket, leaving only his smooth shoulders out. Lan WangJi, "You..."

Wei WuXian purred, "Hmm?" Lan WangJi, "Last night, I..."

Wei WuXian winked his left eye at Lan WangJi and smiled mysteriously, resting his chin on one hand, "You were so bold last night, Han GuangJun."

"..."

Wei WuXian, "Do you really remember nothing of the things that happened last night?" It seemed that Lan WangJi really didn't remember. His face was already as pale as snow.

It was fortunate that he didn't remember. Or else, if Lan WangJi still remembered that he sneaked outside to summon Wen Ning during the night and asked about it, neither lying nor speaking truth would make the situation better.

With so many cases failing to tease Lan WangJi and lifting a rock only to have it drop on his foot, Wei WuXian finally found some of his past abilities. Although he wanted to continue his successful pursuit, Wei WuXian still wanted to lure Lan WangJi into drinking again in the future, so he probably shouldn't go as far as to scar him for life, else Lan WangJi would be cautious the next time. Wei WuXian lifted the covers open and showed him the trousers and boots that he still had on, "What a man! HanGuang-Jun, it was only a joke. I just took off our clothes. Your chastity is still there. You hadn't been tainted. Don't worry."

Lan WangJi was still frozen on the spot and didn't answer. A shattering sound came from the center of the room.

The sound was quite familiar—it was already their second time hearing it. The Qiankun Pouches that had been on the table were becoming restless again, throwing the cups and teapots onto the ground. This time, with the three body parts together, it was even more wild. Last night, one of them was hopelessly drunk while the other was helplessly tormented, so of course they forgot all about the duet. Wei WuXian was worried that Lan WangJi was overly-shocked and would accidentally impale him onto the bed out of impulse. He hurried, "Serious business. Come, come. Let's do serious business first."

He wrapped a piece of clothing around him, hopped off the bed, and extended a hand toward Lan WangJi, who had just stood back up. He wanted to help him up, but it looked almost as if he wanted to rip his clothes. Lan WangJi still hadn't come over the shock and

stepped backward, only to stagger from something under his foot. Looking down, it was Bichen, which had been lying on the ground ever since last night.

And, at this point, one of the ropes that tied the pouches had come loose. Half of an ashen arm had already crawled out of the tiny opening. Wei WuXian put his hand into Lan WangJi's semi-opened clothes and searched around, fishing a flute out of the other's arms, "HanGuang-Jun, don't be scared, alright? I'm not going to do anything to you. It's just that you took away my flute last night. I need to have it back." After the comment, he even considerably pulled Lan WangJi's collars back up and tied his sash belt properly.

Lan WangJi looked at him with a complicated expression, as if he really wanted to ask about the details of what happened after he was drunk. However, he was used to finishing important tasks first, so, suppressing his questions, he put on a serious expression and took out the seven-stringed guqin. Of the three Qiankun Pouches, one held the left arm, another held the legs, and the last

held the torso. The three parts could already form a large portion of the body. They influenced the others and the resentful energy multiplied, making them harder to deal with than before. The agitation only ceased after the two played Rest three consecutive times.

Wei WuXian put away his flute. He was about to gather up the body parts that rolled all over the ground when he suddenly commented, "Our dear friend hadn't been missing his workouts."

The sash belt of burial robe on the torso had already loosened. The collars opened to reveal the strong, solid body of a man in the prime of his life. With broad shoulders and a thin waist in addition to the sharply contoured abdominal muscles, it was the masculine body figure that countless men dreamed to have. Staring at it from every direction, Wei WuXian couldn't help smacking those abs a few times, "HanGuang-Jun, look at him. If he were alive and I hit him, the impact would've bounced back and hurt myself. Just how on Earth did he train?"

The tips of Lan WangJi's brows seemed to twitch, but he said nothing. Yet, unexpectedly, Wei WuXian smacked on it two more times. Lan WangJi finally took over the Qiankun Pouches, his face remaining expressionless, and silently started to seal the corpses. Wei WuXian made way for him at once. Quickly afterward, Lan WangJi finished sealing back all of the body parts and even tied quite a few dead knots over each one. Wei WuXian didn't think too much of it. He looked down at the figure of his current body, raised his brows, and tied his sash belt again, appearing to be properly dressed again.

Looking to the side, he saw that Lan WangJi still glanced at him after he put away the Qiankun Pouches, his eyes full of hesitation. Wei WuXian purposely spoke, "HanGuang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? Are you still worried? Trust me. I really didn't do anything to you last night. Of course, you didn't do anything to me either."

Lan WangJi thought for a few moments. As if he finally made a decision, he lowered his voice, "Last night, other than taking your flute, I..."

Wei WuXian, "You? What else did you do? Nothing much, really. You just said a lot of things."

The Adam's apple on Lan WangJi's snow-colored neck bobbed slightly, "... What sort of things?"

Wei WuXian, "Nothing too important. Pretty much, mnn, for example, you really like..."

Lan WangJi's gaze froze.

Wei WuXian, "You really like rabbits."

"..."

Lan WangJi closed his eyes and turned his head to the side. Wei WuXian added in consideration, "It's okay! Rabbits are so cute—who doesn't like rabbits? I also like them, as in, I like to eat them hahahahaha! Here, HanGuang-Jun. You drank so much last night... Uh, not really. You were so drunk last night, so you're probably not feeling that good right

now. You can wash your face, have some water, then rest for a while before we set off again. This time, it's pointing at the Southwest. I'll go buy some breakfast downstairs and not bother you any longer."

As he was about to go, Lan WangJi spoke coldly, "Wait." Wei WuXian turned around, "What?"

Lan WangJi stared at him fixedly. Finally, he asked, "Do you have money?"

Wei WuXian grinned, "Yes! You didn't think that I don't know where you keep your money, did you? I'll grab some breakfast for you too, alright? HanGuang-Jun, you can take it slow. We're not in a hurry."

He left the room and closed the door behind him. In the hallway, he bent over and silently laughed for quite a long while.

Lan WangJi seemed as if he had received a major shock. He shut himself inside the room and didn't come out for a long period of time. As he waited, Wei WuXian sauntered downstairs, left the inn, and strolled around the area, buying some snacks along the way. He sat down on a set of stairs and bathed in the sunlight as he ate. After having sat there for a while, a group of thirteen-, fourteen-year-old children ran across the street.

The child in the front ran as if he flew, holding a long string in his hand. At the end of the string, a kite danced up and down in the air. The children behind him had toy bow and arrows, shouting as they chased and shot at the kite.

Wei WuXian also loved to play this game when he was young. Archery was a required skill for all disciples from prominent sects. However, most of them didn't enjoy shooting properly at a target. Aside from shooting evil beings during night-hunts, shooting kites was what they loved the most. Everyone had one; whoever flew the highest, furthest, and shot the most accurate was the winner. This game was originally only popular among the younger disciples of cultivational sects. After it became known to the public, the children of ordinary families also loved it, though,

of course, the damage from one of their little arrows was nothing compared to those of the skilled disciples'.

Back when Wei WuXian lived in the Lotus Pier and played shooting kites with the Jiang Sect's disciples, he won a lot of first places. Jiang Cheng, on the other hand, had always been second. His kites were either flown too far away to shoot down or near enough to shoot but not as far as Wei WuXian's. Their kite was almost twice the other people's kites, made into the shape of a flying beast. It had bright, exaggerated colors, a large, gaping mouth, and a few sharp tails that flapped in the wind. From a distance, it was exceptionally vibrant and lively, not quite terrifying, but almost a bit silly. The framework had been assembled by Jiang FengMian himself, then given to Jiang YanLi to paint. This was why, whenever they took the kite out to compete, they both felt a sense of pride.

Thinking of this, Wei WuXian's lips shaped into a smile. He couldn't help but raised his head to see how the kite that the children were flying looked. It was entirely golden, a round mass of some sort. He pondered to himself, what is this thing? A pancake? Or some beast that I don't know about?

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew over. The kite wasn't that high in the first place and it wasn't in an open space, so it was immediately knocked off. One child cried out, "Oh no, the sun fell!"

Wei WuXian understood at once. These children were probably playing a game in imitation of the Sunshot Campaign.

They were in the area of Yueyang. When the QishanWen Sect was at the peak of its prosperity, it abused its powers everywhere. And, since Yueyang wasn't far from Qishan, the people here must have suffered greatly, having been either troubled by their unleashed beasts or bullied by their arrogant cultivators. After the Sunshot Campaign ended, the Wen Sect was annihilated by the combined forces of other sects, the hundred-years-old

foundation instantly crumbling down. Around the area of Qishan, a lot of places enjoyed activities that celebrated the Wen Sect's destruction, which almost turned into traditions. This game was probably one of them.

The children stopped the chase and, gathering together in contemplation, started to discuss, "What do we do? We didn't even shoot the sun, and it fell off by itself. Now who's the leader?"

Someone raised a hand, "Me, of course! I'm Jin GuangYao. I killed the Wen Sect's big villain!" Sitting on the stairs leading to the inn, Wei WuXian watched them with keen interest.

In these types of games, the head of all cultivators, LianFang-Zun, who was currently the most successful of all, was of course the most popular character. Although his family background was a bit disgraceful, the fact that he later climbed to such a rank was precisely why people respected him. During the Sunshot Campaign, he skillfully worked undercover for the QishanWen Sect, deceiving all of the Wen Sect's people to a point that a tremendous amount of information was disclosed, yet they knew nothing. After the Sunshot Campaign, with flattery, wit, and countless other methods, he finally became the Chief Cultivator, fully deserving of the title. Such a life could even be considered a legend. If he was playing, he'd also want to try being Jin GuangYao. Choosing this boy to be the leader would very reasonable choice!

Someone else protested, "But I'm Nie MingJue! I've won the most battles and captured the most people. I should be the leader!"

"Jin GuangYao", "But I'm the Chief Cultivator!"

"Nie MingJue" raised swung his fist, "So what if you're the Chief Cultivator. You're still my youngest brother. You'll have to run away whenever you see me anyways."

"Jin GuangYao" did indeed cooperate and maintain his character. Flinching his shoulders, he quickly ran away. Someone else spoke up, "You short-lived idiot."

Choosing a cultivator to be must have meant that they felt admiration toward the certain cultivator. "Nie MingJue" raged, "Jin ZiXuan, you died even earlier than I did, so you're more short-lived!"

"Jin ZiXuan" responded defensively, "What's wrong with being short-lived? I'm ranked third." "Even if you're third, it's only your face!"

One of the children seemed to be tired from all the running and standing. He also moved to the stairs and sat down beside Wei WuXian. Waving his hands, he mediated between the two, "Okay, okay. Let's stop fighting. I'm the YiLing Patriarch, so I'm the most powerful. So, if you guys insist so much, I can be the leader."

Wei WuXian, "..."

He looked down. There really was a small, wooden stick stuck beside the boy's waist, probably Chenqing.

Only simple-minded children like this would deign to be the YiLing Patriarch, only discussing in terms of power, not whether he was good or evil.

Someone else barged in, "No. I'm the SanDu ShengShou. I'm the most powerful."

The "YiLing Patriarch" replied as if he understood everything, "Jiang Cheng, how is it possible for you to be better than me? Is there even one time that you didn't lose against me? How do you dare to say that you're the most powerful? Aren't you embarrassed?"

"Jiang Cheng", "Hmph, I can't be better than you? Do you remember how you died?" The light smile on Wei WuXian's face dissipated at once.

It was as if he had suddenly been pricked by a poisonous needle. A faint, sharp pain came from all around his body.

The "YiLing Patriarch" who sat beside him clapped his hands, "Look at me! Chenqing on my left, the Tiger Seal on my right, along with the Ghost General—I'm invincible! Hahahaha..."

Holding a stick on his left hand and a rock on his right, he laughed for quite a while,

“Where’s Wen Ning? Come out!” A child from behind the crowd raised a hand and replied feebly, “I’m here... Uh... I’m just saying... When the Sunshot Campaign happened, I wasn’t dead yet...”

Wei WuXian felt that he really needed to interrupt. He asked, “Cultivators, may I ask a question?”

When the children played this game, there had never been an adult who stepped in. Not to mention, it wasn’t a scolding, but this sort of serious question. The “YiLing Patriarch” looked at him with both wonder and caution, “What do you want to ask?”

Wei WuXian, “Why isn’t there anyone from the GusuLan Sect?” “There is.”

“Where are they?”

The “YiLing Patriarch” pointed at a child who never said anything from the beginning to the end, “That’s him.”

Wei WuXian looked over. The child had delicate features, the seedling of a charming, handsome man. A white rope wrapped around his smooth forehead, in place of a forehead ribbon. Wei WuXian asked, “Who is he?”

The “YiLing Patriarch” pouted in disdain, “Lan WangJi.”

... Fine. These children understood the essence. Someone acting as Lan WangJi should indeed shut his mouth and stay silent!

Out of the blue, Wei WuXian’s lips curled upward again.

The poisonous needle had been pulled out, tossed into some random corner. All of the pain had been instantly wiped away. Wei WuXian murmured to himself, “How strange. Why can someone as boring as him always make me so happy?”

When Lan WangJi came downstairs, he saw Wei WuXian sitting on the stairs. A group of children sat around him, eating steamed meat buns together. Wei WuXian ate his meat bun as he directed two children who stood back-to-back in front of him, “... Now, in front of you, there are thousands of the Wen Sect’s cultivators. All of them were heavily armed and surrounded you so closely that even a single drop of water wouldn’t have leaked in. Your eyes should be sharper.

Yes, that’s it. Okay, Lan WangJi, pay attention here. You aren’t how you usually would be. You’re covered in blood! There’s a lot of killing intent! You look really scary! Wei WuXian, move closer to him. Do you know how to spin the flute? Let me see you spin it, with only one hand. Be cooler. Do you know how to look cool? Come, let me show you.” “Wei WuXian” responded and gave the small stick to him. Wei WuXian adeptly whirled “Chenqing” between his fingers, causing all of the children to crowd around him and gasp in awe.

Lan WangJi, “...”

He silently walked over. Seeing that he was here, Wei WuXian dusted off his trousers and said goodbye to the children. Finally managing to stand up, he laughed as he walked, almost as if he had taken some strange poison.

Lan WangJi, “...”

Wei WuXian, “Hahahahaha I’m sorry, HanGuang-Jun. I gave them all of the breakfast I bought for you. Let’s buy some more later.”

Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

Wei WuXian, “What do you think? Were those two kids cute? Guess who was the one with a rope tied around his forehead pretending to be, hahahaha...”

After a while of speechlessness, Lan WangJi finally couldn’t hold it any longer, “... What else did I really do, last night?”

It definitely wasn’t that simple. Or else, what could’ve made Wei WuXian laugh even until now???

Wei WuXian quickly waved his hands, “No, no, no. You didn’t do anything. I’m just being ridiculous, hahahahaha... Okay. Ahem. HanGuang-Jun, I’m going to talk serious business now.”

Lan WangJi, “Speak.”

Wei WuXian pulled on a straight face, “The coffin-slamming noises of the Chang Clan’s cemetery had been silent for ten years. Suddenly starting again, it definitely wasn’t a coincidence. There must’ve been some other cause.”

Lan WangJi, “What do you think the cause is?”

Wei WuXian, “Good question. I think that the cause was the corpse being dug out.” Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

His expression was so attentive that it made Wei WuXian recall how sincere he looked as he held both of his fingers last night, when he had been drunk. Painfully holding back laughter, Wei WuXian continued in all seriousness, “I think that the dismemberment of the corpse probably wasn’t simply to seek revenge and vent hatred, but a malicious way of suppression. The person who cut up the corpse intentionally chose those places haunted by evil beings to place the body parts.”

Lan WangJi, “Combatting poison with poison. They balance out and keep each other in check.”

Wei WuXian, “That’s right. So, since the gravedigger dug out the torso yesterday, there wasn’t anything to suppress the Chang Clan’s resentful spirits anymore, so that coffin-slamming noises started again. It’s the same as how the QingheNie Sect’s Saber Hall suppressed the saber spirits and wall-corpses. Perhaps, this technique was derived from the Nie Sect’s Saber Hall in the first place. It looks like that this person is connected to both the QingheNie Sect and the GusuLan Sect. I’m afraid they aren’t some easy opponents.”

Lan WangJi, “There are only few people like this.”

Wei WuXian, “Yep. The truth is slowly being unveiled. And, since the opponent started to move the corpse parts already, it means that he or they are already starting to become anxious. They’ll definitely move again soon. Even if we don’t go find them, they’ll come and find us. As they search around, they’d leave behind more clues for sure. And, our dear friend’s hand will also tell us which direction to go. But we’ll probably need to move faster as well. Only the right hand and the head are left. After this, we must also arrive before they do.”

The two travelled in the direction of the Southwest. This time, the ghost hand pointed at Shudong, a place known for heavy fog.

It was a haunted city that nobody in the area dared to approach.

#### Translator’s Notes

SanDu ShengShou: This is Jiang Cheng’s title. Check out the Character and Sect Guide for more details.

## Chapter 33: Grasses—Part One

The Shudong area was abundant in rivers and valleys. With towering peaks and a rough terrain, only faint breezes passed the area, causing the majority of places to be enveloped in mist.

Walking straight toward where the left hand pointed, the two of them came upon quite a small village.

A few rails of fencing encircled thatched houses made from mud. A brood of colorful chicks scuttered in and out of the yards, pecking on the ground for rice. A large, bright-feathered rooster stood single-legged on a roof. With a twitching comb, it looked downward loftily, its neck turning left and right. It was fortunate that nobody had any dogs. It was likely that these villagers could only get their hands on a few chunks of meat a year, much less have any leftover bones to feed the dogs.

In front of the village, there was a fork road, leading to three different directions. Of these, two were rather bare. Covered with a great deal of footprints, it was clear that they were often walked upon. Yet, the last one has been overrun with weeds. A square sign made from a piece of rock was positioned slantingly at this road. Subject to age and weathering, the sign was split down the middle with a large crack. Even from within the crack, withered weeds peeked out.

Two large characters, which appeared to be the place that the road led to, had been carved onto the sign. One could manage to tell that the bottom character was the character for “city”.

However, the top character was complex in both form and brushstrokes. The crack just so happened to have run through it, causing a few broken bits of rock to lay scattered on the ground. Wei WuXian bent down and pushed the weeds aside. Even after staring at it for a long time, he still couldn’t figure out what the character was.

Coincidentally, the direction that the left arm pointed at was indeed this path. Wei WuXian, “Why don’t we ask the villagers?”

Lan WangJi nodded. Of course, Wei WuXian didn’t expect him to ask. With a large grin over his face, Wei WuXian walked toward the villager women who were feeding the chicken.

Among the group women, some were old and some were young. Noticing the approach of an unfamiliar man, all of them looked nervous, as if they wanted to throw their dustpans away and flee back inside. Only after Wei WuXian exchanged a few words with them, a cheerful smile on his face, did they finally begin to calm down and respond shyly.

As Wei WuXian pointed at the sign and asked a question, their expressions changed at once. They paused for a moment, and unwillingly started to converse with him. During the chat, they didn’t dare to look at Lan WangJi, who stood by the sign, at all. With the corners of his lips still curved upward, Wei WuXian listened intently. Eventually, it seemed as if the topic had switched, and the women’s expressions calmed again. They gradually relaxed and started to smile timidly at him.

Lan WangJi stared at them from afar. He waited for a while, but Wei WuXian still didn’t seem like he intended to return. Slowly looking to the ground, Lan WangJi kicked a small chunk of rock that was by his feet.

He stepped on it for a long time, rolling the innocent rock over again and again. As he looked up again, he saw Wei WuXian take something from his sleeves and hand it to the woman who spoke the most.

Lan WangJi stood still, a blank look on his face. When he really couldn’t control himself anymore, ready to approach them, Wei WuXian finally sauntered over.

He stood back beside Lan WangJi, “HanGuang-Jun, you should’ve gone. There were even rabbits in the yard!”

Lan WangJi didn’t react to his teasing comment and responded with feigned indifference, “What have they answered?”

Wei WuXian, “This path leads to Yi City. The first character on the sign is ‘yi.’” Lan WangJi, “Yi as in chivalry?”

Wei WuXian, “Yes and no.” Lan WangJi, “And why is that?”

Wei WuXian, “The character is correct, but not the meaning. It’s not yi as in chivalry, but yi as in a coffin home.”

They stepped over the bundles of weeds and went on the path, quickly passing the sign. Wei WuXian continued, “The girls said that, ever since a long time ago, most of the people in that city have died early, either having short lives or meeting accidental deaths, so there were a lot of coffin homes for temporarily holding the corpses. Also, their specialty is in making coffins,

paper money, and other sorts of burial goods. Everyone was skilled at no matter it be making coffins or paper mannequins, which is why it became known by such a name.”

Aside from wilted weeds and pieces of rocks, on the path, there were also cracks and ditches that were difficult to notice. Lan WangJi kept his eyes on wherever Wei WuXian stepped, while Wei WuXian talked as he walked, “They said that the people here rarely go to Yi City. The people inside don’t leave, either, for reasons other than the export of goods. In the past few years, almost nobody could be seen leaving. Nobody has walked on this path for years. Sure explains why it’s so hard to walk over.”

Lan WangJi, “And?”

Wei WuXian, “And what?”

Lan WangJi, “What did you give them?”

Wei WuXian, “Oh. You mean that? It’s rouge.”

When they were in Qinghe, he bought a small compact of rouge from the charlatan that told him information about the Xinglu Ridge, and had always kept it with him. Wei WuXian, “You have to show people your thanks when you’re asking them things, right? I wanted to give them money, but they were too scared and didn’t dare to take it. It seemed like that they really liked the scent of the rouge. They had probably never used such a thing before, so I gave it to them.”

With a pause, he added, “HanGuang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? I know that the rouge’s quality really isn’t that great. But I’m not like how I used to be, when I always had a ton of flowers and jewelry on me to give the girls. I really don’t have anything else to give them. At least it’s better than nothing.”

As if a displeasing memory had bubbled up, Lan WangJi’s brows twitched, and he slowly turned his head away.

Walking along the rough path, the weeds gradually became fewer, climbing back toward the sides, and the road also widened. Yet, the fog grew denser.

As the left hand formed a fist, a city gate lay in ruins at the end of the long path.

The tower in front of the city had missing paint and a broken roof. With one corner chipped off, it looked unusually dilapidated. The walls of the city were covered in graffiti done by some unknown person, while the red color of the doors had almost faded white, every single one of its

doornails rusty and black. The pair of doors was left unlatched, almost as if somebody had just opened a slit and slipped inside.

Even before entering, one could feel that this must be haunted with ghosts and demons running wild.

As Wei WuXian walked down the path, he examined the surroundings carefully. At the city gates, he commented, “The feng shui is horrible.”

Lan WangJi nodded without hurry, "Barren mountains and turbulent rivers."

Yi City was surrounded by steep cliffs on all sides. The cliffs tilted toward the center in an extreme manner, appearing both menacing and constricting, almost as if it would collapse any moment. Bound by these dark, massive peaks and enveloped in the ghostly white fog, it appeared even monstrous than monsters. Even simply standing here would make one feel anxious and suffocated, along with a strong sense of being threatened.

Ever since the ancient times, there had been the saying that "the greatness of a person brings glory to their birthplace". The opposite saying was also present. In some places, because of the terrain or location, the feng shui would be exceptionally awful. Surrounded by a natural gust of sinister energy, it was easy for anyone who lived there to die early or be generally unlucky. If all of their ancestors dwelled there, then they'd be even more unfortunate. Also, irregularities such as living corpses or the return of souls. It was clear that Yi City was such a place.

Places like this were usually in secluded locations that weren't under the control of any cultivation sect. Of course, even if they were, sects wouldn't want to help either. Such situations really were annoying, even more annoying than the Waterborne Abyss. The Waterborne Abyss could be chased away. However, feng shui was difficult to change. If nobody wailed in front of their doors, the sects turned a blind eye and pretended that they didn't know.

For the city's residents, the easiest solution was to leave the place. But, if someone's family had been living at a secluded place for generations, it'd be almost impossible for them to make the decision to leave where they grew up. Even if five or six out of ten people would have short lives, maybe they would be the remaining three or four. It didn't seem too unbearable.

The two halted before the city gates and exchanged a look.

Squeak. Supported by hinges on the verge of snapping, the two city doors, although being unable to align properly, slowly opened.

Before their eyes, there was neither bustling streets nor violent corpses. There was only an all-enveloping shade of white.

The fog was even a few times denser than the fog outside the city, allowing them to only see a long, straight street ahead of them. On the sides, there stood no passers, but only brooding houses.

The two of them naturally walked a few steps nearer to each other, and entered the city together.

It was still daytime, but no sound could be heard in the city. Aside from the lack of human voices, not a single note of caws or barks could be heard either. It was more than peculiar.

Then again, since this was the place where the left arm pointed, it'd be stranger if it weren't peculiar.

They walked down the street for a while. The farther they went, the thicker the fog, as if evil energy permeated the air. At first, they could still manage to see anything within ten steps' distance. And then it became impossible to make out any figure more than five steps away. In the end, they couldn't even see their hands in front of them. The more Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked, the closer to each other they shifted. They could only manage to see each other's face if they walked shoulder-to-shoulder. A thought suddenly popped into Wei WuXian's mind, if someone took advantage of this fog and snuck between us, a third person to our group of two,

it'd be hard to say whether or not we'll notice.

Suddenly, his foot stepped on something. He looked down, but couldn't tell what it was. Wei WuXian grasped Lan WangJi's hand firmly so that he didn't go off on his own, bent down, and squinted. A head with a pair of glaring eyes ripped through the fog, jumping into his sight.

The head had the face of a man with thick brows, large eyes, and two smudges of rouge that stood out acutely.

When Wei WuXian stepped on the head, he almost sent it flying, so he knew how heavy it weighed. Being so light, this definitely wasn't a human head. He picked it up and squeezed it. A large part of the man's face sunk in. Some of the rouge was also smudged.

It was a head made from paper.

The paper head was skillfully crafted. Although the makeup was overly dramatic, the features were rather delicate. Yi City's specialty was burial goods, so of course the technique of crafting paper mannequins was decent. Among the paper mannequins, there were substitute mannequins,

which the people believed that, if burned for the deceased, would suffer in hell in place of them; there were also maidservants and beautiful girls, which would attentively care for the deceased in the nether world. Of course, these were really only made for the living to feel some relief. This paper head was probably a "Nether Brawler".

Like its name, a "Nether Brawler" was a fighter, said to be able to protect the deceased from the bullying of other ghosts or tricky Judges; the paper money that the juniors burned wouldn't be stolen away by other souls either. The paper head definitely had a large, sturdy body also made of paper to go with it. Someone had probably pulled the head off and thrown it onto the streets.

The strands of hair on the paper head were jet-black and quite glossy. Wei WuXian touched it. The hair was firmly attached to the scalp, as if the head really grew the hair. He thought to himself, it really was crafted skillfully. Did they take real, human hair and glue it on? Suddenly, a thin shadow swept past him.

The shadow was extremely bizarre. It ran past, brushing against his shoulder, and instantly disappeared into the thick fog. Bichen unsheathed on its own, chasing after the figure, but quickly returned to its sheath.

The thing that slipped by him ran too quickly—a human definitely couldn't have reached that speed!

Lan WangJi, "Pay attention. Be careful."

Although it only brushed past, it was difficult to say that the next time it came, it wouldn't do something else.

Wei WuXian straightened up, "Did you hear that?" Lan WangJi, "Footsteps and a bamboo pole."

He was correct. During the moment, aside from hurried footsteps, they heard another strange noise. The ta-ta sounded rather clear, as if someone was quickly tapping a bamboo pole on the ground. Wei WuXian didn't know why the noise was present.

In front of them, from within the fog, came another series of footsteps.

This time, the footsteps were light, slower, and greater in number. It seemed as if a group of people were carefully approaching, but not saying anything. Wei WuXian fished out a Gloom-

burning Talisman and tossed it forward. If anything surrounded by resentful energy was in front of them, it would burn up, and the fire would probably somewhat light up the area.

The people in front also noticed that something had been tossed at them. They immediately attacked.

A multitude of differently-colored sword glares rushed over. Bichen unsheathed calmly and drifted in front of Wei WuXian, fending off all of the glares. On the other side, the people fumbled in confusion. Hearing the shouts, Lan WangJi immediately sheathed Bichen. Wei WuXian called out, "Jin Ling? SiZhui!"

As he expected, he hadn't heard wrong. Jin Ling's voice sounded through the white fog, "Why's it you again?!"

Wei WuXian, "Well, actually, I want to know why it's you again!"

Lan SiZhui tried to contain himself, but his voice sounded delighted, “Young Master Mo, you are also here? Then is HanGuang-Jun here as well?”

Hearing that Lan WangJi might also be here, Jin Ling shut his mouth immediately, as if he had been silenced again. He was probably scared that he’d be punished again. Lan JingYi also shouted, “He definitely is! The glare before was from Bichen, right? It was Bichen, right?!”

Wei WuXian, “Yep. He’s here, right beside me. You should come over.”

As soon as the boys knew that the ones in front of them were friend instead of foe, they immediately let out a few sighs of relief and scurried over. Aside from Jin Ling and some of the Lan Sect’s juniors, there were also seven or eight boys wearing clothes of different sects, who still acted hesitant. They were probably also disciples from distinguished backgrounds. Wei WuXian asked, “Why are all of you here? With such an attack, it’s lucky that I have HanGuang- Jun by my side. What if you hurt ordinary people?”

Jin Ling retorted, “There isn’t any ordinary people here—there isn’t any people here at all!”

Lan SiZhui nodded, “It is daylight, but there is fog everywhere. And there is not a single shop open.”

Wei WuXian, “This won’t matter for now. How did you guys run into each other? Don’t tell me that you arranged to night-hunt together.” Jin Ling saw everyone as an eyesore and wanted to fight with everyone. And, since he already had an unpleasant interaction with the Lan Sect’s

disciples, how would it be possible that they wanted to night-hunt together? Lan SiZhui obediently explained, “That would be a long story. We were originally...”

Suddenly, a series of clucks and taps, the unusually ear-piercing noise of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground, came from within the dense fog.

The juniors’ faces changed at once, “It’s here again!”

### Translator’s Notes

Coffin home: A coffin home refers to a building where “a temporary coffin depository where the coffins containing the cadavers of recently deceased people are temporarily stored while awaiting transport to the place of burial.” (Wikipedia)

Judges: In Chinese folklore, when someone dies, they go to the underworld to be recorded by a judge. There are a lot of different versions, and this really isn’t that important.

## Chapter 34: Grasses—Part Two

The sudden peculiar noises of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground sounded loud then soft, far then near, making it so that it was impossible to determine where or what exactly was making it.

Wei WuXian, “All of you, come over. Huddle close. Don’t move and don’t attack.”

Amid the fog, if the juniors all withdrew their swords and attempted to attack, it’d be possible for them to hurt themselves instead of the enemy. After a moment, the noise stopped. Having waited in silence for a few seconds, one disciple spoke under his breath, “It’s that again... Just how long is it going to follow us for?!”

Wei WuXian, “It’s been following you?”

Lan SiZhui, “After we entered the city, because the fog was too thick and it would be easy to wander off, we decided to walk closely together. Then, we suddenly heard the noise. At the time, it was not as fast. It went quite slowly, one knock at a time. Through the fog, we also managed to see a short shadow walk past, right in front of us. But when we chased over, it disappeared. The noise has been following us ever since.”

Wei WuXian, “How short?”

Lan SiZhui gestured at his chest, “Very short. Very small.” Wei WuXian, “How long have you been here for?”

Lan SiZhui, “Around fifteen minutes.”

“Fifteen minutes?” Wei WuXian asked, “HanGuang-Jun, how long have we been here for?”

Lan WangJi’s voice sounded from behind the hazy fog, “Around thirty minutes.”

“Look, “Wei WuXian continued, “We’ve been here for longer than you did. How is it possible that you ended up in front of us, and only ran into us after you turned around?”

Jin Ling couldn’t help but replied, “We never turned around. We’ve always been walking forward, following this path.”

If both of them were walking forward, then would it be possible that someone jinxed the path and made it into a cyclic maze array?

Wei WuXian asked again, “Have you tried using your swords to fly up and see?”

Lan SiZhui, “Yes. I thought that I flew a long distance upward, but it was actually not that high. And there were also some fuzzy shadows darting here and there. I did not know what they were and was afraid that I could not deal with them, so I came down.”

Hearing this, everyone was silent for a while. Since the Shudong area was foggy anyway, they never thought too much about the fog in the city. Now, it seemed that the fog didn’t form naturally and really was a ghostly mist.

Lan JingYi was shocked, “The fog wouldn’t be poisonous, would it?!”

Wei WuXian, “It probably isn’t. We’ve been in here for quite a while, and we’re still alive.”

Jin Ling, “I should’ve brought Fairy with me. It’s all because of your damned donkey.”

Hearing the dog’s name, goosebumps climbed all over Wei WuXian’s back. He then heard Lan

JingYi shout, “We have not even blamed your dog yet! It opened its mouth to bite first, and then

it ended up with Lil’ Apple’s hoove. Whose fault was that? Anyhow, neither of them can move at this point.”

Wei WuXian, “What?! My Lil’ Apple was bitten by a dog?!”

Jin Ling, “How can that donkey be more important than my spiritual dog? Fairy was given to me by my youngest uncle. If something happened to it, not even ten thousand donkeys could pay for it!”

Wei WuXian retorted in all absurdity, “Don’t use LianFang-Zun’s name to scare people off. Well, my Lil’ Apple is a gift from HanGuang-Jun. How could you take Lil’ Apple out to night-hunt? And even let it be injured?!”

The juniors from the Lan Sect responded in unison, “Liar!” They would never believe that someone like HanGuang-Jun would choose such a gift for someone. Even if Lan WangJi didn’t speak up, they firmly refused to believe it. Lan SiZhui clarified, “Uhh... Sorry, Young Master Mo. Your Lil’ Apple... Your donkey had been making noise everyday in the Cloud Recesses, and the seniors had been complaining for a long time, ordering us to get rid of it during this night-hunt. So, we...”

Jin Ling didn’t believe that the donkey was a gift from Lan WangJi either, “I can’t even stand looking at that donkey. And it’s even called ‘Lil’ Apple’. It’s so damn stupid!”

Lan JingYi thought that, if it really were from HanGuang-Jun, then they’d be in trouble. He immediately spoke up for it, “What is wrong with ‘Lil’ Apple’? It likes to eat Apples, so it is called Lil’ Apple. How down-to-earth. This is ten times better than calling your fat dog ‘Fairy’!”

Jin Ling, “How is Fairy fat?! Try finding me a spiritual dog that’s in a better shape than...” Suddenly, all of the chatter ceased.

A few seconds later, Wei WuXian asked, “Is anyone still there?”

A series of oomph-s and mmn-s came from around him, which meant that everyone was there. Lan WangJi coldly stated, “Noise.”

... How could he silence everyone at once? Wei WuXian couldn’t help but touched his lips, feeling quite lucky.

All of a sudden, the sound of footsteps came amid the fog on the front-left side.

The footsteps staggered in a tremendously cumbersome way. Immediately afterward, from the front, the front-right, the sides, and the back came the same sound. Although the fog was too thick for any figures to be seen, the rancid stench had already drifted over.

Of course, Wei WuXian wouldn’t worry about just a few walking corpses. He whistled lightly, and ended on a note that curved upward, signalling for them to back off. As he had expected, after the corpses behind the fog heard the whistle, they briefly paused.

However, a moment later, they rushed over!

Wei WuXian didn’t expect this at all. Not only did the command not work, it actually provoked them. He would never have mixed up the two different commands of “back off” and “be stimulated”!

Yet, at the moment, there wasn’t any time for him to think. Seven or eight slanting figures had already appeared through the white fog. Judging from the thickness of the fog in Yi City, the fact that they could see them meant that the corpses were already extremely nearby!

Bichen’s icy-blue sword glare tore open the fog. Surrounding the group, it drew a distinct circle in the air, cutting all of the walking corpses in half then returning back to its sheath. Wei WuXian let out a breath of relief, while Lan WangJi lowered his voice, “Why?”

Wei WuXian was also wondering why, why couldn’t the command control these corpses? With a slow pace and rancid scent, they definitely weren’t any high-level corpses. I should’ve been able to scare them away with just a few claps. It was impossible for my whistling to suddenly not work anymore, since it doesn’t use spiritual powers anyways. A situation like this has never...

Suddenly, he remembered something. A thin layer of sweat seeped from his back.

No. It wasn’t that “a situation like this has never happened before”. In reality, it had indeed happened before, and not only once. There really was a type of corpse or spirit that he couldn’t command—

Corpses or spirits that were already under the control of the Stygian Tiger Seal!

Lan WangJi lifted the silence spell, and Lan SiZhui could talk again, “HanGuang-Jun, is the situation really dangerous? Should we leave the city at once?”

“But the fog is so thick. We cannot use the path or fly out either...” One disciple exclaimed, “I think more corpses are coming!” “Where? I did not hear any footsteps.”

“I think I heard strange breathing sounds...” The boy only realized what a ridiculous remark it was after he said it, shutting his mouth in embarrassment. Another boy responded, “You really are something, are you not? Breathing sounds. Corpses are dead—how can there be any breathing sounds?”

Before he finished, another large figure crashed over. With Bichen unsheathing again, the shadow’s head separated from its body. At the same time, strange splashing sounds could be heard. The disciples who were near the scene all screamed in fright. Afraid that they were hurt, Wei WuXian immediately called out, “What happened?”

Lan JingYi, “Something spurted out of the corpse’s body. I think it was some sort of powder. It tasted both bitter and sweet. And rotten!” It was very unlucky for him. Since he happened to have wanted to speak, he opened his mouth, and a fair amount of powder went inside. Not caring about how he looked, he immediately spat a few times. The things that gushed out from a corpse

were undoubtedly not trivial matters. The powder still roamed in the air. If it was accidentally sucked into the lungs, it would’ve been even harder to deal with than if it entered one’s mouth. Wei WuXian instructed, “All of you, stand away from that area! Come here quickly. Let me see you.”

Lan JingYi, “Okay. But I cannot see you. Where are you?”

One couldn’t even see their hand if it was right in front of them, let alone walk in this fog. Wei WuXian recalled that, whenever Bichen was unsheathed, its sword glare could penetrate the white fog. He turned to Lan WangJi, who stood by his side, “HanGuang-Jun, draw your sword for a moment, so that he can walk over.”

Lan WangJi was standing right beside him, yet neither replied nor moved. Suddenly, a clear, blue sword glare lit up an area around seven steps away.

... Lan WangJi was there?

Then who was the person that had always stood silently beside him?!

Suddenly, a shadow flashed before Wei WuXian’s eyes. A dark face approached from in front of him.

It was dark because, on top of the face, there was a thick layer of black mist!

The mist-faced man reached out for the Qiankun Pouch hung by his side. However, after he had taken it, the Qiankun Pouch suddenly swelled up. The string that had tied it snapped in half, and three enraged spirits shot forward. Forming an entangled mess, they charged toward him!

Wei WuXian laughed, “Did you want the Qiankun Pouch? Then, your eyesight must be in a bad shape. Why did you take my Spirit-Trapping Pouch instead?”

Ever since they snatched the recently-unearthed torso from the gravedigger’s hands in the YueyangChang Sect’s cemetery and caused him to retreat frustratedly, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi had always been on the alert. They predicted that he wouldn’t give up and would instead look out for any opportunity to take it back. As they had expected, after they entered Yi City, the gravedigger attacked, intending to take advantage of the thick fog and the chattering crowd.

Indeed, his attack worked, but Wei WuXian had long since swapped the Qiankun Pouch that held the left arm with the Spirit-Trapping Pouch.

With a clang, the opponent jumped backward and unsheathed his sword. Instantly, the spirits’ hatred-filled screeches sounded about, as if the attack pushed them toward the verge of dissipating. Wei WuXian thought to himself, so he really is someone with a high level of cultivation. He immediately shouted, “HanGuang-Jun, the gravedigger’s here!”

Without needing the reminder, Lan WangJi knew that something had happened just by listening. He stayed silent. Bichen's swift, fierce sweep served as response.

The current situation was far from optimistic. A black mist covered the gravedigger's sword, making it so that the sword glare didn't come through and allowing it to hide perfectly within the white fog. On the other hand, the sword glare from Lan WangJi's Bichen couldn't be concealed at all. He was out in the open while the enemy was hidden in the dark. Also, the enemy was not only highly skilled in terms of cultivation, but he was also familiar with the GusuLan Sect's sword moves. And, although both of them were fighting blindly in the fog, he could do whatever he wanted, yet Lan WangJi had to be careful so that he didn't accidentally injure anyone on his own side. Seeing from all of this, Lan WangJi was really at a disadvantage. Having heard a few clashes of the blades, Wei WuXian's heart suddenly tightened. He blurted out, "Lan Zhan? Are you hurt?!"

From afar, there came a muffled grunt, as if someone had received a critical injury. It clearly wasn't Lan WangJi's voice, though.

Lan WangJi, "Of course not."

Wei WuXian grinned, "So it seems!"

It sounded as if the other person laughed bitterly. He attacked again. The clashing sounds of Bichen's glare and the other sword were farther and farther away. Wei WuXian knew that Lan WangJi didn't want to accidentally hurt them and purposely drew the battle away to deal with the gravedigger on his own. Of course, the rest was up to Wei WuXian. He turned around, "How are the ones who inhaled the powder?"

Lan SiZhui, "They are starting to have trouble standing up!" Wei WuXian, "Come to the middle and number yourselves off."

It was fortunate that, after finishing off a wave of walking corpses and leading away a gravedigger, nothing else came to disturb them. The noise of the bamboo pole didn't come out to make trouble either. The remaining disciples gathered around and counted themselves off.

Nobody was missing. Wei WuXian took Lan JingYi into his hands and felt his forehead. It was a

bit warm. He then felt the foreheads of the other boys who had inhaled the powder from the corpse. They were the same. He lifted Lan JingYi's eyelids, "Show me your tongue. Ahh."

Lan JingYi, "Ahh."

Wei WuXian, "Yep. Congratulations. You're under corpse poisoning." Jin Ling, "How is this something to congratulate someone for?!"

Wei WuXian, "It's another life experience. It'd be a conversation starter when you grow older."

Corpse poisoning was mostly due to being wounded by a turned corpse or having a wound touch their necrotic blood. Cultivators usually didn't allow walking corpses to get so near that they get wounded, so nobody made it a habit to carry elixirs that cured corpse poisoning. Lan SiZhui worried, "Young Master Mo, will anything happen to them?"

Wei WuXian, "Nothing at the moment. When it goes in the bloodstream and travels all around the body and enters the heart, then nothing could help anymore."

Lan SiZhui, "Wh-what will happen?"

Wei WuXian, "Whatever happens to corpses will happen to you. If you're lucky, you're just going to rot away. If you're not, you might become a long-haired zombie and you'll only be able to shop around for the rest of your life."

All of the poisoned disciples gasped. Wei WuXian, "So you want to cure it?"

Everyone nodded. Wei WuXian continued, "If you want to cure it, then listen up. From now on, all of you have to behave and listen to whatever I say. Every one of you."

Although a lot of the boys still weren't familiar with him, seeing that he could intimately call HanGuang-Jun by his birth name as if they were from the same generation, that they

stood in the middle of a ominously foggy haunted city, and that they were both poisoned and feverish, they felt particularly anxious, instinctively wanting to depend on someone. And, since anything that came out of Wei WuXian's mouth somehow had a tone of confidence that eliminated all worries, they couldn't help but listened to his words, answering in unison, "Yes!"

Wei WuXian pressed further, "You have to do whatever I tell you to. Be obedient. Understood?"

"Yes!"

Wei WuXian clapped, "Stand up. Those who aren't poisoned can carry those who are, preferably over the shoulder. If you can only lift them on your front, remember to position the head and the heart higher than the rest of the body."

Lan JingYi, "But I can walk. Why do we need to be carried?"

Wei WuXian, "Brother, if you jump around, your blood is going to circulate quickly, and it will enter your heart sooner. So, you shouldn't move too much. It's best if you don't move at all."

The boys immediately stood as still as boards, allowing their peers to lift them up. Carried on the shoulder of another disciple from his sect, one boy mumbled, "The corpse that sprinkled the poisonous powder really did breathe."

The boy who carried him complained as he panted on, "I already told you. If it knew how to breathe, then it'd be a living person."

Lan SiZhui, "Young Master Mo, all of them have been carried. Where will we go?"

Lan SiZhui was the nicest, most obedient, and least worrisome one. Wei WuXian replied, "At the moment, we definitely won't be able to leave the city. Let's knock a few doors."

Jin Ling, "Knock the doors of what?"

Wei WuXian thought for a moment, "Is there anything else that has doors except for houses?"

Jin Ling, "You want us to enter these houses? It's already this dangerous outside. Who knows what things are hidden in these rooms, watching and waiting for us."

After he spoke, everyone felt that there really were pairs of eyes hidden within the fog and the houses, closely watching their every move, their every word. They couldn't help but shuddered in fear. Wei WuXian responded, "True. It's hard to say whether outside the houses or inside the houses is more dangerous. But, since it's already like this on the outside, the inside can't be any worse. Let's go. There's no time to lose. We still need to cure the poisoning."

The group had to do what they were told. Listening to Wei WuXian's instructions, everyone held the sword sheath of the person in front of him, so that they didn't wander off amid the dense fog. From house to house, they knocked on the doors. Jin Ling pounded for awhile, and didn't hear

any response from within the house, "There doesn't seem to be anyone inside this one. Let's go in."

Wei WuXian's voice drifted over, "Who told you to enter if there wasn't anyone inside? Continue knocking. We need to go into a house that does have someone inside of it."

Jin Ling, "You want to find one with someone inside?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes. Knock nicely. Your knocks were too strong. It's quite rude."

Jin Ling was so irritated that he almost kicked the wooden door down. In the end, he only... stomped angrily on the ground.

Every household by the street shut its door tightly, refraining from opening it no matter how hard they knocked. The more Jin Ling knocked, the more annoyed he became, but the amount of force he exerted had clearly lessened. On the other hand, Lan SiZhui remained calm. At the thirteenth shop, he repeated the phrase that had already been repeated a number of times, "Excuse me. Is anyone inside?"

Suddenly, the door shifted. A thin, black slit had been opened. It was very dark on the other side of the door, not allowing anyone to make out what was behind the slit. The person who opened the door didn't speak either. The boys who were close by couldn't help but stepped backward.

Lan SiZhui regained his composure, "Excuse us, but are you the manager of the shop?" A moment passed, and an old, bizarre voice leaked from the slit, "Yes."

Wei WuXian walked over and patted Lan SiZhui's shoulder, signalling for him to step back as well, and spoke, "Manager, it's our first time coming here. The fog was so thick that we got lost. We've been walking for a long time already, and we're rather tired. Would it be possible for you to lend your shop so that we can rest a bit?"

The bizarre voice replied, "My shop is not for travellers to rest."

Wei WuXian looked as if he didn't find anything strange at all, and spoke with his usual expression, "But, in the area, there isn't any other shop that has anyone inside. Manager, are you really not willing to do us a favour? We are willing to pay."

Jin Ling blurted out, "How would you get the money to pay? Let's make this clear—I won't lend you money."

Wei WuXian waggled a delicate pouch in front of his eyes, "Look what this is." Lan SiZhui was shocked, "How dare you?! This is HanGuang-Jun's!"

As they argued, the slit was opened a bit further. Although they still couldn't see the furniture in the room, they could see that a gray-haired, expressionless woman stood behind the door.

Although the old woman had a hunched back, appearing quite elderly at first glance, she actually didn't have a lot of wrinkles or age spots. It would even be possible to describe her as middle-aged. She proceeded to open the door and move out of the way. It looked like that she was willing to let them in.

Jin Ling was astonished. He whispered, "She really is willing to let us in?"

Wei WuXian also whispered, "Of course. One of my feet was within the slit, so she couldn't close the door even if she wanted to. If she still didn't let me in, I would've just kicked the door down."

Jin Ling, ..." Yi City was already frightening and peculiar; the people who lived here were definitely not ordinary either. Seeing how suspicious the old woman looked, the disciples all whispered in silence. Although they didn't want to go inside at all, there wasn't any other choice left for them. They could only pick up their peers, who were too scared to move an inch due to the poisoning, and enter the door one by one. The old woman stood waiting on the side, looking coldly at them. When everyone was inside, she immediately closed the door. The room was pitch-black again.

Wei WuXian asked, "Manager, why do you not open the lights?" The old woman, "The light is on the table. Light it yourselves."

Lan SiZhui just happened to be standing by a table. Slowly feeling around, he found an oil lamp covered with a thick layer of dust. He fished out a fire talisman and lit it up. As he moved it toward the lampwick, unintentionally looking around the room, a gush of cold air washed from his feet to his head. His scalp tingled with terror.

Within the shop's central chamber, a roomful of people were crammed inside, shoulders to shoulders and heels to heels. Each and every single one of them had their eyes wide open, staring at them without a single blink!

#### Translator's Notes

Spirit-Trapping Pouch: This used to be called the Spirit-Locking Pouch.

## Chapter 35: Grasses—Part Three

He couldn't help but loosen his hand, yet Wei WuXian saved the oil lamp just as it was about to hit the ground. Calmly brushing it against the burning fire talisman on the other hand, he lit it up and set it onto the table, "Did you make these yourself, Manager? They're quite well-made."

The rest finally realized that the people who stood in the room were not real humans, but actually paper mannequins.

The mannequins' heads and bodies were delicately crafted, the same size as those of real people. There were men, women, and even children. All of the men were "Nether Brawlers", crafted with tall, sturdy bodies and angered expressions. All of the women were fair-featured beauties, with hair in either single or double buns. Even when covered with loose-fitting paper clothes, one could still see their graceful postures. The patterns on the clothes were almost finer than those of real brocade robes—some were colored with rich, vivid ink; others were uncolored, left with ashen grays. On each mannequin's cheeks, there were two smears of blush in pretense for a living person's rosy complexion. However, none of their pupils had been added yet—the eyes were entirely white. The bolder the blush was, the gloomier they looked.

There was another table in the room. On the table, there were a few candlesticks, each a different length than the others. Wei WuXian lit them up one by one, and the yellow light illuminated most corners of the house. Aside from the paper mannequins, there were also two wreaths placed on both sides of the room. Paper gold, ghost money, and pagodas were heaped up beside the walls.

Jin Ling already had his sword slightly unsheathed. Seeing that it was only a shop that sold burial goods, he sighed with discreet relief and sheathed his sword again. In the cultivational world, even if a cultivator passed away, nobody employed the eerie, chaotic obsequies of the common folk. Since they hadn't seen such things before, after the initial scare, curiosity sprouted from within their hearts. With skin covered in goosebumps, they felt that it was even more exciting than night-hunting ordinary beasts.

No matter how dense the fog was, it couldn't seep into houses. Ever since they entered Yi City, this was the only point in time where they could easily see one another's faces, which set their minds at rest. Wei WuXian saw that they'd relaxed, and asked the old woman again, "Would it be possible for us to borrow your kitchen?"

The old woman almost glowered at the lamp, as if she disliked the presence of any light, "The kitchen is in the back. Use it as you please." After her words, she dodged into another room as though she was avoiding the plague. She slammed the door so loud that a few even shivered.

Jin Ling exclaimed, "There's definitely something wrong with the hag! You..."

Wei WuXian responded, "Okay. Hush. I need somebody to help me. Any volunteers?" Lan SiZhui hurried, "I can come."

Lan JingYi was still standing as straight as a stick, "Then what do I do?" Wei WuXian, "Remain standing. Don't move if I don't tell you to."

Lan SiZhui followed Wei WuXian to the kitchen in the back. As soon as they went in, they were overwhelmed by a foul stench. Lan SiZhui had never smelled such a terrible scent before.

Although his head spun, he managed to stop himself from rushing back out. Jin Ling followed as well, but leapt outside again immediately after he entered. He fanned the air as fast as he could, "What in the world is this?! What are you doing here instead of thinking up cures?!"

Wei WuXian, "Hmm? Perfect timing. How did you know that I was going to call you over? Lend me a hand."

Jin Ling, "I'm not here to help! Urgh! Did somebody kill someone but forget to bury them?!"

Wei WuXian, "Young Mistress Jin, are you coming or not? If you're coming, then come in and help; if you're not coming, then go back and tell someone else to come over."

Jin Ling raged, "Who are you calling Young Mistress Jin? Be careful what you say!" He pinched his nose for a while, debating with himself whether or not to stay or to leave, and finally humped, "Well I want to see what on Earth you're trying to do." With this, he stormed inside.

Yet, he didn't expect that, with a bang, Wei WuXian opened a chest on the ground, which was where the stench came from. Within the chest, there were ham and chicken. Blotches of green dotted among the red meat, while white, coiling maggots dotted among the green. Jin Ling was forced to exit the room again. Wei WuXian picked up the chest and passed it to him, "Throw it away. Anywhere works, as long as we don't smell it."

With a churning stomach and a head full of doubt, Jin Ling threw it out as he was told. He fiercely rubbed his fingers with a handkerchief, then threw it out as well. After he returned to the

kitchen, Wei WuXian and Lan SiZhui fetched two buckets of water from the well in the backyard, and were currently cleaning the kitchen. Jin Ling demanded, "What are you doing?"

Lan SiZhui wiped around in diligence, "As you can see, we are cleaning the kitchen hearth." Jin Ling, "What's the use of cleaning the hearth? We're not making food or anything."

Wei WuXian, "Who told you so? We are making food. You can sweep the dust. Get rid of all the cobwebs up there."

His words sounded so natural, so assured that, with a broom stuck into his hands, Jin Ling somehow obeyed. The more he cleaned, the more he felt that something was off. Just as he was about to throw the duster at Wei WuXian's head, Wei WuXian opened another box, scaring him to the point that he darted out again. Luckily, this time, there wasn't any stench.

The three worked quickly. After a short while, the kitchen looked completely different. The house finally seemed a bit more lively, no longer haunted and long-abandoned. In a corner, there were some already-chopped firewood. They piled them into the hearth and set them alight using a fire talisman. They rested a large pot that they had already washed on the hearth and began to boil water. Wei WuXian poured some glutinous rice out of the second chest, washed all of it, and put it into the pot.

Jin Ling, "You're making congee?" Wei WuXian, "Uh-huh."

Jin Ling hurled the cleaning rag onto the ground. Wei WuXian commented, "You see how you get mad after working for just a bit? Look at SiZhui. He worked the hardest and didn't even say anything yet. What's wrong with congee?"

Jin Ling, "What's not wrong with congee? It's so watery and tasteless! Wait... I'm not mad because there's something wrong with congee!"

Wei WuXian, "It's not for you anyways."

Jin Ling was even more angered, "What did you say? I worked for so long, and I don't even get any?!"

Lan SiZhui, "Young Master Mo, is it that congee can cure corpse poisoning?"

Wei WuXian smiled, "Yes, but it's not the congee that can cure corpse poisoning—it's the rice. This is folk medicine. Normally, you apply the glutinous rice to the scratched or bitten wound. In the future, if you ever find yourselves in such a situation again, you can try this. Although it'll hurt a lot, it definitely works efficiently. But, since they swallowed corpse

poisoning powder instead of being scratched or bitten, we can only make some rice congee for them to eat up.”

Lan SiZhui came to realization, “So that was why you intended to enter a house with someone inside. Only a house with someone living inside could have a kitchen. Only a kitchen could have glutinous rice.”

Jin Ling, “Who knows how long the rice has been here for? Can you still eat it? This kitchen hasn’t been used in at least a year. There’s dust everywhere and the meat’s even rotten. Don’t tell me that the hag hasn’t eaten for an entire year. It’s impossible that she has practiced inedia. How did she survive?”

Wei WuXian, “It’s either that nobody has been living here and that she really isn’t the shopkeeper at all, or that she simply doesn’t need to eat.”

Lan SiZhui lowered his voice, “If she does not need to eat, then she would be dead. But the old woman clearly breathes.”

Using a spatula, Wei WuXian nonchalantly stirred the pot of congee, mixing in ingredients from various bottles and jars, “Right. You haven’t finished explaining. Why did you come to Yi City together? It wasn’t just by chance that you ran into each other and then us, was it?” The boys’ expressions immediately grew serious. Jin Ling replied, “I, the Lan Sect’s people, and the ones from other sects were all chasing after something. I came from the Qinghe area.”

Lan SiZhui also replied, “We came from Langya.” Wei WuXian, “What was it?”

Lan SiZhui shook his head, “We do not know. It never showed its face. We don’t even know what or who... or which organization it was, exactly.”

Ever since a few days ago, after Jin Ling lied to his uncle and let Wei WuXian go, he had been worried that this time Jiang Cheng would really break his legs, so he decided to sneak out and disappear for a few days, not appearing in front of Jiang Cheng until his anger subsided. He ran away immediately after he passed Zidian to one of Jiang Cheng’s trusted subordinates. Having arrived at a city on the border of the Qinghe area, his journey paused. In search for the location

for his next night-hunt, he took a short rest at a large inn. At night, when he was memorizing spells in his room, Fairy, who lay by his side, suddenly started barking at the door. It was already deep into the night. Jin Ling ordered the dog to stop, yet he immediately heard someone knocking on the door.

Although Fairy stopped barking, it was still restless. Its claws dug at the ground as it growled deeply. Already on the alert, Jin Ling asked for who the person was. There came no reply, so he got back to his business. However, after an hour, the knocks sounded again.

Jin Ling leaped out the window along with Fairy. He circled around and went upstairs from the first floor, intending to see who exactly was messing with him in the middle of the night. Despite his efforts, there was nobody there. He waited silently for a while, but still didn’t see anyone in front of his door.

Keeping an eye on this, he let Fairy guard the door. He was ready to attack the person at any moment and stayed awake for the whole night. Despite this, nothing had happened. There were only some strange sounds, as if water was dripping down.

On the second morning, a scream came from outside the door. Jin Ling kicked the door open only to step into a pool of blood. Something fell from above the door. Darting backward, Jin Ling barely managed to prevent it from hitting him.

It was a black cat!

Someone, not long ago, nailed the corpse of a dead cat on top of his door. The strange dripping sounds he heard throughout the night were from the cat’s blood dripping down.

Jin Ling, “It was the same after switching to a few different inns, so I went on the offensive. If I heard that a cat’s corpse happened to appear anywhere, I would go and see, since I just had to find out who was messing around.”

Wei WuXian turned to Lan SiZhui, "You guys as well?"

Lan SiZhui nodded, "Yes. A few days ago, a few of us were night-hunting at Langya. During dinner one day, we suddenly fished out the unskinned head of a cat from inside the soup... In the beginning, we did not know that it was directed at us, but on that night, when we switched to another inn, we found the corpse of a cat in one of the bedsheets. It was the same for a few continuous days. We chased after it, arrived at Yueyang, and ran into Young Master Jin. We found out that we were searching for the same thing, so we decided to work together, and only

arrived at this area today. We asked a hunter in the village in front of a stone tablet, and we were shown the path to Yi City."

Wei WuXian thought to himself, A hunter?

The juniors should've passed the village in front the road fork after Lan WangJi and he did. However, they didn't see any hunters at the time. There were only a few timid village women feeding chicken, who said that the men were out shipping goods and wouldn't be back for a long while.

The more Wei WuXian thought about it, the more solemn his expression grew.

From the narration, their opposition did nothing other than killing cats and dumping the corpses. Although it both sounded and looked scary, they weren't actually harmed. In fact, these events stirred up their curiosity to get to the root of the matter.

Also, these juniors met one another in Yueyang. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi also came to Shudong from Yueyang. It almost seemed as if somebody was purposely leading the muddleheaded juniors to meet up with the two of them.

To lead a few confused juniors to a dangerous place for them to face the violent limb of a fierce corpse—wasn't this the exact same routine as the occurrence at Mo Village?

And, this wasn't the most complicated part of it. Right now, what Wei WuXian feared the most was that... the Stygian Tiger Seal might be within Yi City at this very moment.

Although Wei WuXian didn't really want to accept this possibility, it was nonetheless the most reasonable explanation. After all, someone who could restore half of the Tiger Seal had even existed. Despite the talk that he had been dealt with, who knew where the seal that he had restored went?

Suddenly, Lan SiZhui, who had been squatting on the ground to fan the flame, raised his head, "Senior Mo, I think that the congee is ready?"

Gathering his thoughts, he stopped stirring. He grabbed the bowl that Lan SiZhui had washed and tasted a spoonful of the congee, "It's ready. Take it out. Feed one bowl to each person who had been poisoned."

However, after it had been carried out, Lan JingYi only had one mouthful before spitting it out, "What is this? Poison?!"

Wei WuXian, "How is this poison? It's the cure! Glutinous rice congee."

Lan JingYi, "First of all, I don't know why glutinous rice would be the cure, but I've never eaten such a spicy bowl of congee before!"

The rest of the boys who had taste their servings nodded in unison, all of their eyes wet with tears. Wei WuXian stroked his chin. He grew up in Yunmeng. People from Yunmeng were all quite spice-tolerant, but Wei WuXian's penchant for spice was beyond hardcore. Anytime he set about the kitchen, the food would be so spicy that even Jiang Cheng could only smash his bowl and curse. Yet, for some reason, he just couldn't hold back from adding spoonful after spoonful of seasoning. It seemed that, this time, he wasn't able to control his hands either. Out of curiosity, Lan SiZhui picked up the bowl and tried a mouthful. Even as his face flushed red and his eyes teared up, he pursed his lips and refrained from spitting it out, thinking to himself, The taste... is so scary that it almost brings about a sense of *deja vu*.

Wei WuXian, "All medicine is poisonous to some degree. The spice will make you sweat so that you get better sooner."

The eww-s coming from the boys revealed their disbelief. Nonetheless, with bitter faces, they ate up the congee. Within seconds, all of their faces reddened and their foreheads gleamed as they suffered from the agony. Wei WuXian couldn't help but comment, "It's not that serious, is it?

HanGuang-Jun is also from Gusu. He takes spice quite well, so why are you guys like this?" Lan SiZhui answered with a hand covering his mouth, "No, Senior. HanGuang-Jun's taste is very mild. He never eats spice..."

Wei WuXian paused for a moment, "Really."

But he could remember that in his past life, before he betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect, he had met with Lan WangJi in Yiling once. At the time, although Wei WuXian was widely reviled, it wasn't to the point that everyone wanted to beat him up. Thus, pulling on a thick face, he asked Lan WangJi to have dinner with him so that they could reminisce together. All of the dishes that Lan WangJi ordered were packed with Sichuan peppers, and so he had always thought that Lan WangJi's taste for spice was pretty much the same as him.

Now that he thought about it, he couldn't remember whether or not Lan WangJi actually picked up his chopsticks. Then again, he even forgot about how he said that the meal was his treat, so Lan WangJi ended up paying for them anyway. This was why it was only natural for him to forget such a detail.

He didn't know why but, all of a sudden, he really, really wanted to see Lan WangJi's face. "... Senior, Senior Mo!"

"Hmm?" Wei WuXian finally pulled himself together. Lan SiZhui whispered, "The old lady's door... has opened."

From somewhere came an eerie gust of wind, faintly opening the room's door. The door swayed open and closed, revealing the vague outline of a stooping shadow sitting by a table within the frightful darkness. Wei WuXian signalled for them to stay put and walked into the room alone.

The dim light of the oil lamp and candlesticks in the central chamber leaked inside. The old woman sat with her head hung low, as if she didn't notice that someone had entered. A cloth lay on her knees, tightly stretched with an embroidery frame, suggesting that she was doing needlework. Her two hands stiffly stuck to each other as they tried to guide a thread through a needle.

Wei WuXian sat down by the table as well, "Manager, why not light the lamp if you're threading a needle? Let me help."

He took over the needle and thread—the thread went through at once. Passing it back to the old woman, he walked out of the room as if nothing had happened and closed the door behind him, "There's no need to go in."

Jin Ling, "When you were inside, did you see if the hag's actually alive or not?"

Wei WuXian, "Don't call her a hag. That's quite rude. The old lady is a living corpse." The boys looked at one another. Lan SiZhui asked, "What is a living corpse?"

Wei WuXian, "From head to toe, everything seems to say that they're a corpse, but the person is actually living. That's what a living corpse is."

Jin Ling was shocked, "You're saying that she's still alive!?" Wei WuXian, "Have you looked inside?"

"Yes."

"What did you see? What was she doing?" "Threading a needle."

"Did it go in?" "... No."

"Correct. She's incapable of threading a needle. Dead people's muscles are too rigid to perform complex actions such as threading needles. The marks on her face aren't age spots,

but livor mortis. And she doesn't need to eat, either. It's only that she can breathe which makes her alive."

Lan SiZhui, "B-but the old lady is already quite elderly. A lot of old ladies have poor eyesight and cannot thread needles by themselves."

Wei WuXian, "So I helped her. Did you notice the other thing, though? From opening the door until now, she hasn't blinked even once."

The boys blinked a few times. Wei WuXian continued, "Living people blink to prevent eyes from becoming sore. Dead people, on the other hand, have no need to do this. And, when I took the needle and thread over, did anyone notice how she looked at me?"

Jin Ling, "Her eyeballs didn't move... but her head did!"

Wei WuXian, "Precisely. When most people look somewhere, their eyeballs usually move, no matter how slight the movement is. However, dead people's eyes don't. This is because dead people can't carry out an action as subtle as moving their eyeballs. They can only turn their heads and necks instead."

Lan JingYi was baffled, "Should we be taking notes?"

Wei WuXian, "A good habit, but do you think you'd have time to flip through your notes when you're out night-hunting? Keep it in your minds."

Jin Ling spoke through clenched teeth, "Walking corpses are already weird enough. Why do things like living corpses exist!?"

Wei WuXian, "There are a lot of disadvantages to dead people: rigid muscles, slow movement, and so on. However, there are also quite a few advantages: the lack of fear towards pain, the

inability to think, how easy they are to control. Somebody thought that they could amend for the disadvantages of corpses and create perfect corpse puppets. This was how living corpses came into being."

Although the boys didn't say anything, one single sentence was written all over their faces—"This person must be Wei! Wu! Xian!"

Wei WuXian didn't know whether to laugh or frown, thinking silently, But I really haven't done such a thing!

Although, it really did sound like his way of doing things!

He carried on, "Ahem. Alright. Wei WuXian started it. But he successfully made Wen Ning, or the Ghost General. To be honest, I've always wanted to ask—who exactly came up with this title? It's so dumb. Anyways, there were some other people who wanted to imitate this but weren't good enough, so they used improper means. Targeting living people instead, they developed living corpses." He concluded, "A type of failed imitations."

Hearing Wei WuXian's name, Jin Ling's face froze over. He snorted, "Wei Ying himself used improper means."

Wei WuXian, "Yep. Then, the ones who developed living corpses used the most improper means of all improper means."

Lan SiZhui, "Senior Mo, what should we do now?"

Wei WuXian, "Some living corpses may not know that they're already dead. I think that this old lady is one of the confused corpses. Let's just not disturb her for now."

Out of blue, a series of the crisp taps of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground suddenly sounded.

The sound came from nearby a window, which was sealed shut by strips of black, wooden boards. All of the disciples in the central chamber turned pale. Ever since they entered the city, they had been constantly pestered by the sound. They now panicked whenever they heard it. Wei WuXian gestured for them to be quiet. All of them held their breaths as they watched Wei WuXian walk to the window and look outside through a narrow slit between the boards.

As soon as Wei WuXian approached the slit, he could see a field of white. He thought that the fog outside was too thick for him to see anything. Suddenly, however, the whiteness rapidly shrunk backward.

He saw a pair of white, hideous eyes, glowering at the slit between the boards. The field of white he saw wasn't fog, but the pair of pupil-less eyes.

#### Translator's Notes

Senior: This is another honorific, where the Japanese senpai honorific came from.

Living corpse: This has been used to mean "moving corpse" in past chapters. It will now refer to this specific type of corpse. In apologies for all of you having to memorize yet another phrase, here is a spreadsheet that compiles most of the important terminology: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a9FyU-53VTTRZ\\_QkNMtIAq1ld61r8YPzwog-Vu\\_jY3A/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a9FyU-53VTTRZ_QkNMtIAq1ld61r8YPzwog-Vu_jY3A/edit?usp=sharing)

Livor mortis: Livor mortis is a settling of the blood in the dependent portion of the body after death, causing a purplish red discoloration of the skin (which means that the old lady died with her face down/being the dependent portion of her body) (Wikipedia).

## Chapter 36: Grasses—Part Four

Jin Ling and the group felt that their hearts were about to jump out of their chests, as they feared that something would happen to Wei WuXian as he was looking outside and that he would collapse with his hands covering his eyes. With an ah of exclamation coming from him, the boys' hearts skipped a few beats. Even their hair seemed to be standing, "What happened?!"

Wei WuXian spoke as quietly as he could, "Shh. Don't talk. I'm looking at it."

Jin Ling lowered his voice so that it was even quieter than Wei WuXian's, "Then what are you seeing? What's the thing outside the door?"

Wei WuXian neither took his gaze away nor gave a straightforward answer, "Hmmm... Yes... This is amazing. Truly amazing."

The expression that could be seen from the side of his face was filled with delight, and both his praise and exclamation sounded as though they were from the bottom of his heart. The disciples' curiosity immediately overrode their nervousness. Lan SiZhu couldn't help but ask, "... Senior Mo, what is truly amazing?"

Wei WuXian, "Wow! It's so pretty. Be quiet, you guys. Don't scare it away. I'm not done looking at it."

Jin Ling, "Move! I want to see." "Me too!"

Wei WuXian, "Are you sure?" "Yes!"

Wei WuXian took his time stepping aside, as if he was unwilling to leave. Jin Ling was the first to move over. He looked outside through the thin slit between the wooden boards.

It was already nighttime. In the cold atmosphere, even the fog in Yi City had somewhat dissipated, just barely allowing one to see the street at a few meters away. Jin Ling peeked for a while. Failing to find the "amazing", "pretty" thing, he was rather disappointed, thinking to himself, I didn't scare it away by talking, did I?

Just as he was about to give up, a small, shrivelled figure suddenly flashed before the slit.

Having seen the entire appearance of the entity without any preparations, Jin Ling's scalp prickled from the shock. He almost bursted out but, somehow suppressing the exclamation that was still in his chest, he actually managed to stay silent, and maintained the stiff, bent-down posture. After the tingles above his head had passed, he turned to Wei WuXian in spite of himself. Wei WuXian, the root of the commotion, leaned on the window beside the door. With one corner of his mouth curving upward, he raised his eyebrows and gave Jin Ling a sly smile, "Doesn't it look pretty?"

Jin Ling glared back at him. Knowing that he was making fun of them on purpose, Jin Ling grit his teeth, "... Yes..."

With a change of heart, he straightened up and casually replied, "It's so-so at best. Only barely worthy of a look!"

After the comment, he moved aside, waiting for the next person to be fooled. Their deceiving words roused the rest of the group's level of curiosity to a peak. Lan SiZhu couldn't hold himself from staying still and walked to the same spot. Just as his eyes approached the slit, he bursted out with an "ah!", but in all honesty, unlike the previous two. With a face full of panic, he jumped backward from the shock. He only found Wei WuXian after dizzily spinning around a few times, then complained, "Senior Mo! There is a... a..."

Wei WuXian responded in absolute awareness, "There's a that, right? No need to say it out loud, else it'd no longer be a pleasant surprise. Let everyone go see for himself."

It was impossible for the others to still dare go over after they saw Lan SiZhu's terrified reaction. A pleasant surprise? More like a nasty fright. All of them waved their hands in refusal, "No thanks. No thanks."

Jin Ling spat, "The situation's already like this and you're still playing tricks. Just what in the world were you thinking?"

Wei WuXian, "You joined me as well, didn't you? Don't imitate your uncle's tone. SiZhui, was it scary?"

Lan SiZhui obediently nodded, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "That's good. This is an excellent opportunity for your cultivation. Why do ghosts scare people? It's because when people are scared, their consciousness fades while their spirit

surges, which make the easiest moments to suck out their yang energy. This is why ghosts are the most afraid of those who are fearless, who aren't scared of them. There are no opportunities to seize, so there isn't anything that ghosts can do to them. Thus, as disciples of cultivation, your number one goals are to become braver!"

Glad that he didn't take a curious look due to his inability to move, Lan JingYi muttered, "Braveness is determined at birth. What can you possibly do if you were born a coward?"

Wei WuXian, "Were you born knowing how to fly on swords? People only know how to do it after practicing and practicing. Similarly, people can get used to things after being scared. Does the outhouse reek? Is it disgusting? Trust me, if you live in an outhouse for a month, you'll even be able to eat your meals in there."

The boys were absolutely terrified. They dismissed the claim in unison, "No you cannot!!! That is impossible!!!!"

Wei WuXian, "It's only an example. Okay, I admit that I haven't lived in an outhouse before. I don't know if you can actually eat in there. I have no evidence. However, you must try the one outside the door. You must not only look at it but, moreover, look carefully. Watch for the details. From the details, find any hidden weaknesses in the shortest time possible. You must take the situation calmly and search for chances to counter-attack. Alright, have I said enough for you to understand? Most people wouldn't have the opportunity for my guidance. Make use of it. Nobody move any further away. A single-file line, please. Look one at a time."

"... Do we really have to?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course. I never joke around. I never fool people, either. Let's start with JingYi. Both Jin Ling and SiZhui have looked already."

Lan JingYi, "What? I would not have to look, would I? People under corpse poisoning cannot move. You said so yourself."

Wei WuXian, "Let me see your tongue. Ah." Lan JingYi, "Ah."

Wei WuXian, "Congratulations. You have been cured. Bravely make your first step forward. Come on!"

Lan JingYi, "I have been cured already?! You are kidding, right?!"

With his protests denied, he could only toughen up and walk toward the window. He looked once, then looked away. He looked once more, then looked away again. Wei WuXian knocked on the board, "What are you scared of? I'm standing here. It won't break through the board, much less eat your eyeballs or anything."

Lan JingYi jumped away, "I'm finished looking!"

And then, whenever someone's turn came, there'd be sharp gasps of fright. After everyone went, Wei WuXian spoke again, "Finished looking? Then, everyone, tell the group what details you've picked up. Let's summarize."

Jin Ling fought to speak first, "White eyes. Female. Short and skinny. Fine looks. Holding a bamboo pole."

Lan SiZhui thought for a moment, "The girl's height reaches my chest. She is only wearing rags and does not look too clean, dressed like a beggar roaming the streets. The bamboo pole appears to be a white cane. It is possible that her white eyes were not formed after death, but instead because she had been blind before she passed away."

Wei WuXian commented, “Jin Ling had greater quantity, while SiZhui had higher quality.” Jin Ling’s lips twitched in dissatisfaction.

One boy spoke up, “The girl is only around fifteen or sixteen. She has an oval face, with a lively air about her delicate features. She fastened her long hair with a wooden hairpin, which had a small fox head carved onto the end. She’s not only small—her figure is slender as well. Although she’s not that tidy, she’s not grimy either. After some grooming, she’s bound to be a lovely girl.”

Hearing this, Wei WuXian immediately felt that this boy would have a very promising future. He vigorously praised, “Well done, well done. The observations are both detailed and unique. Child, you’ll definitely be the sentimental type after you grow up.”

The boy blushed and turned to face the wall, ignoring his peers’ laughter. Another boy spoke, “It looks like that the sounds of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground were from when she was walking. If she had been blind before she passed away, she would not have been able to see even after she became a ghost, so she could only rely on the white cane.”

Another one of the boys argued, “But how would that be possible? You have all seen blind people, have you not? Because they cannot use their eyes, they move and walk slowly, in case

they bump into anything. However, the ghost outside the door has swift movements. I have never seen such a nimble blind person before.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Good job. Props to you for thinking about this. This is exactly how you should analyze. Don’t dismiss any points of suspicion. Now, let’s invite her inside to get some answers.”

As soon as he finished his sentence, he immediately took off one of the boards. Not only the boys inside, even the ghost outside the window jumped from his sudden movement, warily raising her bamboo pole.

Wei WuXian first greeted the ghost, then asked, “Maiden, do you have any business here, having followed them all this way?”

The girl widened her eyes. If she were a living person, she must have looked as adorable as can be. However, with no pupils and only two streaks of blood pouring from her eyes, it only made her look scarier than ever. Some more people in the back had gasped. Wei WuXian comforted them, “What are you scared of? You’re gonna get used to seeing people bleeding from the seven qiao in the future. It’s only two of the seven that are currently bleeding, and you can’t handle it? This is why I tell you to experience more things and toughen up.”

Before this, the girl had been irritatedly circling in front of their window, knocking on the ground with her pole, stomping her feet, glaring at everyone, waving her arms around. Now, however, her actions changed. She gestured, as if she wanted to express something. Jin Ling wondered, “Strange. Can’t she talk?”

Hearing this, the girl’s ghost paused, then opened her mouth.

Blood gushed out from her empty mouth. Her tongue had been pulled out from its root. The disciples were covered in goosebumps, yet they felt a same sense of sympathy, so that was why she could not speak. Both blind and mute—how unfortunate.

Wei WuXian, “Is she using sign language? Does anyone understand?”

Nobody understood. The girl was so anxious that she stomped her feet, using her pole to write and scribble on the ground. Yet, she clearly wasn’t from a scholarly family. She was illiterate and couldn’t write anything. With only a mess of stick-figures, no-one could understand what she was trying to say.

Suddenly, from the far end of the street came a series of sprinting footsteps and human pants.

The girl’s spirit suddenly disappeared. She’d probably come back again, though, so Wei WuXian wasn’t worried. He quickly put the board back and continued peeping outside

from the slit. The rest of the disciples wanted to see the situation outside as well, and all squeezed in front of the door. A row of heads stacked from the top to the bottom, blocking the entire slit.

Although the fog had thinned for a while, at the moment, it started to circulate again. A figure clumsily broke through the fog and rushed over.

The person was dressed in black. As if he had been injured, he staggered as he ran. A sword hung by his waist, which was also enveloped in black cloth. Lan JingYi whispered, “Is he the mist-faced man?”

Lan SiZhui whispered back, “Probably not. The mist-faced man had entirely different moves from this person.”

A group of walking corpses followed the person. Moving quickly, they soon caught up to him. The person faced the attacks by unsheathing his sword. Its bright, limpid sword glare sliced the fog open. Wei WuXian silently cheered, What a good move!

However, after the attack, the strange yet familiar spurts sounded again. The black-red powder shot out from the corpses’ severed limbs. The person was surrounded by them. With nowhere to hide, he stood where he was, and was immediately engulfed by the powder. Lan SiZhui was shocked by the scene. He urged in a hushed voice, “Senior Mo, this man, we...”

Another group of walking corpses went over and surrounded the person. The circle shrank smaller and smaller. His sword slashed out again, and more corpse-poisoning powder bursted out. He breathed in more of the powder as well, appearing as though he was already beginning to lose his balance. Wei WuXian spoke up, “We need to help him.”

Jin Ling, “How do you intend on helping him? We can’t go over there now. The corpse-poisoning powder is everywhere. You’re gonna get poisoned if you go near.”

After a moment of thinking, Wei WuXian left the window and walked inside the central chamber. The boys couldn’t help but follow him with their eyes. Differently-postured paper mannequins stood silently between the two wreaths. Wei WuXian strode in front of them, and stopped in front of a pair of female mannequins.

Each of the paper mannequins looked different. Yet, this pair seemed as if they were purposely made to be two twin sisters. Their makeup, clothes, and features were all the exact same. With curved brows and smiling expressions, one could almost hear their “hee-hee” laughter. They wore double-buns, red earrings, gold bracelets, and embroidered shoes, closely resembling a pair of maids from a wealthy family.

Wei WuXian, “How about these two?”

He lightly brushed his hand against a boy’s unsheathed sword, producing a cut on his thumb. Turning around, he smeared two pairs of eyes, four pupils, onto the mannequins.

Then, he took a step backward. With a faint smile, he chanted, “Eyes behind thy long lashes, lips parted, smiling in tease. Mind not the good or evil, with smeared eyes I summon thee.”

Out of the blue, a chilly breeze drifted across the entire shop. The boys couldn’t help but tightly grip their swords.

All of a sudden, the twin mannequin sisters suddenly trembled.

The next moment, giggles of “hee-hee” really came out of their brightly tinted lips! It was the Summoning of Painted Eyes!

As if they saw or heard something hilarious, the pair of paper mannequins giggled incessantly. At the same time, the eyes painted with human blood spun rapidly inside their sockets. The sight was truly stunning, but also truly frightening. Standing before them, Wei WuXian lowered his head in salutation.

With respect, the pair of paper mannequins also bowed slightly, returning salutations of a higher level.

Wei WuXian pointed outside the door, “Take the living person back inside. Other than him, eliminate everything.”

Shrill laughter emerged from the mouths of the paper mannequins. An eerie gust of wind threw the doors open!

Side by side, the two mannequins swept outside and into the circle of walking corpses. It was beyond belief how, although they were mannequins made from pieces of paper, they had such strong powers. With dainty shoes and drifting sleeves, they severed the arm of a corpse with one

swish of their hands, then severed half of a head with another—it was as if the paper sleeves had been turned into keen blades. The flirtatious giggles continued to echo through the entire length of the street, bringing about both horror and allure.

Not long afterward, the fifteen or sixteen walking corpses had been chopped into broken chunks that lay limply on the ground!

The two paper maids gained a complete victory. Obeying the command, they carried the weakened escapee inside. Then, as they jumped outside again, the doors closed on their own. Each of them guarded each side of the entrance as if they were lion statues that guarded estates, and finally quieted down.

The disciples inside the room were shocked speechless.

They had only seen and heard the descriptions of improper cultivation methods from books and their own seniors. At the time, they couldn't understand it, If they were improper methods, then why would so many people still want to learn them? Why would the YiLing Patriarch still have so many imitators? And, now, after they had seen it with their own eyes, they finally realized the fascination around these sorts of practices. Moreover, this was only the tip of the iceberg—the “Summoning of Painted Eyes”. Thus, after the boys got over the initial shock, there were no signs of repulsion on their faces, but instead excitement that couldn't be concealed. They felt that it enriched their experiences, allowing for more conversations between their juniors and them.

Jin Ling was the only one who didn't look too well.

Lan SiZhui went over to help Wei WuXian with the stranger. Wei WuXian spoke, “Nobody come near. Be careful not to touch the corpse-poisoning powder. It's possible that even physical contact would poison you.”

When the person was carried inside by the paper mannequins, he was already in a state of only half-consciousness, appearing as if there was only little energy left of him. Now, though, his mind had become clearer. He coughed a few times, covering his mouth with his hand as though to prevent any powder that he had coughed up from affecting other people. He spoke in a low tone, “Who are you?”

The voice sounded extremely tired. He asked the question not only because he didn't know who the people in the room were, but also because he couldn't see anything.

A thick layer of white bandages wrapped around the man's eyes. He was probably blind. And, not to mention, he was both blind and relatively good-looking. With a high nose bridge and thin lips that had the hue of a soft red, he could almost be described as handsome. He looked quite young as well, somewhere between a boy and a man, naturally gaining the sympathy of anyone who came across him. Wei WuXian wondered to himself, why have I been meeting so many blind people in the past few days? Both heard and seen; both alive and dead.

Suddenly, Jin Ling called out, “Hey. We still don't know who he is, whether he's friend or foe. Why should we save him without taking any considerations? If he's a bad guy, then wouldn't we be letting a snake in?”

Although this was indeed the case, it sounded rather awkward when spoken in such a frank tone right in front of the person himself. Strangely, the person wasn't angered and didn't

appear to be worried that he'd be thrown out at all. He smiled, revealing the small tips of two canine teeth, "Young Master, you're very right. It would be best if I leave."

Not expecting this sort of reaction at all, Jin Ling paused for a second. With no idea what to say, he hastily snorted. Lan SiZhui hurried to mediate between the two, "But it is also possible that he is not a bad person. No matter what, not helping a dying person is against our sect's rules."

Jin Ling stubbornly continued, "Fine. You're the good guys. If someone dies, it's not my fault."

Lan JingYi fumed, "You..." Before he could finish his sentence, it was as if the cat got his tongue.

It was because he saw the sword that the man propped up against the table. The black cloth wrapped around it had somewhat fallen off, and the body of the sword could be seen.

The sword was forged with unequaled skill. The sheath was in the color of bronze, with intricate patterns of frost hollowed out. Through the patterns, the body of the sword shone through as if it was made of silver stars, glistening with snowflake-shaped flecks of luminescence. There was a pure yet bright sense of beauty to it.

Lan JingYi widened his eyes, as if he was about to blurt something out. Even though Wei WuXian didn't know what he wanted to say, since the man covered his sword with black cloth, he clearly didn't want it to be seen. Instinctively not wanting to alert the stranger, he covered Lan JingYi's mouth with one hand and put the index finger of his other hand to his lips, signalling for the similarly astonished boys to make no sounds.

Jin Ling mouthed two characters at him, then used his hand to write the two characters on the dust-covered table:

"Shuanghua"

... The Shuanghua sword?

Wei WuXian mouthed his question, Xiao XingChen's sword—Shuanghua?

Jin Ling and the rest nodded in confirmation.

The boys had never seen Xiao XingChen himself, but "Shuanghua" was both rare and well-known. It was not only strong in spiritual power, but also looked stunningly intricate. It had been illustrated as part of countless versions of sword catalogues, which was why everyone knew of it. Wei WuXian pondered, If the sword is Shuanghua, and the person is blind...

One of the boys thought of this as well. He couldn't help but reach out toward the bandages wrapped around person's eyes, in hope of taking them off so that he could see if his eyes were still there or not. Yet, just as his hand touched the bandages, a pained expression appeared on the person's face. He inched backward slightly, as though he was scared of his eyes being touched.

Noticing his own rudeness, the boy immediately took his hand away, "Sorry, sorry... It wasn't on purpose.

The person raised his left hand, which wore a thin, black glove. He wanted to cover his eyes, but was afraid to do so. It was probably that even a light touch brought about unbearable pain—a thin layer of sweat had already appeared on his forehead. He managed with difficulty, "It's fine..."

His voice, though, trembled faintly.

With such behavior, one could almost ascertain that this person was Xiao XingChen, who had disappeared after the case of the YueyangChang Clan.

Xiao XingChen didn't know that his identity had been exposed yet. After the pain had passed, he felt around for Shuanghua. Wei WuXian quickly pulled the black cloth that had fallen off back on. With Shuanghua in his hand, Xiao XingChen nodded, "Thanks for the help. I'll take my leave."

Wei WuXian, "Stay here for now. You're under corpse poisoning." Xiao XingChen, "Is it severe?"

Wei WuXian, "Quite so."

Xiao XingChen, "If it's severe, then what is the point of staying? It's long past hope, anyways. Why not kill a few more corpses before I become one as well?"

Hearing how he didn't care for his own life, the boys felt their blood burn with indignation. Lan JingYi bursted out, "Who said that you are long past hope? Stay here! He will cure you!"

Wei WuXian, "Me? Sorry, but were you talking about me?" He really couldn't speak the truth—Xiao XingChen had already breathed in too much of the corpse-poisoning powder. With a dark red hue to his complexion, he was most likely too ill for rice congee to work.

Xiao XingChen, "I have already killed a number of corpses in this city. They kept on following me and new ones would join shortly after old ones died. If I stay, you'll be drowned in an ocean of corpses, either sooner or later."

Wei WuXian, "Do you know why Yi City became this way?"

Xiao XingChen shook his head, "No. I'm only a roaming cul... roaming around the area. I heard about the strange events here and decided to night-hunt in the city. You haven't seen how many, how powerful the living and walking corpses here are. Some move too quickly to take precautions against. Others, when killed, release corpse-poisoning powder that poisons people upon touch. However, if you don't kill them, they would pounce on you and attack. Both result in poisoning, which makes it truly difficult to deal with. Judging from your voices, there are quite a few young masters in your group, right? It's best if you leave as soon as possible."

Just as he finished his sentence, the sinister giggles of the mannequin sisters came from outside the door. This time, the laughter was sharper than ever.

### Translator's Notes

Qiao: This has been mentioned in the past. See the vocabulary sheet if you find yourself having memory loss.

Summoning of Painted Eyes: This originated from the story of a man who added pupils to the painting of a dragon, and the dragon became real. The incantation here is partly from He SiCheng's poem—Meeting a Beauty in Nanyuan. Since he's not a well-known poet and it's not a well-known poem, it hasn't been translated to English yet. Thus, although I spent quite a long

time on it, the translation here is definitely not professional or even anywhere near perfect. Major thanks to Tracy for helping me.

## Chapter 37: Grasses—Part Five

Lan JingYi looked out through the door slit, then immediately blocked it with his body, “Th-th- there are so many of them!”

Wei WuXian, “Walking corpses? How many is so many?”

Lan JingYi, “I do not know! They fill the entire street—possibly hundreds! And more are coming! I do not think the mannequins can hold them off any longer!”

If the mannequins outside failed to guard the doors, all of the corpses on the street would rush into the shop. If they were killed, one would be under corpse poisoning and, when struggling to fight, the poison would circulate quickly; if they were not killed, one would be ripped and bitten to death. Holding his sword, Xiao XingChen got ready to leave, most likely in the hopes of doing as best as he could with all that was left of his strength. However, his face suddenly flushed purple, and he stumbled to the ground.

Wei WuXian spoke, “You can just sit back and relax. It’s going to be over soon.”

Again, he cut the index finger of his right hand on Lan JingYi’s sword. Droplets of blood trickled down.

Lan JingYi volunteered, “Are you going to use the Summoning again? If you dot twice in each mannequin’s eyes, how much blood are you going to use? Do you need me to give you some?”

Immediately, a few other boys rolled up their sleeves, “I can also spare some...”

Wei WuXian couldn’t decide whether to laugh or sigh, “It’s okay. Are there any blank talismans?”

The disciples were still fairly young, not yet at a level of cultivation that allowed them to write runes on-spot. Thus, all of the talismans that they carried with them had already been written with runes.

Lan SiZhui shook his head, “No.”

Wei WuXian wasn’t too concerned, “Already-written ones are fine as well.”

Lan SiZhui took out a stack of yellow talismans from a Qiankun Pouch, yet Wei WuXian only grabbed one of them. After taking a rough look at it, with the middle and forefinger of his right hand put together, he scrawled from top to bottom, above the cinnabar runes that were already there. The crimson blood and the vermilion cinnabar formed a new set of runes. With a flick of Wei WuXian’s wrist, the yellow talisman and the red runes hovered in the air and ignited on their own. Wei WuXian reached out his left hand to catch the sprinkling ashes. Then, he closed his fingers into a fist and lowered his head slightly. As he opened his hand again, he softly blew the black ashes toward the row of paper mannequins. He breathed, “With prairie fires it fails to die, when spring winds blow it regains life.”

The ashes whirled around the room.

The Nether Brawler who stood in front of all others suddenly picked up the hacking saber by his feet and carried it over his shoulder.

A lady, wearing a tall bun and fine robes, slowly raised her right hand. Her slender fingers twirled nimbly, as though she was a languid noblewoman, insouciantly appreciating her long, blood-red nails. By the lady’s side, there stood a golden boy and a jade girl—a pair of child servants. The boy playfully tugged at the girl’s braid, while the girl stuck out her tongue at him. A tongue almost nine inches long rapidly stretched out from within her mouth, stabbing a large hole in the boy’s chest as if it were a snake. After the violent attack, it shrunk back at once. The boy opened his mouth wide, revealing two rows of ghastly, white teeth, and bit into her arm.

With this, the two paper children started a fight of their own.

One by one, the dozens of paper mannequins started to teeter. As if they were stretching their limbs, they jolted as they whispered to one another. The rustling noises rose and fell all around them. They were not human, but better than humans.

Wei WuXian, "Hold your breaths."

After his words, he moved away, leaving the path to the door open. With a slight bow, he made a gesture of invitation.

The wooden doors sprang open again. The sickeningly sweet stench of the corpse-poisoning powder poured into the room, and the disciples immediately covered their faces with their sleeves. With a booming shout, the Nether Brawler charged outside. The rest of the mannequins followed.

The doors shut itself behind the last paper mannequin. Wei WuXian asked, "Nobody breathed it in, right?"

Everyone replied negative. Wei WuXian helped Xiao XingChen up, intending to find a place for him to lie down. However, since there wasn't any, he could only sit on the cold, dust-covered ground. Xiao XingChen was still gripping Shuanghua tightly. Finally waking up from the semicomma, he coughed a few times, then spoke in a weak manner, "Was that... the Summoning of Painted Eyes?"

Wei WuXian, "I know a thing or two."

After some thought, Xiao XingChen smiled, "Yes... To eliminate these walking corpses, it was indeed the best method."

With a pause, he continued, "However, this path of cultivation can easily lead to the backfiring of one's ghosts and spirits. Even the founder of the path, the YiLing Patriarch, couldn't avoid such an end. I suggest for you to be more careful and refrain from using this unless you're in dire situations. You can cultivate some other paths..."

Wei WuXian sighed silently, "Thank you for your advice."

Most famous cultivators would take clear-cut stands on the matter, drawing distinct lines that showed their absolute hatred toward the certain someone. Yet, his youngest shishu still tried to persuade him, even when he himself was only half-alive, and warned him of the backfire. He truly was a tender-hearted person, both gentle and kind. Seeing the thick layer of bandages wrapped around Xiao XingChen's eyes and thinking of the things he had been through, Wei WuXian couldn't help but sympathize with him.

Usually, only young, relatively inexperienced disciples would feel a greater sense of curiosity than loathing toward these sorts of improper paths. Aside from Jin Ling, who kept up an expression of contempt, all others were crammed in front of the door slit as they watched the fight, "Oh my... The mannequin woman's nails are so scary! One scratch and there are five lines."

"Why is the little girl's tongue so long and so hard? Is she a hanged ghost?"

"The man is so strong! How can he lift up so many corpses at once? He's gonna drop them on the ground! Look, look! He dropped them! They broke!"

After he finished listening to Xiao XingChen's good-natured words, Wei WuXian picked up the last bowl of leftover rice congee, "The poison has already worked its way around. The things in

this bowl may slow it down, but may also not work at all, not to mention that it tastes really bad. Do you want to try? If you don't want to live, then nevermind what I said."

Xiao XingChen took over the bowl with both hands, "Of course I do. If I can live, there's no reason not to."

Yet, after he had just one mouthful, the corners of his mouth started to twitch. He only stopped himself from spitting it out by tightly pursing his lips together. A moment later, he replied with respect, "Thank you."

Wei WuXian turned around, "Did you see that? Did you see that? What did he say? You guys are the only ones who have such high standards, so full of complaints even after eating my congee."

Jin Ling, "Your congee? What else did you do, apart from adding a bunch of weird things into the pot?"

Xiao XingChen, "But, now that I think about it, if I had to eat this every single day, I'd rather die."

Jin Ling laughed at him without holding back at all. Even Lan SiZhui couldn't stop himself from bursting with a "pfft". Speechless, Wei WuXian turned to look at them, and Lan SiZhui put on a straight face at once. Lan JingYi spoke up, his voice full of delight, "Finished. All of them have been killed. We won!"

Xiao XingChen put his bowl down right away, "Don't open the door just yet. Be careful. More might still come..."

Wei WuXian, "Don't put down the bowl. Pick it up and drink everything." With that, he approached the wooden doors and peeked through the slit. After the inhuman battle, thin fog and powder in the color of a purplish red pervaded the entire street. The corpse-poisoning powder was beginning to dissipate and the group of paper mannequins calmly inspected the path. Among the corpse pieces that covered the ground, when there was any that could still move, they would step on it mercilessly, until pools of muddied flesh were all that was left.

Aside from this, all was silent. At the moment, no new corpses came.

Just as Wei WuXian was about to relax, a series of almost imperceptible noises came from above him.

The noises were extremely difficult to pick up. It was as if somebody was walking rapidly above the roof. However, since the person's movements were abnormally light, the sound of their footsteps was close to unnoticeable. Wei WuXian only caught the slight noises of collision between the roof tiles due to his keen senses. Of course, since he was blind, Xiao XingChen noticed the noises as well. He cautioned them, "From the above!"

Wei WuXian shouted, "Disperse!"

As soon as he said it, a large hole was smashed through the ceiling of the central chamber. Dust, grasses, and broken roof tiles rained down from the top. It was fortunate that most of the disciples had already scattered around, thus nobody was hurt. A black figure leaped down from the opening in the roof.

The man wore black cultivation robes. With a tall stance and a straight back, he had the air of a firm pinetree. A horsetail whisk was strapped to his back and a long sword was held in his hand. His face, although handsome, tilted upward slightly, suggesting a haughty, aloof personality.

Yet, there were no pupils within his eyes, only deathly fields of white. It was a fierce corpse! As soon as everyone determined this fact, he launched an attack with his sword in his hand. He aimed his attack at Jin Ling, who was the closest to him. Jin Ling defended with his sword. The power that came with the attack was so strong that his arm almost numbed. If it wasn't for the immense spiritual powers of his own sword, Suihua, it might have broken and he might have died on the spot. With a failed first attack, the black-clothed corpse attacked again. His movements were smooth and natural, while his attacks were sharp and ruthless. This time, he lunged at Jin Ling's arm. Under desperation, using his sword, Xiao XingChen defended the attack for Jin Ling. Possibly because the corpse poisoning broke out again, he finally collapsed.

Lan JingYi panicked, "Just what exactly is he, dead or alive?! I have never seen a..." A corpse with such high speed and fine swordsmanship!

He didn't finish his sentence, because he remembered that he had seen one before. The Ghost General was also like this!

Wei WuXian watched the cultivator with utmost attention. Thinking quickly, he pulled out the bamboo flute by his waist and played a shrill, ear-piercing long tone. It was so painful to listen to that everyone who was present covered his ears. As the cultivator heard the sound, despite how his figure reeled and his hands trembled, he still attacked at Wei WuXian! He couldn't be controlled. This corpse had a master!

The sword was as fast as thunder, yet Wei WuXian dodged it. As they brushed past, he calmly played another tune. A split second later, the mannequins patrolling outside also hopped onto the roof and jumped down through the hole. Sensing that something was wrong, the corpse stabbed twice with his right arm, vertically slicing two of the mannequins into four halves. With his left hand, he pulled out his whisk. It was as if the thousands of soft, white strands turned into the poisonous spikes on a mace, slashing and piercing with each whip. If it accidentally touched someone, they would surely be turned into a bloodied sieve.

In the midst of multitasking, Wei WuXian managed, "Nobody come here. Be good and stay in the corners!"

After his words, he immediately returned to commanding the corpses. The flute sounded vivacious at times, while vehement at other times. Though the cultivator used both hands and attacked with strong hostility, paper mannequins ceaselessly dropped from the roof, encircling him with attacks. When he fought one side, more came on the other; when he killed the ones in front, there'd be more behind him. It really was impossible to deal with everything at once.

Suddenly, a Nether Brawler shot down from above and landed on him, holding him on the ground with a foot on his shoulder.

Immediately afterward, three more Nether Brawlers jumped down from the opening and slammed onto his body one by one.

In legends, Nether Brawlers had incredible strength. When craftspeople made them, some things were usually added onto their bodies to increase their weight. After being possessed by roaming spirits, each was heavier than the next. Simply one of them would be as heavy as a mountain.

With four on him at once, he'd be doing well if his guts didn't gush out. Thus, the robed corpse was securely held down onto the ground by the four Nether Brawlers.

Wei WuXian walked over and found that an area on the back of his clothes had been torn. Soothing it out, he noticed that there was a wound, both thin and narrow, near his left shoulder blade. He commanded, "Turn him over."

The four Nether Brawlers proceeded to turn the cultivator over. With his front on the upside, it was easier to inspect. Wei WuXian brushed the finger with the cut near each of their lips as awards. With crimson tongues made of paper, the Nether Brawlers slowly licked the blood beside their lips, as if they truly cherished the delicacy. Only then did Wei WuXian look down again and continue his inspection. On the cultivator's left chest, near his heart, there was a similar tearing, a similar thin, narrow wound. It seemed as if he died with a stab through the heart.

The corpse had been struggling as hard as he could. Low growls came out of his throat and ink-colored blood trickled from the corners of his lips. Wei WuXian pinched his cheeks and forced him to open his mouth. Inside, his tongue had also been pulled out from the root.

Blind eyes, detached tongue. Blind eyes, detached tongue. Why did these two traits appear so often?

After a while of observation, Wei WuXian began to feel that the corpse was similar to Wen Ning when he had been controlled by the black nails. With the thought, he felt around the corpse's temples and, as he had expected, he really found two metal points!

This type of long nails were used to control high-level fierce corpses so that they'd lose consciousness and the ability to think for themselves. Without knowing the corpse's

identity and character, Wei WuXian decided that he shouldn't rashly pull the nails out, but instead interrogate him first. However, since his tongue was no longer there, even if the corpse regained consciousness, he wouldn't be able to talk.

Wei WuXian asked the disciples from the Lan Sect, "Have any of you studied Inquiry?" Lan SiZhui raised a hand, "Me. I have."

Wei WuXian, "Have you brought your guqin?"

Lan SiZhui, "Yes." At once, he took out a simplistic guqin, the wood of which still looked bright, from his Qiankun Pouch.

Seeing that the guqin was fairly new, Wei WuXian asked, "How is your qin language? Have you had actual experience? Will the spirit that you summon be able to lie?"

Lan JingYi interjected, "HanGuang-Jun said that SiZhui's qin language is fine."

If Lan WangJi said that it was "fine", then it must be fine. He wouldn't exaggerate or underestimate the matter, and so Wei WuXian ceased to worry. Lan SiZhui added, "HanGuang-Jun told me to focus on quality instead of quantity. The spirit that I summon will be able to avoid answering, but will not be able to lie. So, if it is willing to answer, then it will definitely speak the truth."

Wei WuXian, "Then, let's start."

The guqin was laid horizontally before the cultivator's head. Lan SiZhui sat on the ground, his robes spreading neatly around him. Having tried a few notes, he nodded. Wei WuXian began, "The first question: who is he?"

After some thought, Lan SiZhui silently chanted the incantations, and was finally ready to play the first sentence.

A moment later, the strings of the guqin vibrated. Two notes rumbled out, sounding as if a rock had exploded.

Lan SiZhui widened his eyes. Lan JingYi urged him, "What did he say?" Lan SiZhui, "Song Lan!"

... Xiao XingChen's most intimate friend of cultivation, Song Lan?!

In unison, everyone turned their heads toward Xiao XingChen, who lay unconscious on the ground. Lan SiZhui whispered, "Does he know that the one who came is Song Lan...?"

Jin Ling also lowered his voice, "Probably not. He's blind, while Song Lan is mute, and even became a fierce corpse who lost his senses... It's best if he doesn't know."

Wei WuXian, "The second question: who killed him?" In all earnestness, Lan SiZhui played another sentence.

This time, the silence was three times longer than the one before.

Just as they were about to conclude that Song Lan's soul wasn't willing to answer this question, the strings of the guqin vibrated three times, their tones echoing grief.

Lan SiZhui blurted out, "That is impossible!"

Wei WuXian, "What did he say?"

Lan SiZhui replied as though he couldn't believe what he had just heard, "He said... Xiao XingChen."

The one who killed Song Lan was Xiao XingChen?!

They asked a mere number of two questions, yet the answers to those questions were more than shocking. Jin Ling was skeptical, "You played it wrong, right?"

Lan SiZhui, "But 'who are you' and 'who killed you' are the two easiest and most common questions of Inquiry. When someone first starts to learn Inquiry, these are the first and second sentences that they learn. One would practice them no less than a thousand times. I checked them before I played. I definitely did not play them wrong."

Jin Ling, "Either you played Inquiry wrong, or you interpreted the qin language wrong."

Lan SiZhui shook his head, "If playing them wrong is impossible, then interpreting them wrong is even more impossible. The name and the three characters of 'Xiao XingChen' are

not at all common in the spirits' answers. If he answered a different name and I interpreted it wrong, it would not have just happened to be this name."

Lan JingYi murmured, "... Song Lan went to find the missing Xiao XingChen, yet Xiao XingChen killed him. Why would he kill a good friend? He does not seem like this sort of person."

Wei WuXian, "Let's not worry about this for now. SiZhui, ask the third question: who is controlling him?"

With a stern face, Lan SiZhui didn't even dare to breathe as he played the third sentence. All pairs of eyes stared at the strings of the guqin, waiting for Song Lan's answer.

Lan SiZhui interpreted the reply word by word, "The. One. Behind. You."

Everyone spun around as fast as they could. Xiao XingChen, who lay collapsed on the ground a few moments ago, had already sat up, with one hand holding his chin. Giving them a smile, he raised the left hand that was covered by a black glove and snapped.

When the crisp sound travelled to Song Lan's ears, it was as though it exploded right beside him. Song Lan suddenly threw off all of the four Nether Brawlers who had been holding him down!

He leaped up at once. Wielding his sword and whisk again, with both of his hands, he slashed twisted the paper mannequins into colorful pieces of confetti, which drifted toward the ground. His sword pressed against Wei WuXian's neck, while his whisk threateningly pointed to the disciples.

Within the mere area of the shop, the situation had changed drastically.

Jin Ling put his hand onto his sword. Catching the movement with a sideway glance, Wei WuXian immediately stopped him, "Don't move. Don't add to the trouble. In terms of swordsmanship, even everybody together wouldn't be a worthy opponent to this... Song Lan."

His body was low in spiritual power and his sword wasn't by his side. Moreover, there was also Xiao XingChen—it remained undetermined what he intended on doing or whether he was friend or foe.

Xiao XingChen, "Adults are going to talk to adults. The children can wait outside."

He gestured to Song Lan, who obeyed at once and drove the disciples outside. Wei WuXian comforted them, "Go outside for now. You won't be much help here, anyways. The corpse-poisoning powder should've settled already. When you go outside, don't run around and stir up the dust again. Breathe slowly."

Hearing "you won't be much help here", Jin Ling was both unconvinced and upset. He didn't want to accept the defeat, yet he knew that he couldn't do anything, so he stormed outside.

Before Lan SiZhui left, he looked as if he wanted to say something. Wei WuXian turned to him, "SiZhui, you're the most sensible one here. Guide them a bit, won't you? Can you do that?"

Lan SiZhui nodded. Wei WuXian added, "Don't be scared." Lan SiZhui, "I am not."

"Really?"

"Really." Lan SiZhui smiled, "Senior, you are so much like HanGuang-Jun."

Wei WuXian was puzzled, "Us? How are we alike?" They were obviously like fire and ice. However, Lan SiZhui only grinned in reply, and led the rest of the group out.

He continued his thought silently, I do not know, either, but they just feel similar. It is as though if either one of the two seniors are present, I will not need to be scared or worry about anything.

Xiao XingChen took out a red elixir from somewhere and put it into his mouth, "How touching."

After he ate it, the purplish-red hue of his face faded immediately. Wei WuXian asked, "Cure of the corpse-poisoning powder?"

Xiao XingChen, "Correct. A lot more effective than your scary bowl of congee, right? And it tastes sweet."

Wei WuXian, "Your performance was wonderful. From courageously killing corpses, tiring out, to blocking the sword for Jin Ling, losing consciousness. They were all for our entertainment?"

Xiao XingChen raised a finger and wagged it in front of his face, "Not for 'your' general entertainment, but 'your' singular entertainment. I've been looking forward to meeting you, the YiLing Patriarch, that is. It's better to see for oneself rather than listening to mere tales."

Wei WuXian didn't react to his words and his expression remained unchanged. Xiao XingChen continued, "I'm guessing that you haven't yet told anyone who you really are, have you? So, I didn't expose your secret either and told them to go outside for us to shut the doors and converse in privacy. How's that? Aren't I thoughtful?"

Wei WuXian, "All of the walking corpses in Yi City are under your control?"

Xiao XingChen, "Of course. Just as you guys came in and your whistles started, I began to think that you were a bit weird, which was why I decided to attend to the matter personally and sound you out. As I expected, someone who could give way to such strong powers with the low-level sorcery of the Summoning of Painted Eyes could only be the founder."

Xue Yang walked his old path. Since it was the same practice, both using improper means, Wei WuXian couldn't fool him. Wei WuXian asked, "So, taking the group of children as hostage, what do you want me to do?"

Xiao XingChen laughed, "Senior, I want you to do me a favor. A tiny favor."

His mother's shidi was calling him a senior. The generations really didn't match up. Just as Wei WuXian was chuckling in secret, Xiao XingChen took out a Spirit-Trapping Pouch and put it onto the table, "Please."

Wei WuXian put his hand over the pouch and felt it for a while, as if he was feeling someone's pulse, "Whose soul is this? It's already in shambles. Even glue won't be able to stick it together. There's only one breath of life left."

Xiao XingChen, "If this person's soul was that easy to stick together, why would I need your help?"

Wei WuXian took his hand away, "You want me to fix this soul? No offense, but there really isn't much left of it in here. When they were still alive, the person probably suffered from a lot of torture. It should've been rather painful. They probably committed suicide, so they probably don't want to come back to this world. If a soul itself doesn't have any desire to live, then it'll most likely be impossible to save. If I'm not wrong, the soul was probably patched up by force. As soon as it leaves the Spirit-Trapping Pouch, it'll dissipate at any moment. You understand this more than anyone."

Xiao XingChen, "I don't understand and I don't care. Even if you don't want to, you'll have to do me the favor. Senior, don't forget that your children are still staring at you from outside, waiting for you to help them out of the danger."

The tone that he spoke in sounded quite odd. It was affectionate, almost sweet, but had a vicinity that arose from nowhere. It was as though one moment he could call you brother and senior, and the next he could turn hostile and kill you instead. Wei WuXian laughed, "I, too, would rather meet you in person instead of listening to the tales. Xue Yang, why are you pretending to be a cultivator instead of being the delinquent you truly are?"

With a pause, "Xiao XingChen" raised his hand and took off the bandages around his eyes. The bandages fell layer by layer, revealing a pair of bright, shining eyes.

A pair of unscathed eyes.

He had young, likeable features, almost handsome. However, the canine teeth that appeared when he smiled were cute to a point of childish, stealthily concealing the untamed cruelty within his eyes.

Xue Yang tossed the bandages to the side, "Uh-oh. You found out."

Wei WuXian, "Purposely pretending that the pain is unbearable so that our consciences won't allow us to take off your bandages and see; purposely showing us some of Shuanghua; purposely blurting out that you're a roaming cultivator by accident. You knew of not only how to make

yourself appear injured and defenseless, but moreover how to gain the sympathy of others. You truly brought out a genuine, virtuous Xiao XingChen. If not for how you were aware of more things than you should, I really would've believed that you were him."

And, during Inquiry, the answer that Song Lan gave for the second question was "Xiao XingChen", while the answer for the third one was "the one behind you".

If "the one behind you" was also Xiao XingChen, Song Lan wouldn't have needed to express it in another way.

Unless, Xiao XingChen and "the one behind you" wasn't the same person at all. Song Lan wanted to warn them of how dangerous the person behind them was, but if he simply answered Xue Yang, it was possible that they didn't know who he was. He could only answer as such.

Xue Yang grinned, "Well, it's true that his reputation is better than mine. Of course, I pretended to be him. It's easier to gain the trust of others this way."

Wei WuXian, "That was some excellent acting right there."

Xue Yang, "Now you're just flattering me. I have a very famous friend. His acting is what I'd call excellent. I still have a long way to go. Anyways, enough with the chit-chat. Senior Wei, you really have to do me the favor."

Wei WuXian, "You're the one who made the long nails that controlled Song Lan and Wen Ning, aren't you? You can even restore half of the Stygian Tiger Seal, so why would you need my help to restore a soul?"

Xue Yang, "They're not the same. You're the founder. If you never made the first half of the seal, I wouldn't have been able to make the second half all on my own. There's no doubt that you're better than me. So, if there's something I can't do, you must be able to do it."

Wei WuXian really couldn't understand why strangers always had an inexplicable sense of confidence in place of him. He touched his chin, unsure of whether or not they should pass a few compliments between each other out of respect, "You're being too humble."

Xue Yang, "It's not being humble. It's the truth. I never like to exaggerate when I'm talking. If I say I'm gonna kill someone's entire clan, I'll actually kill their entire clan. I won't even leave a dog behind."

Wei WuXian, "For example, the YueyangChang Clan?"

Before Xue Yang had the opportunity to answer, a black-robed shadow swept inside.

Wei WuXian and Xue Yang stepped back in unison and left the table. Xue Yang quickly snatched the Spirit-Trapping Pouch. Lightly pressing his hand against the table, Song Lan flipped as he was midair and landed on top of it. After he steadied, he quickly turned to look at the door. Black streaks of blood climbed over his cheeks.

With iron chains following behind him, Wen Ning broke through the door from amid the white fog and chilly winds.

While he was playing the the first tunes on the flute, Wei WuXian had already given the commands for summoning Wen Ning. He ordered, "Fight outside. Be careful not to beat him up too badly. Watch the living people and don't let any other corpses approach them."

Wen Ning raised his left hand, and one of the chains swung over. As Song Lan faced the attack with his whisk, it collided with the chain and the two twisted together. Wen Ning pulled on the chain and backed away. Song Lan didn't let go either, and was dragged outside the door. The disciples had already hidden inside another shop near this one, every one of them stretching his neck and staring fixedly at the scene. With the horsetail whisk, the iron chains, and the long sword, it was a frenzy of clangs and clashes. They could see

that a battle between two fierce corpses was intense indeed. Each move was ruthless, each attack was fatal—only two corpses could fight in such a brutish way. If two living humans fought like this, they would've already been nothing more than severed limbs and battered flesh!

Xue Yang, “Guess who’s gonna win?”

Wei WuXian, “Would I need to guess? Wen Ning, of course.”

Xue Yang, “It’s such a shame that even though I gave him so many nails in his head, he was still unwilling to obey. Things that are too loyal are also quite troublesome.”

Wei WuXian replied in an indifferent tone, “Wen Ning is not a thing.”

Xue Yang laughed, “Don’t you see that what you said could be interpreted in a different way?” As the “be” came out of his mouth, he suddenly unsheathed his sword and attacked.

Wei WuXian darted to the side, “Do you often sneak up on people when you’re in the middle of a sentence?”

Xue Yang’s voice was filled with surprise, “Of course. I’m a delinquent, aren’t I? I’m sure you know already. Anyways, it’s not that I want to kill you. I just want to make it so that you can’t move. Then I can take you back and you can take your time repairing the soul for me.”

Wei WuXian, “I’ve already said that I can’t do anything about it.”

Xue Yang, “Don’t be so eager to refuse me. If you don’t know what to do about it, the both of us can discuss the matter together.” Before he finished his sentence, he lunged once more. Wei WuXian dodged and dodged again, surrounded by ragged strips of paper that covered the ground. He thought to himself, the little delinquent has some good moves. Watching Xue Yang’s attacks become greater in both speed and lethality, Wei WuXian couldn’t help but exclaim, “Are you really taking advantage of my body’s low spiritual power?”

Xue Yang, “That’s right!”

Wei WuXian had finally met someone more shameless than him. He returned the smile, “It’d be better for one to upset a hero than to upset a rogue, which is you, in this case. I’m not dealing with you any longer. Let’s have someone else.”

Xue Yang grinned, “Who else? That HanGuang-Jun? I got more than three hundred walking corpses to gang up on him. He...”

Before he finished his sentence, a white-robed figure descended from the sky. Bichen’s icy blue glare swept at him.

## Translator’s Notes

With prairie fires it fails to die, when spring winds blow it regains life.: This is taken from Bai JuYi’s poem, Grass. <http://www.chinese-poems.com/bo4.html> was used as reference when translating this phrase.

A golden boy and a jade girl: This is a proverb in China, referring to the servants of a heavenly place.

Qin language: This refers to the language of the guqin. Each note, combined with different timbre, volume, tonality, etc., means a different Chinese character. Of course, this is mostly fictional.

## Chapter 38: Grasses—Part Six

Surrounded by an ambience of frost and ice, Lan WangJi stood in front of Wei WuXian. Xue Yang fended the attack by casting out Shuanghua. The two swords collided, then flew back to their respective owners. Wei WuXian commented, “Isn’t this called ‘to come in time is better than to come early’?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

As their exchange finished, they turned back to fighting with Xue Yang. A few moments ago, Wei WuXian was chased around by Xue Yang, but now, Xue Yang was driven around by Lan WangJi. In reaction to the adverse situation, with a roll of his eyes and a grin on his face, he tossed Shuanghua to his left hand. His right hand shifted inside his sleeve. Wei WuXian was concerned that he might hurl poisonous powder or hidden knives from the qiankun sleeves.

However, he simply pulled out another sword, and seamlessly adjusted to a double-sworded style of attack.

The glare of the sword that he pulled from his sleeve was grim and dark. As it was wielded, it almost seemed to emit a black aura, creating a stark contrast with Shuanghua’s silver radiance. Using both swords equally well, Xue Yang’s hands kept in perfect time with each other. He gained the upper hand at once. Lan WangJi questioned, “Jiangzai?”

Xue Yang, “Hmm? HanGuang-Jun, you know of this sword? What an honor.”

“Jiangzai” was Xue Yang’s own sword. As its name and as its owner, it was a foreboding sword that brought with it bloodshed. Wei WuXian interrupted, “The name matches you perfectly.”

Lan WangJi, “Step back. You are not needed here.”

Thus, Wei WuXian humbly listened to the suggestion and stepped back. When he got to the door, he looked outside. Expressionless, Wen Ning was gripping Song Lan by the neck. He lifted him into the air and slammed him onto the wall, creating a large man-shaped dent. Similarly, expressionless, Song Lan grabbed Wen Ning’s wrists. With a backflip, he threw him onto the ground. Both corpses fought expressionlessly, ceaselessly smashing and banging. Since neither of them felt pain or feared injury, unless they were cut into pieces, they would continue to fight even if they lost a limb or two. Wei WuXian muttered under his breath, “I don’t think I’m needed here, either.”

Suddenly, he saw that Lan JingYi, inside a dimly-lit shop, was frantically waving to him. He beamed, Aha. I’ll definitely be needed there.

Just as he left, Bichen’s sword glare brightened tenfold. With a brief slip of the hand, Shuanghua flew out of Xue Yang’s grip. Lan WangJi conveniently caught the sword. Seeing that Shuanghua was in someone else’s hands, Xue Yang had Jiangzai slash directly at the left arm that Lan WangJi used to grab the sword. As the attack was dodged, a chilling rage flashed within Xue Yang’s eyes. He demanded coldly, “Give me the sword back.”

Lan WangJi, “You do not deserve this sword.” Xue Yang made a bitter sound of laughter.

On the other hand, Wei WuXian walked over to the disciples. Surrounded by the boys, he inquired, “Everyone alright?”

“Yes!”

“We all listened to you and held our breaths.”

Wei WuXian, “Good. If anyone doesn’t listen to me, I’ll feed him congee again.”

The few boys who had encountered the taste pretended as if they were vomiting. Suddenly, the sounds of footsteps came from all around them. Shadows had already begun to emerge from the end of the street. Lan WangJi heard the sound as well. With a wave of his sleeve, he took out his guqin, Wangji.

The body of the guqin was horizontally slammed onto the table. Lan WangJi tossed Bichen to his left hand and continued to fight with Xue Yang, his attacks remaining strong. At the same time, without even turning his head, he raised his right hand and strummed across the strings.

The chord was loud and clear. It resonated all the way to the end of the street. What came back was the strange yet familiar noises of the corpses' heads bursting. Lan WangJi continued to fight Xue Yang with one hand and play the guqin with the other. He'd glance across the scene as if it was only a simple matter, then nonchalantly curve his fingers to strum again. Working with both of his hands, he somehow still seemed calm and unhurried.

Jin Ling blurted out in spite of himself, "He's so good!"

He had seen Jiang Cheng and Jin GuangYao go on night-hunts and kill beasts, which made him think that his two uncles were the two most powerful cultivators in the entire world. Toward Lan WangJi, though, he had always felt more fear than respect, especially toward his technique of silencing others and his cold temper. However, at the present moment, he couldn't help but admire Lan WangJi's abilities. Lan JingYi approved, "Well, obviously. Of course HanGuang-Jun is good. He just never likes to show it off. He is very low-key, right?" The "right?" was directed at Wei WuXian, who replied in confusion, "Are you asking me? Why are you asking me?"

Lan JingYi was on the verge of being angered, "So you think that HanGuang-Jun is not good?!"

Wei WuXian touched his chin, "Hmm. He's good. Of course. He's really good. He's the best." As he talked, he couldn't help but break into a smile.

The dangerously terrifying night was finally about to pass—dawn was almost here. However, this wasn't the best of news. If daylight came, the fog would also become thicker. Then, they'd again be unable to do a thing!

If there were only Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, it wouldn't be as difficult. But with so many living humans around, if they end up surrounded by a large group of walking corpses, escape would be close to impossible. As Wei WuXian urgently tried to think of a solution, the crisp tip-taps of the bamboo pole sounded once more.

The ghost of the blind-eyed, tongue-less girl came again! Without any hesitation, Wei WuXian ordered, "Go!" Lan JingYi, "Where to?"

Wei WuXian, "Follow the sounds of the bamboo pole."

Jin Ling was somewhat surprised, "You want us to follow a ghost? Who knows where she'll take us to!"

Wei WuXian, "That's precisely what you're going to do. The sound has been following you guys ever since you came, correct? You were trying to go into the city, but she was leading you toward the city gates, where you ran into us. She was chasing you out—she was trying to save you!"

The strange, sporadic sounds of the bamboo pole were a technique that she used to scare people who entered the city. The Nether Brawler's head that Wei WuXian stepped on was possibly also placed there by her to startle and alert them. Wei WuXian continued, "And, last night, she clearly wanted to tell us something really important, but couldn't explain it. However, she disappeared as soon as Xue Yang came. She was most likely trying to avoid Xue Yang. Anyways, she definitely isn't on the same side as him."

"Xue Yang?! Why is Xue Yang here as well? Wasn't it Xiao XingChen and Song Lan?"

"Uhh, I'll explain that later. Anyways, the one fighting with HanGuang-Jun inside isn't Xiao XingChen, but Xue Yang, who pretended to be him."

The bamboo pole's noises continued, as if the girl was waiting or urging them. If they followed her, they could fall into a trap; if they didn't follow her, they'd be surrounded by corpses who release corpse-poisoning powder. It wouldn't be much safer. The boys

decisively chose to follow the knocking sounds along with Wei WuXian. Sure enough, as they moved, the sounds also moved. At times, they could see a small, vague shadow amid the thin fog in the distance, but sometimes there was nothing at all.

After running for a while, Lan JingYi spoke up, “So we are just going to run off like this?” Wei WuXian turned around and shouted, “HanGuang-Jun, it’s up to you now. We’re gonna go ahead!”

The strings of the guqin vibrated, as if someone was saying “mnn”. Wei WuXian cracked up with a pfft. Lan JingYi hesitated, “That was it? You are not going to say anything else?”

Wei WuXian, “What else do you want me to do? What else should I say?”

Lan JingYi, “Why did you two not say ‘I’m worried about you. I’m staying!', ‘Go!', ‘No! I'm not going! If I'm going, you're going with me!?’ Is it not a must?”

Wei WuXian was left open-mouthed, “Who taught you this? Who told you that this sort of conversation must happen? It'd sound fine out of my mouth, but can you even imagine your HanGuang-Jun say such things?”

The Lan Sect's juniors chorused, “No...”

Wei WuXian, “Right? It's a waste of time. I believe that someone as reliable as HanGuang-Jun will definitely be able to deal with it. I can just focus on my own things and either wait for him to find me or go find him myself.”

They followed the bamboo pole's noises for less than fifteen minutes. After a few twists and turns, in front of them, the noises abruptly came to a halt. Wei WuXian extended his arm, stopping the boys behind him, and walked a few steps forward. A house stood alone in the fog that grew thicker and thicker.

“Squeak...”

Somebody pushed open the door to the house, which silently awaited the entrance of the strangers. Wei WuXian felt that something must be inside. It wouldn't be anything dangerous or that could kill them, but something that would tell him things and show them the answers.

He turned to the disciples, “We've already come this far. Let's go in.”

He raised his foot and stepped into the house. Adjusting to the dark, he cautioned without looking back, “Watch for the threshold. Don't trip.”

As he had expected, one of the boys almost tripped over the tall threshold. He complained, “Why is the threshold so high? It is not a temple or anything like that.”

Wei WuXian, “It's not a temple, but it's somewhere that also needs a high threshold.”

Hustling about, they lit up around a dozen fire talismans. The orange light of the wavering flames illuminated the entire house.

Straws were scattered on the ground, serving as a carpet. In the frontmost area, there was an altar and a few fallen stools of different heights. A small, unlit room was on the right side. Other than these, there were also seven or eight black, wooden coffins.

Jin Ling, “This is the so-called coffin home? Where dead people are temporarily put?”

Wei WuXian, “That's right. Corpses that aren't claimed by anyone, that would make a house ominous, or that are waiting to be buried are often put into coffin homes. It could be described as a courier station for dead people.” The smaller room on the side was probably where the person who guarded the coffin home rests.

Lan SiZhui asked, “Senior Mo, why is the threshold to the coffin home so high?”

Wei WuXian, “In case any corpses transform.”

Lan JingYi puzzled, “Would making a high threshold be able to prevent corpse transformation?”

Wei WuXian, “It can't prevent corpse transformation, but it can sometimes prevent low-level corpses that have already transformed from going outside.” He went to stand in front of the threshold, “Say, for example, I'm dead and I just transformed.”

The boys nodded. He continued, "Since I just transformed, my limbs are really stiff, right? And I can't perform certain actions?"

Jin Ling, "That goes without saying. You can't even walk. You can't step forward, so you can only jump..." At this point, he immediately understood.

Wei WuXian affirmed, "Correct. I can only jump." With both of his feet together, he tried to jump outside. However, since the threshold was too high, he failed every attempt. Seeing how his toes bumped into the threshold, all of the disciples found the scene funny. They started laughing as they imagined a corpse who had just transformed desperately try to jump outside like this, but get blocked by the high threshold every time. Wei WuXian spoke again, "Do you see now? Don't laugh. This is the intelligence of common folk. Although it's lame and seems too simple, it's indeed effective against low-level corpses. If a corpse who has transformed is tripped by the threshold, after they fall on the ground, with their stiff body, they won't be able to get back up in a short time. When they're finally able to get up, either the sun will rise soon afterwards and the rooster will call, or the person guarding the coffin home will've discovered them. It's actually quite impressive how ordinary people who didn't cultivate could think of such a solution."

Although Jin Ling had laughed at the scene as well, now that he heard the explanation, he stifled his laughter at once, "Why did she bring us to a coffin home? Don't tell me that it was because we won't be surrounded by walking corpses if we're here. Where did she go herself?"

Wei WuXian, "It's likely that we really won't be. We've been standing still for so long already. Has anyone heard any walking corpses?"

Just as he finished speaking, the ghost of the young girl appeared on top of a coffin.

Due to Wei WuXian's persuasion, all of them had already seen what the girl looked like. They had even seen how she looked with bleeding eyes and a mouth without a tongue. So, now that they saw her again, nobody felt scared or uneasy. It could be seen that, precisely as what Wei

WuXian had said, one would become braver and face situations with better composure after being frightened a couple of times.

The girl didn't have physical form, only a spiritual body surrounded by a soft, dim aura. Both her figure and her face were small. After some grooming, she'd become just the charming girl-next-door. However, from how she sat with her legs apart, she didn't look delicate at all. The bamboo pole that she used as a white cane leaned on the coffin. Her two legs hung down, anxiously swinging to and fro.

As she sat on the coffin, she used her hand to tap on the lid. She then hopped down and circled around the coffin a few times, making hand gestures at them. This time, the gesture was rather easy to understand. It was the action of "opening" something. Jin Ling guessed, "She wants us to open this coffin for her?"

Lan SiZhui suggested, "Would it be that her body is inside of here? She may want us bury her and bring her peace." This was the most logical inference, since one of the most common reasons why plenty of ghosts haunted the Earth was that their corpses weren't buried. Wei WuXian stood on one side of the coffin, while a few boys stood on the other, intending to help him open it.

He reassured them, "You don't have to help me. Stand further back. What if it's not a corpse and spouts out some more corpse-poisoning powder at you?"

He opened the coffin alone and lay the lid onto the ground. Looking down, he saw a corpse. However, it wasn't the corpse of the girl, but somebody else instead.

It was a young man. He had been put into a peaceful position with his hands folding crisscrossed together, beneath of which rested a horsetail whisk. On his body was a cultivation robe as white as snow. The silhouette of the lower half of his face, along with a pale countenance and soft-colored lips, was handsome and refined. The upper half of his

face, though, was enfolded in layers and layers of bandages that totalled a width of four fingers. Under the bandages, nothing protruded from where his eyes should've been. The bandages sunk in instead. There weren't eyes, only two empty hollows.

Having heard them open the coffin, the girl stumbled over. She stuck her hands into the coffin and, after some searching around, she finally felt the corpse's face. Stomping her feet, tears of blood trickled down from her blind eyes again.

Everyone understood, without the need of any words or gestures. Placed all alone inside of a coffin home that stood all alone, this corpse was the real Xiao XingChen.

Ghost tears were incapable of dripping down. After the girl cried for a while, she suddenly stood up and ahh-ed at them through her clenched teeth. Appearing both angered and irritated, it was as though she really wanted to express her thoughts. Lan SiZhui asked, "Should I play Inquiry again?"

Wei WuXian, "There's no need. It's possible for us to ask the wrong questions, instead of the questions that she wants us to ask. And, I think that her reply will be quite complex, quite difficult to interpret."

Although he didn't say "you might not be able to do it", Lan SiZhui still felt rather ashamed. He silently promised to himself, After I get back, I will study Inquiry with greater diligence. I will have to be as fluent, as quick, and as accurate as HanGuang-Jun. Lan JingYi asked, "Then what should we do?"

Wei WuXian, "How about Empathy?"

All of the major sects specialized in various methods of gaining information and searching for material on ghosts. Empathy was the one that Wei WuXian was the best at. His method wasn't as profound as those of the other sects. Everyone could use it. It was simply to ask the ghost to possess his own body. Using his own body as medium, he could invade the spirit's soul and memory, hear what they heard, see what they saw, feel what they felt. If the spirit's emotions were abnormally strong, then he'd be affected by their sorrow, their rage, their ecstasy. Thus, it was called "Empathy".

One could say that this was the most straightforward, most convenient, and most effective method. Of course, it was even more so the most dangerous method. Everyone feared and avoided chances for ghosts to possess their body. On another level, Empathy, though, was playing with fire. The slightest mistake happened, and it would backfire. If the ghost went back on their word and used the opportunity to counter-attack, even the best result would be the seizure the Empathizer's body.

Jin Ling protested, "That's too dangerous! Using such a dark technique without someone..." Wei WuXian broke him off, "Okay, okay. We're running out of time. Stand up properly. Quick. We still have to go back and find HanGuang-Jun after we're finished. Jin Ling, you'll be the supervisor."

A supervisor was an indispensable part of the Empathy ritual. In case the Empathizer lost themselves in the ghost's emotions, they needed to settle on a code with the supervisor. It was

best if the code was a sentence or a voice that the Empathizer was familiar with. The supervisor must preside over the scene at all times. If they saw that the situation had changed, they'd need to act at once and pull the Empathizer out of the trance. Jin Ling pointed to himself, "Me? You want a young mast-... You want me to supervise you while you do something like this?"

Lan SiZhui, "If Young Master Jin does not want to do it, I can do it as well." Wei WuXian, "Jin Ling, did you bring the Jiang Sect's silver bell?"

The silver bell was a signature accessory of the YunmengJiang Sect. When Jin Ling was young, he was brought up by two sects. He lived at the LanlingJin Sect's Jinlin Tower half the time, and the YunmengJiang Sect's Lotus Pier the other half, so he should be carrying belongings from both sects. As Wei WuXian had expected, with a complicated expression

on his face, he pulled out a small, simplistic bell. The Jiang Sect's clan motif, the nine-petaled lotus, was carved onto the silver body of the bell. Wei WuXian stared at the bell for a few moments. Sensing that he looked a bit off, Jin Ling asked, "What?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Nothing." He passed the bell to Lan SiZhui, "The silver bell of the Jiang Sect can steady one's focus and calm one's mind. Use this as the code."

Jin Ling grabbed the bell back, "Actually, I'll do it!"

Lan JingYi grumbled, "You did not want to do it, and now you do want to do it. With such a hot- and-cold temper, are you a young mistress?"

Wei WuXian turned to the girl, "Come in."

The girl wiped her eyes and her face, and crashed into his body. Her entire soul was slammed inside. Leaning against the coffin, Wei WuXian slowly slid to the ground. The boys hurried to drag over a pile of straw for him to sit on. Jin Ling clutched the bell tightly, his thoughts unknown.

When the girl had just slammed into him, Wei WuXian suddenly thought of a problem, The maiden is blind. If I Empathize with her, wouldn't I be blind as well and I won't unable to see a thing? The effects would plummet. Oh well, only the ears should work as well.

After a few dizzying moments, the soul that had been light felt as though it landed on firm ground. As the girl opened her eyes, Wei WuXian opened his eyes as well. However, the scene before his eyes wasn't a field of pitch-black, but instead a clear landscape with bright colors.

He could see!

Seemingly, at the time of this piece of memory, she wasn't blind yet.

During Empathy, the scenes shown to Wei WuXian would be segments of her memory with the strongest emotions and that she most wanted to express to other people. He could simply watch quietly and feel what she felt. At the moment, the two of them shared the same senses. The girl's eyes were his eyes; the girl's mouth was his mouth.

Sitting by a brook, the girl groomed herself in front of the water. Although her clothes were tattered, she still needed the most basic level of cleanliness. Tapping a tempo with the tip of her foot, she hummed as she fixed her hair, as though she wasn't satisfied no matter how she fixed it. Wei WuXian could feel a thin, wooden hairpin poking around in her hair. Suddenly, she looked down at her reflection in the water. Wei WuXian's viewpoint lowered as well. A young maiden with an oval face and a sharp chin was mirrored against the water of the brook.

There were no pupils within the maiden's eyes, only a field of white.

Wei WuXian wondered, this is clearly the look of someone who's blind, but right now I can see, can't I?

After the girl fastened her hair, she dusted her clothes and leaped up. Grabbing the bamboo pole by her feet, she skipped along the road. She swung her pole as she walked, ceaselessly swatting at the branches above her head, knocking at the rocks that she passed, scaring the grasshoppers within the bushes. As soon as somebody approached from afar, she immediately stopped skipping. Properly holding onto her pole, she knocked on the ground as she slowly wandered forward, appearing quite wary. The group that came was a few villager women. Seeing her situation, they all moved out of her way and whispered to one another. The girl nodded with hurry, "Thank you, thank you."

One of the women seemed as though she felt sorry for her. Lifting the white cloth that covered her basket, she took out a steamed bun and gave it to her, "Sister, be careful. Are you hungry? Take this and eat it."

The girl ah-ed and replied thankfully, "How can I take it? I-I..." The woman shoved the bun into her hand, "Take it!"

She finally took it, "Sister, A-Qing is very thankful of you!"

So the girl's name was A-Qing.

Bidding the villager women farewell, A-Qing finished the bun in just a few bites, and continued to skip along, hopping three inches high each time. Skipping with her inside of her body, Wei WuXian's head spun from dizziness. He thought to himself, the maiden is so full of energy. Now I understand. She's pretending to be blind. She was probably born with those white eyes.

Although she looks blind, she can actually see, so she's pretending to be blind with her eyes, tricking people into feeling sorry for her. Being a girl who roamed the streets alone, if she pretended to be blind, people would naturally think that she really couldn't see and lower their guard. However, in reality, she could see everything. This allowed her to adjust according to the circumstances and was indeed a clever method of self-protection.

Despite this, A-Qing's soul was truly blind, which meant that she did lose her sight before she died. Then, how did she go from pretending to be blind to being actually blind?

Was it that she saw things she shouldn't have seen?

When nobody was around, A-Qing skipped along; when people were around, A-Qing shrunk down and pretended to be blind. Pausing now and then, she arrived at a marketplace.

Since it was bustling with people, of course she'd show off her skills. Performing to the fullest, she knocked on the ground with her bamboo pole, her act as believable as ever. Slowly walking through the crowd, she suddenly ran into a middle-aged man dressed in bright, expensive-looking clothes. She pretended as though she was frightened, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I can't see. I'm sorry!"

She couldn't see? She clearly rushed right into the man!

Having collided with someone, the man turned angrily around, as if he wanted to curse at whoever was in front of him. However, seeing that it was not only a blind person, but also a young maiden who looked rather pretty, if he slapped her face in the streets, he'd definitely be criticized by the passerby. He could only scold, "Watch where you're going!"

A-Qing continued to apologize. As he was about to leave, he still wasn't satisfied, and squeezed A-Qing's buttocks with his right hand. Since they felt the same things, it was as though the squeeze landed on Wei WuXian's body. Instantaneously, Wei WuXian felt as if a blanket of goosebumps climbed over his heart. He wanted no less than to slam the man into the ground.

A-Qing shrunk herself into a ball as if she was deeply frightened. However, after the man was some distance away, she tapped her way into an obscure alleyway, and immediately spat on the

ground. Fishing out a money pouch, she poured the contents out, counted them, then spat again, "Those lousy men, all of them are like this. Dressed as if they really are something, but they don't have any coins. You can't even shake a penny out of them."

Wei WuXian was halfway between frowning and bursting into laughter. A-Qing was still young, possibly younger than fifteen-years-old, but she was already quite adept at cursing, and even more adept at snatching people's money. He reminisced, if you stole my money, you wouldn't have cursed in such a way. Back then, I used to be wealthy as well...

Just as he was sighing about how he became so poor, A-Qing had already found her next target. Acting as a blind person, she walked out of the alleyway, wandered on the streets for a while, and did the same thing. With an "ah", she drove herself into a white-robed cultivator, then apologized, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I can't see. I'm sorry!"

Wei WuXian silently shook his head. This young beauty didn't even change her lines!

Having been jolted by her, the person turned around. He helped her steady herself first, "I'm fine. Maiden, you can't see either?"

The person was fairly young. His cultivation robes were simple yet clean, and he carried a sword wrapped in white cloth on his back. The lower half of his face was quite handsome, although somewhat emaciated. On the other hand, the upper half of his face was covered

with bandages about four fingers wide. A soft tinge of blood vaguely seeped from beneath the bandages.

#### Translator's Notes

Qiankun sleeves: Similar to a Qiankun bag, robes that have Qiankun sleeves are often worn by cultivators to carry things with them. This is what xianxia stories mean when someone takes something “out of their arms” or “out of their sleeves”.

Courier station: Courier stations were implemented in the past for couriers (or messengers) to relay letters to the next person when the distance was too long for one courier to make.

Jinlin Tower: Jinlin Tower has been mentioned a few times already, hasn't it? The same as the Cloud Recesses and Lotus Pier, Jinlin Tower is where the LanlingJin Sect is situated. However, since the former two were translated without pinyin, I'm thinking about changing this one to English as well. Then again, Jinlin means “golden carp”, so it wouldn't sound as pretty if it's called “Carp Tower”. Any suggestions?

## Chapter 39: Grasses—Part Seven

A-Qing seemed to have paused shortly before answering, “Y-yes.”

Xiao XingChen, “Then, walk a bit slower. Don’t be so fast. You wouldn’t want to bump into someone again, would you?”

He didn’t mention at all that he himself couldn’t see either. Holding A-Qing’s hand, he led her to the side of the road, “Walk here. There are less people.”

Both his words and his actions were gentle yet careful. A-Qing reached out with hesitation, but in the end, she still snatched away the money pouch that hung by his waist, “Brother, A-Qing is very thankful of you!”

Xiao XingChen, “Not Brother. It’s Daozhang.”

A-Qing blinked, “But you’re both Daozhang and Brother.”

Xiao XingChen smiled, “Then, since you call me Brother, why don’t you give back Brother’s pouch?”

No matter how quick a street-roamer like A-Qing was, they wouldn’t be able to fool the senses of a cultivator. Startled, she took her pole and sprinted as fast as she could. Yet, not having run very far, Xiao XingChen grabbed the back of her collar with one hand and brought her back, “As I’ve already said, you shouldn’t run so fast. What if you bump into someone again?”

A-Qing struggled to escape his grasp. With a twitch of her lips, her upper teeth bit down on her lower lip. Wei WuXian understood at once, oh no, she’s gonna shout ‘molester’! Suddenly, a middle-aged man hurried out of a street corner. As he saw A-Qing, his eyes lit up at once. He stormed over as he cursed, “You little bitch. I’ve finally caught you. Give back my money!”

Simply cursing wasn’t enough to relieve his anger. With a wave of his arm, his hand swung toward her face. A-Qing immediately looked down and closed her eyes. Yet, before the slap landed on her cheek, it was stopped halfway through.

Xiao XingChen, “Sir, please calm down for a moment. It’s quite an impolite way to treat a young maiden, don’t you think?”

A-Qing secretly peeked from behind her eyelids. The middle-aged man clearly used a lot of strength, yet his hand was held by Xiao XingChen’s in a seemingly light way, unable to move an inch. Although he was nervous, he accused stubbornly, “What is a blind guy like you doing here? Saving the damsel in distress? So, the little bitch is your lover? Did you know that she’s a thief? She stole my money! If you protect her, then you’re also a thief!”

With him in one hand and A-Qing in the other, Xiao XingChen turned around, “Give the man his money back.”

A-Qing fumbled out the small amount of money and passed it over. Xiao XingChen let go of the man, who counted the money. Everything was still there. Glancing at the blind cultivator again, the man knew that he’d be difficult to deal with, so he trudged awkwardly away.

Xiao XingChen, “You really are too bold. How do you dare steal things even when you’re blind?”

A-Qing leaped up three inches high, “He touched me! He pinched my butt, and it hurt so much, so what’s wrong with me taking some of his money? There’s only so little inside of such a big pouch, and he’s being a bully about it. He’s gonna die flat broke!”

Wei WuXian disagreed, you clearly had stealing intentions and bumped into him first, but now you’re saying it like he wronged you first. What a fraud argument.

Xiao XingChen shook his head, “Such being the case, you really should’ve known better than to provoke him. Today, if nobody was here, the matter wouldn’t have been solved with a mere slap. Maiden, take care.”

After he finished, he turned to the opposite direction and left. Wei WuXian observed, He didn't ask for his money pouch back. This shishu of mine is gentle towards women as well.

Holding the money pouch that she stole, A-Qing stood and stared blankly for a few seconds. Suddenly, she stuffed it into her lapel, chased over with her pole, and crashed right onto Xiao XingChen's back. Xiao XingChen could only help steady her again, "Is there anything else?"

A-Qing, "I still have your money pouch!"

Xiao XingChen, "It's yours now. There's not much inside, anyways. Before you spend all of it, be sure not to steal anything else."

A-Qing, "I heard the filthy man curse. So, you're blind too?"

Hearing the second sentence, Xiao XingChen's expression faltered at once. His smile disappeared as well.

The bold, innocent remarks of children were often the crudest. Children didn't know anything. Precisely because they didn't know anything, they hurt people's feelings in the most direct of ways.

Under the bandages wrapped around Xiao XingChen's eyes, a smear of red grew darker and darker, almost seeping through the cloth. His raised his hand for it to hover over his eyes, while his arm trembled slightly. The pain and injury that came with gouging out one's eyes were not that easy to heal. However, A-Qing simply thought that he was feeling dizzy. She beamed, "Then let me follow you!"

Xiao XingChen managed to smile, "Why would you want to follow me? To become a cultivator?"

A-Qing, "You're tall and blind, and I'm small and blind. If we travel together, we can care for each other. My parents are gone and there's nowhere I can stay. I'll follow anyone to anywhere." Being as clever as she was, she was afraid that Xiao XingChen would refuse her, so she took advantage of his agreeable nature and threatened, "I spend money really quickly. If you refuse to take me with you, the money will be gone at once, and I'll have to go steal and trick people again. And then somebody will slap me hard and I'll fall down and I won't even be able to find my way. Poor me!"

Xiao XingChen laughed, "Someone as clever as you should be able to fool others so that they

can't find their way. Who in the world can do the same to you?"

After watching for a while, Wei WuXian found something interesting.

Now that he had seen Xiao XingChen himself, he discovered that, in comparison to the real one, Xue Yang's imitation really was precise! Aside from his face, all of the details were true to the real Xiao XingChen. If someone told him so, he could've even believed that Xiao XingChen had possessed Xue Yang's body.

Pleading, pestering, and pretending that she was pitiful, A-Qing clung to Xiao XingChen the whole way. Xiao XingChen warned her quite a couple of times that it'd be dangerous if she followed him, but A-Qing never listened. She wasn't even scared after Xiao XingChen exorcised an old cattle that had gained consciousness when they passed a certain village. She still kept on calling him "Daozhang" and stuck to him as if she was syrup, never going more than three

meters away from him. As she followed him, possibly deciding that A-Qing was quick-witted, brave, and never a hindrance all the while being a young, blind maiden with nowhere to go, Xiao XingChen finally gave tacit permission to her staying with him.

Wei WuXian originally thought that Xiao XingChen must have had a destination. However, as a few pieces of memory passed, judging from the climates and dialects, the places that they went couldn't at all form a distinct route. He didn't seem like he was going anywhere, but rather night-hunting by chance. He went to wherever

people mentioned peculiar things were happening. Wei WuXian guessed, Maybe the YueyangChang Clan's case had too big of a blow on him. He didn't want to be among the clans and sects anymore, but he couldn't give up on his aspirations, so he chose to night-hunt as he wandered around, solving as many problems as he could.

At the moment, Xiao XingChen and A-Qing were walking along a long, flat road with weeds and grasses of waist height growing on both sides of it. Suddenly, A-Qing cried out with an ah. Xiao XingChen immediately asked, "What's wrong?"

A-Qing, "Ugh. Nothing. My ankle twisted."

Wei WuXian could clearly see that it wasn't because her ankle twisted at all. She was walking as fine as ever. If not for that she was pretending to be blind in front of Xiao XingChen so that he couldn't come up with any reasons to shoo her away, she could hop up to the heavens as she walked. A-Qing's exclamation was because as she glanced around, she suddenly saw a black figure lying among the bushes of weeds.

Although she didn't know whether he was dead or alive, most likely thinking that it'd be a drag either way, she obviously didn't want Xiao XingChen to find the person. She urged him, "Let's go, let's go. Let's rest a bit at that whatever city that's ahead. I'm so tired!"

Xiao XingChen, "Didn't you twist your ankle? Do you want me to carry you?"

A-Qing was ecstatic, knocking loudly on the ground with her bamboo pole, "Yes, yes, yes!" Smiling, Xiao XingChen turned around with his back to her and kneeled down with one leg. Just as A-Qing was about to throw herself over, Xiao XingChen suddenly stopped her. With a serious expression, he stood up, "Something smells like blood."

A-Qing could also smell a faint hint of blood. Amid the night wind, it was indeed discernible at times. She bluffed, "Really? Why can't I smell it? Are any families around the area killing livestock?"

Just as she finished speaking, as if Heaven wanted to go against her wishes, the person in the bushes coughed.

Even though the sound was almost imperceptible, it couldn't escape Xiao XingChen's ears. He immediately found the direction, stepped into the bushes, and squatted down beside the person.

Due to how Xiao XingChen discovered the person anyway, A-Qing stomped on the ground, then pretended to find her way over, "What happened?"

Xiao XingChen was feeling the person's pulse, "Someone is lying here."

A-Qing, "So that's why the smell of blood is so strong. Are they dead? Should we make a ditch and bury them?"

Of course, a dead person was less of a hassle than a living one, so A-Qing couldn't wait for the person to die. However, Xiao XingChen replied, "Not yet. He's just badly injured."

After giving it some thought, he gently carried the person onto his back.

Seeing that a filthy, bloodstained man took the position where she would've been and that Xiao XingChen wouldn't be able to carry her to the city anymore, A-Qing pouted and poked a few deep holes on the ground with her pole. Yet, she knew that Xiao XingChen wouldn't not help the person, so complaining wouldn't work anyway. They went back onto the road and continued walking. The more they walked, the stronger Wei WuXian's sense of familiarity grew. He suddenly recalled, isn't this the road that Lan Zhan and I used to get to Yi City?

Sure enough, Yi City could be seen looming at the end of the road.

As of this time, the city gates weren't as run-down. The tower was still in fair condition and there weren't any scribbles on the walls. Entering the city, the fog was somewhat denser, but compared to the unnatural density in later times, it was not a hindrance at all. On the sides of the road, lights and even human conversations leaked from the doors and windows of houses.

Although it was an obscure place, it had some liveliness to it. Carrying a person with severe injuries and drenched in blood on his back, Xiao XingChen definitely knew that no shops would let someone like him inside. Thus, he didn't search for places to rest, but instead directly asked a night watchman who walked by if there were any idle coffin homes in the city. The watchman told him, "There's one over there. The guy who guarded it passed away last month. There's currently nobody there." Seeing that Xiao XingChen was blind and might have difficulties finding the way, he decided to lead them over.

This was precisely the coffin home where Xiao XingChen's corpse was put after he had died.

They thanked the watchman, and Xiao XingChen carried the injured person into the chamber on the right. The room wasn't large, but wasn't too small either. Including a low bed by the wall, the room had all of the necessities. He carefully laid the person onto the bed. Taking an elixir from his qiankun pouch, he pushed it through the person's clenched teeth. A-Qing felt around in the room for a while before she beamed, "There are so many things here! Here's a basin!"

Xiao XingChen, "Is there a stove?" "There is!"

Xiao XingChen, "A-Qing, why don't you try to boil some water? Be careful and don't hurt yourself."

A-Qing pouted some more and got to work. Xiao XingChen touched the person's forehead, then took out another elixir and fed it to him. Wei WuXian really wanted to take a good look at the person's face, but A-Qing was clearly not interested in him. She was rather annoyed and refused to spare him a single glimpse. After the water had been boiled, Xiao XingChen slowly wiped off the blood on his face. Out of curiosity, A-Qing gave him a glance, and made a soundless huh.

Now that the person's face had been cleaned, she could see that his looks were actually quite decent.

As Wei WuXian saw the face, his heart immediately sunk. Just as he had expected, it was Xue Yang.

He sighed in silence, Enemies really can't avoid each other, can they? Xiao XingChen, you really are... hopelessly unlucky.

At this point in time, with a childish charm, Xue Yang looked nothing more than a boy. However, who could've known that a boy like him whose canine teeth showed when he smiled was a maniac who wiped out entire clans.

Counting the years, this was probably after Jin GuangYao became the Chief Cultivator. In such a difficult situation, Xue Yang had probably just escaped Jin GuangYao's "elimination". Since he couldn't kill him, Jin GuangYao naturally didn't want to let anything out. Or, maybe because he believed that he wouldn't be able to live, he told the public that Xue Yang had already been

eliminated. However, villains always tended to outlast heroes. On the brink of dying, he was saved by his old rival XingChen. It was unfortunate that Xiao XingChen wasn't cautious to the point of feeling and examining his face. By accident, he had saved his enemy—the one who made his life this way. Although A-Qing could see, since she wasn't a cultivator, she didn't know of Xue Yang, much less the immense hatred between the two of them. She didn't even know what Xiao XingChen's name was...

Wei WuXian sighed again. Xiao XingChen couldn't be any unluckier. It was as though all of the ominous energy in this world had tainted him.

Suddenly, Xue Yang frowned. Xiao XingChen was in the middle of inspecting and bandaging his wounds. Sensing that Xue Yang was about to wake up, he spoke, "Don't move."

Someone like Xue Yang who had done countless bad deeds in their life would naturally be more alert than ordinary people. Hearing this voice, his eyes sprang open and he sat up at once.

Tumbling to the corner of the room, he glared at Xiao XingChen with a fierce expression and a careful posture. His eyes resembled those of a beast who had been trapped, not at all concealing the malice and cruelty within them. Watching the scene, A-Qing's scalp tingled. The sensation also passed onto Wei WuXian's head, who shouted silently, Talk! Xiao XingChen definitely wouldn't have forgotten Xue Yang's voice.

Xue Yang, "What..."

As soon as he spoke, Wei WuXian knew that there was no hope. Even after he spoke, Xiao XingChen wouldn't be able to discover who he was.

Xue Yang's throat was injured as well. After coughing up a large quantity of blood, his voice was so hoarse that nobody could tell they were the same person!

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Xiao XingChen assured, "I told you not to move. Your wounds are going to open. Don't worry. Since I saved you, of course I won't hurt you."

Xue Yang was quick at adjusting to sudden changes of situation. He immediately inferred that Xiao XingChen most likely didn't recognize him. With a roll of his eyes, he coughed, "Who are you?"

A-Qing interrupted, "If you have eyes can't you see for yourself? He's a roaming cultivator. He went to such lengths to carry you back and saved you and even gave you magical elixirs, yet you're so mean!"

Xue Yang turned to her at once. He spoke in a cold voice, "You're blind?" Wei WuXian was alarmed.

The little delinquent was both crafty and vigilant. Even though A-Qing had a pair of white eyes, he didn't let down his guard. Not passing any points of suspicion, he immediately caught A-Qing's slip of the tongue. Xue Yang had only spoken four words. With only these four words, it was impossible to determine if he was mean or not, unless A-Qing had seen his expression.

The good thing was that A-Qing grew up lying. She replied on the spot, "Do you discriminate against blind people? Well, a blind person saved you. Or else, nobody would care even if you rotted on the side of the road! The first words you said weren't even to thank Daozhang. How rude! And you called me blind in such a tone. Hmph... What's wrong with being blind..."

She successfully switched the topic and the point of the conversation. As A-Qing muttered nonstop in an unyielding yet dejected manner, Xiao XingChen immediately went over to comfort her. In the corner, Xue Yang rolled his eyes. Xiao XingChen turned to him again, "Don't sit by the wall. I didn't bandage the wound on your leg yet. Come here."

With an indifferent expression, Xue Yang continued to think. Xiao XingChen added, "If it's not treated soon, you might end up crippled." Hearing this, Xue Yang decisively made his choice. Wei WuXian could speculate what he was thinking. With a body covered in severe wounds, he couldn't go anywhere if nobody helped treat him. Since Xiao XingChen was such an idiot that he placed himself right at his disposal, why not accept the help?

Thus, he changed his expression at once. In a voice filled with gratitude, he replied, "Then, thank you, Daozhang."

Having seen Xue Yang's skill of changing from merciless to affectionate within fractions of a second, Wei WuXian was truly worried for the two blind ones, both real and fake, in the room, but especially for A-Qing. She could see everything. If Xue Yang discovered this, to prevent the secret from leaking out, she'd definitely die. Although he knew that, in the end, A-Qing probably died in Xue Yang's hands anyway, Wei WuXian still felt anxious since he'd be going through the same experience.

All of a sudden, he noticed that Xue Yang had been discreetly preventing Xiao XingChen from touching his left hand. Taking a closer look at it, he found that the little finger of Xue Yang's left

hand was severed. From where it cut off, it could be seen that it wasn't a new wound. Back then, Xiao XingChen definitely knew that Xue Yang only had nine fingers. So, this was why Xue Yang wore a black glove on his left hand when he was putting up his act.

Xiao XingChen was rather dedicated to helping him. After applying medicine to his wound, he bandaged it in a remarkably neat manner, "It's finished, but it's best if you don't move, or else your bones will dislocate again."

Xue Yang had already ascertained that Xiao XingChen was so gullible that he didn't recognize him. Although he was covered in blood and surrounded by other messes, the lazy grin appeared on his face again, "Daozhang, so you aren't going to ask who I am? Why I was injured so badly?"

If someone else were at his position, they would've carefully avoided the topic so that they didn't reveal details that would expose their identity. He, on the other hand, deliberately did the exact opposite. Turning to clean the medical kit and bandages, Xiao XingChen softly replied, "If you won't say it, then why should I ask? I just happened to have seen you and decided to lend a hand. It's nothing difficult for me, anyways. After your injuries heal, we'd go our separate ways. If I were you, there'd also be a lot of things that I don't want others to ask about."

Wei WuXian commented, even if Xiao XingChen asked, the little delinquent would probably make up a seamless explanation and fool him around. It was natural for people to have complicated pasts. Xiao XingChen only avoided inquiring too much out of respect. Yet, it made it convenient for Xue Yang to use his respect. Wei WuXian was sure that he was not only going to get Xiao XingChen to heal all his wounds, after he recovered, he definitely wouldn't let them "go their separate ways" either.

Xue Yang rested in the bedroom of the coffin home's guard, while Xiao XingChen went to the main hall. Opening up a new coffin, he picked up some of the straws on the ground and thickly spread them over the bottom of the coffin. He turned to A-Qing, "The person inside is injured, so let's let him have the bed. Would you mind making do with this? I put straws on the bottom, so it shouldn't be too cold."

A-Qing had been roaming in the streets ever since she was young. Having lived alongside wind and hunger, there was nowhere she hadn't slept. She replied nonchalantly, "Not at all. It's good enough that I have somewhere to sleep. It won't be cold. Don't take off your coat for me again."

Xiao XingChen stroked the top of her head. With both his sword and horsetail whisk on his back, he walked outside again. To ensure safety, Xiao XingChen never let her follow when he was on

night-hunts. After crawling into the coffin and lying for a while, she heard Xue Yang call her from the other room, "Little Blind, come over."

A-Qing poked her head out, "What?" Xue Yang, "Do you want candy?"

The end of A-Qing's tongue felt sour, as though she really wanted candy. Despite this, she still refused, "I'm not eating it. I'm not going."

Xue Yang threatened sweetly, "Are you sure you're not eating it? Are you too scared of coming? But, did you think that I actually can't move? That if you don't come, I'm not going to go over and find you?"

Hearing the strange tone of his words, A-Qing shuddered. She imagined the malicious grin suddenly appear on top of the coffin, and felt that it was even creepier. With some hesitation, she finally picked up her pole and slowly tapped her way to the room's door. Before she could speak, a small object flew straight at her.

Wei WuXian instinctively wanted to dodge, worried that it was some sort of weapon. Of course, he couldn't control this body. Immediately afterward, he finally realized, It's a trap! Xue Yang was testing A-Qing—if she was truly blind, she wouldn't be able to avoid it!

As both a quick-witted person and someone who pretended to be blind throughout the year, A-Qing didn't dodge at all. She didn't even blink as she saw the object rush toward her. Instead, she let it hit her chest, then jumped back and fumed, "Hey! What did you throw at me?"

With A-Qing having passed the test, Xue Yang replied, "It's candy, for you. I forgot that you're blind and can't catch. It landed by your feet."

A-Qing hunched and squatted down. Searching around as if she really were blind, she found a piece of candy. She had never eaten something like this before. She gulped, wiped it, then put it into her mouth, happily crunching it with her teeth. Xue Yang lay on his side with one hand holding his chin, and asked, "Is it good, Little Blind?"

A-Qing, "I have a name. I'm not called Little Blind."

Xue Yang, "You didn't tell me your name, so I could only call you this."

A-Qing had always told her name only to people who were nice to her, but she didn't like the way Xue Yang said it, so she told him, "Listen up. My name is A-Qing. Don't keep on calling me Little Blind and Little Blind!" After she said it, she felt that her voice was somewhat harsh. Afraid that she'd anger the person, she immediately started another topic, "You're such a strange person. You're covered in blood and this injured, but you have candy with you."

Xue Yang grinned, "When I was young, I really liked candy, but I couldn't get them no matter what and I could only watch people eat. So, I've always thought that if I become wealthier one day, I'd carry an infinite amount of candy with me."

A-Qing just so happened to have finished the candy that he gave her. Licking her lips, she wanted more. Her desire for candy outweighed her fear of the person in front of her, "Then do you have any more?"

Xue Yang laughed, "Of course I do. I'll give you more if you come over here."

A-Qing stood up and, with her bamboo pole, she walked toward him. Yet, when she was halfway there, Xue Yang started to look at her in an eerie way, his smile unchanged. Without making a sound, he pulled a sharp-edged sword out of his sleeve.

It was Jiangzai.

He pointed the tip of the sword toward A-Qing. If she walked just a few more steps forward, she'd be impaled by the sword. However, if A-Qing hesitated for the slightest moment, the fact that she wasn't actually blind would be revealed!

Sharing the same senses as A-Qing, Wei WuXian also felt the pins and needles pricking his scalp. Despite this, the young maiden bravely searched her way forward in a calm, ordinary manner. When the tip of the sword was half an inch away from her stomach, Xue Yang took it away and put it back into his sleeve. Exchanging it with two pieces of candy, he gave one to A-Qing and tossed the other one into his own mouth.

He asked, "A-Qing, where's that daozihang of yours gone to in the middle of the night?" A-Qing licked and munched on the candy, "I think he went hunting."

Xue Yang tittered, "Hunting? More like night-hunting."

A-Qing, "Oh really? The two are pretty much the same. What's the difference? It's just helping other people fight ghosts and beasts without receiving any money."

Wei WuXian was truly amazed by how clever she was.

It wasn't that A-Qing couldn't remember what Xiao XingChen said to her. In fact, she remembered it better than anyone. She said "night-hunt" wrong on purpose. Since Xue Yang corrected her, in a way, he confirmed that he was also a cultivator. Xue Yang's test failed and was instead tested by her. The maiden was only so young, yet she already had such tactics.

Although Xue Yang looked scornful, his voice sounded confused, “He’s blind already. How can he night-hunt?”

A-Qing raged, “You’re at it again. What’s wrong with being blind? Even if Daozhang’s blind, he’s still really cool. His sword’s like whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. One word: fast.” As she was prancing around, Xue Yang suddenly asked, “You can’t see, so how do you know his sword is fast?”

The opponent was quick, but her defense was quicker. A-Qing replied in an outraged voice, “It’s fast because I say so. Daozhang’s sword must be fast! It’s true that I can’t see, but can’t I listen? Just what are you trying to say? Do you discriminate against blind people like us?” She behaved exactly like a naive girl who was bragging about the person she admired. It sounded as natural as can be.

Now that she passed all three of his tests, Xue Yang’s expression finally relaxed. It was likely that he finally believed that A-Qing was indeed blind.

However, A-Qing, on the other hand, grew extremely wary toward Xue Yang. The next day, Xiao XingChen found some wood, straw, and tiles for repairing the roof. As soon as he came inside, A-Qing secretly dragged him out again, whispering on about how this person was suspicious and that he definitely wasn’t a good person, judging from him hiding secrets even though they were both cultivators. Unfortunately, she thought that the broken little finger was a trivial matter, so she didn’t mention the most fatal characteristic. Xiao XingChen went about comforting her, “You’ve already eaten his candy, so you should stop chasing him away. Of course he’ll go after his wounds have healed. Nobody would be willing to stay with us inside this coffin home.”

This was indeed the truth. There was only a single bed inside such a shack. It was lucky for them that there was no wind or rain, or else the roof would’ve created a great problem. Nobody would want to live here. Just as A-Qing was about to continue her complaint of Xue Yang, the certain someone’s voice came from behind them, “Are you talking about me?”

To A-Qing’s surprise, he got off the bed again. However, she wasn’t afraid of being found out at all, “We’re talking about you? Don’t flatter yourself!” Picking up her bamboo pole, she went inside, sneaked behind the window, and continued to eavesdrop.

Outside of the coffin home, Xiao XingChen turned to Xue Yang, “Your wounds haven’t healed yet, and you’re walking around already. Are you sure you’ll fine?”

Xue Yang, “It’ll heal faster if I walk around. And it’s not that both of my legs are broken or anything. I’m used to injuries like these. I grew up beaten by others.”

Xiao XingChen seemed as though he didn’t know what to say in response, whether he should comfort him or take it as a joke. After a pause, he replied, “Oh...”

Xue Yang continued, “Daozhang, are the things that you brought here gonna be for repairing the roof?”

Xiao XingChen, “Yes. I’ll most likely stay here for a temporary while. The broken roof won’t be beneficial to A-Qing or to your injuries.”

Xue Yang, “Should I help?”

Xiao XingChen thanked him, “I’ll be fine.”

Xue Yang, “Daozhang, do you know how to do it?”

Xiao XingChen laughed and shook his head, “I’m sorry, but I really haven’t tried to do such a thing before.”

And so, the two of them started to repair the roof together. One of them worked, the other one gave directions. Xue Yang was quite eloquent with words and was especially good at making witty remarks. His humor was accompanied by a presumptuous tone common to street markets. In the past, Xiao XingChen most likely had very rare contact with this type of people. Easily amused, he’d start laughing after just a few sentences. Hearing how

cheerful their conversations were, A-Qing moved her lips in silence. After careful scrutiny, it seemed to have sounded like “let me kill you damn thing”.

Wei WuXian felt the same as A-Qing.

Xue Yang’s severe injuries that had almost taken his life were partly due to Xiao XingChen. The two had a relationship of absolute hatred. In his heart, he was probably hoping for Xiao XingChen to die in the most gruesome way possible, yet he could still converse with him in such a lighthearted manner. If the one hiding behind the window right now was Wei WuXian himself, he would’ve killed Xue Yang regardless of the consequences to avoid later trouble. However, it wasn’t his own body. And, even if A-Qing wanted to, she wasn’t capable of killing him.

After about a month, under Xiao XingChen’s meticulous care, Xue Yang’s wounds had mostly healed. Aside from how he limped slightly when he walked, nothing else posed any inconvenience. Despite this, he still hadn’t mentioned anything about leaving. He continued to live in this crammed coffin home with the two others. Wei WuXian had no idea what he was scheming of.

Today, after putting A-Qing to sleep, Xiao XingChen was about to leave and night-hunt again when Xue Yang’s voice suddenly came, “Daozhang, why don’t you take me with you tonight?”

His throat injury should’ve healed already as well. However, he purposely avoided using his original voice and disguised it in another tone. Xiao XingChen laughed, “Of course not. If you talk, I start laughing, and if I laugh, my sword won’t be steady anymore.”

Xue Yang replied in a piteous way, “Then I won’t talk. I’ll carry your sword and help you. Please don’t give me the cold shoulder.”

He had always been a master at behaving as though he was a spoiled child. When talking to people older than him, he sounded like a younger brother. And, since Xiao XingChen had probably cared for his shidi and shimei when he was a disciple of BaoShan SanRen, he naturally saw Xue Yang as junior to him. Xue Yang was a cultivator as well, so Xiao XingChen gladly agreed to the request. Wei WuXian thought, Xue Yang definitely won’t be so nice that he wants to help Xiao XingChen night-hunt. If A-Qing doesn’t go, she’ll miss something important for sure.

A-Qing was indeed clever. She also figured that Xue Yang probably didn’t have good intentions. After the two left, she jumped out of the coffin and followed them from afar. The distance between them was a bit too far, since she was scared that she’d be discovered, and she ended up losing sight of them. Luckily, when Xiao XingChen was washing the vegetables earlier, he mentioned that a small village nearby was plagued by walking corpses and told the two of them to refrain from running around. A-Qing could still remember the place. Rushing over, she arrived soon afterward. She slipped into a dog hole on the bottom of the village’s fence, hid behind one of the houses, and sneakily peeked out.

Wei WuXian wasn’t sure if A-Qing understood what was happening, but he felt a sudden chill within his heart.

With his hands folded in front of him, Xue Yang stood on the side of the road, smiling with his head tilted. Xiao XingChen stood on the opposite side. Calmly unsheathing his sword, Shuanghua flashed its silver sword glare before it pierced through a villager’s heart.

The villager was still alive.

## Chapter 40: Grasses—Part Eight

If she were another girl of the same age, she would've started screaming immediately. However, since A-Qing had feigned being blind for so many years, a lot of people had put down their guard in front of her, believing that she couldn't see. She was used to seeing the more sickening sides of people, which had hardened her heart. She somehow managed to not make a sound.

Even so, Wei WuXian could feel the numbing stiffness that travelled upward from the bottom of her legs.

Standing amid numerous villagers' corpses that lay scattered on the ground, Xiao XingChen sheathed his sword and spoke in a solemn voice, "How can it be that there isn't a single living person inside this village? That all of them are walking corpses?"

Xue Yang smiled, but the voice that came out of his mouth sounded extremely confused, even somewhat pained, "Yeah. Good thing that your sword points at corpse energy on its own. Or else, with just the two of us, it would've been very difficult to break through."

Xiao XingChen, "Let's examine the village again. If there really isn't anyone left, then let's burn these corpses as soon as possible."

After they walked side-by-side into the distance, some strength finally returned to A-Qing's legs. She sneaked out from behind the house to where the piles of corpses were and glanced around on the ground. Wei WuXian's viewpoint oscillated as well.

All of these villagers were killed by sharp, clean pierces through the heart, done by Xiao XingChen's sword. Suddenly, Wei WuXian saw a few familiar faces.

A few pieces of memory ago, the three of them went outside one day and came upon a few men who had too much free time on their hands, playing dice at the crossroad of a village. As the three passed the village, the men glanced up and saw a blind man, a blind girl, and a boy who limped, they all laughed and pointed. A-Qing spat at them and brandished her bamboo pole; Xiao XingChen walked past calmly, as if he didn't hear anything; Xue Yang even smiled, although his eyes held no trace of any amusement.

A-Qing flipped over quite a few corpses. Opening their eyelids, she saw that all of them had white eyes. Livor mortis had already climbed over some of their faces. She let out a sigh of relief, but Wei WuXian's heart sunk even lower.

Although they looked a lot like walking corpses, these people were indeed living. Except that they were under corpse poisoning.

Near the mouths and noses of a few corpses, Wei WuXian could also see leftover traces of a reddish-purple powder. Of course, the ones who'd been under poisoning for a long time were beyond hope since they had already become walking corpses. However, among them, there were still a few who hadn't been poisoned for long. They'd start to develop traits of corpses that had transformed, such as emitting corpse energy, but they would still be conscious and be able to speak, which meant that they would still be living. If they were helped, they could still be saved like Lan JingYi and the others. One should truly be careful not to accidentally kill them, since it'd be the same as killing a live human.

They should've been able to talk, to say who they were, to shout for help. However, the awful thing was that somebody had cut all of their tongues off before this. The corners of all of the corpse's lips seeped blood, either still warm or already dried.

Although Xiao XingChen couldn't see, Shuanghua could point out the directions of corpse energy. Because these villagers lost their tongues, they could only make strange howls that was extremely similar to those of walking corpses. Thus, he didn't doubt at all that the villagers he killed had already died.

It was a maniac way to kill others without dirtying his own hand, a merciless way to instead dirty the hand that fed him.

A-Qing, however, didn't understand how this worked. She only knew of the rough process, having heard them sometimes being mentioned by Xiao XingChen. She murmured, "Is the bastard really helping Daozhang?"

Wei WuXian cautioned in silence, please don't believe Xue Yang just like this!

Luckily, A-Qing's intuition was rather sharp. Although her knowledge didn't allow her to find anything suspicious, her vigilance toward Xue Yang was already deeply rooted in her intuition. She instinctively hated him and refused to settle. And so, whenever Xue Yang went out night-hunting with Xiao XingChen, she'd secretly follow them. Even when they were in the same house, she didn't lower her guard.

During one night, the winter winds howled outside. The three of them were crammed inside the smaller room, warming up by the old furnace. Xiao XingChen was mending a basket that had a broken strip of bamboo. A-Qing was draped in the only cotton quilt. Wrapping herself as though

she was a zongzi, she sat by his shoulder. Xue Yang held his chin with one hand and had nothing to do. Listening to A-Qing pester Xiao XingChen about telling her a story, he was rather annoyed, "Stop being so noisy. I'll tie your tongue into a knot if you keep on yapping."

A-Qing didn't listen to him at all and demanded, "Daozhang, I wanna hear a story!"

Xiao XingChen, "When I was young, nobody told me stories. How would I know how to tell one?"

A-Qing continued the tantrum, and was about to start rolling on the ground when Xiao XingChen finally agreed, "Alright. I'll tell you a story that happened on a mountain."

A-Qing, "Once upon a time there was a mountain and, on the mountain, there was a temple?"

Xiao XingChen, "No. Once upon a time, there was a celestial mountain that nobody knew of. On the mountain, there was an Immortal who reached enlightenment. The Immortal accepted a lot of disciples, but she didn't let them leave the mountain."

After hearing the beginning, Wei WuXian understood at once, She's BaoShan SanRen.

A-Qing, "Why not?"

Xiao XingChen, "The Immortal only hid in the mountain because she couldn't understand the world outside it. She told her disciples, 'If you are going to leave the mountain, then there's no need for you to come back. Don't bring the disputes of the outside world into the mountain.'"

A-Qing, "Then how can you withstand the boredom? There'd definitely be disciples who want to go outside and play."

Xiao XingChen, "You're right. The first disciple who left was very outstanding. When he first left the mountain, due to his mastery over his skills, everyone praised and admired him, and he became a famous cultivator of the righteous path. But afterward, people don't know what he went through, but his personality changed drastically, and he suddenly became a villain who killed people without blinking twice. In the end, he died under thousands of swords."

This was the first disciple of BaoShan SanRen who "didn't die a peaceful death" —YanLing DaoRen.

What this shibo of Wei WuXian's went through after leaving the mountain that caused his personality to change so much remained a mystery. It was likely that nobody would ever find out. After Xiao XingChen finished mending the basket, he felt it a few times. He made sure that it wouldn't hurt the hand, put it down, and continued, "The second disciple was a girl and also very outstanding."

Wei WuXian's chest felt warm. She was ZangSe SanRen.

A-Qing, "Is she pretty?"

Xiao XingChen, "I don't know. She was said to be really pretty."

A-Qing, "Then, I know! There must've been a lot of people who liked her and wanted to marry her after she left the mountain. And then, she must've married a high-ranking official or the leader of a big sect! Heehee."

Xiao XingChen laughed, "You guessed wrong. She married the servant of the leader of a big sect, and the two lived happily ever after."

A-Qing, "I don't like this. How would an outstanding and beautiful cultivator settle on a servant. This story's so cliche. It's probably made up by some poor scholar. And then what happened?"

How was their life like after they lived happily ever after?"

Xiao XingChen, "And then the two of them accidentally lost their lives during a night-hunt."

A-Qing spat, "What sort of story is this?! She not only married a servant, but they died together! I'm not listening anymore!"

Wei WuXian thought to himself, Good thing that Xiao XingChen didn't go on and tell her that the two of them gave birth to another big villain that everyone wanted to beat up. Or else, she might be spitting about me.

Xiao XingChen sighed, "This was why I said in the beginning that I don't know how to tell stories."

A-Qing, "Then, Daozhang, you must remember the night-hunts you've been on, right? I like to hear those! Tell me, what sort of monsters have you fought?"

Xue Yang had been unfocused on the story, listening with his eyes shut. Now, though, his expression grew a bit more serious. His pupils shrunk, and he glanced at Xiao XingChen.

Xiao XingChen, "There really are too many."

Xue Yang suddenly asked, "Really? Then, Daozhang, did you used to night-hunt alone as well?"

The corners of his lips curled up, indicating that he was up to no good, yet his voice was filled with simple curiosity. After a pause, Xiao XingChen smiled slightly, "No."

This got A-Qing interested, "Then who else were with you?"

This time, Xiao XingChen's pause was longer. After a few moments, he answered, "A very good friend of mine."

An eerie light flashed inside Xue Yang's eyes and his smile grew larger. It seemed that peeling off Xiao XingChen's scabs gave him quite a lot of pleasure. A-Qing, on the other hand, was actually curious, "Daozhang, who's this friend of yours? What sort of person are they?"

Xiao XingChen replied calmly, "A sincere man of noble nature."

Hearing this, Xue Yang rolled his eyes in contempt. His lips moved faintly, as though he cursed at him. However, he purposely pretended that he was confused, "Then, Daozhang, where's this friend of yours right now? Why hasn't he come to find you when you're already like this?"

Wei WuXian, What an insidious knife.

This time, Xiao XingChen didn't reply. Although A-Qing didn't know what was going on, she looked as if she also sensed something. Holding her breath, she glared at Xue Yang. She clenched her teeth, as though she wanted to take a bite out of him. After a while of spacing out, Xiao XingChen broke the silence, "Where he is right now, I don't know either. But, I hope that..."

Before he finished his sentence, he patted A-Qing's head, "Alright. That's it for tonight. I really don't know how to tell stories. It's quite embarrassing."

A-Qing replied obediently, "Oh. Okay!"

Yet, Xue Yang suddenly spoke up, "Then how about I tell one?"

A-Qing was just about to feel disappointed. She immediately agreed, "Yes, yes. You tell one."

Unhurried, Xue Yang began, “Once upon a time, there was a child.”

“The child really liked eating sweet things. But because he had no parents or money, he could rarely eat them. One day, the same as any other day, he was sitting zoned-out on a flight of stairs. Opposite to the stairs, there was a liquor shop. A man sat on a table inside of the shop. As he saw the child, he gestured for him to go over.”

Although this story’s beginning wasn’t that great either, it was definitely a lot better than Xiao XingChen’s cliche one. If A-Qing had a pair of rabbit ears, they must’ve perked up already.

Xue Yang continued, “Being naive and puzzled, the child had nothing to do anyways. He saw someone wave at him, and immediately ran over. The man pointed at a plate of pastries on the table and asked him, ‘Do you want this?’”

“Of course he wanted it. He nodded as fast as he could. So, the man gave the child a piece of paper and said, ‘If you want it, take this to a certain room in a certain place. I’ll give it to you after you take the paper.’

“The child was really happy. He could have a plate of pastries if he ran the errand, and he earned the plate of pastries himself.

“He didn’t know how to read, so he just took the paper and went to the place. After he opened the door, a huge, brawny man came out. He took over the paper and looked at it, and he gave the child a slap so hard that his nose started bleeding. The man pulled the child’s hair and asked, ‘Who told you to take such a thing over?’”

The child must’ve been Xue Yang himself.

Wei WuXian could never have imagined that a crafty person like Xue Yang was so honest, so dim-witted when he was young, doing whatever a stranger asked him to do. The things written on the piece of paper definitely wasn’t nice. Most likely, the person at the liquor shop and the brawny man had some conflicts. The former didn’t dare curse at the latter in front of his face, so he told a child on the streets to bring over a humiliating letter instead. Such an act could even be described as perverse.

Xue Yang, “He felt scared and pointed the direction. The man went to the liquor shop, carrying the child by pulling his hair. The other man had long been gone. The leftover pastries on the table had been taken away by the waiters as well. The man was so angry that he threw over quite a few tables before storming out.”

“The child was really frustrated. He ran an errand for someone, got beaten up, and was held by his hair on the way back. His scalp was almost pulled off. Of course, he wouldn’t settle without the pastries. So, he asked a waiter with tears in his eyes, ‘Where are my pastries? Where are the pastries that he said will be mine?’”

Xue Yang continued as he grinned, “The store was in a mess and the waiter was feeling quite cross. He slapped the child a few times, so hard that his ears were even buzzing, and chased him out the door. He crawled up and walked for a while. Guess what? Coincidentally, he ran into the man that made him take the letter again.”

He stopped at this point. A-Qing was just getting engrossed in the story. She hurried him, “And then? What happened?”

Xue Yang, “What do you think happened? Just a few more slaps and a few more kicks.”

A-Qing, “This was you, right? He liked sweets—it definitely was you! Why were you like this when you were young? If I were you, I would’ve been like ptew, ptew, ptew and spat in his food, and then I’d hit him, and I’d hit him, and I’d hit him...” She danced around, almost hitting Xiao XingChen, who sat by her side.

Xiao XingChen quickly spoke, “Alright, alright. You finished listening to the story. It’s time to sleep.”

Even as A-Qing was carried by him to the coffin, she was still angrily complaining, “Ugh! Your stories make me so mad! One is so boring that it makes me mad, and the other is so

annoying that it makes me mad! Jeez, that guy who made him take the letter was so annoying! I'm so frustrated!"

After Xiao XingChen tucked her, he walked a few steps, then asked, "What happened afterward?"

Xue Yang, "Guess. There was no afterward. You didn't continue telling your story either, did you?"

Xiao XingChen, "No matter what happened afterward, since right now your life is fairly adequate, there's no need for you to dwell too much on the past."

Xue Yang, "I'm not dwelling on the past. It's just that the Little Blind keeps on stealing my candy and even finished them, so now I can't help but remember the days when I couldn't have any."

A-Qing kicked the coffin hard and protested, "Daozhang, don't listen to him! I didn't really eat that much!"

Xiao XingChen laughed softly, "Let's all rest."

That night, Xue Yang didn't follow him. Xiao XingChen went out to night-hunt alone. A-Qing lay motionless inside the coffin, but she couldn't fall asleep.

When the sky began to brighten, Xiao XingChen came back, not making a sound as he entered.

As he passed the coffin, he put his hand inside. A-Qing pretended as if she were asleep, and only opened her eyes again after Xiao XingChen left the coffin home. She saw a small piece of candy beside her straw pillow.

She stuck her head out and looked into the bedroom. Xue Yang wasn't asleep either. He sat at the table, appearing as if he was thinking about something.

A piece of candy lay silently on the edge of the table.

After the night when they talked at the furnace, Xiao XingChen would give both of them a piece of candy everyday. Of course, A-Qing was quite pleased. Xue Yang expressed neither gratitude nor rejection toward this act, which made A-Qing angry at him for some time.

Xiao XingChen had always been responsible for the three's meals. Since he was blind, he didn't know how to select vegetables and was too embarrassed to bargain with others. When he went out alone, it was fine if the vendors were nice, but he sometimes met vendors who purposely took advantage of his blindness. The vegetables that he brought back would be lacking in either quality or quantity. Xiao XingChen didn't care much himself, or one could say that he didn't really pay attention to the matter, but A-Qing was often infuriated. In a seething manner, she'd demand to shop for ingredients alongside Xiao XingChen. Unfortunately, even though she could see, she couldn't express anything. She didn't dare throw tantrums and knock down the stalls in front of Xiao XingChen either. This was when Xue Yang became useful. With keen eyes and a sharp tongue that came with his delinquent self, if he went outside with them, whenever they wanted to buy something, the first thing he'd do was to shamelessly bargain the price down to a half. If the vendor agreed, he'd bargain even further; if the vendor didn't, he'd put on a menacing look, and the vendors would start thinking that they were lucky somebody like him would decide to pay at all, hoping for him to leave as soon as possible. Presumably, when he was roaming freely in Kuizhou and Lanling, he probably didn't have to pay anything for the things he wanted. Now that A-Qing had her anger vented out, out of happiness, she even praised him a few times.

And, thanks to the delightful candy everyday, since then, for a short length of time, a delicate peace was maintained between A-Qing and Xue Yang.

However, she could never let down her guard for Xue Yang. The short periods of peace were also often immediately suppressed by multiple doubts and suspicions.

One day, A-Qing was playing on the streets again, pretending to be blind. She had been playing the game for her whole life, and hadn't grown tired of it even once. As she was

knocking her bamboo pole while walking around, suddenly, a voice came from behind her, “Young Maiden, if your eyes can’t see, it’s best if you don’t run so fast.”

It was the voice of a young man, which sounded rather cold. A-Qing turned around to see a tall cultivator who wore black robes, standing a few meters away from her. A sword was carried behind his back while a horsetail whisk was in his arm. With an upright posture and drifting sleeves, he had a proud, aloof air to him.

This man just happened to be Song Lan.

A-Qing tilted her head. Song Lan had already walked over. Putting his whisk over A-Qing’s shoulder, he led her to the side, “There are less people on the side of the road.”

Wei WuXian commented, they really are good friends, aren’t they? Good friends would have to be similar in character.

A-Qing tittered, “A-Qing is very thankful of Daozhang!”

Song Lan took his whisk back and held it in his arms again. He glanced at her, “Don’t play around too much. The dark energy here is quite strong. In the future, be careful not to linger outside.”

A-Qing, “Okay!”

Song Lan nodded and continued walking, but A-Qing couldn’t help but turn around to watch him. After he walked for a while, he stopped a passerby, “Excuse me. Has anyone seen a blind cultivator who carries a sword in the area?”

At once, A-Qing started to listen carefully. The passerby replied, “I’m not too sure. Daozhang, you can try asking the people over there.”

Song Lan, “Thank you.”

A-Qing tapped her way over, “Daozhang, why are you searching for the other daozihang?”

Song Lan immediately turned around, “Have you seen him?”

A-Qing, “Maybe I have, but maybe I haven’t.”

Song Lan, “How can I make it so that you’ve seen him?”

A-Qing, “If you answer a few questions for me, then maybe I’ll remember that I have. Are you a friend of the daozihang?”

Song Lan hesitated. He only replied after a few moments, “... Yes.” Wei WuXian wondered, why did he hesitate?

A-Qing also felt that his answer was somewhat reluctant. Her suspicion grew again, “Do you really know him? How tall is he? Is he pretty or ugly? What is his sword like?”

Song Lan answered straight away, “His height is similar to mine. His appearance is rather fine. His sword is carved with patterns of frost.”

Seeing that he answered everything correctly and didn’t look like a bad guy, A-Qing responded, “I know where he is. Daozhang, follow me!”

Song Lan had already been travelling in search for his close friend for a few years, and had been disappointed countless times. Now that he finally heard news of him, he couldn’t even believe his ears. He managed with effort, “... Thank... Thank you...”

A-Qing led him until they were near the coffin home, yet Song Lan stopped in his tracks. A-Qing asked, “What’s wrong? Aren’t you gonna go over?”

For some reason, Song Lan’s face was extremely pale. He stared at the door of the coffin home, as if he would rush inside if he could, but was too scared to do so. The aloof look that he had was completely gone. Wei WuXian guessed, maybe he’s nervous since they haven’t seen each other for so long?

Just as he made up his mind and was about to go in, a lackadaisical figure strolled inside before he could.

As he saw who the figure was, Song Lan’s face instantly went from pale to ashen!

A series of laughter came from the coffin home. A-Qing snorted, “The annoying one is back.” Song Lan, “Who is he? Why is he here?”

A-Qing whined, "He's a bastard. He never told us his name, so who knows who he is? He was saved by Daozhang. Now he sticks to Daozhang all the time. He's such a pain!"

Song Lan's face switched between being surprised and exasperated. After a moment, he spoke, "Be quiet!"

A-Qing was scared by his expression and obeyed. The two of them silently approached the coffin home, one standing beside the window and the other hiding beneath it. In the coffin home, Xiao XingChen asked, "Whose turn is it today?"

The instant he heard the voice, Song Lan's hands trembled so much that A-Qing could clearly see it.

Xue Yang, "What if, from now on, we don't take turns anymore? Let's change it up."

Xiao XingChen, "You only spoke up because it's your turn today, didn't you? How do you want to change it?"

Xue Yang, "Here. There are two sticks. If you pick the longer one, you don't have to go; if you pick the shorter one, then you'll have to go. What do you think?"

After a moment of silence, Xue Yang laughed, "Yours is short. I win. You're going!" Xiao XingChen said with reluctance, "Alright. I'll go."

He sounded as though he finally stood up and started walking toward the door. Wei WuXian cheered, Great. Come outside, quick. It's best if Song Lan grabs him and runs as soon as he's out.

However, before he walked very far, Xue Yang spoke up, "Come back. I'll go." Xiao XingChen, "Why are you willing to go, now?"

Xue Yang stood up as well, "Are you an idiot? I tricked you. I picked the shorter one. It's just that I've been hiding the longest stick behind me, so whichever one you pick, I can take out a longer one. I'm just exploiting the fact that you can't see."

He laughed at Xiao XingChen some more and sauntered out, holding a basket in his hand. A-Qing looked up at Song Lan, whose entire body was shaking. She didn't understand why he was so angry. Song Lan gestured for her to be quiet. Only after the two walked some distance away did Song Lan start asking A-Qing about the details, "This man, when did Xing... when did the daozi save him?"

His tone was solemn. A-Qing understood that the situation was no joke, and she answered him seriously as well, "It's been a long time, a couple of years."

Song Lan, "The daozi never found out who he is?" A-Qing, "No."

Song Lan, "What has he done during his stay with the daozi?"

A-Qing, "Joke around, bully me, scare me, and... Oh, he also night-hunts with Daozhang!"

Song Lan frowned, thinking that Xue Yang probably wouldn't be so nice, "Night-hunt? Night-hunt what things? Do you know?"

A-Qing didn't dare to be careless. After some thought, she replied, "They used to often night-hunt walking corpses, sometime in the past. Now it's usually ghosts, animals that behave weirdly, and so on."

As he inquired into the matter, Song Lan also felt that something was strange, but he couldn't find any clues. He continued, "Is the daozi close with him?"

Although she didn't want to admit it, A-Qing still confessed, "I think that Daozhang is really unhappy when he's alone... He's finally got someone who cultivates as well... So, I think he sorta likes listening to the bastard tell jokes."

Song Lan's face was clouded with both rage and devastation. Amid the confusion, only one thing was for certain:

He definitely couldn't tell Xiao XingChen about this!

He cautioned, "Don't tell the daozi anything unnecessary."

As soon as he finished, he went toward the direction that Xue Yang left in. A-Qing asked, "Daozhang, are you going to beat up that bastard?"

Song Lan was already far away from her. Wei WuXian thought, Way more than beat him up. He's going chop Xue Yang into pieces!

Xue Yang went outside holding the vegetable basket. A-Qing knew which path he'd use if he was going to buy vegetables. Taking a shortcut, she sprinted through a part of a forest, her heart beating faster than ever. After chasing for a while, she finally saw Xue Yang's figure forward of her. He held a basket in one hand, which was filled with cabbages, carrots, steamed buns, and other food. He walked as he yawned lazily. He had probably finished shopping.

A-Qing had always been good at hiding and eavesdropping. She snuck into a bush beside the forest, moving along with him. Suddenly, Song Lan's cold voice came from in front of her, "Xue Yang."

As if someone had poured a bucket of freezing water over his face, or if someone had slapped him awake from a deep sleep, Xue Yang's expression became scary at once.

Song Lan came out from behind a tree. His sword had already been unsheathed. He held it in his hand, with the tip pointing to the ground.

Xue Yang pretended to be surprised, "Oh, isn't this Daozhang Song? What a rare guest. You here to get a free meal?"

Song Lan lunged with his sword. Xue Yang immediately shook Jiangzai out of his sleeves, blocked the attack, and backed a few steps. He put the basket under a tree, "You damn cultivator. For once I actually wanted to shop for food, and here you fucking are, spoiling my mood!"

In a fury, Song Lan's attacks were aiming for fatality. He shouted in a low voice, "Just what in the world are you scheming?! Why have you spent so long near Xiao XingChen?!"

Xue Yang laughed, "And I was wondering why Daozhang Song still had business with me. So, you want to ask me about this."

Song Lan raged, "Tell me! Why would a scum like you be so nice as to help him night-hunt?!"

The wind of the sword brushed against his face. A cut appeared on Xue Yang's cheek, but he wasn't surprised at all, "How does Daozhang Song understand me so much?"

One of the two fought with skills learned from a proper sect, while the other fought with experience from committing crimes. It was obvious that Song Lan was more skilled than Xue Yang. His pierced through Xue Yang's arm, "Tell me!"

If not for how the matter was so alarming that Song Lan must know what was going on, the sword might have pierced through the neck instead of the arm. Although Xue Yang was injured, his expression didn't change at all, "You really wanna hear it? I'm afraid that you might go mad. Some things shouldn't be made known."

Song Lan's voice was colder than ever, "Xue Yang, my patience is running out!"

With a clang, Xue Yang blocked an attack that was aimed at his eyes. He replied, "Fine, if you're so keen on hearing it. Do you know what that bestest friend of yours did? He killed a lot of walking corpses. He exercised for the greater good, without asking for anything in return. It's quite touching, really. Although he dug his eyes out for you and became blind, the good thing was that Shuanghua can point out corpse energy for him. What's even better? I discovered that if you cut off the tongues of people under corpse poisoning and made it so that they couldn't speak, Shuanghua couldn't tell apart living and dead corpses either, so..."

He explained it in an extremely detailed way. Both Song Lan's arm and sword were trembling, "You monster... You vile monster..."

Xue Yang, "Daozhang Song, sometimes I feel like that polite people like you are really at a disadvantage when they're cursing others, because it's always those few words being repeated over and over again. There's absolutely no power or creativity at all. I haven't used these two words to call others ever since I was seven."

Song Lan was in a towering rage. He attacked again, this time aiming at his throat, "You imposed upon his blindness and fooled him so terribly!"

The attack was both fast and fatal. Xue Yang managed to dodge it, but it pierced his shoulder nonetheless. As if he couldn't feel anything, he didn't even flinch, "His blindness? Daozhang Song, have you forgotten who he dug out his own eyes and became blind for?"

Hearing this, both Song Lan's face and movements stiffened.

Xue Yang continued, "What position are you in to blame me? A friend of his? Are you shameless enough to say that you're his friend? Hahahaha, Daozhang Song, do I need to remind you of what you said to Xiao XingChen after I wiped out the Baixue Temple? When he worried about you and wanted to help you, what sort of expression did you face him with? What sort of things did you say?"

Song Lan was in a terrible state of mind, "I! At the time, I..."

Xue Yang cut him short, "At the time, you were upset? You were pained? You were grieving? You didn't know where to vent your anger? And that was why you took it out on him? To be fair, the reason why I wiped out your temple was precisely because of him. It's quite understandable why you took it out on him. In fact, it was exactly what I wanted."

Every sentence was a critical strike!

Both Xue Yang's speech and attacks quickened. His movements becoming calmer and more difficult to defend, he gradually gained the upper hand, yet Song Lan didn't notice this at all. Xue Yang added, "Well! Who was the one who said 'from now on, we won't need to meet again'? Wasn't it you, Daozhang Song? He listened to your request and disappeared after he dug out his eyes for you, but why have you come to him now? Isn't this making it a bit too difficult? Daozhang Xiao XingChen, don't you agree?"

Hearing this, Song Lan wavered. His attacks hesitated as well!

Being fooled by such a simple trick, it could be seen that Song Lan's mind and movements were really disrupted by Xue Yang. Taking advantage of such a perfect chance, with a wave of his hand, corpse-poisoning powder rained from above.

Nobody had seen this sort of carefully refined corpse-poisoning powder before, including Song Lan. He accidentally breathed in quite a large amount. Immediately knowing that he was in a bad situation, Song Lan started to cough. However, Xue Yang's Jiangzai had long been waiting.

With a cold flash of the sword's tip, it shot straight into his mouth!

Instantly, Wei WuXian's field of vision turned into complete darkness. A-Qing was so scared that she closed her eyes.

But he knew already. This was when Song Lan's tongue had been cut off by Jiangzai. The sounds were terrifying.

A-Qing's eyes felt warm, but she clenched her teeth tightly, not making a single sound. Her eyes blinked open again. Song Lan managed to keep standing, leaning on his sword. With his other hand, he covered his mouth. Blood seeped incessantly from between his fingers. With his tongue cut off by Xue Yang's sudden attack, Song Lan was under so much agony that he couldn't even walk. Yet, he still pulled his sword from the ground and staggered toward Xue Yang. Xue Yang dodged the attack easily. A bizarre smile was on his face.

The next moment, Wei WuXian saw why he smiled in such a way.

Shuanghua's silver glare pierced into Song Lan's chest, then came out from his back.

Song Lan looked down at Shuanghua's blade, which penetrated his heart, then slowly looked up again. He saw Xiao XingChen, who calmly held the sword.

Xiao XingChen wasn't at all aware of the situation, "Are you there?" Song Lan moved his lips soundlessly.

Xue Yang grinned, "I am. Why are you here?"

Xiao XingChen pulled out Shuanghua and returned it to its sheath, "Shuanghua behaved strangely. I followed its guidance and came to see." He wondered, "We haven't seen any

walking corpses in this area for quite a while, not to mention one that roamed alone. Did it come here from somewhere else?"

Slowly, Song Lan fell to his knees before Xiao XingChen.

Xue Yang glanced down at him, "Probably. It's making awful noises."

At such a time, if Song Lan passed his sword to Xiao XingChen's hands, Xiao XingChen would've immediately known who he was. He'd be able to recognize the sword of his closest friend with just a touch.

Yet, Song Lan could no longer do so. Would he pass the sword to Xiao XingChen, tell him who he had just killed with his own hands?

This was precisely what Xue Yang was aiming for, thus he had nothing to fear. He turned to Xiao XingChen, "Let's go. It's time to cook dinner. I'm hungry already."

Xiao XingChen, "Have you bought the vegetables?"

Xue Yang, "Yep. I ran into this thing on my way back. What a bad day."

Xiao XingChen left first. Xue Yang patted the wounds on his shoulder and arm. He picked up the basket again and, as he passed Song Lan, he smiled and looked down, "No food for you."

After Xue Yang was long gone and had probably reached the coffin home with Xiao XingChen already, A-Qing finally stood up from behind the bush.

Her legs had both numbed after squatting for so long. Holding her pole, she limped and wobbled to Song Lan, whose kneeling corpse had already stiffened.

Song Lan's death was far from being peaceful. A-Qing jumped from his widely opened eyes. Then, as she saw the blood that spilled out of his mouth, streaming down his chin, staining the front of his shirt, pooling over the ground, large drops of tears rolled from her eyes.

Although she was scared, A-Qing reached out to close Song Lan's eyes. She then kneeled in front of him and put her palms together, "Daozhang, please don't blame me or the other daozihang. If I came out, I'd die anyways, so I had to hide and couldn't help you. The other daozihang was fooled by that bastard as well. He didn't do it on purpose. He didn't know that you were the one he killed!"

She sobbed on, "I'm going back. Please, let your deceased spirit bless me so that I can get Daozhang Xiao XingChen out of there, bless us so that we can escape the demon's control. I must not let that monster Xue Yang die in peace. I must cut him into pieces so that he never enters reincarnation again!"

After her speech, she kowtowed on the ground three loud times. She wiped her face harshly, stood up, encouraged herself, and walked in the direction of Yi City.

The sky had already darkened when she returned to the coffin home. Xue Yang was peeling apples at the table. Cutting all of the slices into rabbits, he seemed to be a wonderful mood. Anyone who saw him would think that this must be a lively youth. Nobody would be able to imagine what he had just done. Hearing her entrance, Xiao XingChen came out with a plate of cabbage in his hand, "A-Qing, where did you go today? It's already so late."

Glancing at her, something suddenly flashed in Xue Yang's eyes, "What's wrong? Her eyes are so swollen."

Xiao XingChen hurried over, "What happened? Did someone bully you?" Xue Yang, "Bully her? Who'd be able to bully her?"

Although he wore a broad smile, he was clearly growing suspicious. Suddenly, A-Qing threw the bamboo pole onto the ground, and started wailing.

She cried with both tears and a runny nose. Almost hiccupping, she flew into Xiao XingChen's arms, "Am I ugly? Am I ugly? Daozhang, you have to tell me. Am I really that ugly?"

Xiao XingChen stroked her head, "Of course not. A-Qing is such a pretty girl. Who said that you're ugly?"

Xue Yang commented with disdain, "You're so ugly. You're even uglier when you cry." Xiao XingChen chided, "Don't say that."

A-Qing cried harder. She stomped her feet, "Well, Daozhang, it's not like you can see! What's the use if you say I'm pretty? You're definitely lying to me! He can see. He said I'm ugly, so I must really be that ugly! Both ugly and blind!"

From all the fuss, both of them naturally believed that some children called her "ugly-pants" or "white-eyed blind girl" when she was outside today, and was feeling frustrated. Xue Yang dismissed, "You came back crying just because they said you're ugly? Where did your usual unreasonable rudeness go?"

A-Qing, "I'm not rude! Daozhang, do you have any money left?"

With a pause, Xiao XingChen replied in embarrassment, "Uh... I think so." Xue Yang interrupted, "I can lend you some."

A-Qing spat, "You've been living and eating with us for so long, and you still call it 'lending' if we use some of your money! What a miser! You have no shame! Daozhang, I wanna buy pretty clothes and pretty jewelry. Can you come with me?"

Wei WuXian thought to himself, so she wants to lead Xiao XingChen out of here. But if Xue Yang wants to follow, what should she do?

Xiao XingChen, "Of course I can, but I won't be able to help you see if they suit you or not."

Xue Yang interrupted again, "I can help her."

A-Qing jumped so high that she almost hit Xiao XingChen's chin, "I don't care, I don't care! I only want you! I don't want him beside me at all. All he'll say is that I'm ugly! And he'll call me Little Blind!"

It wasn't the first time that she acted in such an unreasonable way. The two of them were already used to it. Xue Yang pulled a face at her, while Xiao XingChen agreed, "Alright. How about tomorrow?"

A-Qing, "Tonight!"

Xue Yang, "If you go tonight, all of the markets will have closed. Where else could you possibly go?"

Having no other choice, A-Qing gave in, "Fine! Then tomorrow it is! It's a promise!" Having failed a first attempt, if she still begged to go outside, Xue Yang would definitely be suspicious again. A-Qing could only drop the matter for now and go to the table for dinner. During the previous ruckus, although her performance was the same as before, appearing more than natural, her stomach had been stretched taut throughout. She had been so nervous that, even now, the hand that she held her bowl with was still trembling. Xue Yang was sitting right at her left. As he glanced sideways at her, her legs stiffened again. Since she was too frightened to eat anything, she conveniently pretended that she was too furious to have an appetite. She spat the food out every time she had a bite. Stabbing her bowl, she muttered and cursed, "You damned bitch. You filthy maid. Well, I don't think you're any better, slut!"

Listening to her curse at the nonexistent "filthy maid", Xue Yang couldn't hold himself from rolling his eyes, while Xiao XingChen spoke, "Don't waste food."

Xue Yang's eyes left A-Qing and turned to Xiao XingChen's face instead. Wei WuXian thought, It could indeed be justified how the little delinquent could imitate Xiao XingChen in such an accurate way. After all, they sat in front of each other every single day. He'd have lots of time to figure it out.

However, Xiao XingChen was not at all aware of the two pairs of eyes that pointed at him. After all, he was the only one in the room who was truly blind.

After they finished, Xiao XingChen cleaned up the bowls and chopsticks, and went in the central chamber again. Unable to sit or stand still, A-Qing wanted to follow him inside, but Xue Yang suddenly called her, "A-Qing."

A-Qing's heart immediately skipped a beat. Even Wei WuXian felt the chills that ran from her head down her back.

She responded, "Why did you suddenly call my name?!"

Xue Yang, "Didn't you say yourself that you didn't wanna be called Little Blind?"

A-Qing humped, "People don't just suddenly act nice to others, unless they're hiding other intentions! Just what do you want?"

Xue Yang smiled, "Nothing, really. I just want to teach you what you should do the next time others curse at you."

A-Qing, "Huh. Tell me, then. What should I do?"

Xue Yang, "If someone calls you ugly, then make her even uglier. Cut a few dozens of times on her face so that she'll never have the guts to go outside again. If someone calls you blind, then carve one end of your pole sharp, and stab once in both of her eyes so that she'll also be blind. Then, see if she dares to bad mouth you again."

A-Qing's blood ran cold. She pretended as if she thought he was frightening her, "You're scaring me again!"

Xue Yang snorted, "Well, think what you want."

As he finished, he pushed the plate that held the rabbit-shaped apple slices in front of her, "Eat up."

Looking at the plate of cute, delicate slices, disgust filled both A-Qing's and Wei WuXian's hearts.

The next day, just as they got up, A-Qing pleaded Xiao XingChen to shop for pretty clothes and makeup alongside her. Xue Yang was annoyed, "If you two are gone, then I'd have to buy today's food again?"

A-Qing, "Why can't you buy it? Think about how many times Daozhang bought them! You're the only one who bullies and plays tricks on Daozhang all the time!"

Xue Yang, "Okay, okay. I'll go buy it. I'll go right now."

After he was gone, Xiao XingChen asked, "A-Qing, are you still not ready yet? Can we go now?"

A-Qing only came inside after she made sure that Xue Yang was long gone. She closed the door and asked in a trembling voice, "Daozhang, do you happen to know someone called Xue Yang?"

#### Translator's Notes

**Temple:** The storyline of "Once upon a time there was a mountain and, on the mountain, there was a temple" is from a classic Chinese children's rhyme that repeats itself over and over again, often used by adults to get children to sleep.

**Enlightenment:** This means that she has already gained immortality, what every cultivator is aiming to do.

**Shibo:** This is similar to a shishu. Whereas shishu refers to one's parent's shidi, shibo refers to one's parent's shixiong.

**Scholar:** In Ancient China, there was a time when scholars were heavily frowned upon, especially associated with poorness.

## Chapter 41: Grasses—Part Nine

Xiao XingChen's smile froze.

The words "Xue Yang" were too big of a shock to him. His complexion was quite pale to start with. After he heard the name, all of the blood drained from his face. His lips were almost a shade of pink-tinted white.

As if he wasn't sure, Xiao XingChen asked in a low voice, "... Xue Yang?" He was suddenly startled, "A-Qing, how did you learn of this name?"

A-Qing, "Xue Yang is the person with us! He's that bastard!"

Xiao XingChen stammered in confusion, "The person with us? ... The person with us..." He shook his head, as though he was feeling somewhat dizzy, "How did you know?"

A-Qing, "I heard him kill someone!"

Xiao XingChen, "He killed someone? Who did he kill?"

A-Qing, "A woman! She's very young. I think she had a sword with her. Xue Yang was hiding a sword on him as well. It was because I heard them fighting. They were really loud. The woman kept on calling him 'Xue Yang', and said that he 'wiped out the temple', that he 'killed countless people', and that he should be 'rightfully punished'. Oh heaven, he's out of his mind! He's been hiding beside us all along, and I don't even know what he's trying to do!"

A-Qing stayed awake the whole night, making up lies in her mind. First, she definitely couldn't let Daozhang know that he killed living humans thinking that they were walking corpses. She couldn't let him know that he killed Song Lan with his own hands either. So, although it'd be unfair to Daozhang, she couldn't tell him about Daozhang Song's death no matter what. The best would be for Xiao XingChen to run away as far as he could after he discovered who Xue Yang was!

Yet, the news was too hard for him to accept. And, it also sounded rather absurd. Xiao XingChen couldn't believe it at all, "But his voice is different. And..."

A-Qing was so frustrated that she kept on knocking her pole on the ground, "He purposely made it so that his voice is different! He's afraid that you'll recognize him!" Suddenly, an idea popped up, "Oh right! Right, right! He has nine fingers. Daozhang, do you know? Did Xue Yang also have nine fingers? You've definitely seen him before, right?"

Xiao XingChen staggered, almost falling to the ground.

A-Qing immediately helped him to the table, where they both sat down slowly. After a while, Xiao XingChen spoke again, "But, A-Qing, how did you find out that he has nine fingers? Have you touched his hand before? If he really is Xue Yang, though, how would he have let you touch his left hand for you to discover it?"

A-Qing clenched her teeth, "... Daozhang! Let me tell you the truth! I'm not blind. I can see! I didn't touch his hands, but saw them instead!"

Each shock was greater than the previous. Xiao XingChen was almost at a loss for words, "What did you say? You can see?"

Although A-Qing was afraid, she couldn't hide the truth any longer. She apologized and apologized, "I'm sorry, Daozhang! I didn't lie to you on purpose! I was scared that if you knew that I'm not blind, you'd chase me away! But please don't blame me for now. Let's run away together. He'll be back after he finishes shopping for food!"

Suddenly, she closed her mouth.

The bandages that wrapped around Xiao XingChen's eyes were initially white. Now, though, two smudges of red seeped from within. The blood grew more and more and eventually leaked through the bandages, trickling down from where his eyes once were.

A-Qing cried out, "Daozhang, you're bleeding!"

Xiao XingChen seemed as if he had just noticed. With a faint exclamation, he reached his hand to his face. When he took it away, it was covered in blood. With quivering hands, A-Qing helped him wipe some off. Yet, the harder she tried, the more blood there was. Xiao XingChen raised a hand, "I'm fine... I'm fine."

Originally, the injury of his eyes would bleed whenever he had excessive thoughts or emotions, but it hadn't recurred in quite a long while. Wei WuXian even thought that it had healed already. Today, though, it started to bleed again.

Xiao XingChen murmured, "But... But if he really is Xue Yang, why would it be like this? Why didn't he kill me in the beginning, and even stayed by my side for so many years? Why would this be Xue Yang?"

A-Qing, "Of course he wanted to kill you in the beginning! I've seen his eyes before. They were meaner than mean and scarier than scary! But since he was injured and couldn't move, he needed someone to care for him! I didn't know him. If I did and knew that he was a killing machine, I would've stabbed him to death when he was in the bush! Daozhang, let's run! Alright?"

Yet, in his heart, Wei WuXian sighed, that'd be impossible. If she didn't tell Xiao XingChen, he would've continued living like this with Xue Yang. Now that she told Xiao XingChen, he wouldn't simply run away either. He'd definitely ask Xue Yang directly. There's no solution to this.

As he had expected, after Xiao XingChen managed to calm down, he told A-Qing, "A-Qing, run away."

His voice was slightly hoarse. A-Qing sounded somewhat scared, "Me? Daozhang, let's run away together!"

Xiao XingChen shook his head, "I can't go. I need to find out what exactly he's trying to do. He definitely has a goal, and tried to reach this goal in the past few years by pretending to somebody else and staying by my side. If I left him here alone, I'm afraid that the people of Yi City would sink into his hands. Xue Yang has always been this way."

This time, A-Qing's sobs weren't faked anymore. She tossed the bamboo pole to the side and clung to Xiao XingChen's leg, "Me? Daozhang, how can I go by myself? I wanna stay with you. If you're not leaving, then I'm not leaving either. If worst comes to worst, we'll just be murdered by him. I'll be so lonely that I die if I'm roaming outside by myself anyways. I know you don't want this to happen so me, so let's run away together!"

Unfortunately, after the secret that she wasn't blind was revealed, her tactic of using this to gain sympathy no longer worked. Xiao XingChen replied, "A-Qing, you can see and you're very clever. I trust that you'll be able to live a good life. You don't know how scary Xue Yang is. You can't stay. You mustn't go near him again, either."

Wei WuXian could even hear A-Qing silent screaming, I do know! I know how scary he is! But she couldn't open her mouth and speak the truth. Suddenly, a series of brisk footsteps came from outside. Xue Yang was back!

Xiao XingChen looked up in alarm, returning to the level of keenness he had when he night-hunted. He quickly pulled A-Qing over and whispered, "When he comes in, I'll handle him while you use the chance to escape. Listen to me!"

A-Qing was so scared that she could only nod, tears still brimming in her eyes. Xue Yang kicked the door, "What are you guys doing? I'm already back, and you haven't left yet? If you're still in there then open the hatch and let me inside. I'm so tired."

Simply from the tone and the voice, one would think that he was only a boy-next-door, a cheerful shidi. However, who'd ever imagine that the person who stood outside was a villain who had no sense of morality, a demon who wore the facade of a human!

Although the door wasn't locked, it had been bolted from the inside. If they didn't open the door anytime soon, Xue Yang would definitely be suspicious. Then, when he entered, he'd definitely be somewhat vigilant. A-Qing wiped her face, "How are you tired?! It's only such

a small distance from here to the market, and you're already tired?! I'm just a bit slow since I'm seeing which outfit is better. How does it concern you?!"

Xue Yang mocked, "How many outfits do you even have? No matter how much you change, you'll look the same. Come, come, open the door."

Even when A-Qing's legs wobbled, she still spat in a strong voice, "Hmph! I'm not gonna open it for you. Kick however you please."

Xue Yang laughed, "Mark your words. Daozhang, fix the door afterwards. Don't blame it on me."

After he spoke, he immediately kicked the wooden door open. He stepped over the high threshold and walked inside. He held the basket filled with vegetables on one hand, and a crimson apple on the other. Just as he took a bite out of it, he looked down only to see Shuanghua, which sunk into his stomach.

The basket dropped to the ground. The cabbage, carrots, apples, and steam buns rolled onto the floor.

Xiao XingChen shouted in a low voice, "A-Qing, run!"

Moving as fast as she could, A-Qing barged through the door of the coffin home. Immediately afterward, she went on another path and crept back again. She climbed to her usual hiding spot, the one she used most often and was most familiar with, and even popped her head out to watch what was going on inside.

Xiao XingChen asked coldly, "Was it fun?"

Xue Yang took another bite into the apple that was still in his hand. He only replied after calmly chewing for a while and swallowing the fruit, "Yes. Of course it was fun."

He used his original voice again.

Xiao XingChen, "Just what do you want to do, having stayed with me for all these years?"

Xue Yang, "Who knows? Maybe I'm bored."

Xiao XingChen pulled out Shuanghua and got ready to attack again. Xue Yang added, "Daozhang Xiao XingChen, do you still want to hear the second half of the story that I didn't finish?"

Xiao XingChen, "No."

Although he refused, his head tilted slightly forward and his sword paused as well. Xue Yang replied, "Well, I'm gonna tell it anyways. After you hear it, if you still think it's my fault, you can do whatever you want."

He casually wiped the wound on his stomach, suppressing it so that it didn't bleed excessively, "The child saw the man who fooled him to take the letter. He felt both frustrated and happy. He threw himself to the man as he cried, and said to him, 'I brought the letter there, but the pastries are gone and I was beaten up. Can you give me another plate?'

"The man seemed like he had been caught by the brawnier one and had been beaten as well. His face was injured. Seeing the dirty little child clinging onto his leg, he couldn't help but feel annoyed and kicked him away at once.

"He climbed up the ox cart and told the cart driver to leave at once. The child climbed up from the ground and kept on chasing the cart. He really wanted to eat the plate of sugary pastries.

Having finally chased up to it, he waved his arms in front of the cart for them to stop. The man was too irritated by his crying. Snatching the driver's whip, he lashed at his head and threw him onto the ground."

He spoke one word at a time, "And then, the wheels of the cart ground over the child's hand, one finger at a time."

Xiao XingChen couldn't see, but Xue Yang raised his left hand at him anyway, "He was seven! The bones of his left hand were crushed, while one finger was ground into battered flesh on the spot! This man was Chang Ping's father.

“Daozhang Xiao XingChen, you were so just, so stern when you brought me to Koi Tower! You condemned me and asked me why I wiped out an entire sect simply because of some suspicion. Is it that, since the fingers weren’t yours, you guys were incapable of feeling the pain?! You guys

didn’t know how horrifying screams sounded like out of your own mouths? Why didn’t you ask him why he decided to amuse himself with me without a single reason?! The current Xue Yang was bestowed upon you by the past Chang CiAn! The YueyangChang CLAN was only reaping what it had sown!”

Xiao XingChen spoke as though he couldn’t believe Xue Yang’s words, “Chang CiAn broke one of your fingers in the past. If you sought revenge, you could’ve simply broken one of his fingers as well. If you really took the matter to heart, you could’ve broken two, or even all ten! Even if you had cut off an entire arm of his, things wouldn’t have been like this. Why did you have to kill his entire clan? Don’t tell me that a single finger of yours was equal to more than fifty human lives!”

Xue Yang actually pondered upon the matter, as if he found Xiao XingChen’s questions strange, “Of course. My finger was my own, while those lives were other peoples’. They wouldn’t be equal no matter how many lives I killed. It was only around fifty. How could it have possibly been equal to one of my fingers?”

Xiao XingChen’s face grew paler and paler from Xue Yang’s confident tone. He shouted, “Then what about others?! Then why did you wipe out Baixue Temple? Why did you blind Daozhang Song ZiChen’s eyes?!”

Xue Yang asked in reply, “Then why did you stop me? Why did you hinder what I wanted to do? Why did you stand up for those dregs of the Chang Clan? You wanted to help Chang CiAn? Or Chang Ping? Hahahaha, how did Chang Ping first cry tears of gratitude? And how did he later beg you not to help him? Daozhang Xiao XingChen, this matter had been your fault, ever since the beginning. You shouldn’t have meddled with the rights and wrongs of other people. Who was right, who was wrong; would an outsider be able to understand? Or, maybe you shouldn’t have even left the mountain in the first place. Your teacher, BaoShan SanRen, was indeed smart. Why didn’t you listen to her and obediently cultivate in the mountains? If you couldn’t understand the happenings of this world, then you shouldn’t have come!”

It was more than Xiao XingChen could bear, “... Xue Yang, you really are... too disgusting...”

Hearing this, the killing intent that hadn’t flashed through Xue Yang’s eyes for quite a long while had appeared again.

He laughed bitterly, “Xiao XingChen, this is why I hate you. The people that I hate the most are ones like you who say they’re righteous, who think they’re virtuous, precisely stupid, naive, dumb idiots like you who think the world’s better just because you did something good! You

think I’m disgusting? Very well. Would I care if anybody thinks I’m disgusting? But, on the other hand, are you in a position to be disgusted by me?”

Xiao XingChen paused slightly, “What do you mean?”

A-Qing’s and Wei WuXian’s hearts were about to jump out of their chests!

Xue Yang spoke in an affectionate manner, “Recently, we haven’t gone out at night to kill walking corpses, have we? But, a few years ago, didn’t we go outside and kill a bunch every couple of days?”

Xiao XingChen’s lips moved, as though he was feeling somewhat uneasy, “Why are you bringing this up now?”

Xue Yang, “Nothing, really. It’s just really unfortunate that you’re blind. You dug out both of your eyes, so you couldn’t see those ‘walking corpses’ that you killed. They were so scared, so pained when you pierced them through the heart. Some even kneeled down and

cried and kowtowed for you to let off the young and elderly of their families. If not for how I cut off all of their tongues, I bet they would've been wailing and shouting ‘Daozhang, spare us’.”

Xiao XingChen’s entire body started to tremble.

After a long while, he managed, “You deceived me. You wanted to deceive me.”

Xue Yang, “Yes, I deceived you. I’ve been deceiving you all along. Who would’ve known that you believed me when I was deceiving you, but now you don’t believe me when I’m speaking the truth?”

Xiao XingChen staggered and swung his word toward Xue Yang, shouting, “Be quiet! Be quiet!”

Xue Yang pressed his abdominal area. Snapping with his left hand, he calmly backed away. The expression on his face wasn’t that of a human anymore. Green light shone from his eyes. Along with the canine teeth that showed when he smiled, he looked as though he was a living monster. He shouted, “Alright! I’ll be quiet! If you still don’t believe me, then pass a few moves with the one standing behind you. Make him tell you that if I’m deceiving you or not!”

A sword brought a gust of wind toward him. Xiao XingChen naturally blocked it with Shuanghua. As the two swords clashed, his face immediately grew blank.

Or, one could say that his entire body instantly became a stone statue depicting a withered human.

Xiao XingChen asked with utmost cautiousness, “... Is that you, ZiChen?” There was no answer.

Song Lan’s corpse stood behind him. He appeared as if he was gazing at Xiao XingChen, but there were no pupils within his eyes. He held the sword that clashed with Shuanghua. The two of them had definitely often learnt from each other by exchanging blows. Even if the two swords had just clashed, Xiao XingChen should be able to tell who the other was from only the strength of the attack. Yet, Xiao XingChen seemed as though he wasn’t sure. He turned around slowly and reached out a quivering hand, feeling for the blade of Song Lan’s sword.

Song Lan didn’t move. Xiao XingChen moved his hand upward from the tip. Finally, one stroke after another, he traced over the characters “Fuxue” that had been carved on the sword.

Xiao XingChen’s face grew even paler.

Almost stupefied, he touched the blade of Fuxue, not even noticing that his palm had been grazed. He was trembling so much that even his voice sounded as though it was scattered on the ground, “... ZiChen... Daozhang Song... Daozhang Song... Is that you...?”

Song Lan looked at him without making a sound.

Two frightening holes had already been soaked through the bandages that was wrapped around Xiao XingChen’s eyes by blood that never seemed to stop seeping. He wanted to reach out and touch the person who held the sword, but he was too afraid, reaching out, then putting his arms back again. Waves of tearing pain rippled through A-Qing’s chest. Both Wei WuXian and she had difficulties breathing. Unable to breathe, tears poured out of her eyes.

Xiao XingChen stood where he was, at a loss of what to do, “... What happened...? Say something...”

He had completely fallen apart, “Can anybody say something?!?”

As he had wished, Xue Yang spoke, “Would I still need to tell you who exactly was the walking corpse that you had killed yesterday?”

A clang.

Shuanghua fell onto the ground. Xue Yang burst out in laughter.

Xiao XingChen stood blankly in front of Song Lan. Putting his hands on his head, he wailed as though he was ripping his chest apart.

Xue Yang laughed so hard that tears formed in the corners of his eyes. He scowled, "What's wrong?! You're so touched to see your old friend again that you're even crying! Do you want to give him a hug?!"

A-Qing covered her mouth as firm as she could, refusing to let out any trace of her whimpered crying. Inside of the coffin home, Xue Yang paced from one side to the other as he cursed with a terrifying tone of both wrath and ecstasy, "Saving the world! What a joke. You can't even save yourself!"

Series of sharp pains stabbed at Wei WuXian's head. This time, the pain wasn't from A-Qing's soul.

Crestfallen, Xiao XingChen kneeled on the ground, beside Song Lan's feet. He squeezed himself close, as though he had shrunk into a small, weak lump of something, almost hoping that he'd disappear from this world. His snowy white robes had already been covered in dust and blood.

Xue Yang shouted at him, "You couldn't do anything, you've failed miserably, you're the only one to blame—you asked for all of this!"

At this moment, Wei WuXian saw himself in Xiao XingChen.

Him, who failed miserably as he stood drenched in blood, who couldn't do anything except silently acknowledge the critiques and accusations, who was wholly beyond hope, who could only cry in despair!

The white bandages had been stained entirely red. Xiao XingChen's face was covered in blood. Without eyes to cry with, he could only bleed tears. Having been deceived for years, he took his enemy as a friend, and all of his kindness was stepped over. He thought that he was exorcising ghosts, but his hands were bathed in the blood of the innocent. He even killed his closest friend!

He could only whimper in pain, "Please. Let me go."

Xue Yang, "Didn't you want to stab me to death with your sword just a moment ago? Why are you begging me to let you go, now?"

He clearly knew that, with Song Lan's corpse protecting him, Xiao XingChen wouldn't be able to pick up his sword again.

He won again. It was an overwhelming victory.

Suddenly, Xiao XingChen snatched up Shuanghua, which had been lying on the ground. Turning the body of the sword, he placed the sharp edge by his neck. The clear radiance of a silver sword glare flashed across Xue Yang's dark, lightless eyes. Xiao XingChen loosened his hands.

Crimson blood trickled down Shuanghua's blade.

Following the limpid echo of the sword tumbling to the ground, both Xue Yang's movement and laughter halted.

After a while of silence, he walked to Xiao XingChen's motionless corpse. He looked down with bloodshot eyes, the twisted curvature of his lips gradually sinking. Wei WuXian didn't know if he had accidentally saw wrong, but it seemed that the rim of Xue Yang's eyes were brimming a reddish tint.

Immediately afterward, he glowered through clenched teeth, "You forced me to do this!"

He then laughed grimly, and spoke to himself, "A dead one is better! Only dead people listen."

Xue Yang felt for Xiao XingChen's breathing and squeezed his wrist, as though he thought that he wasn't dead enough, that he wasn't rigid enough. He stood up, went into the bedroom on the side, and carried out a basin of water. Using a clean towel, he wiped away all of the blood on Xiao XingChen's face. He even exchanged the old bandages with new ones, carefully wrapping them around him.

He painted an array on the ground, prepared the materials needed, and properly placed Xiao XingChen inside. He only remembered to look after his own abdominal wound after he had done so many things.

Probably thinking that the two of them would be able to meet after just a short while, his mood grew better and better. He picked up all of the fruits and vegetables that had been scattered on the ground and organized them into the basket again. Out of a rare surge of diligence, he even cleaned the house and placed a new layer of straws into A-Qing's coffin. At last, he took out the piece of candy that Xiao XingChen gave him last night.

Just as he was about to put it in his mouth, he thought for a bit. Holding the urge back, he put it back again. With one hand holding his chin out of boredom, he waited for Xiao XingChen to sit up.

But it never happened.

The sky had been darkening, and so had Xue Yang's expression. He tapped his fingers irritatedly on the table.

When dusk fell completely, he kicked the table and cursed. Standing up, he half-kneeled in front of Xiao XingChen's corpse, checking over the array and incantations that he had painted. After repeated examinations, he felt that there was nothing wrong. However, after frowning for a moment, he still wiped away all of them and redrew the entire thing.

This time, Xue Yang directly sat on the ground, staring patiently at Xiao XingChen. He waited for another while. A-Qing's legs had already gone through three stages of numbness. Now, they both itched and hurt, as though thousands of ants were nibbling on them. Her eyes had been swollen as well from crying. Her sight was a bit blurry.

After another two hours, Xue Yang finally discovered that the situation had gotten out of control.

He put his hand onto Xiao XingChen's forehead, closing his eyes for detection. A moment later, his eyes flew open.

Wei WuXian knew. What he could still detect was probably just a few strands of a fragmented soul.

And, a soul that was broken in such a way that it could never be used to create a fierce corpse.

It seemed that Xue Yang had never expected something like this to happen. On his face, which constantly grinned, an emptiness appeared for the first time.

Without thinking, although it was too late, he pressed his hands against the wound on Xiao XingChen's neck. However, all of the blood had already drained away. Xiao XingChen's face was whiter than paper. Large areas of dark-red blood dried up on his neck. Covering the wound now would do nothing.

Xiao XingChen had died. He had died completely.

Even his soul had shattered.

The child in Xue Yang's story who cried because he couldn't eat pastries was too different from the present him. It was almost impossible to link the two together. Yet, in the current moment, Wei WuXian could finally catch a few traces of that ignorant, confused child on Xue Yang's face.

In an instant, red veins climbed over Xue Yang's eyes. He stood up suddenly. Squeezing both of his hands into fists, he rampaged around the coffin home. He kicked and thrashed, noisily destroying the house that he had just cleaned a few seconds ago.

At this point, his expression, the sounds that he made were closer to the word "insane" than all of his past attitudes added together.

After he smashed everything the house, he calmed down again. He squatted where he had been and called out in a small voice, "Xiao XingChen."

He continued, "If you don't get up, I'll make your dear friend Song Lan murder people.

“I’ll kill off everyone in the entire Yi City and make them into living corpses. You’ve been living here for such a long time. Is it really okay for you not to care?”

“I’ll strangle that little blind A-Qing and leave her corpse in the fields for wild dogs to gobble her up.”

A-Qing shivered soundlessly.

Having received no reply, Xue Yang suddenly shouted out of rage, “Xiao XingChen!” He yanked at Xiao XingChen’s collars, even though it did nothing, and shook it a couple of times as he stared at the lifeless face in his hands.

Suddenly, pulling Xiao XingChen’s arm, he lifted him onto his back.

Xue Yang carried the corpse toward the door. As if he had lost his mind, he ranted in a whisper, “Spirit-trapping Pouch, Spirit-trapping Pouch. Right, a Spirit-trapping Pouch. I need a Spirit-trapping Pouch, a Spirit-trapping Pouch, a Spirit-trapping Pouch...”

Only after he was far away did A-Qing dare to move slightly.

Unable to balance herself, she tumbled to the ground, and only crawled up again after writhing for a while. She managed to walk a few more steps forward. As her muscles stretched, she walked faster and faster and faster, and started to run.

After she ran so far that Yi City was far behind her, she finally let out the cries that she buried within herself, “Daozhang! Daozhang! Aaah, Daozhang!”

The scenario suddenly changed and turned to somewhere else.

At this point, A-Qing had probably already been on the run for a couple of days. She was walking in an unfamiliar town, holding a bamboo pole and pretending to be blind again. She asked whoever came toward her, “Excuse me, are there any big sects around here?”

“Excuse me, are there any really powerful people around the area? Powerful people who cultivate.”

Wei WuXian thought to himself, she’s searching for people who can help her seek revenge for Xiao XingChen.

Unfortunately, nobody took her questions seriously. They’d often walk away after just a few half-hearted sentences. A-Qing wasn’t discouraged, either. She tirelessly asked, even if she had been shooed away all those times. Seeing that she couldn’t get any answers here, she left and went on a smaller path.

She had been walking and asking for an entire day. Exhausted, she dragged her heavy legs toward a brook. She cupped her hands and drank a few sips of the water, soothing her dry throat. Through the water, she saw a wooden hairpin in her hair, and reached for it.

Looking at the hairpin, A-Qing puckered her lips, wanting to cry again. Her stomach growled, and she took a small, white money pouch out of her lapel. This was the one she stole from Xiao XingChen. She then dug out a small candy from within it, and licked it carefully. After the tip of her tongue tasted the sweetness, she put the candy back again.

This was the last piece of candy Xiao XingChen gave her.

A-Qing looked down and packed the pouch away again. With a glance, she suddenly found that another person’s shadow appeared within the reflection of the water.

Standing in the reflection, Xue Yang was smiling at her.

With a startled scream, A-Qing immediately scrambled away.

Ever since sometime, Xue Yang had been standing behind her. With Shuanghua in his hand, he opened his arms and made the gesture of a hug. He spoke happily, “A-Qing, why are you running away? We haven’t seen each other in such a long time. Don’t you miss me?”

A-Qing shrieked, “Help me!”

Yet, this was already an obscure mountain path. Nobody would come to help her.

Xue Yang raised a brow, “I just happened to have run into you when you were asking around in the city after I finished my business in Yueyang. What a wonderful turn of fate. Speaking of it, your acting is superb. You even fooled me for such a long time. Well done.”

A-Qing knew that there was no chance of escaping death this time. After the shock, thinking to herself that she'd die anyway, why couldn't die after cursing all she wanted? Becoming bolder again, she jumped up and spat, "You animal! Thankless wretch! Lower than low bastard! Your parents must've made love in a pigpen for a son of a bitch like you to happen! You're just a germ who grew up eating shit!"

Having used to roam the marketplaces, she had heard more than a great deal of curses and arguments. She spat out whatever profanities that came to her mind. Xue Yang only grinned and listened, "You're quite good at this, aren't you? Why haven't I heard you act so rude in front of Xiao XingChen? You got more coming?"

A-Qing continued, "Fuck your shameless filth! And you still dare to mention Daozhang and hold Daozhang's sword! Do you deserve to hold it? You're dirtying his belonging!"

Xue Yang held up Shuanghua with his left hand, "Oh, you mean this? It's mine now. Did you think your daozhang is any cleaner? After this, he'll also be my..."

A-Qing, "You piece of shit! Dream on! You don't deserve to call Daozhang unclean. You're just a pool of spittle! Daozhang must be the unluckiest man in the world to have met you! You're the only one who's dirty! It's only a disgusting pool of spittle like you!"

Xue Yang's expression finally darkened.

Having been on the edge for such a long time, now that the moment had finally arrived, A-Qing felt strangely relieved.

Xue Yang spoke in a cold tone, "Since you like pretending to be blind so much, why don't you become truly blind?"

With a wave of his hand, some sort of powder came at her face and went into her eyes. Immediately, everything she could see became a bloody red, then turned into darkness.

Stung by the scorching pain on her eyes, A-Qing let out a blood-curdling screech. Xue Yang's voice came again, "You're too talkative. You won't need your tongue anymore, either."

The crisp rings of the silver bell sounded as though they were right beside Wei WuXian, yet he was still immersed in A-Qing's emotions, unable to come back to his senses. His head spun as well.

Lan JingYi waved a hand in front of him, "There is not reaction? What if he lost his marbles?!" Jin Ling, "I said already that Empathy is very dangerous!"

Lan JingYi, "Well it was because your head was up in the clouds and did not ring the bell in time."

Jin Ling's face froze, "I..."

Luckily, Wei WuXian had finally came to. He stood up against the coffin. A-Qing, having already left his body, leaned on the coffin as well. The boys swarmed around him as though they were a litter of piglets and all talk at the same time, "He's up, he's up!"

"Whew, he hasn't lost his marbles." "Hasn't he lost his marbles to begin with?" "Don't talk nonsense!"

With loud chatters surrounding his ears, Wei WuXian spoke up, "Don't be so loud. My head feels awful."

They quieted at once. Wei WuXian looked down, reached into the coffin, and slightly opened Xiao XingChen's collars. As he had expected, at his neck, there was a thin yet fatal wound.

Wei WuXian sighed in silence and turned to A-Qing, "Thanks for all the trouble."

The reason why A-Qing's ghost was blind but she wasn't as slow or careful as other blind people was that she only became truly blind the moment before she died. Before, she had always been such a fast, lively maiden.

In these years, she hid alone within the fog of Yi City, stealthily going against Xue Yang by scaring away the humans who had entered the city and warning them, directing them outside. Just how much courage and dedication did she have to be able to do this?

Beside the edge of the coffin, A-Qing put her palms together and saluted Wei WuXian for a couple of times. Then, using her bamboo pole as a sword, she made the “kill, kill, kill” gestures that she had always played around with.

Wei WuXian replied, “Don’t worry.” He turned to the disciples, “Stay here, all of you. The walking corpses in the city won’t be able to come here. I’ll be back soon.”

Lan JingYi couldn’t help but asked, “Just what did you see during Empathy?” Wei WuXian, “It’s too long of a story. I’ll tell you later.”

Jin Ling, “Can’t you sum it up? Don’t leave us at a cliffhanger!” Wei WuXian, “In summary: Xue Yang must die.”

Amid the dense fog that stretched as far as the eye could see, the knocks of A-Qing’s pole led the way for him. The two moved rapidly and immediately returned to where the fight happened.

Lan WangJi and Xue Yang had already gone outside. The sword glares of Bichen and Jiangzai clashed—the fight was at a critical moment. Bichen was calm and unhurried, gaining the upper hand, while Jiangzai lashed out as though it was a rabid dog, somehow managing to keep up.

However, within the dreadful white fog, Lan WangJi had difficulties with vision, yet since Xue Yang had lived so many years in the city like A-Qing, he was able to know where he was even if he closed his eyes. Thus, the fight was in a deadlock. Notes of the guqin sometimes thundered through the fog, preventing the groups of walking corpses that wanted to approach. Just as Wei WuXian was about to take out his flute, two black figures slammed in front of him as if they were two iron pagodas. Wen Ning was pressing Song Lan onto the ground. Both corpses held each other’s necks with their hands, their knuckles cracking loudly.

Wei WuXian commanded, “Hold him down!”

He bent down and quickly found the ends of the two nails that went through Song Lan’s head. He felt relieved at once. The nails were a lot thinner than the ones inside Wen Ning’s head and the material used was different as well. It shouldn’t be too difficult to bring Song Lan back to consciousness. He immediately pinched the two ends and started to slowly pull the nails out.

Feeling strange objects stirring within his head, Song Lan widened his eyes and growled in a low voice. Wen Ning only prevented him from breaking loose after he exerted more strength on him. When the nails had been pulled out, at once, as though he was a puppet whose strings had been cut off, he collapsed on the ground and ceased to move.

Suddenly, a furious roar came from where the other two fought, “Give it back!”

## Translator’s Notes

Koi Tower: Thanks to the suggestions by various readers in the comments, Jinlin tower will be changed to Koi Tower (so that you don’t have to memorize the difference between Jin Ling, LanlingJin, and Jinlin anymore).

## Chapter 42: Grasses—Part Ten

Lan WangJi's sword had slashed across Xue Yang's chest. Not only did he bleed, the Spirit-trapping Pouch that he hid in his lapels had been taken out by the Bichen's tip as well. Wei WuXian, though, couldn't see what was happening, "Xue Yang! What do you want him to give back to you? Shuanghua? It's not like Shuanghua is your sword to begin with, so why do you say 'give it back'? Do you know no shame?"

Xue Yang laughed loudly, "Senior Wei, you really don't want to show me any mercy, do you?"

Wei WuXian, "Laugh. Go on. Even if you die laughing, you won't be able to piece together Xiao XingChen's soul. He was so disgusted by you, yet you still want to bring him back to play games."

Abruptly, Xue Yang shouted, "Who wants to play games with him?!"

Wei WuXian, "Then why did you kneel and beg me so that I can help you mend his soul?" Of course, someone as sharp as Xue Yang knew that Wei WuXian was purposely diverting him, first to distract him with anger, second to make him raise his voice so that Lan WangJi could tell where he was and attack. Even so, he replied in spite of himself. He spoke in a cruel voice, "Why did I do so? Hah! How can you not know? I want to make him into a fierce corpse, an evil spirit, so that I can control him! Didn't he want to be a virtuous person? Then, I'll make it so that he never stops killing, so that he'll never be at peace!"

Wei WuXian, "Hmm? You hate him that much? Then why did you kill Chang Ping?"

Xue Yang sneered, "Why did I kill Chang Ping? Did you really need to ask, Patriarch YiLing?! Haven't I told you? I said that I was going to wipe out the entire YueyangChang Clan, so I won't even leave a dog behind!"

Whenever he talked, it was as though he was announcing his location. The sounds of a blade piercing through flesh kept coming, but Xue Yang's tolerance for pain was much higher than those of normal people. Wei WuXian had seen during Empathy that even if he was pierced through the stomach, he could laugh as if nothing had happened.

Wei WuXian continued, "That's a great reason you came up with. Unfortunately, the years don't add up. Someone like you who seeks revenge for the smallest things and murders in such

ruthless ways wouldn't have waited so many years to finish off one clan, would you? You know the reason why you killed Chang Ping."

Xue Yang, "Then, tell me. What do I know? What do I know?!"

He shouted the last sentence. Wei WuXian asked again, "You didn't just kill him. Why did you choose to use lingchi, the torture that represents 'punishment'? If you were avenging for yourself, why did you use Shuanghua, instead of your own Jiangzai? Why did you dig out his eyes and make it so that he was just like Xiao XingChen?"

Xue Yang shouted himself hoarse, "Nonsense! That's all nonsense! It's revenge—why in the world would I have let him die comfortably?"

Wei WuXian, "You were indeed seeking revenge, but whose revenge were you actually seeking? What a joke. If you wanted to seek revenge, the one you should've executed lingchi on is yourself!"

With two whooshes, the sharp noises of something slicing the air came right at him. Wei WuXian didn't even flinch. Wen Ning darted in front of him and intercepted two nails that shone a cruel, black light. Xue Yang let off a series of horrifying laughter, as though he was a screeching owl. The laughter died down at once, and he quieted. He ceased to pay heed to Wei WuXian and went back to fighting with Lan WangJi amid the fog.

Wei WuXian thought in silence, the little delinquent has got such a high vitality. It's as if he can't feel pain at all and will be fine no matter where he's injured. If only he talks a bit more

and Lan Zhan stabs him a few more times. I'm sure that he won't be able to jump around anymore after his arms and legs are chopped off. Well, unfortunately, he's no longer taking the bait!

Suddenly, a series of crisp knocks came from within the fog.

Thinking quick, Wei WuXian shouted, "Lan Zhan, attack where the pole knocks!"

Lan WangJi lunged at once. Xue Yang let out a suppressed moan. A moment later, the bamboo pole sounded again, at a place a few meters away!

Lan WangJi continued to attack where the noise came from. Xue Yang threatened, "Little Blind, aren't you scared that I'll break you into pieces, following me around like that?"

Ever since she was killed by Xue Yang, A-Qing had always been hiding so that he didn't find her. However, for some reason, Xue Yang didn't really care about such a ghost either, as though he felt that she was too weak to be cautious of. Now, though, A-Qing followed behind Xue Yang as if she was his shadow. Knocking her bamboo pole and revealing his location, she pointed out to Lan WangJi where he should attack!

Xue Yang's movements were extremely quick. He immediately appeared somewhere else. When she lived, A-Qing had also been a fast runner. Now that she was a ghost, she stuck closely to him as though she was a curse. She knocked her pole on the ground as quickly as she could. The crisp taps sounded near and far, left and right, in front and behind. They were impossible to avoid. As soon as they sounded, Bichen's sword glare followed immediately!

In the beginning, Xue Yang moved through the fog as though a fish amid water. He could both hide and sneak attacks however he wanted to. Yet, now, he had to spare attention to deal with A-Qing. With a curse, he quickly threw a talisman behind him. Immediately after the split second of distraction, following A-Qing's bone-chilling screech, Bichen pierced through his chest!

Although A-Qing's ghost had already been destroyed by Xue Yang's talisman and there ceased to be any noise that revealed where he was, the attack was vital. Xue Yang couldn't continue to be as unpredictable as before!

From amid the fog came the noises of someone coughing up blood. Wei WuXian tossed out a Spirit-trapping Pouch for it to save A-Qing's soul. With heavy steps, Xue Yang walked for a while, then suddenly launched forward. With his hands extended, he roared, "Give me it!" Bichen's blue light split through the air. Lan WangJi cleanly severed off one of his arms.

Blood spurted out at once. In front of Wei WuXian, a large area of white fog had been stained red. The scent of blood was so overwhelming that even a single breath brought in a moist, rusty odor. However, he didn't care about it at all. He concentrated on solely searching and absorbing the soul of A-Qing that had been scattered. On the other hand, although Xue Yang didn't make a single noise, there came the heavy sound of knees dropping onto the ground. It seemed that he had lost so much blood that he finally collapsed, unable to walk any further.

Lan WangJi summoned Bichen again. The next attack would cut off Xue Yang's head! Yet, suddenly, blue flames shot from the fog-covered earth to the sky.

It was fire from a transportation talisman!

Wei WuXian knew that the situation wasn't bright. Not caring for the dangers within the fog, he rushed over. Immediately afterward, he had almost slipped on the ground. Where the bloody

scent was strongest, the ground was covered in wet, still-fresh blood, all from Xue Yang's severed arm.

However, Xue Yang was gone.

Lan WangJi walked over. Wei WuXian asked, "The gravedigger?"

Xue Yang's most vital organ had been injured by Bichen, and he lost an arm as well. Judging from the amount of blood loss, he'd die for sure. It'd have been impossible for him to still have enough energy and spiritual powers to use a transportation talisman.

Lan WangJi nodded slightly, "I gave the gravedigger three blows. As he was close to being captured, a group of walking corpses attacked and allowed him the opportunity to escape." Wei WuXian spoke with a serious expression, "Although he was injured, the gravedigger still brought away Xue Yang's corpse, even though it cost him extensive spiritual powers. He probably knew who Xue Yang was and what he could do. Bringing away Xue Yang's corpse... was to search if he carried the Stygian Tiger Seal with him."

It was rumored that, after Xue Yang had been "eliminated" by Jin GuangYao, the Stygian Tiger Seal was lost. But, seeing from the current situation, it was very likely that he carried the seal with him. Tens of thousands of walking corpses, even fierce corpses, had been gathered in Yi City. They would've been extremely difficult to control with only corpse-poisoning powder and nails through the skull. Only the Stygian Tiger Seal could explain how Xue Yang commanded them at his wish, ordering them to obey him and attack for him. Somebody as crafty and mistrustful as him definitely wouldn't put the Tiger Seal somewhere they couldn't see. Only keeping it on him at all times would've made him feel a sense of security. When the gravedigger brought away his corpse, he brought away the Stygian Tiger Seal as well.

This was no trivial matter at all. Wei WuXian's voice was stern, "Now that the situation is already like this, we can only hope that there's a limit to the powers of the Tiger Seal that Xue Yang restored."

Suddenly, with a light toss, Lan WangJi passed something to him. Wei WuXian caught it perfectly, "What is it?"

Lan WangJi, "The right hand."

He had tossed over a new Qiankun Pouch. Having finally remembered why they had come to Yi City at the first place, Wei WuXian brightened up, "The right hand of our dear friend?"

Lan WangJi, "Mnn."

Under the obstructions of the gravedigger, the groups of walking corpses, and the thick fog, Lan WangJi still managed to successfully find the right hand of the corpse. Wei WuXian was more than pleased. He praised, "I expected no less from HanGuang-Jun! Now, we're one step ahead of them again. What a pity that it's not the head. I wanted to see what our dear friend looks like.

Well, I guess it'd happen soon enough... Where's Song Lan?"

After Xue Yang's corpse disappeared, the circulation of the fog quickened. It seemed to have thinned and the surroundings became somewhat easier to see. Because of this, Wei WuXian suddenly noticed that Song Lan was gone. At where he had originally lay, only Wen Ning still squatted on the ground, staring at them blankly.

Lan WangJi put his hand back to Bichen, which he had already unsheathed. Wei WuXian stopped him, "It's fine. There's no need to be alarmed. Song Lan, or the fierce corpse back there, probably doesn't have killing intentions anymore, or else Wen Ning would've alerted us. It's likely that he regained consciousness and left on his own."

He whistled lightly. Wen Ning stood up and proceeded to leave, his figure disappearing into the fog. The noises of chains dragging on the ground gradually faded into the distance. Lan WangJi didn't say anything more. He calmly turned to Wei WuXian, "Let us go."

Just as they were about to leave, suddenly, Wei WuXian stopped, "Wait." He saw something lying alone in the blood.

It was a severed left arm. Four of the fingers were closed tightly. The little finger was missing.

The fist of the arm was firmly clenched. Wei WuXian squatted down. Only by using most of his strength did he succeed in prying the fingers open one by one. After the fist had been opened, he found that it held a small piece of candy.

The piece of candy was tinted slightly black. It was definitely not edible anymore. It had been clenched so tightly that it was almost crushed.

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi returned to the coffin home together. The doors were open. As they had expected, Song Lan was standing beside the coffin that Xiao XingChen lay in, looking inside with his head hanging low.

All of the disciples unsheathed their swords. They huddled on the side, staring cautiously at the fierce corpse that had just attacked them. Seeing that Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi returned, they looked as if their lives had been saved, yet they were too scared to make any noise, afraid of alarming or infuriating Song Lan.

Wei WuXian walked into the coffin home and introduced to Lan WangJi, "This is Song Lan, Daozhang Song ZiChen."

Standing by the coffin, Song Lan raised his head and turned to them. Lifting up the hem of his robes, Lan WangJi stepped over the high threshold in an elegant manner, then nodded. Since Song Lan had regained his consciousness, his pupils returned as well. A pair of clear, black eyes stared back at them.

Amid the eyes that had originally been Xiao XingChen's, a deep, indescribable sorrow brimmed.

Thus, there was no need to ask any questions. Wei WuXian knew already. During the period that Xue Yang made him into a fierce corpse and commanded him, he saw and remembered everything.

No matter how much more they inquired, how much more they talked, it'd only lay more emphasis on the pain and hopelessness.

After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian took out two Spirit-trapping Pouches of the same small size. He handed them to Song Lan, "Daozhang Xiao XingChen and Maiden A-Qing."

Even though A-Qing was extremely scared of Xue Yang, a while ago, she still followed closely behind the one who killed her, refusing to let him dodge or escape until, finally, he was pierced through the heart by Bichen and got what he deserved. From a slap of the talisman, she had almost disappeared. Wei WuXian only brought back a few fragments by searching and piecing as hard as he could. However, now, it was also rather scattered, the same as Xiao XingChen.

Of the two lumps of weak souls, each was curled up in its Spirit-trapping Pouch. It was as if just a slight bump would cause them to dissipate within the pouch. With shaking hands, Song Lan took them over and rested them on top of his palm. He didn't even dare to carry them by the strings, afraid that they'd sway too much.

Wei WuXian asked, "Daozhang Song, what do you intend on doing with Daozhang Xiao XingChen's corpse?"

With one hand carefully cupping the two pouches, he pulled out Fuxue with his other hand and wrote two lines on the ground, "Incinerate the corpse. Look after the soul."

Now that Xiao XingChen's soul was so shattered, it definitely couldn't return to its body, so incinerating the corpse wouldn't be a bad idea. With the body gone and only a pure soul left, after being diligently looked after, maybe the day would come when it returned again.

Wei WuXian nodded, "What do you intend on doing afterwards?"

Song Lan wrote, "Roam this world with Shuanghua. Exorcise evil beings alongside XingChen." After a pause, he continued, "When he wakes, say I'm sorry, it wasn't your fault."

This was what he couldn't tell Xiao XingChen before he died.

The fog of Yi City was gradually melting away. One could already manage to see the roads and intersections. Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian led the group of disciples out of the deserted city. In front of the city gates, Song Lan parted with them.

He still wore the dark cultivation robes. Standing alone, he carried two swords, Shuanghua and Fuxue, he brought two souls, Xiao XingChen and A-Qing, and walked another path. Not the one that led them to Yi City.

Lan SiZhui stared at his leaving figure, “Xiao XingChen, the bright moon, the gentle breeze; Song ZiChen, the distant snow, the bitter frost... I wonder if the two of them would be able to meet each other again.”

Wei WuXian walked over the road covered in weeds. Suddenly, he saw a patch of grass and thought to himself, back then, this was where Xiao XingChen and A-Qing took Xue Yang back.

Lan JingYi, “Now you should tell us what you really saw during Empathy, right? Why would the person be Xue Yang? Why did he pretend to be Xiao XingChen?”

“And, also, was that the Ghost General? Where did the Ghost General go? Why do we not see him anymore? Is he still in Yi City? Why did he appear so suddenly?”

Wei WuXian pretended as though he didn’t hear the second series of questions, “Well, this is a very complicated story...”

As they walked, after he finished telling the story, everyone was so depressed that nobody still remembered the Ghost General.

Lan JingYi was the first one to cry, “Why would something like this exist!?”

Jin Ling raged, “That Xue Yang is such a filthy scumbag! Death was letting him off too lightly! If Fairy were here, I would’ve made her chomp him to death!”

Wei WuXian was terrified. If Fairy had been here, before Xue Yang died, he himself would’ve been scared to death.

The boy who had complimented A-Qing through the door slit stomped his feet, “Maiden A-Qing, oh, Maiden A-Qing!”

Lan JingYi cried the loudest. He looked awful, but this time, nobody reminded him to keep his voice low, since Lan SiZhui’s eyes were red as well. It was fortunate that Lan WangJi didn’t silence him. Lan JingYi suggested through snot and tears, “We should go burn some paper money for Daozhang Xiao XingChen and Maiden A-Qing. There is a village in front of the road fork over there, right? Let us buy some things and pray for them.”

Everyone agreed, “Sure, sure!”

As they talked, they arrived at the village. Lan JingYi and Lan SiZhui impatiently scurried inside and carried out a few random incense sticks, candles, and paper money. Walking over to the side, they built something that resembled a stove using bricks and rocks. The boys then squatted around it and started to burn paper money, muttering as they fanned the fire. Wei WuXian wasn’t in a great mood either. On the way here, he didn’t even tell many jokes. Seeing this, though, he finally couldn’t bear it any longer. He turned to Lan WangJi, “HanGuang-Jun, look at what they’re doing right in front of other people’s doors. You’re not even stopping them.”

Lan WangJi replied in an indifferent tone, “You can stop them.” Wei WuXian, “Fine. I’ll discipline them for you.”

And he went over, “Am I seeing things? All of you are disciples of prominent sects. Your parents and relatives must’ve taught you that dead people can’t receive paper money, right? Why would dead people want money? They can’t receive those. And, you’re in front of somebody’s doors. If you burn them here...”

Lan JingYi waved at him, “Shoo, shoo. You are blocking the wind. It will not be able to burn anymore. And, it is not like you have died, so how do you know that dead people do not receive paper money?”

With a face covered in tears and ashes, another boy turned to him and agreed, “That’s right. How do you know? What if they can actually receive them?”

Wei WuXian murmured, “How do I know?” Of course he knew!

During the ten-or-so years when he had been dead, he hadn’t even received one single piece of paper money!

Lan JingYi stabbed another knife into his heart, “Even if you could not receive them, it was probably because nobody burned them for you.”

Wei WuXian asked himself in silence, how come? Was I really that much of a failure? Was there not a single person who burned paper money for me? Was it really because nobody burned them that I didn’t receive any?

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that it was impossible. He turned around and whispered to Lan WangJi, “HanGuang-Jun, have you burnt paper money for me? At least you’ve burnt paper money for me, right?”

Lan WangJi glanced at him. He looked down, dusting away the ashes that stuck to the bottom of his sleeve, then stared quietly into the distance, giving not a single word in reply. Looking at his calm face, Wei WuXian thought to himself, Really?

Had he really not burnt anything?!

Suddenly, a villager walked over with a bow on his back. He seemed rather annoyed, “Why are you burning these here? It’s in front of my house. How ominous!”

These boys hadn’t done anything like this before and didn’t know that it was ominous to burn paper money in front of someone’s house. All of them apologized. Lan SiZhui hurried to wipe his face, “Is that your house over there?”

The villager, “Hey, brat, look at what you’re saying. My family’s been here for three generations. How can it possibly be anything but my house?”

Hearing his tone, Jin Ling grew unhappy at once and was about to stand up, “How dare you talk to us like this?”

Wei WuXian pressed his head and held him down again. Lan SiZhui continued, “I understand now. Sorry, I did not mean anything else with the question I asked. It was just that, the last time we passed this house, we saw another hunter, which was why we were confused.”

The villager was puzzled, “Another hunter? What do you mean another hunter?”

He made a “three” with his fingers, “This house was passed straight down through the three generations. There’s only me, no other brothers! My dad passed away long ago and I haven’t even married much less had a child. Where on Earth would there be another hunter?”

Lan JingYi, “There really was!”

He stood up as well, “He wore a lot of clothes and had a big cap on, sitting right in your yard repairing his bow and arrows, as though he was going to hunt soon. When we arrived, we even asked him for the directions. He was the one who pointed us to Yi City!”

The villager spat, “Nonsense! You really saw him in my yard? Nobody like him exists in my household! Even ghosts could beat up humans in a place like Yi City. He directed you there? More like he wanted to kill you! The thing you saw was definitely a ghost!”

He spat a couple of times, venting out his anger, then shook his head and turned around to leave. The boys were left staring at one another. Lan JingYi was still protesting, “But he really was sitting in this yard. I remember really clearly that...”

Wei WuXian said a few things to Lan WangJi. He then turned around, “You understand now? Somebody led you to Yi City. The hunter who directed you there wasn’t a villager here at all. He was disguised by someone with ill intentions.”

Jin Ling, “Was it that somebody had been leading us here ever since the corpses of the cats? Was the fake hunter the one who did all those things?”

Wei WuXian, “Most likely so.”

Lan SiZhui wondered, "Why did he spend so much effort leading us to Yi City?"

Wei WuXian, "We still don't know. But, after this, please be careful. If you run into such strange things again, don't go tracking them down alone. First contact your sects and work together with a large group of people. If not for how HanGuang-Jun also happened to be at Yi City, you might've even died."

Imagining what would've happened if they were stuck in Yi City, a lot of the disciples felt their hair standing up. No matter if they ended up surrounded by groups of corpses or facing the living demon Xue Yang, the situation would've been absolutely terrifying.

Walking with the disciples, after a while, when the sky had almost darkened, Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian finally arrived at the city where the dog and donkey had been placed.

The city was not only brightly lit, but also filled with the chatter of people. The disciples all exclaimed that this finally seemed like a place where humans lived.

Wei WuXian extended his arms toward the donkey and shouted, "Lil' Apple!"

Lil' Apple brayed as though it was mad. Immediately, Wei WuXian heard the barks of a dog. He darted behind Lan WangJi at once. Fairy had also rushed over. The dog and the donkey stood on opposite sides and snarled at each other.

Lan WangJi, "Leash it. It is time to eat."

Dragging Wei WuXian, who was almost glued to his back, he walked toward the second floor, following the tea servant. Jin Ling and the rest wanted to follow, yet Lan WangJi turned around and gave them an obscure glance. Lan SiZhui immediately told the others, "The elders' and the juniors' rooms should be separated. We can stay on the first floor."

Lan WangJi nodded and continued to walk up, his face as detached as always. Jin Ling stood on the stairs hesitantly, unsure of whether to go up or down. Wei WuXian turned around and grinned, "The adults and the children should be separated. It's best if you don't see some of the things that happen."

Jin Ling's lips twitched, "Who'd want to see that!"

Lan WangJi told a servant to prepare one table downstairs for the group of disciples and a private room upstairs for Wei WuXian and him. The two sat across from each other.

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, listen to me. Please don't have your sect handle all of the aftermath of Yi City alone. It's such a big city. If you really want to tidy the place up, it'd cost you a lot in terms of many aspects. It'll be quite difficult. Shuzhong isn't under the administration of the GusuLan Sect anyways. Count the disciples downstairs and see which sects they came from. Add their sects up as well. Those sects should also help you."

Lan WangJi, "I will consider it."

Wei WuXian, "Yes, please do. Everyone likes to fight for the praise and push around the responsibilities. Now, if your sect is taken advantage of, even if it's for the good of them, they might not feel grateful or understand why you did it. If this repeats too much, they'd take it as granted that your sect always takes care of such things. That's how things are in this world."

After a pause, he continued, "But, speaking of it, they really are unlucky. Yi City is too remote and there aren't any lookout towers around it. Or else, Jin Ling, SiZhui, and the rest wouldn't have accidentally barged in. Maiden A-Qing and Daozhang Xiao XingChen's souls wouldn't have stayed hidden for all these years either."

No matter how big or how small, there were as many cultivational sects as stars in a night sky. Most were situated at flourishing cities that could be conveniently accessed or spiritual grounds with beautiful scenery. The sects, however, were unwilling to be stationed at certain remote areas. Rogue cultivators rarely travelled to those places either. Thus, when evil beings haunted, the dwellers there usually suffered in silence, unable to find help anywhere.

When the previous leader of the LanlingJin Sect, Jin GuangShan, was still alive, Jin GuangYao had brought the matter up before. However, it would have cost a great deal and

Jin GuangShan wasn't overly enthusiastic about the idea either. Also, since, back then, the LanlingJin Sect's leadership wasn't as powerful, the matter wasn't seen as important, and nothing ended up happening.

After Jin GuangYao officially succeeded the position of Sect Leader and became the Chief Cultivator, he immediately gathered people and resources from the sects, and started to carry out his past goals. In the beginning, the voices of opposition were deafening. A lot of people suspected that the LanlingJin Sect used it to gain personal benefits and stuff its own pockets.

With a smiling face, Jin GuangYao persisted for five years. During the years, he allied but also fell out with countless people. Using both gentle and forceful methods, he did all that he could

and what he wished for was finally completed. More than twelve hundred "lookout towers" had been built.

These "lookout towers" were scattered around the more remote places. Every one of them were assigned disciples from certain sects. If anything, strange happened, they'd take action at once. When they couldn't deal with the matter, they'd send out messages to other sects or rogue cultivators for help. Even if the cultivators who came wanted something in return while the locals were too poor to give them any, the money that the LanlingJin Sect gathered throughout each year would be enough to support them.

All of these happened after the death of the YiLing Patriarch. Wei WuXian only heard the ins and outs from Lan WangJi after they passed a few lookout towers during their journey. Rumors had it that Koi Tower was preparing to build the next batch of lookout towers, increasing them to three thousand in number so that they covered a greater area. Although after the first lookout towers were built, they received widespread approvals due to their notable effects, the voices of suspicion and ridicule had never died either. When the time came, the cultivation world would definitely be thrown into chaos again.

Not long later, both the food and the liquor arrived. Wei WuXian glanced over the table, pretending as if he didn't mean it. Almost all of the dishes were covered in red. Paying attention to Lan WangJi's chopsticks, he notes that he ate mostly from the milder dishes, rarely the bright- red ones. Even when he did, his expression remained the exact same. Wei WuXian felt something tug at his heart.

Having noticed his gaze, Lan WangJi asked, "What is wrong?"

Wei WuXian slowly poured himself a cup of liquor, "I want somebody to drink with me."

## Chapter 43: Allure—Part One

He never actually expected Lan WangJi to drink with him, and simply finished the liquor in his own cup. However, staring silently at him, Lan WangJi gently swept his own sleeves aside. He poured a cup for himself as well and, after a pause, he slowly downed the liquor. Wei WuXian was quite surprised, “HanGuang-Jun, you really are considerate, aren’t you? You’re really gonna drink with me?”

The last time they drank together, Wei WuXian didn’t pay much attention to Lan WangJi’s expression. This time, however, he went out of his way to scrutinize it.

Lan WangJi closed his eyelids when he drank. With a faint frown, he finished the liquor, and only opened his eyes again after subtly pursing up his lips. A blanket of mist even seemed to have fallen over his eyes.

Resting his chin in his hand, Wei WuXian started to count in silence. As he had expected, when he reached the number eight, Lan WangJi put the cup down. He touched his forehead, closed his eyes, and fell asleep.

Wei WuXian was completely convinced—Lan WangJi really did fall asleep before he woke up drunk!

For some unknown reason, he was starting to feel a bit eager. Finishing all of the leftover liquor in one gulp, Wei WuXian stood up and paced around the room, his hands folded behind him.

After a while, he walked toward Lan WangJi, bent down, and whispered by his ear, “Lan Zhan?” There was no reply. Wei WuXian continued, “WangJi-xiong?”

Lan WangJi was leaning his head on his right hand. His breathing was calmer than ever. Both his features and the hand at his forehead were impeccably fair in color. He looked as if he was a piece of fine jade.

The faint fragrance of sandalwood that surrounded him had originally been cold, somewhat grim. Now, however, as it combined with the liquor’s mellow aroma, a few tinges of warmth rippled through the coldness. As though a saccharine whisp had wound its way through, the scent could almost be described as intoxicating.

Now that Wei WuXian was near enough, the scent intertwined with his breaths. He couldn’t help but bend down further so that he was even closer to Lan WangJi. Vaguely, he thought to himself, Strange... Why is it starting to feel a bit hot in here?

Amid the fusion of liquor and sandalwood, his face inched nearer and nearer, while he himself didn’t notice it at all. His voice had lowered as well. In an almost teasing manner, he murmured, “Second... Bro-...”

Suddenly, a voice entered his ears, “Young Master...”

Wei WuXian’s face was already less than an inch away from Lan WangJi’s. The word “Brother” was at the tip of his tongue as well. Startled by the sound, he almost fell onto the ground with a slip of his feet.

He immediately positioned himself in front of Lan WangJi. Then, he turned to the wooden windows of where the voice came from.

A careful knock could be heard through the windows, then a small voice drifted through the slit, “Young Master...”

Wei WuXian finally noticed that his heart was beating a bit too fast. He puzzled over it again, then regained his composure. Walking over, he raised the window to see a black-clothed figure dangling upside-down with legs hung at the roof, preparing to knock once more. Wei WuXian quickly opened the window, which bumped into the person’s head. The figure exclaimed with a light ah. Holding the windows back with both of his hands, he finally made eye contact with Wei WuXian.

A cold breeze barged into the room. Wen Ning's eyes were opened, no longer an ashen white, but instead filled with a pair of black, silent pupils.

The two stayed like this, one standing, one hanging, and stared at each other for a few moments. Wei WuXian, "Come down."

With a sudden loss of balance, Wen Ning fell and slammed onto the ground outside the inn. Wei WuXian wiped away the nonexistent sweat on his forehead.

He commented, we really chose the right place!

It was a good thing that they chose this inn. For the sake of tranquility, the windows of the private room faced a small grove instead of the streets. Using the support pole, Wei WuXian left the windows open and looked down, leaning outside. With his heavy body, Wen Ning made a man-shaped dent on the ground. He was still staring at Wei WuXian even as he lay in the dent.

In a hushed voice, Wei WuXian shouted at him, "I told you to come down, not go down. 'Come', you understand?"

Wen Ning looked up at him. Dusting off his clothes, he crawled out of the dent and hurried to reply, "Oh. I'm coming."

As soon as he finished, he clung to a pillar and prepared to climb. Wei WuXian interrupted him at once, "Stop! Stay where you are. I'll come get you."

He returned to Lan WangJi and leaned down toward his ears, "Lan Zhan, oh, Lan Zhan. Please

sleep for a while longer. I'll be back before you know it. Won't you be a good boy?"

After he spoke, he felt a strange urge. He couldn't help but brushed the tip of his finger against Lan WangJi's eyelashes.

In a slight manner, Lan WangJi's lashes trembled and his brows twitched. He looked rather perturbed. Removing his hand, Wei WuXian leaped out the window. He hopped a few times on the branches by the roof, then landed on the ground. Right after he turned around, Wen Ning kneeled down in front him.

Wei WuXian, "What are you doing?"

Wen Ning said nothing, his head hanging low.

Wei WuXian asked again, "Do you really have to talk to me like this?" Wen Ning lowered his voice, "Young Master, I'm sorry."

Wei WuXian, "Well then."

Immediately after he spoke, he kneeled in front of Wen Ning as well. Startled, Wen Ning proceeded to kowtow him, while Wei WuXian soon returned the kowtow as well. Wen Ning was so alarmed that he jumped up at once. Only then did Wei WuXian stand up again, sweeping off the dirt at his hems, "You could've just stood straight and talked to me, you know?"

Wen Ning was still looking at the ground, afraid to say anything. Wei WuXian asked, "When did you regain consciousness?"

Wen Ning, "Just a while ago."

Wei WuXian, "Do you still remember the things that happened when the nails were in your head?"

Wen Ning, "Some... but not all."

Wei WuXian, "What do you remember?"

Wen Ning, "That I'd been chained in a really dark place. I think people sometimes came to check on me."

Wei WuXian, "Do you remember who they were?"

Wen Ning, "No, only that somebody nailed something into my head."

Wei WuXian, "It was probably Xue Yang. He also used those nails to control Song Lan. He used to be a guest cultivator at the LanlingJin Sect, but we still don't know whether he did such a thing out of his own intentions or was it the LanlingJin Sect's wishes." After giving it

some thought, he continued, "Most likely, it was out of the LanlingJin Sect's wishes. Back then, they all said that you'd been completely annihilated. If the LanlingJin Sect didn't take part in this, he wouldn't have been able to hide the truth all on his own." With a pause, he asked again, "Then, what happened afterwards? How did you go to Dafan Mountain?"

Wen Ning, "Afterwards, I don't know how long had passed, but I suddenly heard someone clap, and then, Young Master, you said 'wake up,' so I... struggled out of the chains and rushed outside..."

It was the command that Wei WuXian gave to the three fierce corpses at Mo Village.

In the past, Wei WuXian had given the Ghost General countless commands. Thus, he also heard the first command that Wei WuXian gave after he came back to this world.

And so, in a muddled state of mind, Wen Ning followed other corpses' directions and Wei WuXian's commands. The LanlingJin Sect, on the other hand, knew that they couldn't make public the fact that they'd been hiding the Ghost General. Or else, if the news leaked out, not only would its own reputation be damaged, the people would also start to panic, which was why

even though Wen Ning ran away, they didn't dare to pursue him with any fanfare. After a mess of a journey, Wen Ning finally reached Wei WuXian, who was playing the flute on top of Dafan Mountain, and the two successfully met again.

Wei WuXian sighed, "You said that you 'don't know how long had passed'. It's already been more than ten years." He continued after a short pause, "Well, it's fair to say that I don't know much more than you do. Do you want me to tell you some of the things that happened?"

Wen Ning, "I've heard of some." Wei WuXian, "Like what?"

Wen Ning, "I heard that the Burial Mounds are gone, that everyone... is gone."

Truthfully, Wei WuXian had only wanted to tell him about the more trivial gossip, such as how the rules of the Lan Sect had increased from three thousand to four thousand. Not at all expecting Wen Ning to bring up such a grave topic to start with, he could only stay silent.

Despite of this being a grave topic, Wen Ning's tone wasn't mournful at all, as though he had already known that it would've happened. In reality, though, this was indeed the case. They expected the worst-case scenario countless times, as early as more than a decade ago.

After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian asked again, "What else have you heard?"

Wen Ning whispered, "Sect Leader Jiang, Jiang Cheng, brought a siege upon the Burial Mounds. And he killed you."

Wei WuXian, "I'll have to clarify this one. He didn't kill me. I died from a backfire." Wen Ning finally looked up at him, "But, Sect Leader Jiang clearly..."

Wei WuXian, "Nobody can walk safely on a single-plank bridge for their whole life. It couldn't be helped."

Wen Ning seemed as if he wanted to sigh, but he had no breath to let out. Wei WuXian ended the conversation, "Okay. Let's not talk about him anymore. Have you heard of anything else?"

"Yes." Wen Ning gazed at him, "Young Master Wei, you died such an awful death."

"..." Looking at how miserable he was, Wei WuXian sighed, "So you haven't heard any good news?"

Wen Ning frowned, "No. There hasn't been any." "..." Wei WuXian was speechless.

Suddenly, a loud shattering noise came from the main hall of the first floor. Lan SiZhui's voice followed, "Were we not talking about Xue Yang? Why are we now arguing over this?"

Jin Ling, "We are talking about Xue Yang. Was what I said wrong? What did Xue Yang do? He's worse than scum, and Wei Ying was even more disgusting than him! What do you mean 'we shouldn't generalize them'? These monsters are vermin to our world! We should kill, murder, and slaughter every single one of them!"

Wen Ning flinched. Wei WuXian gestured for him to stay still. On the other side, Lan JingYi joined in as well, “Why are you being so angry about it? SiZhui did not say that Wei WuXian should not have been killed. He just said that not everyone who cultivates the ghost path is the same type of person as Xue Yang. Did you have to throw things? I did not get to eat that one yet...”

Jin Ling sneered, “Didn’t he also say that ‘the founder of this path may not have intended harm with it’? Who was ‘the founder of this path’? Go on, tell me, who else could it be except for Wei Ying?! I just can’t seem to understand you. Your GusuLan Sect is also a prominent sect, and back then you also lost quite a number of people in Wei Ying’s hands, didn’t you? Was it hard, killing all those corpses and whatnot that were under his control? Lan Yuan, why are you speaking from such a strange standpoint? From the way you talk, don’t tell me that you’re making excuses for Wei Ying!”

Lan Yuan was Lan SiZhui’s birth name. He protested, “I was not making excuses for him. I was simply suggesting that we may not want to make conclusions before we understand the entire situation. You know, before we came to Yi City, a lot of people also claimed that the YueyangChang Clan’s Chang Ping was killed by Daozhang Xiao XingChen for revenge, right? But what was the truth?”

Jin Ling, “Nobody actually saw whether or not Chang Ping was killed by Daozhang Xiao XingChen. All they had were guesses, so why are you calling them claims? Just try and count how many cultivators lost their lives to Wei Ying, to Wen Ning, to the Tiger Seal during the battles at the Qiongqi Path and the Nightless Day! These are truths that everyone accepts, that

nobody can deny! And what else I’ll never forget is that he ordered Wen Ning to kill my father and mother!”

If Wen Ning had a single trace of blood in his complexion, it would’ve already drained out of his face.

He breathed, “... Maiden Jiang’s son?” Wei WuXian stayed still.

Jin Ling continued, “My uncle grew up with him, my grandfather saw him as his own child, my grandmother wasn’t horrible to him either, but what did he do? He made Lotus Pier the lair of the Wen Sect, he wrecked the entire YunmengJiang Sect, he caused the deaths of both my parents and grandparents, and now my uncle is the only one left! He brought about his own death through the havoc he created and ended up leaving not even a whole corpse behind him! Just which part of the entire situation do you not understand? Just what excuses are you still making for him?!”

He argued forcefully, while Lan SiZhui didn’t reply at all. A moment later, another boy spoke up, “Why are we suddenly getting so heated over such a thing? Let’s just drop the subject, alright? We haven’t finished eating yet. The food’s gonna go cold.”

Judging from the voice, he was the “sentimental” one that Wei WuXian poked fun at. Someone else agreed, “ZiZhen is right. We should stop arguing. SiZhui simply forgot to choose his words carefully. It was only an offhand comment—how could he have thought about so much? Sit down, Young Master Jin. Let us continue to eat.”

“That’s right. All of us had just left Yi City, so technically we’ve already been through life and death together... We really shouldn’t argue over such a careless mistake.”

Jin Ling snorted. Lan SiZhui finally responded, his tone as polite as ever, “I am sorry. I should have put more thought to my wording. Young Master Jin, please sit back down. We would not want to continue and bring HanGuang-Jun down here as well.”

The mention of HanGuang-Jun was truly a splendid move. Immediately, Jin Ling stopped, not even making another noise. The sounds of moving tables and chairs came through. It seemed that he sat back down again. The hall quickly refilled with clamor, and the boys’ voices were soon drowned out by the clinks of bowls and dishes. However, Wei WuXian and Wen Ning still stood silently in the grove, their expressions stern.

Without making a sound, Wen Ning kneeled down again. Wei WuXian only noticed him after a short pause. Waving his hand weakly, he responded, “It wasn’t your fault.”

Just as Wen Ning was about to open his mouth again, he suddenly looked behind Wei WuXian and hesitated. Before Wei WuXian could turn around, a white-robed figure walked past him and kicked Wen Ning’s shoulder.

Wen Ning created another man-shaped dent on the ground.

Wei WuXian hurried to pull back Lan WangJi, who seemed as though he wanted to kick again, “HanGuang-Jun, HanGuang-Jun! Calm down!”

It appeared that the time for “sleeping” had passed, while the time for “being drunk” had arrived, and thus Lan WangJi found his way outside.

The situation felt somewhat familiar—history really did repeat itself, didn’t it? However, this time, Lan WangJi looked even more normal than last time. He didn’t wear his boots wrong, either. Even when he rudely kicked over Wen Ning, his expression was still perfectly righteous. Nobody could find any fault on him. After Wei WuXian pulled him back, he fixed his sleeves and nodded. He stood proudly where he was, stopping himself from kicking again.

Wei WuXian used the time to ask Wen Ning, “How are you?” Wen Ning, “I’m fine.”

Wei WuXian, “If you’re fine then stand up! What are you still kneeling for?” Wen Ning crawled up and hesitated, “Young Master Lan.”

Lan WangJi scrunched his brows and covered his ears. He then turned around with his back toward Wen Ning. Facing Wei WuXian, he used his own body to block their eye contact.

Wen Ning, “...”

Wei WuXian, “It’s best if you don’t stand there. Lan Zhan, uh, doesn’t really like seeing you.” Wen Ning, “... What happened to Young Master Lan?”

Wei WuXian, “Nothing much. He’s just drunk.”

“What?” Wen Ning’s face was blank, as though he couldn’t accept such a thing. After a while, he finally continued, “Then... What are you going to do?”

Wei WuXian, “Well, what can I do? I’m gonna carry him inside and tuck him in.” Lan WangJi, “Okay.”

Wei WuXian, “Hmm? Aren’t you covering your ears? How come you’re suddenly able to hear me again?”

This time, Lan WangJi refused to answer, pretending that the one who interrupted them a moment ago wasn’t him. Wei WuXian wasn’t sure of how to react. He turned to Wen Ning, “Be careful, yourself.”

Wen Ning nodded. He couldn’t help but look at Lan WangJi again. Just as he was about to leave, Wei WuXian stopped him, “Wen Ning, why don’t you... find somewhere to hide first?”

Wen Ning paused for a second. Wei WuXian added, “One can say that you’ve died twice already. Go get some good rest.”

After he left, Wei WuXian took away the hands that Lan WangJi blocked his ears with, “Alright. He’s gone. You can’t hear or see him anymore.”

Lan WangJi finally let go of his own ears. He stared blankly at Wei WuXian with the pair of light-colored eyes.

His eyes were so clear, so honest that a desire of mischief surged through Wei WuXian. As though something inside of his body had been ignited, he smiled teasingly, “Lan Zhan, you’re still gonna answer whatever I ask? Do whatever I tell you to?”

Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

Wei WuXian, “Take off your forehead ribbon.”

Obediently, Lan WangJi reached behind his head and slowly untied the strands. He took off the white forehead ribbon, which had been sewn with the motif of drifting clouds.

Holding the ribbon in his hands, Wei WuXian turned it over a few times, examining every angle of it, "So there really isn't anything so special about it, is there? And I thought that it's hiding

some sort of a gigantic secret. Back then, though, why were you so mad when I took it off?" Or perhaps the past Lan WangJi simply hated him, alongside everything that he did?

Suddenly, he felt something tighten at his wrists. Lan WangJi had tied both of his hands together using the forehead ribbon and was starting to make knots over it.

Wei WuXian, "What are you doing?"

He wanted to see what exactly Lan WangJi wanted to do, so he let him continue. After Lan WangJi secured his hands together, he first tied a simple knot. He thought for a while and, as though he felt that something wasn't quite right, he changed it to a tighter knot. He then thought about it some more, still unsatisfied, and tied another knot on top.

The GusuLan Sect's forehead ribbon was a strip of fabric that hung down at the back after it had been fastened. When one moved, it fluttered elegantly in the air, which was why it was rather long. Lan WangJi tied seven or eight knots on the ribbon, forming a stack of small, ugly-looking lumps, and finally felt pleased enough to stop.

Wei WuXian, "Hey, do you still want this ribbon of yours?"

Lan WangJi's frown dissolved. Holding onto the other end of the forehead ribbon, he lifted Wei WuXian's hands in front of himself, as though he was admiring what a masterpiece he had just created. With his hands suspended in the air, Wei WuXian thought to himself, I probably look a lot like a criminal right now... Wait, why am I playing with him like this? Wasn't I supposed to be the one playing him?

Wei WuXian finally realized, "Take it off."

Lan WangJi happily reached for his collar and sash, repeating the exact same approach as before. Wei WuXian shouted, "Don't take this off! Take off the thing on my hands. The thing that you're tying me with. The ribbon."

If Lan WangJi not only tied his hands together but also stripped him of his clothes, the scene would be scary beyond belief!

Hearing his request, Lan WangJi furrowed his brows again, and proceeded to do nothing. Wei WuXian raised his hands and coaxed, "You said that you'll listen to me, didn't you? Be a good boy and take it off."

Lan WangJi glanced at him, then silently moved his sight away, as though he couldn't understand what Wei WuXian was saying and had to ponder upon it for a while longer. Wei WuXian complained, "Oh, now I get it! You're all hyped if I tell you to tie me up, but you can't understand it if I tell you to take it off. Is that so?"

The Lan Sect's forehead ribbon was made from the same material as its uniform. Although it looked flimsy, it was actually quite sturdy. And, since Lan WangJi wrapped it tightly around and tied a long strand of knots, Wei WuXian couldn't struggle out of it no matter how hard he tried. He commented in silence, I really did shoot myself in the foot, didn't I? Good thing that it's only a forehead ribbon, not some weird magical ropes, or else he would've really tied me up.

Lan WangJi stared into the distance as he tugged at the ends of the forehead ribbon, contently swinging them around. Wei WuXian pleaded, "Can you please take it off? HanGuang-Jun, how can someone as graceful as you do such a thing? What's the use of tying me like this? It's gonna look so bad on you if someone sees us like this, right?"

Hearing the last sentence, Lan WangJi started to drag him toward the streets.

Pulled around by Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian staggered, "W-w-wait a sec. What I meant was that it'd be bad if someone sees this, not that you should let someone see this. Hey! You're just pretending to not understand me, aren't you? Are you doing this on purpose? So you're only gonna understand what you want to understand? Lan Zhan, Lan WangJi!"

Before he even finished speaking, Lan WangJi had already dragged him out of the grove. They walked around onto the street and entered the main hall again through the first floor. The juniors were still eating and fooling around. Even though a minor disagreement happened, young people were always quick to forget these matters. They were in the middle of playing a drinking game. Some of the bolder juniors of the Lan Sect wanted to sneak a few sips as well. There would always be somebody watching the stairway that led to the second floor, keeping an eye out for Lan WangJi. None of them expected that Lan WangJi would suddenly drag Wei WuXian through the main entrance, where they never paid attention to. All of them were shocked after they turned around.

As Lan JingYi hurled himself at the cup of liquor on the table, hoping to cover it up, he knocked over a few bowls and dishes along the way. The object that he wanted to cover up became even more conspicuous. Lan SiZhui stood up, “H-HanGuang-Jun, why have you come inside through this entrance again?”

Wei WuXian laughed, “Haha. Your HanGuang-Jun was feeling a bit too hot and decided to take a stroll outside so that he could also catch all of you off guard. You see? Here you are, drinking when you’re not supposed to.”

He secretly prayed that Lan WangJi would haul him upstairs directly, without doing or saying anything unnecessary. If he kept silent and maintained the cold appearance, nobody would notice anything wrong with him.

Just as the thought passed through his mind, Lan WangJi dragged him toward the juniors' table. Lan SiZhui was beyond shock, “HanGuang-Jun, your forehead ribbon...”

Before he could finish his words, he saw Wei WuXian's hands. HanGuang-Jun's forehead ribbon was tied around Wei WuXian's wrists.

As though he felt that not enough people noticed this fact, holding the ends of the ribbon, Lan WangJi held up Wei WuXian's hands and displayed it for everyone to see.

#### Translator's Notes

Burial Mounds: Well, now that we have the Cloud Recesses, the Lotus Pier, and the Koi Tower, why not give Luanzang Hill a proper name as well?

## Chapter 44: Allure—Part Two

The chicken wing that Lan JingYi was holding in his mouth plopped into his bowl, splattering the sauce onto the front of his clothes.

One single thought filled Wei WuXian's mind—after Lan WangJi sobered up, he wouldn't ever have the face to look at others again.

Jin Ling was bewildered, "... What's he doing?"

Wei WuXian, "Showing you guys a special way to use the Lan Sect's forehead ribbon." Lan SiZhui, "What special way..."

Wei WuXian, "When you find a really strange corpse and you feel that you should take it back to examine it properly, you can take off your forehead ribbon and bring it back like this."

Lan JingYi blurted, "But you cannot do that! Our sect's forehead ribbon is..."

Lan SiZhui stuffed the chicken wing back into his mouth, "Oh, I see! I did not know that it can be used in such a way!"

Ignoring the strange looks that other people gave them, Lan WangJi dragged Wei WuXian up the stairs.

He entered the room, turned around, closed the doors, latched them, and finally pushed the table over as though he wanted to block out an imaginary enemy. Watching Lan WangJi hurry around, Wei WuXian asked, "Are you gonna kill me here?"

Within the private room, there was a wooden screen, which separated the space inside the room into two halves. One half had a table and a few chairs for eating and chatting, while the other had a long bed and curtains for resting. After Lan WangJi dragged him to the other side of the screen, he forcefully pushed Wei WuXian onto the bed.

Wei WuXian's head knocked lightly against the wooden backing that was joined to the bed. He gave an offhand "ow" in exclamation as he thought, is he gonna make me sleep again? It's not nine yet, is it?

Hearing the exclamation, Lan WangJi lifted the hems of his white robes and sat down elegantly on the bed, reaching out to feel Wei WuXian's head. Although he was expressionless, his movements were extremely gentle, as though he was asking "did it hurt?"

As his hand felt around, Wei WuXian's lips twitched, "It hurts! It hurts sooo much!"

From the cries of pain, a slight worrying expression finally formed over Lan WangJi's face. His hands were even gentler as he patted Wei WuXian's shoulder as though to comfort him. Wei WuXian raised his wrists for him to see, "Why don't you let me go? HanGuang-Jun, it's so tight that my hands are almost bleeding. It hurts so much! Take off the ribbon and let me go, okay? Okay?"

Lan WangJi covered his mouth at once. Wei WuXian, "Mn mnn mnnffff mnn mn mnffffnnnnn mnn mnnnnn mnn mnnn nfff mn nn, mnn nn mnn mnnffff mnnn mnnfff nnff mnnn mnnff mnn nnf mn mnn mnff!?"

So, you pretend not to understand the things that you don't want to do, and if you really can't pretend, you're just gonna not let me say them?! How rude!

Wei WuXian thought to himself, now that things are like this, don't blame anything on me. Lan WangJi was tightly covering Wei WuXian's mouth with one hand. Under it, Wei WuXian parted his lips and quickly brushed the tip of his tongue over Lan WangJi's palm. It was only the dip of a dragonfly, yet Lan WangJi looked as if his palm had been signed by a flame. He instantly took his hand away.

Wei WuXian took in a deep breath. Just as he felt that he one-upped Lan WangJi again, he saw him turn around. Sitting on the bed, Lan WangJi hugged his knees and clutched the hand that Wei WuXian had just licked to his chest, not moving at all.

Wei WuXian, "What's this? What are you doing?"

He appeared as though he'd given up on life, having been tainted by a pervert and such. People who walked upon the scene might actually think that Wei WuXian did something to him. Wei WuXian commented on his defeated look, "You didn't like it? Well, it's not my fault if you didn't like it. You're the one who was being so pushy and didn't even let me speak. Why don't you come here, and I'll wipe it for you?"

He reached toward Lan WangJi's shoulder with his bound hands, but Lan WangJi avoided him. Seeing how quietly he nestled at the corner of the bed, Wei WuXian felt the familiar urge of mischief again. Kneeling on the bed, he moved toward Lan WangJi and smiled through the most devilish tone that he could manage, "You scared?"

Lan WangJi jumped off the bed at once. As though he really was scared, he continued to stand with his back to him and maintained the distance between them.

Wei WuXian was finally starting to enjoy himself.

He grinned as he calmly left the bed, "Hey, what are you hiding for? My hands are still tied, and I'm not even scared, so why would you be scared? Come, come. Come here."

He approached Lan WangJi, harboring no good intentions at all. Lan WangJi passed the wooden screen only to run into the table that he himself blocked the doors with. Wei WuXian walked past the screen, chasing after him, while he went the other way around. The two circled the screen for quite a number of times, and Wei WuXian was just starting to feel the fun of it as he suddenly realized, what am I doing? Playing hide-and-seek? What is this? Am I out of my mind? Lan Zhan is drunk, but why am I also playing with him?

Noticing that the person chasing him had stopped, Lan WangJi stopped as well.

Hiding behind the screen, he showed only half of his fair-skinned face, peeking silently at the direction of Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian watched him carefully. He still looked so prim and proper, as though the six-year-old who chased Wei WuXian around the screen was somebody else.

Wei WuXian, "Do you want to continue?" Expressionless, Lan WangJi nodded.

Wei WuXian struggled to hold back his laughter.

Hahahahahahahahahaha oh gosh Lan Zhan wanted to play hide-and-seek with him now that he was drunk hahahahahahahahahaha!

The laughter that he tried to suppress was even greater than tidal waves. Finally, having managed to hold it back, Wei WuXian's entire body was shivering, A sect like the GusuLan Sect prohibits noise, fooling around, and even walking quickly. Lan Zhan definitely never had so much fun when he was young. Tsk tsk tsk, poor him. He won't remember a single thing after he sobers up anyways. I might as well keep on playing with him.

He ran a few more steps toward Lan WangJi, pretending that he was going to chase him. As he had expected, Lan WangJi started to go in the opposite direction. As though he was playing with a toddler, Wei WuXian cooperated as best as he could, chasing him around the screen a few more times, "Run, run. Go faster. I'm gonna catch you! If I catch you, I'm going to lick you again. Scared, much?"

He originally intended it to be a threat. However, Lan WangJi suddenly walked toward him from the other side of the screen, and the two bumped into each other.

Wei WuXian was planning to catch him, not at all expecting that he'd walk right into his arms. Speechlessly startled, he even forgot to reach out. Seeing that Wei WuXian didn't do anything, Lan WangJi lifted his tied-up hands and brought them over his neck as if he voluntarily slipped into an unbreakable trap, "You caught me."

Wei WuXian, "... Huh? Yes, I caught you."

As though he was waiting for something to happen but it never did, Lan WangJi repeated the three words again. This time, he enunciated each word with heavy emphasis and sounded anxiously eager, "You caught me."

Wei WuXian, "Yeah. I caught you." He caught him. What else?

What did he say? What was he going to do after catching him? ... No.

Wei WuXian, "This time doesn't count. You walked over yourself."

Before he even finished his words, Lan WangJi's expression had darkened. He looked extremely unhappy. Wei WuXian, this can't be. After Lan Zhan is drunk, he not only likes to play hide-and-seek, but also likes to be licked? He wanted to take his arms away from Lan WangJi's neck, but Lan WangJi reached for them before he did. He held them securely at Wei WuXian's neck, not letting him take them away. Seeing how one of Lan WangJi's hands just happened to be pressing onto his arm, Wei WuXian thought for a moment, then shifted over, moving his face closer and closer. His lips swept across the back of Lan WangJi's hand as though it was a halfway kiss. The tip of his tongue skimmed lightly over the jade-like skin.

Lightly. Very lightly.

Lan WangJi flinched and removed his hand as fast as he could. He took away Wei WuXian's arms, turned his back to him again, and darted to the side. Again, clutching the hand that had been licked, he faced the wall silently.

Wei WuXian pondered, does he like it, or is he scared of it? Or is it both at the same time? As he was pondering, Lan WangJi turned around, his face as calm as always, "Again." Wei WuXian, "Again? Again what?"

Lan WangJi hid behind the wooden screen once more and peeked at him with only half of his face showing.

His intentions were as clear as could be—again, you chase, I run.

Speechless for a moment, Wei WuXian obeyed and did it again. This time, having only been chased for a short while, Lan WangJi ran into him again.

Wei WuXian, "You really are doing this on purpose, aren't you?"

Again, Lan WangJi brought Wei WuXian's arms around his neck as though he couldn't understand what his words meant, waiting for him to fulfil his promise again.

Wei WuXian, Am I just going to let Lan Zhan have fun all by himself? Of course not. He wouldn't remember anything that I do to him now, anyways. Let me play something better with him.

With his arms around Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian returned to the bed with him, then asked, "You like this, don't you? Don't turn around. Speak. Do you like it or not? If you like it, we don't have to run around every single time. How about I let you have as much fun as you want?"

As he spoke, he held up one of Lan WangJi's hands, bent down, and kissed between two of his slender fingers.

Lan WangJi wanted to take his hand away again, but Wei WuXian held it tightly, not allowing him to do so.

And then, Wei WuXian's lips pressed onto his distinct knuckles. Softer than the touch of feather, his breaths wandered to the back of his hand, and he kissed again.

Lan WangJi couldn't pull his hand back no matter how hard he tried. He could only clench his fingers together into a tight fist.

Wei WuXian lifted up his sleeves, revealing the pale-skinned wrist, then kissed it as well.

After he kissed, he didn't raise his head. He only turned his eyes to Lan WangJi, "Is that enough?"

Lan WangJi pursed his lips, refusing to speak a single word. Wei WuXian finally sat up straight again and continued, his voice unhurried, "Tell me. Have you burnt any paper money for me?"

There was no answer. Wei WuXian laughed out loud and inched toward him. Over the clothing, he kissed where his heart was, "If you don't talk, I'm not gonna give you any more. Tell me. How did you know it was me?"

Lan WangJi closed his eyes. His lips quivered, as though he was on the verge of confessing.

Suddenly, however, as Wei WuXian stared at those soft, pale-red lips, he didn't know what had taken over him, but he suddenly went and kissed them.

After the kiss, he even licked them, as though a kiss wasn't enough. Both of them widened their eyes.

A moment later, Lan WangJi raised his hand. At once, Wei WuXian was startled into realization. He immediately broke into a cold sweat, fearing that Lan WangJi would smack him dead on the spot, and quickly scrambled off the bed. Turning around, he saw Lan WangJi smack his own forehead. He now lay unconscious, collapsed on the bed.

Inside of the private room, Lan WangJi lay on the bed as Wei WuXian sat on the ground. A cold gust of wind rushed inside through the opened windows, sending chills down Wei WuXian's back. His head finally felt clearer.

He stood up from the ground, pushed the table to where it used to be, then sat down beside it.

After spacing out for a while, he used his teeth to bite at the knots on the forehead ribbon. With effort, he finally managed to open the stack of lumps.

Now that his hands had been loosened, to get over the shock, he went to pour himself a cup of liquor. He held the cup to his lips for a few moments, but not a single drop entered his mouth. Looking down, he finally saw that there wasn't any liquor in the cup at all. He had already downed the entire pot. Even when he was pouring, he failed to notice that nothing was being poured out.

Wei WuXian put the empty cup back onto the table, No more alcohol for me. I've really had enough.

As he turned around, past the wooden screen, he could see Lan WangJi, who lay quietly on the bed. He thought to himself, ... I really had too much to drink today. Lan Zhan is such a serious person. Even though he was drunk, even though he wouldn't remember anything when he sobers up, I still shouldn't have done something so outrageous... It's too disrespectful to him.

Remembering what an "outrageous" thing did he just do to Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian couldn't help but touched his lips.

He only managed to flatten the forehead ribbon again after a while of work. Walking to the bed, he put it beside the pillow, and succeeded in holding himself back from even looking at Lan WangJi. He squatted down and took off Lan WangJi's boots, then placed him in the official sleeping position of the Lan Sect.

After everything had been done, leaning against the bed, Wei WuXian took a seat on the ground again. His mind was in a jumbled state of confusion, but one thought stood out from the rest—

In the future, it was best to not make Lan Zhan drink anymore. If he treated everyone like this when he became drunk, then the situation really wouldn't be well.

#### Translator's Notes

Face: This, again, refers to the Chinese concept of face. It pretty much means that he'd have too bad of a reputation to ever dare show his face to other people again.

Long bed: The long bed, in this case, is similar to a slender daybed couch, but it's made of wood and there's no matting.

The dip of a dragonfly: This is a common proverb in China that describes light, dainty kisses.

## Chapter 45: Allure—Part Three

For some reason, tonight, Wei WuXian felt a bit too guilty to still dare squeezing himself onto the same bed as Lan WangJi. He spent the rest of the evening sitting on the ground and fell asleep sometime during the night, his head leaning on the wooden bed. At dawn, he vaguely felt someone lift him up with gentle movements and place him onto the bed. Struggling to open his eyes, Wei WuXian could see Lan WangJi's still-indifferent face.

He immediately felt more awake, "Lan Zhan."

Lan WangJi answered with a "mnn". Wei WuXian asked, "Are you sober or still drunk?"  
Lan WangJi, "Sober."

Wei WuXian, "Oh... So, it's five already."

Lan WangJi woke up at this time every single day, which was why Wei WuXian learnt how to tell the time without looking out the windows. He held up Wei WuXian's wrists, of which both were covered in reddish marks. He took out a small, turquoise porcelain bottle from within his sleeves and applied the contents. The areas that the smooth ointment had been spread on felt soothed at once. Wei WuXian squinted, "It hurts... HanGuang-Jun, you're so rude when you're drunk."

Lan WangJi didn't even look up, "You reaped what you had sown."

Wei WuXian's heart skipped a beat, "Lan Zhan, you really don't remember what you did after you were drunk, do you?"

Lan WangJi, "I do not."

Wei WuXian, That's probably true. Or else, he would've already killed me out of embarrassment.

In his heart, he found it both good and unfortunate that Lan WangJi didn't remember. It felt as though he'd secretly done or eaten something he shouldn't have and was hiding alone in a corner, snickering at how nobody found out but disappointed that he couldn't share the delight with anyone. Involuntarily, his eyes caught sight of Lan WangJi's lips again.

Although the corners never lifted, his lips looked quite soft, and did indeed feel quite soft. Wei WuXian unconsciously bit at his own lips and started to space out again, The GusuLan Sect is so strict, and Lan Zhan isn't romantic at all, so he definitely hasn't kissed any girls before.

What do I do now? I happened to have received the grand honor. Should I tell him? Will he be so angry that he starts crying after he knows? Oh, well... He might do so when he was young, but probably not now. And it's like he's a monk made of wood. It's possible that he's never even had such thoughts before... Wait! The last time he was drunk, I asked him 'is there anyone you like', and he said yes. Maybe he'd already kissed her? But judging from Lan Zhan's habit of self-

restraint, he's probably really careful about not crossing any lines. They probably never kissed, or even held hands. Speaking of it, maybe back then he didn't even understand which type of

'like' I was talking about...

After Lan WangJi finished applying the ointment, somebody knocked three times at the door. Lan SiZhui's voice came through, "HanGuang-Jun, everyone is up. Will we be leaving?"

Lan WangJi, "Wait downstairs."

The group left the city and was parting ways before the city's tower. Originally, the disciples weren't as familiar with one another. They had only visited the others during discussion conferences at their respective sects. However, during these past few days, they'd been through both the cat corpse's incidents and a thrilling day at a haunted city with the others.

They'd even burnt paper money, snuck liquor, argued, and cursed other people together. In summary, they already knew one another quite well. Before the departures, all of them were reluctant to leave, taking their time in front of the city gates to discuss when to visit one's discussion conference and when to night-hunt at another's place. Lan WangJi didn't hurry them, either. He let them chatter on as he himself stood silently under a tree. Under Lan WangJi's eyes, Fairy didn't at all dare to bark or run around. Crouching under the tree as well, it stared anxiously at Jin Ling, wagging its tail at him.

Taking the chance that Fairy was being watched by Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian grabbed Jin Ling's shoulder and walked for some time.

Mo XuanYu was one of Jin GuangShan's illegitimate sons, which made him a half-brother of Jin ZiXuan and Jin GuangYao. In terms of the generations, he could be considered Jin Ling's uncle as well. Thus, he walked as he righteously talked to Jin Ling in a patronizing tone, "When you go back, don't keep on arguing with your uncle. Listen to him. Be careful from now on. Don't run around trying to night-hunt alone again."

Although Jin Ling was from a prominent sect, rumors didn't let anyone off. With both of his parents gone, it was only natural for him to want to prove himself to others as soon as possible.

Wei WuXian continued, "What are you? Fifteen? Most of the disciples around your age haven't hunted any amazing beasts either, so why should you be so eager and strive for such a first?"

Jin Ling sulked, "My uncles were also fifteen-or-so when they became famous."

Wei WuXian commented in silence, That's not the same! Back then, the QishanWen Sect was still on top and everyone had to watch out. If they didn't fight and cultivate as much as possible, who knew if they'd be the next one to run out of luck? During the Sunshot Campaign, you'd be hauled to the battlefields no matter if you were fifteen or any other age. Now, since the situations is stable and the sects are at peace, of course the atmosphere isn't as tense and people don't cultivate like they're crazy. There's no need anymore.

Jin Ling added, "Even when the dog Wei Ying was around fifteen when he killed the Tortoise of Slaughter. If he could even do it, why can't I?"

Hearing his name come right after the word before it, Wei WuXian blood run cold. He somehow managed to shake off the goosebumps on his back, "He was the one who killed it? Wasn't it killed by HanGuang-Jun?"

After the mention of Lan WangJi, Jin Ling looked to Wei WuXian in a strange way. He wanted to say something, but held it back, "You and HanGuang-Jun... Nevermind. It's your own business. Anyways, I don't care about you guys at all. Have fun being cut-sleeve. The disease is incurable."

Wei WuXian grinned, "Hey, how is it a disease?"

He was laughing in silence; He's still thinking that I'm shamelessly nagging Lan Zhan?!

Jin Ling continued, "I already know the meaning behind the GusuLan Sect's forehead ribbon. Now that it's already like this, then stay by HanGuang-Jun's side properly. Even if you're a cut- sleeve, you should be a modest one. Don't go about messing with other men, especially people from our sect! Or else, don't blame the results on me."

The "our sect" that he said included both the LanlingJin and the YunmengJiang Sect. It seemed that his ability to tolerate cut-sleeves had increased, that as long as it wasn't anyone from the two sects, he could turn a blind eye to it.

Wei WuXian disagreed, "You little brat! What do you mean 'messing with other men'? I'm not that terrible of a person. Forehead ribbon? There's a meaning behind the GusuLan Sect's forehead ribbon?"

Jin Ling, "Come on! You know what it means. Stop getting so carried away. I don't want to talk about this anymore. Are you Wei Ying?"

At the end of his reply, he suddenly tossed out the straightforward question, taking Wei WuXian by surprise. Wei WuXian responded calmly, “Do you think we’re similar?”

Jin Ling was silent for a while. Then, he suddenly whistled and called out, “Fairy!”

Having been called by its owner, with its tongue sticking out, Fairy sprinted over. Wei WuXian broke into a run at once, “Be nice! What are you sending out the dog for?!”

Jin Ling, “Hmph! Goodbye!”

After he said goodbye, he proudly marched in the direction of Lanling, probably still afraid to see Jiang Cheng in Yunmeng’s Lotus Pier. The disciples from the other sects went off in different directions as well. In the end, Wei WuXian, Lan WangJi, and the juniors of the Lan Sect were the only ones left.

As they walked, the juniors couldn’t hold themselves from turning around and looking back. Although Lan JingYi didn’t say anything, the reluctance to leave was written all over his face. He asked, “Where are we going next?”

Lan SiZhui, “ZeWu-Jun is currently night-hunting in the Tanzhou area. Are we going to directly return to the Cloud Recesses, or go over there to meet up with him?”

Lan WangJi, “Go to Tanzhou.”

Wei WuXian, “Great. Maybe we can even help him. We don’t know where next to search for our dear friend’s head, anyways.”

The two walked in the front while the rest of the boys followed some distance behind them. After walking for a while, Lan WangJi spoke up, “Jiang Cheng knows who you are.”

Wei WuXian was sitting on the donkey as it slowly trotted forward, “Yeah, he knows. What can he do, though? He doesn’t have any evidence.”

Unlike the possession of bodies, there was no evidence to the sacrifice of bodies. Jiang Cheng only determined the fact through how he looked when facing a dog, anyway. First, Jiang Cheng had never told anyone that Wei WuXian was afraid of dogs; second, only those familiar with him would be able to judge things based on reactions and expressions, since there couldn’t be any conclusive proof. Even if Jiang Cheng finally chose to stick flyers that said the YiLing Patriarch Wei WuXian was scared of dogs everywhere he could, everyone would probably still believe that the SanDu ShengShou had finally become crazy after searching for the YiLing Patriarch for so many times and failing every attempt.

Wei WuXian, “So, I’m actually really curious. Just how did you recognize me?”

Lan WangJi replied in a calm voice, “I am also really curious as to why your memory is so bad.”

They arrived at Tanzhou within a day. Before they met up with Lan XiChen, they passed a garden along the way. Seeing how the garden was big and majestic yet had no-one to care for it, all of the disciples went inside out of curiosity. As long as it wasn’t anything against the sect rules, Lan WangJi never stopped them, which was why he let them inside. In the garden, there was a pavilion and a few fences, a table and a few stools, all made of stone, for people to enjoy the scenery. However, through years of wind and rain, one corner had fallen off the pavilion and two of the stools had toppled over. There were no plants or flowers in the garden, only brittle branches and withered leaves. This garden had been abandoned since a long time ago.

After the juniors roamed eagerly around the garden for a while, Lan SiZhui spoke up, “This is the garden of the Damsel of Annual Blossoms, is it not?”

Lan JingYi was confused, “The Damsel of Annual Blossoms? Who is that? Does the garden have an owner? Why does it look so worn-down? It seems like nobody has been caring for it for a long time.”

Annual blossoms were flowers that had short flowering periods and only bloom during certain seasons. There were many varied types and colors, which filled the entire garden with fragrance when they bloomed. Hearing the name, Wei WuXian couldn’t help but recalled something.

Placing his hand over one of the pillars of the pavilion, Lan SiZhui thought for a while, “If I remember correctly, it probably is. This garden used to be rather famous. I read about it on a book once, in the chapter The Blossoming Spirit of the Florist Damsel. In Tanzhou there is a garden, and in the garden, there is a damsel. Under the moonlight, if one should recite poetry, when she deems it fine, she grants them an annual blossom, the fragrance of which persists for three years; when she deems it poor or when the rhyming does not pass, she casts a blossom at their face, then fades away.”

Lan JingYi, “So if you recited the poetry wrong, she would throw a flower at your face? Hopefully the flowers did not have thorns. Or else, if I were there to try, my face would definitely start bleeding. What sort of fae was she?”

Lan SiZhui, “I would not call her a fae. She was more like a spirit. The legends have it that the earliest owner of the garden was a poet. He planted these flowers himself and treated them as friends, reciting poetry here everyday. Affected by the emotions of the poetry, a spirit crystallized from the flora of the garden and became the Damsel of Annual Blossoms. When someone came, if their poetry was decent and allowed her to remember the one who planted her, she would be happy and give them a flower. If the poetry was wrong or did not sound pleasing, she would emerge from the bushes and hurl a flower onto the person’s face. The one who had been attacked would faint and realize that they had been thrown out of the garden after they woke up. Ten years ago, an endless number of people would come to this garden.”

Wei WuXian, “Romantic, romantic. But I know for sure that the GusuLan Sect’s Library Pavilion wouldn’t hold books that say such things. SiZhui, be honest. Tell us what book you were reading and who gave it to you.”

Lan SiZhui blushed and sneaked a glance at Lan WangJi, worried that he’d be punished. Lan JingYi asked, “Is the Damsel really pretty? Or else why would so many people come?” Seeing that Lan WangJi had no intentions of scolding him, Lan SiZhui secretly let out a sigh of relief. Only then did he smile and reply, “She probably was. After all, she crystallized from such pleasant things and was such a romantic spirit. But in reality, nobody had ever seen the Damsel’s face. Because of how even if someone did not know how to compose poetry, it was more than easy for them to memorize a few poems, most people had received the Damsel’s flowers. Even when there came the rare person who recited wrong, they would not get to meet her since they were knocked out immediately. However... one person was the exception.”

Another boy asked, “Who?”

Wei WuXian let out a light cough.

Lan SiZhui, “The YiLing patriarch, Wei WuXian.”

Wei WuXian coughed again, “Uh, why’s it him again? Can’t we talk about something else?” Nobody paid him any attention. Lan JingYi waved anxiously, “Be quiet! What did Wei WuXian do? He was such a big villain—what did he do, this time? Did he snatch the Damsel away and take her outside?”

Lan SiZhui, “Well, no. But, in order to see the Damsel’s face, he went out of his way to come to Tanzhou all the way from Yunmeng. Whenever he came to the garden, he would recite the poetry wrong on purpose so that the Damsel became angered, hit him with flowers, and threw him out. When he woke up, he would crawl back inside and continue to recite incorrectly. After this repeated for more than twenty times, he finally saw the Damsel’s face. After this, he would go about everywhere praising how beautiful she looked. However, the Damsel was rather irritated as well. She did not show up for quite a while. Whenever he came, she would pound him with a rain of flowers. The scene was truly more wondrous than any wonders.”

The boys bursted into laughter, “Wei WuXian was such an annoying person!” “Was he really that bored?”

Wei WuXian touched his chin, “How was it boring? Who hasn’t done a couple of such things when they were young? Speaking of it, why do people even know about something like this? And it’s even seriously recorded in a book. That’s pretty boring as well, if you ask me.”

Lan WangJi was looking at him. Although still expressionless, an unusual glint hid beneath his eyes. He looked as though he was laughing at him. Wei WuXian thought to himself, Hey, Lan Zhan, don’t you dare make fun of me. I know at least eight—if not ten—of your embarrassing stories from when you were young. I’ll tell them to the boys sooner or later and destroy the inviolable, irreproachable reputation they have of their HanGuang-Jun. He declared, “You children are so hyper all the time. You’ve definitely been reading idle books instead of focusing on cultivation. When you get back, make sure HanGuang-Jun punishes you by making you copy the sect rules. Ten times.”

The boys wailed, “Ten times even when doing the handstand?!”

Wei WuXian was also shocked. He turned to Lan WangJi, “Your sect makes disciples do handstands while copying? That’s awful.”

Lan WangJi replied calmly, “There would always be someone who did not learn their lessons by simply copying the sect rules. Handstands not only guaranteed better performance in the future but also benefited cultivation.”

Of course, Wei WuXian was the someone who never learnt his lessons. He pretended as though he didn’t know what Lan WangJi was talking about. Turning around, he found himself glad that he didn’t have to copy the scriptures while doing handstands.

In high spirits from listening to the stories, the boys decided that they’d camp at the Garden of Annual Blossoms for the night. Camping was common during night-hunts, anyway. The group gathered a pile of dead branches and dry leaves from around them and finished making the bonfire. Lan WangJi went away to patrol the area, not only making sure that their surroundings were safe but also setting up an array in case of any night attacks. Stretching out his legs, Wei WuXian sat by the fire. Now that Lan WangJi was gone, he finally had a chance to clear up his confusion, “Right. I need to ask you guys a question. Just what is the meaning behind your sect’s forehead ribbon?”

Hearing this, the boys’ expressions changed at once. They’d all started to stammer. Wei WuXian’s heart skipped a beat and then thumped faster and faster.

Lan SiZhui asked in caution, “Senior, do you not know?”

Wei WuXian, “If I knew would I still have asked? Do I seem like that bored of a person?”

Lan JingYi mumbled, “Yes... After all, you could even do something like tricking us to line up and look at that sort of thing...”

Wei WuXian poked at the fire with a stick, releasing bursts of sparks, “Wasn’t that for you to train yourselves and get out of your comfort zones? It really is effective. If you listen to what I say, you’ll definitely benefit from them in the future.”

Lan SiZhui seemed as though he was carefully choosing his words. He only answered after a long while of hesitation, “Okay. The forehead ribbon of the GusuLan Sect means to ‘regulate oneself’. Senior, you know this, right?”

Wei WuXian, “Yes. And?”

Lan SiZhui continued, “And the founder of the GusuLan Sect, Lan An, had said that one can only let go of all regulations when they are with the one they love and cherish. So, the message that has been passed down the generations is that, uh, our sect’s forehead ribbon is a special object that is very, very personal and sensitive. One cannot easily give another permission to touch it, one cannot take it off as they please, and one absolutely cannot tie it on someone else. It is prohibited. That is, unless, unless...”

He didn’t need to finish his sentence.

By the bonfire, the young, innocent faces blushed many shades of red. Even Lan SiZhui couldn’t continue speaking.

Wei WuXian felt almost half of the blood in his body rush to his head. The forehead ribbon, the forehead ribbon, th-th-the...

The forehead ribbon was indeed quite significant!

He suddenly felt that he really needed some fresh air. He sprang up and darted outside, only managing to find his balance by holding onto the bark of a wilted tree. He exclaimed in silence,

... Good Heavens! What in the world have I done?!

Back then, at Qishan, the Wen Sect held a grand Discussion Conference. The conference was to last for seven days. Each of the seven days' entertainment had been planned to be different. One of those days involved an archery competition.

The rules of the competition were as follow. Any disciples younger than twenty were to enter the hunting grounds. Of the more than a thousand life-sized paper mannequin targets, only one hundred were possessed by fierce spirits. If one shot the wrong target, they were out at once. One could only stay in the competition of the continuously shot correct paper mannequins that held evil spirits in them. In the end, the disciples were ranked by who shot the most, who shot with highest accuracy, and so on.

In such an event, of course Wei WuXian would be participating as one of the YunmengJiang Sect's contestants. Before the competition, since he had been listening to the sects' debates for the entire morning, he was feeling unusually groggy. His spirits only lifted as he heaved the bow and arrows onto his back. Yawning as he walked toward the hunting grounds, he suddenly caught sight of a handsome boy with a fair face and a cold demeanor to the side of him. He wore a red round-collar robe with sleeves that had tight openings and a belt of nine golden rings. This was the uniform attire of all of the juniors who came to the Qishan Discussion Conference. On him, it looked exceptionally good. He had a dash of elegance, a few traces of vigour, but a whole lot of good looks. One couldn't help but brighten up at the sight of such a boy.

The boy was in the middle of trying out his bow, carrying a bundle of arrows with white-feathered fletchings. Brushing past the bowstring, his slender fingers made the it sounds as though it were a guqin string, strong yet beautiful.

To Wei WuXian, the boy felt a bit familiar. After he thought for a while, he finally remembered and greeted the boy with enthusiasm, "Hey! WangJi-xiong, it's you!"

At the time, it had already been a year since Wei WuXian studied at Gusu and was sent back to Yunmeng. After he arrived at Yunmeng, he told the people there all about what he had seen in Gusu, especially things such as how although Lan WangJi's face looked nice he was so stiff as to do this, so boring as to do that. Not long afterward, he had forgotten all about his days at Gusu and continued to fool around in the lakes and mountains. In the past, he had only seen Lan WangJi in the plain "mourning clothes" of the GusuLan Sect's uniform, never in such a bright, eye-catching outfit. Along with that overly-pretty face of Lan WangJi's, now that they met again, Wei WuXian's eyes had momentarily been blinded by his looks, failing to immediately recognize him.

On the other hand, as soon as Lan WangJi finished testing his bow, he walked away at once. Awkwardly, Wei WuXian turned to Jiang Cheng, "He ignored me again. Huh."

Jiang Cheng glanced at him with indifference, also deciding to ignore him. There were more than twenty entrances to the shooting range; each sect was different. As Lan WangJi walked toward the entrance of the GusuLan Sect, Wei WuXian sneaked over before he could. Lan WangJi shifted to the one side, and he shifted to the side as well; Lan WangJi moved to the other side, and he moved to the other side as well. In short, he simply refused to let Lan WangJi pass.

In the end, standing where he was, Lan WangJi raised his chin slightly. In a serious tone, he spoke, "Excuse me."

Wei WuXian, "You're finally gonna talk to me? Were you pretending that you didn't know me or that you didn't hear me?"

Not far away, the boys from other sects all stared at them. Some laughed, some exclaimed. Jiang Cheng clicked his tongue impatiently. With arrows on his back, he walked toward another entrance.

Lan WangJi raised his eyes coldly and repeated, "Excuse me."

A faint smile by his lips, Wei WuXian raised his brows and turned to the side. The arch door of the entrance was rather narrow. Lan WangJi could only brush by him as he walked in. After he entered, Wei WuXian shouted from behind him, "Lan Zhan, your forehead ribbon is crooked."

All disciples from prominent sects took great care to maintain their appearances, especially those from the GusuLan Sect. Hearing this, Lan WangJi reached to adjust it without a second thought. Yet, the forehead ribbon was clearly as proper as always. Turning around, he casted an annoyed look at Wei WuXian. The latter only laughed as he turned to the YunmengJiang Sect's entrance.

After everyone had entered and the competition had officially begun, one by one, disciples left due to accidentally shooting normal mannequins. With each shot, Wei WuXian brought one down. Although he was slow, he never missed once. The number of arrows in the quiver soon decreased by seventeen or eighteen. Just as he was thinking about what would happen if he shot with his other hand, suddenly, something drifted to his face.

Softer than even the touch of catkin blossoms carried by the wind; the object made Wei WuXian's cheek itch. Turning around, he saw that Lan WangJi had somehow already walked near him. With his back facing Wei WuXian and front to a paper mannequin, he was in the process of drawing his bow.

The ends of his forehead ribbon danced in the breeze, gently brushing against Wei WuXian's face.

He squinted, "WangJi-xiong!"

With his bow already in the shape of a full moon, Lan WangJi still responded after a short moment of hesitation, "What?"

Wei WuXian, "Your forehead ribbon is crooked."

This time, Lan WangJi refused to believe him again. As he released his arrow, he replied without even turning around, "Ridiculous."

Wei WuXian, "It's true this time! It really is crooked. Just watch if you don't believe me. Let me straighten it up for you."

He proceeded as he spoke, grabbing the ribbon tail that kept on fluttering in front of his eyes. Alas, however, his hands were simply too unruly. In the past, he made a habit of pulling on the Yunmeng girls' braids. Whenever he touched a strip-like object, he'd have the urge to tug it.

Thus, without a second thought, he tugged it this time as well. However, since the forehead ribbon was already slightly askew, a bit loose, now that he pulled on it, it fell from Lan WangJi's forehead at once.

The hand that Lan WangJi held the bow with immediately gave out a shiver.

He only managed to turn around after quite a long while. Slowly, his eyes finally locked into Wei WuXian's.

Wei WuXian was still holding the soft ribbon in his hand, "I'm sorry. It wasn't on purpose. Here, you can tie it up again."

Lan WangJi's expression was darker than ever.

It almost seemed as if a cloud of black fog hovered over his face. As he clenched his arrow, veins climbed over the back of his hand. He appeared so angry that his body was almost shaking. Seeing that even his eyes looked bloodshot, Wei WuXian couldn't help but squeeze the forehead ribbon, Am I sure that the thing I pulled off is a forehead ribbon and not some

part of his body? Shocked that he dared to squeeze it, Lan WangJi snatched the forehead ribbon from his hands as fast as he could.

Wei WuXian let go the moment he snatched it. The rest of the Lan Sect's disciples ceased with their attacks as well, and everyone came over. Arm around his younger brother, Lan XiChen talked to the unspeaking Lan WangJi in a low voice. All of the others seemed similarly serious, as though they were facing a powerful enemy. They shook their heads as they spoke, glancing at Wei WuXian with odd, indescribable looks on their faces.

Wei WuXian only heard a few vague terms, such as "accident", "calm down", "no need to worry", "a man", "the sect rules", and so on. He felt even more confused. After glowering at him one last time, Lan WangJi turned around and walked alone toward the outside of the range. Jiang Cheng came over and asked, "What did you do, this time? Didn't I tell you not to tease him? Your day just won't be complete unless you dig your own grave at least once, huh?" Wei WuXian shrugged, "I said that his forehead ribbon was crooked. I was tricking him the first time but the second time was real. He didn't believe me and got mad. I didn't pull off his forehead ribbon on purpose. Why do you think he's so angry? He's not even participating in the contest anymore."

Jiang Cheng mocked, "Isn't it clear? It's because he especially hates you!"

The arrows behind him were almost all gone. Seeing this, Wei WuXian got to work as well. Throughout all these years, he never really paid much attention to this incident. In the beginning, he actually did doubt that the forehead ribbon held a special meaning to the Lan Clan. After the competition, though, he forgot all about it. Now that he thought about how the other disciples of the Lan Sect looked at him...

With his forehead ribbon taken off by a brat without any consent or whatsoever in front of everyone's eyes, Lan Zhan managed to hold himself back from shooting Wei WuXian to death right then, right there—people with good manners were so scary!!! He was indeed worthy of the title HanGuang-Jun!!!

And, thinking about it some more, Wei WuXian realized that he touched Lan WangJi's forehead ribbon more than just once after the incident!!!

Lan JingYi puzzled, "What is he doing, walking here and there like that? Did he eat too much?" Another boy added, "And his face is switching between red and green... Is it something that that he ate?"

"We did not eat anything special in particular... Is it because of the forehead ribbon's meaning? He seems a bit too excited. It seems like he really loves HanGuang-Jun a lot. Look at how happy he is..."

Wei WuXian finally managed to calm down after walking around a bush of withered flowers for about fifty times. Hearing that last sentence, he was between laughter and tears. Suddenly, he heard the noise of somebody stepping on dried leaves behind him.

From the sound of the footsteps, he could tell that it wasn't a child. Lan WangJi had probably come back. Quickly adjusting his facial expressions, Wei WuXian turned around to see a black figure standing within the shadow of a dead tree nearby.

The figure was quite tall, quite straight, quite dignified. It was missing a head, though.

## Translator's Notes

Fae: Previously translated as yao... It just didn't seem right to have demon, ghost, monster, and all of a sudden, a pinyin.

Catkin blossoms: Filling the skies with white, fluffy seeds, catkins have long been the subject of many renowned poets in China. Of course, in places like Beijing, it's quite annoying for people with allergies.

## Chapter 46: Guile— Part One

As though somebody dumped a bucket of cold water over his head, the curvature of Wei WuXian's smile froze at once.

Standing below the dead tree, the tall figure faced Wei WuXian. If a head sat atop his neck, he'd be staring silently at Wei WuXian for sure.

By the bonfire, the juniors of the Lan Sect saw the shadow as well. Each of them felt their hair stand up. With widened eyes, they went for their swords at once. Wei WuXian put his pointer finger in front of his lips and softly shushed them.

He shook his head, then looked at them with eyes that said "no". Seeing this, Lan SiZhui noiselessly pushed back Lan SiZhui's half-unsheathed sword.

The headless man reached for the tree trunk beside him and felt it for a while, as if he was thinking or trying to figure out what it was.

He walked a small step forward. Wei WuXian could finally see most of his body.

A burial robe hung over the man, somewhat tattered. It was indeed the one that the torso buried in the Chang Clan's cemetery had been wearing.

And, by the man's feet, a pile of shreds lay scattered on the ground. Wei WuXian could tell that this was a couple of torn-up Qiankun Pouches.

Wei WuXian, My mistake. It seems that our dear friend has pieced himself together!

Now that he thought about it, after he and Lan WangJi entered Yi City, so many things had happened that they hadn't

played Rest for almost more than two days. During the time that they spent travelling, they only barely managed to suppress the parts again. Yet, since all limbs of the corpse had been collected already, the attraction between each part multiplied. Perhaps they had felt one another's resentful energy and their desire to be put back together grew, now that Lan WangJi was out patrolling, they hurriedly rolled off to the side, barged out of the Qiankun Pouches that had bound them, and pieced into a corpse by themselves.

Unfortunately, however, the corpse still lacked a part. One most important part.

The headless man put a hand to his neck, feeling the clean, crimson cut at his throat. After he had been at it for quite some time and still couldn't find the object that was supposed to be there, as though enraged by such a fact, he suddenly slammed his palm into the tree beside him! With a crack, the trunk broke at once. Wei WuXian commented in silence, What a temper!

Lan JingYi held his sword horizontally in front of his body and stammered, "W-what sort of monster is this?"

Wei WuXian, "You haven't been reviewing the basics, have you? What's a monster? This is obviously a corpse, categorized as the ghoul type. How can it be a monster?"

Lan SiZhui whispered, "Senior, you... you are talking so loudly. What if he hears you?"

Wei WuXian, "It's alright. I suddenly realized that it'd be fine no matter how loud we talk. Because he doesn't have a head, he doesn't have eyes or ears, which means that he can't see or hear anything. If you don't believe me, give him a shout."

Lan JingYi was curious, "Really? Let me try."

After he spoke, he indeed shouted a couple of times. As soon as he had finished, the headless man spun around and walked in the direction of the Lan Sect's juniors.

The boys could almost feel their souls escaping their bodies. Lan JingYi wailed, "But you said that it would be alright!"

Wei WuXian cupped his hands over his mouth and raised his voice, "It really is alright, look! I'm talking in such a loud voice and it's not coming over, is it? But over on your side it's not a matter of being loud or not. It's because there's firelight! It's hot! There's a lot of live humans and they're all male! The yang energy is too heavy! He can't see or hear, but he can walk in the direction where he feels is the most crowded. Why aren't you putting the fire out already? And

scatter around!"

With a wave of Lan SiZhui's hand, a gust of wind put out the fire. The boys immediately scattered all around the deserted garden.

Just as Wei WuXian said, after the bonfire died and the people had dispersed, the headless man lost his direction.

He stood still for a few moments. Just as the group was about to sigh in relief, he suddenly started to move again. And, without any hesitation, he walked straight toward one of the boys!

Lan JingYi started to wail again, "But you said that we would be fine as long as the fire was out and we were scattered!"

WeiWuXian couldn't find the time to answer him. He shouted at the other boy, "Don't move!"

He picked up a pebble beside his feet. With a flick of his wrist, he threw the pebble toward the headless man. The pebble landed at the center of the man's back. He stopped in his tracks and turned around. After he pondered for a moment, as though deciding that this side was more suspicious, he started walking toward Wei WuXian.

Slowly, Wei WuXian shifted two steps to the side, only closely missing the trudging corpse. He continued, "I told you to scatter, not to run around. Don't run too quickly. The ghoul has quite a high level of cultivation. If you move too fast and carry the air with you, he'll also notice."

Lan SiZhui, "It seems like he is searching for something... Maybe it is... his head?"

Wei WuXian, "That's right. He's searching for his head. There are quite a few heads here, so since he doesn't know which one is his, he'll pull off the head of each person and place it on top of his own neck to see if it fits or not. If it does, he'll do with it for a period of time, and if it doesn't, he'll throw it away, so you should walk slowly. You must not get caught by him."

Imagining their heads being pulled off by the headless corpse and gruesomely attached to his own neck, the boys shivered in horror.

Raising their hands over their heads in unison, they started to slowly "flee" around the garden. It was as though they were playing a treacherous round of hide-and-seek with the ghoul. Whoever that the ghoul seized would have to hand over his head. As soon as he caught of a boy's presence, Wei WuXian would toss out a pebble and draw his attention to himself.

Hands behind his back, Wei WuXian moved slowly, walking as he examined the corpse's actions, our dear friend's posture seems a bit strange, doesn't it? He keeps on waving his arm with his hand in a loose fist. This type of movement...

As he thought, Lan JingYi couldn't stand it any longer, "Are we just going to continue walking like this? Just how long will we have to keep on walking!?"

Wei WuXian pondered for a moment before replying, "Of course not."

Just as he finished, he started to shout, "HanGuang-Jun! Oh, HanGuang-Jun! HanGuang-Jun, are you back yet? Help us!"

Seeing this, the others joined in as well. Since the corpse lacked a head and couldn't hear anything, each shout echoed more passionate, more miserable than the last. A few moments later, the soft, flowing note of a Xiao sounded amid the night. Closely following it was the limpid reverberation of a string.

Hearing the Xiao and the guqin, the juniors were so ecstatic that they almost teared up, "HanGuang-Jun! ZeWu-Jun!"

Two slender figures flashed before the garden's worn-down doors. They were the same jade-like posture, the same snowy shade. One holding a Xiao and the other carrying a guqin, the two of them walked shoulder to shoulder. As they saw the headless shadow, both paused shortly.

Lan XiChen's expression was especially surprised, almost to the point of shocked. Liebing's ceased to sound, yet Bichen had already unsheathed. Sensing that a cold, powerful sword glare came at him, the headless man raised his arm and waved again. Wei WuXian exclaimed in silence, it's that move again!

The man was also quite agile. Dodging Bichen's glare with a leap, he backhandedly snatched at it. With this, he managed to grab Bichen's sword hilt!

He held Bichen in his hand and raised it up, as if he was trying to examine what he had just got hold of even though he had no eyes. After the juniors saw that the man somehow stopped Bichen in midair, all of their faces paled. Lan WangJi, though, seemed as calm as ever. Taking out his guqin, he looked down and curved his finger, plucking one string. As if it was a formless arrow, the sound whistled as it whipped toward the corpse. The headless corpse slashed with the sword and fractured the note into pieces. Lan WangJi strummed downward. All seven strings vibrated, singing with even greater power. At the same time, Wei WuXian pulled out his bamboo flute and accompanied with an abnormally shrill pitch. It was as though the sharp blades of swords and sabers rained down from the sky!

The headless corpse lunged again. Lan XiChen had finally returned to his senses. Raising Liebing to his lips, he started to play as well. Wei WuXian didn't know if it was only his imagination, but as soon as the soft, serene tone of the Xiao appeared, the corpse's movement paused. For a moment, he seemed to have stood still and listened, then turned around, as though he wanted to see who was the one playing the music. Yet, without eyes or a head, he couldn't see anything at all. Still under

the forceful attacks of the flute and the guqin, he looked as if he finally lost all energy, succumbing to the three instruments. With a stagger, he fell to the ground.

To be more accurate, it wasn't that he fell down, but that he fell apart. There were the arms, the legs, and the torso, broken and scattered over the carpet of dry leaves.

Lan WangJi put his guqin away and summoned his sword back. Together with Wei WuXian, he walked toward the limbs, looked down, and took out five new Qiankun Pouches. The juniors encircled them, still in a panicked state. First, they saluted ZeWu-

Jun, but before they had the chance to start chirping and twittering, Lan WangJi stated, "Go rest."

Lan JingYi was confused, "Huh? But HanGuang-Jun, it is not nine yet."

Lan SiZhu, on the other hand, tugged him and answered respectfully, "Yes."

With that, he didn't ask anything else. Leading the rest of the juniors, he went to another area of the garden, preparing to restart the fire and sleep.

Only three people were left by the pile of corpse parts. Wei WuXian nodded at Lan XiChen in respect. He squatted down and began to seal the parts inside the Qiankun Pouches again. Just as he was in the middle of stuffing the left hand into a pouch, Lan XiChen spoke up, "Please wait a moment."

Back then, when Wei WuXian had seen Lan XiChen's expression, he knew that something was wrong. Sure enough, Lan XiChen's complexion was ashen as he repeated his words, "Please... wait a moment. Let me see the corpse."

Wei WuXian stopped, "ZeWu-Jun, do you know who this person is?"

Before Lan XiChen could reply, Lan WangJi already nodded slowly.

Wei WuXian, "Well, then I also know who he is." He lowered his voice, "He's ChiFeng-Zun, right?"

When they were "playing hide-and-seek", the headless corpse kept on repeating the same movement—with a loosely-closed fist, he waved his arm and slashed the air. It looked as though he was brandishing a type of weapon.

At the first idea of a weapon, Wei WuXian thought of a sword. But as someone who used the sword himself and had dueled other swordsmen, he had never seen any sword expert use their sword in such a way. The sword was the "gentleman of all weapons".

Anyone who used the sword would pay attention to an air of grace or dignity. Even the sword of an assassin would need to have some agility amid the cruelty. In the art of swordplay, there were more of "lunge" and "stab", and less of "hack" and "slice".

However, the headless man's movements were too heavy. There was an abundance in malice and the slashes of the arm lacked elegance.

But, if he wasn't holding a sword, but a saber—and a hefty saber with a strong killing intent—

then everything would make sense.

The sword and the saber were different in both usage and temperament. The weapon that the man had used before he died was probably a saber. As fierce as the saber was, it valued power instead of style. When he was searching for his head, he was searching for his weapon as well. This was why he kept on

repeating the moves of wielding a saber and even grabbed Bichen, using it as though it were his weapon.

Moreover, this corpse didn't have any special markings such as a birthmark. And now after he had been cut into pieces, it was impossible find out who he was. It was only natural that Nie HuaiSang couldn't recognize it in the Saber Hall. In fact, even Wei WuXian couldn't guarantee that if he cut off his own leg andthrew it everywhere, he'd be able to recognize whose leg it was. It wasn't until the torso and the limbs were temporarily pieced into a corpse capable of movement by the resentful energy that Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi finally recognized him.

Wei WuXian, "ZeWu-Jun, HanGuang-Jun told you about what we saw during the journey, right? Mo Village, the grave digger, Yi City and all that."

Lan XiChen nodded. Wei WuXian continued, "Then HanGuang- Jun probably told you this already. The mist-faced man who tried to take the corpse away in the Chang Clan's cemetery knew the Lan Sect's sword moves like the back of his hand. There canonly be two possibilities. One, he's from the Lan Sect and has been practicing the Lan Sect's moves since a young age; two, he's not from the Lan Sect, but he's really familiar with your sect's moves. He either often dueled with the Lan Sect's people or he's so intelligent that he can remember the moves as long as he has seen them."

Lan XiChen remained silent. Wei WuXian added, "He fought for the corpse because he didn't want others to realize that ChiFeng- Zun had been cut up. If ChiFeng-Zun's corpse is pieced back together, the situation would be really difficult for him. This is someone who knows of the secrets behind the Nie Sect's Saber Hall. Someone who's quite close with the GusuLan Sect.

Someone who has a rather complicated history... with ChiFeng- Zun."

Without having to say who this person most likely was, everyone had understood.

Although Lan XiChen's expression was solemn, he still replied quickly, "He will not have done such a thing."

Wei WuXian, "ZeWu-Jun?"

Lan XiChen, "Your incidents of investigating the corpse parts and encountering the gravedigger all happened within the present month. During this month, he has been discussing matters with me every single night. We were planning the Discussion Conference occurring next month at the LanlingJin Sect just a few days ago. He could not have been to anywhere else. The gravedigger could not have been him." Wei WuXian, "What if he used a transportation talisman?" Lan XiChen shook his head. His tone was gentle yet resolute, "One must cultivate the transportation technique in order to use the transportation talisman. It is rather difficult to cultivate. He has never shown signs of cultivating it. Likewise, one must expend large quantities of spiritual powers to use this technique, but we night-hunted together just a few days ago. His performance was excellent. I am certain that he has never used the transportation talisman." Lan WangJi, "He did not have to go himself."

Lan XiChen still shook his head. Wei WuXian continued, "Sect Leader Lan, you know who is the most suspicious person. You're just refusing to admit it."

The light of the bonfire casted everchanging shadows over the three faces. All was still in the abandoned garden. After a while of silence, Lan XiChen replied, "I understand that because of certain reasons, the world holds quite a few misconceptions about him. But... I trust what I have seen throughout all these years. I trust that he is not this sort of person."

It wasn't difficult to understand why Lan XiChen defended this person. To be honest, even Wei WuXian himself didn't have a terrible opinion of the person they were suspicious of. Perhaps

because of his background, he had always treated others with kindness and humility. He was the type of person who never offended anyone, the type who could make everyone around him feel comfortable talking to him, let alone ZeWu-Jun, who had been friends with him for years?

The time before Nie MingJue's death was precisely the peak of the QingheNie Sect's advances toward the LanlingJin Sect. Who would've Nie MingJue's death benefited the most? Death by a qi deviation under the public's eyes... It looked like such a reasonable, unavoidable regret, but was the truth really so simple?

## Chapter 47: Guile— Part Two

The time of the Discussion Conference at Carp Tower came within the blink of an eye. Most of the prominent sects' residences were built in areas of beautiful scenery, but the LanlingJin Sect's Carp Tower sat in the most flourishing part of Lanling City. The main road used to visit the tower was a carriage path more than half a mile in length. It only opened for important events such as banquets or the Discussion Conferences. According to the LanlingJin Sect's rules, one must not walk at a fast pace here. Both sides of the path were covered in murals and reliefs, telling stories of the Jin Clan's leaders and other distinguished cultivators. During the journey, disciples of the LanlingJin Sect would act as guides as they drove the carriages. Out of all of them the four most famous sections about the current sect leader—Jin GuangYao—were respectively “disclosure”, “assassination”, “oath”, and “kind austerity”. Of course, the scenes showed how during the Sunshot Campaign Jin GuangYao hid in the QishanWen Sect and reported important information, assassinated the Wen Sect's leader Wen RuoHan, became sworn brothers with the rest of the Venerated Triad, and rose to the position of Chief Cultivator. The painter was quite adept at painting people's expressions. Although nothing seemed special at first glance, a more detailed look would reveal that even when his figure was executing the assassination, cheeks dripping blood, Jin GuangYao still had the hint of a smile over his face. One could feel their hair stand as they looked.

Immediately after it were Jin ZiXuan's murals. Usually, in order to signify their absolute power, sect leaders would purposely lessen the number of murals for cultivators of their own generation or perhaps switch to an inferior artist, so that they wouldn't be outshone. To these acts, everyone gave silent approval, showing their understanding. However, Jin ZiXuan had four murals as well, unbelievably standing on equal footing as Jin GuangYao. The handsome man in the paintings displayed both pride and vigor.

Hopping off the carriage, Wei WuXian stopped in front of the murals and stared for a while. Lan WangJi also stopped, waiting for him.

From not far away, a disciple declared, “Sect Lan of Gusu, please enter here.”

Lan WangJi, “Let us go.”

Wei WuXian didn't reply. The two walked together.

Following the stairs up Carp Tower was a wide, brick-paved square, bustling with people. The LanlingJin Sect had probably been expanded and refurbished during the past few years. The extravagance was greater than what Wei WuXian had seen back then. To the far side of the square, an alabaster base sat over a flight of nine stairs in the ruyi style. On top of the base, a magnificent palace completed with a hip-and-gable roof overlooked the ocean of Sparks Amidst Snow.

Sparks Amidst Snow was the crest of the LanlingJin Clan, an exquisite type of the white peony. Not only was the flower fine, its name was fine as well. There were two layers of petals and the larger petals on the outside grew tier upon tier, becoming waves of churning snow. The smaller petals on the inside were thin and delicate, embracing golden strands of the stamen as though they

were stars. If just one blossom was beyond splendid, how could one ever describe the grandeur of thousands blooming at once?

Multiple paths were situated before the square. Sects entered incessantly, yet in an organized manner.

“Sect Su of Moling, please enter here.” “Sect Nie of Qinghe, please enter here.” “Sect Jiang of Yunmeng, please enter here.”

As soon as he showed up, Jiang Cheng shot a sharp glance at them. Walking over, he spoke in an indifferent tone, “ZeWu-Jun. HanGuang-Jun.”

Lan XiChen nodded as well, “Sect Leader Jiang.”

Both of the two seemed preoccupied. After a few words of small talk, Jiang Cheng asked, “HanGuang-Jun, I’ve never seen you at Carp Tower’s Discussion Conferences before. Why have you gained the sudden interest?”

Neither Lan XiChen nor Lan WangJi replied. Luckily, Jiang Cheng didn’t intend for this to be a serious question in the first place. He had already turned to Wei WuXian, speaking as though he’d spit out a sword and impale the latter anytime he wished to, “If I remember correctly, wasn’t it that you two never took needless personnel with you when travelling out? What’s the situation this time? Once in a blue moon? Now who is this renowned cultivator? Could someone please introduce him to me?”

Suddenly, a smiling voice appeared, “Brother, why didn’t you tell me beforehand that WangJi was also going to come?”

The owner of Carp Tower—LianFang-Zun, Jin GuangYao—had personally come out to greet them.

Lan XiChen returned him a smile, while Lan WangJi a nod. Wei WuXian, on the other hand, carefully observed the chief cultivator of all sects.

Jin GuangYao was born with quite an advantageous face. His skin was fair, and he had a vermillion mark embellished on his forehead. His pupils were distinct against the whites of the eyes, appearing lively but not frivolous. His features appeared rather clean, attractive yet also ingenious. The shadow of a smile that always perched by the corners of his lips, and his brows, revealed at once his clever character. Such a face was enough to earn the love of women, but still wouldn’t evoke the vigilance or aversion of men; the elderly would think of him as sweet, while the young would think of him as amicable. Even if one didn’t like him, they definitely wouldn’t hate him either, which was why his face was “advantageous”. Although his figure was a bit small, his calm demeanor was more than enough to make up for it. Donning a cap made of black gauze, he wore the LanlingJin Sect’s formal uniform, a blooming Sparks Amidst Snow crest over the front of his round-collared robe. With a nine-ringed belt at his waist, liuhe boots at his feet, and a right hand pressing down on the hilt of the sword hung by his side, he let out a powerful aura of inviolability.

Jin Ling followed Jin GuangYao out here. He still didn’t dare meet Jiang Cheng alone. Hiding behind Jin GuangYao’s back, he mumbled, “Uncle.”

Jiang Cheng replied harshly, “So you still know that I’m your uncle!”

Jin Ling quickly tugged at the back hems of Jin GuangYao’s robe. Jin GuangYao seemed as though he had been born to resolve

conflicts, “Now, Sect Leader Jiang, A-Ling realized his mistake a long time ago. During the past few days, he’s been so scared you’d punish him that he hasn’t even been eating well. Children just like to make mischief. I know you love him the most. Let’s not bother him about it so much.”

Jin Ling hurried, “Yes, yes. Uncle can prove it. My appetite’s been bad these days!”

Jiang Cheng, “Your appetite’s been bad? Looking at how well your complexion is, I wouldn’t say you missed too many meals!”

As Jin Ling was just about to speak again, he glanced behind Lan WangJi and finally saw Wei WuXian. Temporarily astounded, he blurted, “Why are you here?!”

Wei WuXian, “To get a free meal.”

Jin Ling was somewhat angered, “How dare you still come?! Didn’t I warn...”

Jin GuangYao rubbed Jin Ling’s head, pushing him behind himself, and smiled, “Why not? You’re our guest now that you’ve come. I don’t know about anything else, but Carp Tower definitely has enough food.” He turned to Lan XiChen, “Brother, have a seat first. I’m going to check over there and make arrangements for WangJi as well.”

Lan XiChen nodded, “There is no need for the trouble.”

Jin GuangYao, “How is this trouble? Brother, you don’t have to be so polite now that you’re at my place. Really.”

Jin GuangYao could remember the name, title, age, and appearance of a person after just one encounter. Even after a few years, he'd be able to greet them without any fault, often carrying out solicitous conversations as well. If he had seen someone more than twice, he'd remember all of their likes and dislikes, therefore able to cater to their needs. This time, since Lan WangJi came to Carp Tower without advance notice, Jin GuangYao didn't arrange for his table. At the moment, he was immediately on the way to do so.

After entering Glamor Hall, the guests strolled down a soft, red carpet. Beside the sandalwood tables on both sides of the carpet were fair-faced maids, adorned with hoops, jades, and each with a genuine smile. With full bosoms and dainty waists, even their figures were similar, appearing both uniform and pleasing to the eye. Wei WuXian had never been able to help himself from looking a while longer when he came upon fair women. After he had been seated, he smiled at her when the maid was pouring him liquor, "Thanks."

Yet, as if she had received a shock, the woman snuck a glance at him, but quickly blinked and looked away. Wei WuXian initially found this strange. He immediately understood, though, when he looked around him. As he had expected, this wasn't the only peculiar pair of eyes. More than half of the Lanlingjin Sect's disciples had strange expressions on their faces when they looked at him.

He had temporarily forgotten that this was Carp Tower, where Mo XuanYu harassed somebody from his own sect and was kicked out. Who would've expected that he'd return with such conspicuity, as if he knew no shame? He even slipped into a high- ranked seat along with the Two Jades of Lan...

Wei WuXian shifted toward Lan WangJi's side, "HanGuang-Jun, HanGuang-Jun."

Lan WangJi, "Yes?"

Wei WuXian, "Please don't leave me. There's probably a lot of people here who know about Mo XuanYu. If somebody decides that they want to talk about the good ol' days with me, I'll have to keep on playing the fool and spouting nonsense. Please don't mind if I end up losing your face." Lan WangJi looked at him and replied in a tepid tone, "As long as you do not provoke others on purpose."

At this point, with a woman dressed in lavish robes by his arm, Jin GuangYao stepped into the room. Although the woman seemed rather dignified, a trace of innocence was blended into her expression. Even her graceful features appeared somewhat childlike. This was the official wife of Jin GuangYao, the mistress of Carp Tower—Qin Su.

The two had been the representation of loving couples in the cultivation world for the past few years, holding mutual respect for each other. Everyone knew that Qin Su was born into the LaolingQin Sect, a subsidiary clan of the LanlingJin Sect. Qin CangYe, the leader of the LaolingQin Sect, happened to be a subordinate who had followed Jin GuangShan for years. Although Jin GuangYao was Jin GuangShan's son, the two were originally somewhat ill-suited for each other due to his mother's status.

However, during the sunshot campaign, Qin Su had been saved by Jin GuangYao. She fell in love with him and never gave up, insisting that she wanted to be his wife. In the end, they finally drew the period on such a romantic story. Jin GuangYao didn't let her down either. Even though he held the important position of Chief Cultivator, his behavior was drastically different from his father's. He never took in any concubines, much less had a relationship with any other woman. This was indeed something that many wives of sect leaders envied.

Wei WuXian silently agreed with such rumors as he looked at the hand that Jin GuangYao held Qin Su's in. Jin GuangYao's expression brimmed tenderly with care, as though he even worried that she'd accidentally trip over the jade stairs.

After the two sat before the foremost table, the banquet had officially started. The one sitting at the table of the next-highest rank was Jin Ling. When his eyes landed on Wei WuXian, they glared at once. Wei WuXian had always been used to being watched by others. During the entire

time, he pretended that nothing was going on, eating and drinking among toast and chatter within Glamor Hall. It was quite a merry scene.

Night had already fallen when the banquet ended. The Discussion Forum would officially begin the next morning. In groups of two and three, the crowd slowly exited the hall, walking toward the guest chambers that disciples had directed them to. Since Lan XiChen seemed rather absent-minded, Jin GuangYao looked as though he wanted to ask what the matter was. Yet, just as he approached and called out, "Brother," another person threw himself over and wailed, "Brother!!!"

Jin GuangYao almost stepped back from the force. He quickly fixed his cap with one hand, "HuaiSang, what's wrong? Let's calm down first."

Such an unbecoming sect leader could only be the QingheNie Sect's Head Shaker. And, of course, the drunk Head Shaker was even more unbecoming. With a ruddy face, Nie HuaiSang refused to let go, "Oh Brother!! What do I do?! Can you help me again? I promise that this is the last time!!!"

Jin GuangYao, "Wasn't last time's situation dealt with by the people I found you?"

Nie HuaiSang cried, "Last time's situation was done, but this time there's a new situation! Brother, what should I do?! I don't want to live anymore!"

Looking at how it seemed like something few words couldn't explain, Jin GuangYao could only turn to Qin Su, "A-Su, you can go back first. HuaiSang, let's find somewhere and sit down. There's no need to hurry..."

He started walking outside with Nie HuaiSang leaning on him. When Lan XiChen came to see what was going on, he was also dragged along by the drunken Nie HuaiSang.

Qin Su saluted Lan WangJi, "HanGuang-Jun, I don't think you've come to Lanling for the Discussion Conferences since quite some years ago. I apologize if the reception was inadequate in any way."

Her voice was soft, truly befitting for such a sweet beauty. Lan WangJi nodded in return of the salute. Qin Su's gaze landed on Wei WuXian next. After a moment of hesitation, she whispered, "Then, please excuse my leave." With this, she left with her maid.

Wei WuXian pondered, "The way that everyone at Carp Tower looks at me is so strange. Just what did Mo XuanYu do? Publicly show his love while naked? What's special about that? The LanlingJin Sect's people really haven't seen things."

Lan WangJi shook his head at Wei WuXian's nonsense. Wei WuXian continued, "I'm gonna go ask someone. HanGuang-Jun, watch Jiang Cheng for me. It's best if he doesn't come find me. If he does, help me hold him back a bit, won't you?"

Lan WangJi, "Do not go too far."

Wei WuXian, "Got it. If I end up going far, let's meet in our roomat night."

His eyes searched throughout Glamor Hall, but didn't find the person he wanted. Raising a brow, he continued searching after he left Lan WangJi. When he passed a small pavilion, someone suddenly appeared from within the rock garden on the side, "Hey!"

Wei WuXian thought to himself, Ha! Found him. He turned around and spoke in a feeble tone, "What do you mean „hey“? How rude. Weren't we all lovey-dovey when we parted? We meet again and you're as heartless as ever. Now I'm sad."

Jin Ling felt goosebumps climb over his body, "Shut up right now! Who's all lovey-dovey with you?! Didn't I warn you already not to mess with our sect's people? Why have you come back?!"

Wei WuXian, "Honestly, I've always been following HanGuang- Jun properly. I'm this close to making him grab a rope and tieme to his body. Where have you seen me mess with your sect's people? Your uncle? He's the one messing with me, alright?"

Jin Ling was enraged, "Go away! My uncle's only suspicious of you! Don't talk nonsense. Don't think I don't know that you haven't given up and still want to..."

Suddenly, a few shouts came from around them. About half-a- dozen boys wearing the LanlingJin Sect's uniform leaped out from the garden. Jin Ling stopped talking at once.

The boys slowly approached them. The one leading the group was a boy of around the same age but a wider physique than Jin Ling, "I thought I saw wrong. So, it really is him."

Wei WuXian pointed to himself, "Me?"

The boy, "Who other than you?! Mo XuanYu, you still have the face to return?"

Jin Ling frowned, "Jin Chan, why did you come? It's none of your business here."

Wei WuXian, I see. It's probably one of the kids from Jin Ling's generation. And, looking at the way of things, this was a group of children who weren't on good terms with Jin Ling.

Jin Chan, "It's none of my business, but is it any of your business? Why do you care about me?"

As he spoke, three or four of the boys had already come over, as though they wanted to hold Wei WuXian down. With a sideways step, Jin Ling put himself in front of Wei WuXian, "Don't mess around!"

Jin Chan, "Mess around? What's wrong with teaching a lesson to an indecent disciple of our sect?"

Jin Ling snorted, "Wake up! He's been kicked out a long time ago! He isn't our sect's disciple no matter how you see it."

Jin Chan, "So what?"

The "so what" sounded so self-assured that Wei WuXian was flabbergasted. Jin Ling replied, "So what? Have you forgotten who he came with today? You want to teach him a lesson? Why don't you ask HanGuang-Jun first?"

Hearing the name "HanGuang-Jun", the boys all seemed nervous. Even if Lan WangJi wasn't present, nobody dared to claim that

they weren't scared of HanGuang-Jun at all. After a while of silence, Jin Chan responded, "Ha, Jin Ling, didn't you also used to hate him? How come today is so different?"

Jin Ling, "How do you have so many things to say? Does whether or not I hate him matter to you?"

Jin Chan, "He shamelessly harassed LianFang-Zun, and you're still talking in favor of him?"

Wei WuXian felt as though he had been struck with thunder.

He harassed whom? LianFang-Zun? Who was LianFang-Zun again? Jin GuangYao?

He couldn't believe it—the person Mo XuanYu had been harassing was LianFang-Zun, Jin GuangYao!

As he was trying to overcome the shock, on the other hand, after Jin Chan and Jin Ling exchanged a few more words, they'd somehow gotten to the point of seeking a fight with each other.

Neither of them saw the other in a good light to begin with. The fuse was ignited at once. Jin Ling asserted, "If you want a fight, then let's have a fight. You think I'm scared of you?"

One of the boys shouted, "Why not? He's only gonna call a dog to help him anyways!"

Jin Ling heard this just as he was about to whistle. He clenched his teeth and roared, "I can beat you up even if I don't call Fairy!!!"

Although his tone was ample with confidence, two fists were hardly a worthy opponent to four hands. After he started to fight, it was clear that his abilities began to fall short. He appeared to be losing ground, forced closer and closer to Wei WuXian.

Jin Ling seethed when he saw that Wei WuXian was still standing at the same place, "Why are you still standing around?!"

Wei WuXian suddenly grabbed his hand. Before Jin Ling had the chance to yell, he felt an overwhelming force press onto his wrist.

He couldn't help but collapse onto the ground. Enraged, he shouted, "Do you want to die?!!"

As he put down Jin Ling, who had been protecting him, Jin Chan and the others were startled. Yet, Wei WuXian asked, "You got it?"

Jin Ling was also startled, "What?"

Wei WuXian turned his hand again, "Have you understood?"

Feeling a numbing pain travel from his wrist to his entire body, Jin Ling cried again. Before his

eyes, however, he could recall Wei WuXian's swift, subtle movement. Wei WuXian spoke once more, "Again. Look carefully."

One of the boys just happened to rush over. With one hand behind his back, Wei WuXian used the other hand to snatch at the boy's wrist. He brought him to the ground in the blink of an eye. This time, Jin Ling saw what was going on. The aching part of his wrist also told him which acupoint to send his spiritual energy to. Springing to his feet, he seemed to be in high spirits, "Yes!"

The situation was reversed in an instant. Not long later, the boys' frustrated cries sounded throughout the garden. In the end, Jin Chan fumed, "Jin Ling, just you wait!"

A trail of curses followed as the boys fled in defeat. Jin Ling, on the other hand, split his sides laughing behind them. When his

laughter finally seemed to die, Wei WuXian spoke up, "Look at how happy you are. Your first time winning?"

Jin Ling spat, "I've always won one-on-one fights. But Jin Chan calls a bunch of helpers every single time. He's got no face."

Wei WuXian was just about to say that he could also find a bunch of people to help him. Fights didn't have to be one-on-one.

Sometimes, the number of people in one's group could make a life-and-death difference. However, he realized that he had always seen Jin Ling go out alone, without any same-age disciples from his sect following him around. It was likely for Jin Ling to have no helpers to choose from, and thus he decided not to say anything.

Jin Ling, "Hey, how did you learn the move?"

Wei WuXian shoved the responsibility to Lan WangJi's shoulders without showing even a hint of shame, "HanGuang-Jun taught me."

Jin Ling didn't doubt this at all. He had already seen Lan WangJi's forehead ribbon tied to Wei WuXian's hands anyways. He simply mumbled, "He even teaches you these things?"

Wei WuXian, "Sure he does. This is only a small trick, though. It's your first time using it and they haven't seen it, so the results are neat. They'll eventually get it if you use it too many times. It won't be so easy next time. How was that? You want to learn a few more moves from me?"

Jin Ling glanced at him and couldn't help but answered, "Why are you like this? My younger uncle has always advised against this, but you're egging me on."

Wei WuXian, "Advised you? Against what? Don't fight and get along with others nicely?"

Jin Ling, "Pretty much."

Wei WuXian, "Don't listen to him. Let me tell you—when you grow older, you'll find out that there are more and more people you want to beat up, but you'll have to force yourself to get along with them nicely. So, since you're still young, go beat up all the people you want. At such an age, if you don't have a few proper fights, your life won't be complete."

Jin Ling's face betrayed faint yearning, yet he still sounded contemptuous, "What are you talking about? Uncle's advice is for my own good."

After he spoke, he suddenly remembered that the past Mo XuanYu had always regarded Jin GuangYao as a deity. He definitely wouldn't have disagreed with Jin GuangYao in any way. Yet, now, he was saying "don't listen to him". Was it that he really didn't hold any improper thoughts toward Jin GuangYao anymore?

Looking at his expression, Wei WuXian could guess what he was thinking of. He responded without any hesitation, "Looks like I can't keep it from you anymore. That's right. I've fallen for someone else."

Jin Ling, "..."

Wei WuXian's face was as dynamic as his tone, "During the days that I was gone, I thought about it seriously and finally decided that LianFang-Zun was neither my type nor somebody who suited me."

Jin Ling backed away.

Wei WuXian, "In the past, I couldn't understand my own heart, but after I met HanGuang-Jun I'm certain." He took in a deep breath, "I'm already incapable of leaving him. I don't want anyone else aside from HanGuang-Jun... Wait, why are you running away? I haven't finished yet! Jin Ling, Jin Ling!"

Jin Ling turned around and sprinted in the opposite direction. Wei WuXian shouted a couple of times from behind him, but he didn't even turn around. He was rather proud that, thinking to himself

that this time Jin Ling definitely wouldn't keep on doubting that he held any improper thoughts about Jin GuangYao. However, as he turned around, he saw a snowy-skinned figure stand under the moon, its robes whiter than frost. About thirty feet away, Lan WangJi stared directly at him, looking as calm as ever.

Wei WuXian, "..."

If these were the days when he just revived, he could say things ten times more embarrassing than what he just did in front of Lan WangJi. Now, however, as Lan WangJi gazed at him, he actually felt a subtle sense of shame, one that he hadn't felt in two lifetimes.

Wei WuXian quickly suppressed the seldom-felt shame. Walking over, he spoke as naturally as he could, "HanGuang-Jun, you're here! Did you know? Mo XuanYu was kicked out of Carp Tower because he harassed Jin GuangYao. So that was why everyone looked at me so weirdly!"

Lan WangJi didn't say anything. He simply turned around and walked alongside him. Wei WuXian continued, "Neither you nor ZeWu-Jun knew about this. You didn't even know who Mo XuanYu was. It seems like the LanlingJin Sect had been keeping

the whole thing hushed. Now this explains why. After all, Mo XuanYu had the sect leader's blood in him. If Jin GuangShan really didn't want such a son, he would've never taken him back. If it was as simple as harassing someone from the same sect, he would've gotten away with a few scoldings. It wouldn't have been enough for him to be kicked out. But if the one he harassed was Jin GuangYao, things would've been a bit different. This wasn't only LianFang-Zun, but also Mo XuanYu's stepbrother. It truly was..."

It truly was a scandal. The matter had to be entirely uprooted. Of course, it was impossible to do anything to LianFang-Zun, so they could only chase Mo XuanYu away.

Wei WuXian remembered that earlier on, during their encounter in the square, Jin GuangYao looked as though nothing had happened. The way that he conversed so politely made him seem as if he didn't even know who Mo XuanYu was. Wei WuXian couldn't help but approve of his skills. On the other hand, Jin Ling's attitude couldn't be hidden at all. The reason he was disgusted at Mo XuanYu was not only that he was a cut-sleeve, but likely also that the one Mo XuanYu harassed was his own uncle.

Thinking of JingYi, Wei WuXian sighed in silence. Lan WangJi asked, "What is wrong?"

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, have you noticed that Jin Ling was alone every single time he went out to night-hunt? Don't tell me

that Jiang Cheng always accompanies him. His own uncle doesn't count. He's about fifteen already, yet there's nobody his own age following him around. When we were young..." The tip of Lan WangJi's brows lifted slightly. Seeing this, Wei WuXian

immediately changed his words, "Alright. Me. It was only me. When I was young, wasn't I like this?"

Lan WangJi replied indifferently, "That was you. Not everyone is like you."

Wei WuXian, "But all children like it where there are lots of people, right? HanGuang-Jun, would you think that Jin Ling's really distant and has no friends in his own sect? I don't know about the YunmengJiang Sect, I don't think any of the Jin Sect's juniors like to play with him. He just fought a few a while ago.

Don't tell me that Jin GuangYao has no son or daughter, or anyone around his age who's close to him."

Lan WangJi, "Jin GuangYao once had a son. His life was taken at a young age."

Wei WuXian wondered, "He was the young master of Carp Tower, though. How could his life have been taken away?"

Lan WangJi, "The lookout towers." Wei WuXian, "And why was that?"

Back then, in order to build the lookout towers, Jin GuangYao not only faced quite a number of oposers, but also displeased a handful of sects. One of the opposing sect's leaders lost the arguments, and went into a murderous rage, killing Jin GuangYao and Qin Su's only son. The boy had always been a good child and he couple had always loved him dearly. Under resentment, Jin GuangYao tore down the entire sect in revenge. Qin Su, however, was overcome with grief. She hadn't been able to bear another child ever since.

After a while of silence, he replied, "With Jin Ling's temper, he offends other people whenever he opens his mouth, he pokes at the hornet's nest whenever he raises his hand. Your sect's JingYi

calls him Young Mistress—well, he's right. The many times before this, if it weren't for how we protected him, he'd have no lives left. Jiang Cheng isn't at all someone who knows how to teach children. Jin GuangYao, on the other hand..."

Remembering why they came to Carp Tower, Wei WuXian's head ached again. He pressed his fingers onto his temples. On the other side, Lan WangJi looked at him quietly. Although he didn't give any words of comfort, he had always listened, answering each question. Wei WuXian sighed, "Never mind. Let's go back inside first."

The two returned to the guest residence that the LanlingJin Sect arranged for them. The room was rather spacious, and rather ornate. A set of exquisite liquor cups made of smooth white porcelain had even been placed onto the table. Wei WuXian sat down on the side, and started to admire the set. He only stopped when it was already late into the night.

Searching through the drawers, he found a pair of scissors and a stack of paper. With just a few cuts, he created a paperman. The paperman, with a round head and unusually long sleeves that resembled butterfly wings, was only as tall as an adult's finger.

Wei WuXian took a brush pen from the table and painted a few strokes. Tossing the brush away, he drank a mouthful from a liquor cup, and immediately lay down onto the bed. The paperman, on the other hand, suddenly twitched. With a few trembles, its wide sleeves lifted its weightless body into the air, as though they were wings. It flitted about and landed on the tip of Lan WangJi's shoulder.

Lan WangJi looked to the side, at his shoulder. The paperman threw itself onto his cheek. It climbed upward, all the way to his forehead ribbon, and tugged at it, as though the ribbon was its favorite thing in the world. Lan WangJi let the paperman wriggle on his ribbon for some time. Just as he reached out to take it

down, the paperman slid its way down as fast as it could. No matter intentionally or not, it bumped its head once against his lips.

Lan WangJi's movements paused for a moment. Using two of his fingers, he finally caught it, "Do not fool around."

Softly, the paperman rolled its body over his slender finger. Lan WangJi, "You must be careful." The paperman nodded and flapped its wings. Clinging flat onto the ground, it climbed through the door slit and snuck out of the guest room.

Carp Tower was heavily guarded. Of course, a large, living human wouldn't be able to travel freely around. The good thing was that Wei WuXian had once learnt a certain technique of the dark arts—the paper metamorphosis.

Although it was indeed useful, it had a number of restrictions as well. Not only was the time strictly limited, the paperman must also return as it were, after it had been released. There mustn't even be a single scratch on it. If, on its way, it was torn apart or broken in any way, the soul would receive the same degree of harm—from a year of unconsciousness to a whole lifetime of lunacy. Thus, one must be extremely careful.

Wei WuXian possessed the paperman's body. At times, he stuck to the hem of a cultivator's robe.

At other times, he flattened himself to pass through closed doors. At times, he unfolded his sleeves and looked down at the ground, pretending to be a piece of used paper, a butterfly that danced amid the night sky.

Suddenly, still airborne, he heard faint sounds of crying come from below him. Looking over, he saw one of Jin GuangYao's residences, Blooming Garden. Wei WuXian flew below the roof and saw three figures sitting in the living room. With Lan XiChen in one hand and Jin GuangYao in the other, Nie HuaiSang cried in a drunken state, complaining about things unknown. Behind the living room was a study.

Seeing that nobody was inside, Wei WuXian went in to look. Sketched designs annotated in red covered the entire desk. On the walls were the four sceneries of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. In the first place, Wei WuXian didn't intend to pay them any attention. After he glanced at them, however, he couldn't help wanting to praise the artist's skills. Both the colors and the brushstrokes were gentle, yet the landscapes appeared vast.

Although only one scene resided on each paper, thousands of miles seemed to extend from it. Wei WuXian thought to himself that such skills were almost comparable to Lan XiChen's, and couldn't help taking a few more looks. Only afterward did he

realize that the artist of the four sceneries indeed happened to be Lan XiChen.

Flying out of Blooming Garden, from a distance, Wei WuXian could see a grandiose five-ridged palace. The roof of the palace was covered in glazed, gleaming tiles. Outside of the palace, there were thirty-two golden pillars. The scene was magnificent. This was probably one of the most guarded areas of Carp Tower, the bedchamber of each of the LanlingJin Sect's leaders, the Fragrant Palace.

Aside from the cultivators dressed in robes of Sparks Amidst Snow, Wei WuXian could also feel that arrays had been packed into the space above and below the palace. Flying toward the base of a pillar, also carved with the peony, he rested for a moment. He only slipped into the door slit after a while of huffing.

Compared to the Blooming Garden, the Fragrant Palace was a classical building of Carp Tower. Sumptuously ornamented, the building was almost majestic. Inside the palace, layers and layers of gauze curtains cascaded onto the ground. The beast-shaped incense burner sat on top of its stand, exuding clouds of aromatic smoke. Amid the extravagance, there was a sweet yet languid sense of decadence.

Jin GuangYao was with Lan XiChen and Nie HuaiSang in the Blooming Garden, which meant that the Fragrant Palace was empty, conveniently allowing Wei WuXian to inspect the area. The paperman flew around the interior of the palace, searching for anywhere that roused suspicion. Suddenly, Wei WuXian saw an agate paperweight on the table. An envelope was under the paperweight.

The envelope had already been opened. Nobody's name was written on it, not even any crests. Yet, seeing from its thickness, it obviously wasn't an empty envelope. Flapping his sleeves, he landed on the table, wanting to take a look at whatever was inside the envelope. But even as he attempted at dragging out the envelope, his "hands" holding onto the edge, the envelope remained still.

His present body was a piece of paper, almost weightless. He could do nothing to move the heavy paperweight.

Paperman WuXian walked a few more times around the agate paperweight. He shoved and kicked, hopped and leaped, yet it still refused to budge. Unable to do anything, he could only give up as of the moment, then go to check if there were any other places of suspicion. Suddenly, a side door of the palace was pushed slightly open.

Alarmed, Wei WuXian swept off the table, motionless against a corner of the table.

The one who entered was Qin Su. Wei WuXian finally realized that it wasn't that the palace had been empty, but that Qin Su was quiet within her room. The fact that the mistress of Carp Tower appeared in the Fragrant Palace was nothing unusual.

However, right now, she looked as abnormal as one could. Her face was paler than snow, drained of all blood. Her figure was also on the verge of collapsing. She looked as though she had just received a substantial shock, like she had just awakened from a swoon and could swoon again.

Wei WuXian thought to himself, what happened? Her countenance was clearly great when she was in the banquet hall, just a while ago.

Leaning against the door, Qin Su stood blankly for a moment before she found her way over, hand on the wall. Staring at the letter under the agate paperweight, she reached for it, as if she wanted to grab it, but still took her hand back. Under the firelight, Wei WuXian could see the obvious trembles of her lips. Those elegant features could almost be described as twisted.

Out of the blue, she let out a scream, and snatched the envelope, throwing it onto the ground. Her other hand spasmed as it dug

into the front of her robe. Wei WuXian's eyes lit up, but he stopped the urge of darting over. If Qin Su was the only one who saw him, he'd be able to deal with it, but not if Qin Su shouted and brought over other people. His soul would be affected if the piece of paper received the slightest damage.

All of a sudden, a voice echoed through the palace, "A-Su, what are you doing?"

Qin Su's head spun around. A familiar figure stood just a few feet behind her. No different from usual, the familiar face smiled at her as well.

She immediately dove to the ground, grabbing the letter. Wei WuXian could only cling tightly to the corner and watch the letter move once again out of his sight. It seemed as if Jin GuangYao stepped forward, "What's in your hand?"

His tone was as kind as ever, as though he really didn't notice anything, neither the strange letter in Qin Su's hand nor the distorted expression on Qin Su's face. It sounded like he was merely asking about a trivial matter. Still gripping the letter, Qin

Su did not reply. Jin GuangYao asked again, "You don't look too well. What's wrong?"

His voice was brimming with care. Qin Su held up the letter and spoke through her trembles, "... I met with somebody."

Jin GuangYao, "Who?"

Qin Su seemed as though she didn't hear him, "This person told me a few things, and gave me this letter."

Jin GuangYao couldn't help but laugh, "Who did you meet with? Are you really going to believe whatever things people tell you?"

Qin Su, "It couldn't have been a lie. Definitely not."

Wei WuXian also thought, who was it? He couldn't even tell whether the person was a man or a woman.

Qin Su, "Are the things written on here true?"

Jin GuangYao, "A-Su, if you don't let me see the letter, how can I know what's written on it?"

Qin Su showed him the letter, "Fine. Go read it!"

In order to see the letter with clarity, Jin GuangYao walked

another step forward. With the letter in Qin Su's hand, he scanned it rapidly. His expression didn't change at all. Not even the single trace of a shadow had fallen over his face. Qin Su, however, was almost screaming, "Speak to me, speak! Tell me that none of this is true! That all of these are lies!"

Jin GuangYao replied with certainty, "None of this is true. All of these are lies. This is complete nonsense, words of false charges."

Qin Su bursted out crying, "You're lying! Things are already like this and you're still lying to me—well I don't believe it!"

Jin GuangYao sighed, "A-Su, you were the one who told me to say so. Now that I've said so, you refuse to believe me. This is indeed quite troubling."

Qin Su threw the letter onto the ground and covered her face, "Oh Heavens! Oh Heavens, oh

Heavens! You, you really... You truly are scary! How could you... How could you?!"

She couldn't continue to speak, backing off to the side with her hands still covering her face. Holding onto a pillar, she suddenly started to vomit.

She heaved as though she was going to let all of her intestines out. Seeing such an intense reaction, Wei WuXian was shocked speechless, she was probably also throwing up when she was inside. Just what in the world is written in the letter? Jin

GuangYao killed someone and dismembered them? But everyone knew that Jin GuangYao killed countless people during the Sunshot Campaign. There were quite a few lives in her father's hands, as well. Maybe it was the thing with Mo XuanYu? No, it was impossible that Jin GuangYao had anything for Mo XuanYu.

It was likely that Mo XuanYu being kicked out of Carp Tower was precisely his doing. Anyways, no matter what, her reaction wouldn't be so extreme that she was disgusted to the point of throwing up. Although he wasn't familiar with Qin Su, they had met a few times in the past, both being the descendants of prominent clans. Qin Su was the beloved daughter of Qin CangYe. Her personality was naive, but she had lived a comfortable life and was taught excellent manners. She'd never act in such a mad, violent way. It really didn't make sense at all.

Listening to the noise that she made, Jin GuangYao bent down in silence and picked up the pieces of paper that had scattered onto the ground. With a raise of his hand, he dipped them over the nine-lotus branched candle stand, and allowed them to slowly burn.

Watching the ashes fall to the ground bit by bit, he spoke in a somewhat dejected tone, "A-Su, we've been husband and wife for so many years. We've always respected each other in peaceful harmony. As a husband, I'd like to think that I treat you well. The fact that you're acting like this really hurts my feelings."

Qin Su had nothing left to vomit. She whimpered on the ground, "You treat me well... You do treat me well... But I... I'd rather that I never met you! No wonder you never... ever since... ever since then... You did such a thing—why don't you just kill me?!"

Jin GuangYao, "A-Su, before you knew of it, didn't we live perfectly fine? You only felt uncomfortable and began to vomit

today, now that you know. We can see that this isn't anything at

all. It won't be able to do any physical harm to you. Your mind is the only thing doing all this."

Qin Su shook her head, her face ashen, "... Tell me the truth. A-Song... How did A-Song die?"

Who was A-Song?

Jin GuangYao was startled, "A-Song? Why are you asking me this? Haven't you known of this since a long time ago? A-Song was killed. I've already destroyed the one who killed him in revenge. Why are you mentioning him, all of a sudden?"

Qin Su, "I did know. But now, I'm starting to think that everything I knew was a lie."

Jin GuangYao's face began to show fatigue, "A-Su, what are you thinking of? A-Song is my son. What do you think I'd do? You'd rather believe someone who's been hiding this whole time, a letter from an unknown person, than believe in me?"

Qin Su pulled at her hair, shrieking, "You're scary precisely because he is your son! What do I think you'd do? You could even do something like this, so what couldn't you have done?! And now you still want me to believe in you? Oh Heavens!"

Jin GuangYao, "Stop thinking nonsense. Tell me—who did you meet today? Who gave you the letter?"

Qin Su held onto her hair, "What... What are you going to do?"

Jin GuangYao, "If the person could tell you, then they can also tell other people. If they could write one letter, then they can also write a second, a third, a countless number of letters. What do you intend on doing? Allow such a thing to be leaked? A-Su, I'm

begging you. Please, no matter for which feelings that have existed between us, tell me where the people mentioned in the letter are. Who was the one that told you to come back and read the letter?"

Who was it? Wei WuXian also wanted to hear Qin Su say just who on Earth it was. Someone who could approach the Chief Cultivator's wife and earn her trust, someone who uncovered a hidden story of Jin GuangYao's. The letter couldn't have been something as simple as murder. It could make Qin Su so disgusted or scared that she vomited, and it remained so unspeakable even when the two of them were the only one's present. During the questioning, they still talked vaguely, not daring to be explicit. But, if Qin Su really decided to be honest and tell him whom had given her the letter, then she'd be truly foolish. If she said it, aside from dealing with whomever it was, Jin GuangYao would also silence Qin Su, either by fair means or foul.

Fortunately, although Qin Su had always seemed innocently ignorant since a young age, even to the point of being somewhat dense, she didn't trust Jin GuangYao anymore. She stared blankly at Jin GuangYao, who sat still before the table. He was the Chief Cultivator above tens of thousands. He was her husband. As of right now, under the candlelight, he looked as calm and as picturesque as ever. He stood up, as though he wanted to help her up, but Qin Su slapped his hand away. Bent over on the ground, she couldn't help another retching fit.

The tip of Jin GuangYao's brows twitched, "Do I really disgust you so much?"

Qin Su, "You're not a person... You're a madman!"

A mourning warmth filled the eyes that Jin GuangYao looked at her with, "A-Su, back then, I really didn't have another path to walk. I wanted to keep you in the dark for your whole life. I didn't want you to know about this. Now, though, it's been entirely ruined by the one who told you. You think that I'm dirty. You think that I'm disgusting. All of these are fine, but you're my wife. How would others see you? How would they talk of you?"

Qin Su buried her head into her arms, "Stop talking, stop talking, stop reminding me!!! I wish I never knew you; I wish that I'm not related to you at all! Why did you approach me in the first place?!"

After a moment of silence, Jin GuangYao answered, "I know that you won't believe me, no matter what I say, but it was sincere, back then."

Qin Su sobbed, "... You're still speaking such blandishments!"

Jin GuangYao, "I'm speaking the truth. I've always remembered that you have never said anything about my background or my mother. I'm grateful for you until the end of my life, and I want to respect you, cherish you, love you. But you have to know that even if A-Song hadn't been killed, he had to die. He could only die. If we let him grow up, you and I..."

With the mention of her son, Qin Su couldn't bear it any longer. With a raise of her hand, she slapped him on the face, "Then who's the one that did all this?! Just what can't you do for this position?!"

Without any avoidance, Jin GuangYao accepted the slap. A crimson handprint immediately appeared over his fair cheek.

Jin GuangYao, "What are you talking about? You must be feeling quite unwell. Your father has already gone to journey and cultivate. I'll send you off sometime soon as well, and you can enjoy being in your father's company. Let's finish this quickly."

There's still quite a number of guests outside. There's still the Discussion Conference tomorrow."

Things were already like this, and he was still thinking of the guests outside and the Discussion Conference tomorrow!

Although he said that he was going to allow Qin Su time for resting, he ignored all of Qin Su's pushes of refusal and helped her up. Wei WuXian didn't know what he did, but Qin Su suddenly collapsed, robbed of all energy. Thus, just like this, Jin GuangYao half-dragged his wife into the layering curtains. Paperman WuXian snuck out from below the table and followed them. He saw Jin GuangYao, whose hand was placed over a full-length mirror made of copper. A moment later, his fingers somehow entered the mirror, as though they broke into the surface of a pool of

water. Qin Su's eyes were wide open, still crying. She could only watch as her husband dragged her into the mirror, unable to speak or shout. Wei WuXian knew that the mirror definitely couldn't be opened by anyone aside from Jin GuangYao himself. Such an opportunity was now or never. Roughly calculating the timing, he quickly leaped inside.

Behind the copper mirror was a secret room. After Jin GuangYao entered, the oil lamps on the walls ignited on their own. The dim light illuminated shelves and cabinets of different sizes, covering the walls. On the shelves were books, scrolls, stones, weapons. There were also a few instruments of torture. Iron rings, sharp spikes, silver hooks—all seemed strange. Just looking at their appearance could make one shiver in fear. Wei WuXian knew that these were probably made by Jin GuangYao.

The QishanWen Sect's leader, Wen RuoHan, had a moody, violent personality. He loved the sight of blood and sometimes took enjoyment in torturing those that offended him. Jin GuangYao was only able to capture Wen RuoHan's interest by catering to his needs, making all sorts of cruel yet amusing devices.

Any sects owned a couple of treasury vaults. Thus, it wasn't strange at all for the Fragrant Palace to hold such a room.

Aside from a desk, an iron table—dark to the eyes, cold to the touch, long enough for a person to lie—was also within the room. There seemed to be black, dried-up traces of something on the surface of the table. Wei WuXian commented in silence, this would be the perfect table to cut someone apart on.

Jin GuangYao gently helped Qin Su lie down on the table. Qin Su's face was ashen as Jin GuangYao straightened out a few

tangled strands of her hair, "Don't be scared. You shouldn't walk around in such a state. There'll be a lot of people during the next few days. Why don't you rest for a bit? You can come back as soon as you tell me who the person is. Nod if you're willing to tell me. I didn't seal all of your meridians. You should still be able to nod."

Qin Su's eyes rolled toward her husband, who was still so kind and caring toward her. Her pupils were filled with fear, pain, and despair.

Suddenly, Wei WuXian noticed that one of the shelves were blocked by a curtain. The curtain was covered in sinister, blood-red runes. It was a talisman of forbiddance, one of extreme power.

The paperman slowly inched upward, clinging to the wall. On the other hand, Jin GuangYao was still pleading with Qin Su in a soft voice. Suddenly, as if he noticed something, he turned around in alarm.

There was no third person in the room except for Qin Su and him. Jin GuangYao stood up. He only returned after finding nothing during his careful inspection of the room.

Of course, he didn't know that, just as he turned around, Wei WuXian had already reached a shelf of books. Just as he saw a slight movement at Jin GuangYao's neck, he immediately inserted his thin, paper body into a book, as though he were a bookmark.

His eyes were stuck right between two pages from a manuscript.

Fortunately, even though Jin GuangYao was more alert than others, he wasn't so alert as to flip open this book to see if anyone was hiding inside.

All of a sudden, Wei WuXian realized that the characters his eyes saw looked a bit familiar. After a while of scrutiny, he cursed in silence—how could he not find them familiar? They were his characters!

The comments that Jiang FengMian gave his handwriting was "careless, yet poised". This was definitely his writing. After Wei WuXian looked at it with more care, he managed to make out the phrases "... different from possession...", "... revenge...", "... forced contract", in addition to the vague or damaged areas. At last, he could finally conclude that the book he crammed himself into was his own manuscript. The content of the manuscript was an article on sacrificing one's body, deducing from the information that he had gathered.

Back then, he wrote quite a few of these manuscripts. He wrote them as he threw them all over the place, especially the cavern on Burial Hill in which he slept. Some of these manuscripts were destroyed by the fires of the siege. Others, like his sword, were collected by various people as war trophies.

He had been confused as to where Mo XuanYu learnt of the forbidden technique. Now, he knew the answer.

This was the damaged manuscript of a forbidden technique, which was why Wei WuXian definitely didn't believe that Jin GuangYao would let just anyone have access to it. It seemed that even of Mo XuanYu and Jin GuangYao weren't in that sort of a relationship, they were still fairly close.

As he was thinking, Jin GuangYao's voice came, "A-Su, my time is up. I'll have to look after the guests. I'll come see you afterwards."

Wei WuXian had already squirmed his way out of his manuscripts. Hearing the voice, he immediately went inside again. This time, what he saw weren't manuscripts, but... two title deeds for household and land?

Wei WuXian found this rather strange. How could title deeds hold such special value that they were kept in the same place as the YiLing Patriarch's manuscripts? But, no matter how he looked at them, they were two of the average title deeds, without any tricks or codes. The papers were turning yellow and even had blotches of ink on them. Nevertheless, he didn't think that Jin GuangYao placed them here at random. Thus, he took the time to remember the address, somewhere in Yunmeng's Yunping City. He thought that he might find something there if he got the chance to do so.

After hearing nothing for quite a while, Wei WuXian began to climb up the wall again. He finally reached the shelf blocked by the talisman of forbiddance. However, before he could examine what was kept inside the shelf, the scene before his eyes suddenly lit up.

Jin GuangYao walked over and lifted the curtain.

For a split second, Wei WuXian thought that he had been exposed. After the faint firelight made its way through the curtain, he found that he was enveloped in a shadow. A circular object just happened to be in front of him.

Jin GuangYao stood still, as though he was staring into the eyes of whatever was inside this shelf.

After a moment, he spoke, "Were you the one looking at me?"

Of course, there couldn't be any response. He was silent for a while, then let down the curtain.

Wei WuXian quietly attached himself to the object. Cold and hard, it seemed to be a helmet. He then turned to the front. As he had expected, he saw a pallid face. The one who sealed the head wanted it to see nothing, hear nothing, speak nothing, and so incantations had been crowded onto the waxen skin. The eyes, the ears, and the mouth were all sealed tightly shut.

Wei WuXian greeted it in silence, what an honor to meet you, ChiFeng-Zun.

## Chapter 48: Guile— Part Three

As Wei WuXian had expected, the final piece of Nie MingJue's body, his head, was indeed being kept by Jin GuangYao.

Nie MingJue, the one who almost seemed to go into invincible rages during the Sunshot Campaign, was sealed under layers

upon layers within such a cramped, dismal room, unable to ever see the light.

If Wei WuXian simply removed the seal on the head, ChiFeng-

Zun's corpse would be able to sense it and come for it on its own. As he was inspecting the restrictions of the helmet, deciding how exactly to deal with it, he suddenly felt a powerful force of attraction. His weightless paper body had been shoved forward so that he was stuck to Nie MingJue's forehead.

On the other side of Carp Tower, Lan WangJi continued to stare at Wei WuXian's face as he sat beside him. A while later, his fingers twitched. With downcast eyes, he touched his lips softly.

It was very soft indeed, as soft as how the paperman had bumped into them.

Suddenly, Wei WuXian's hands jerked slightly, clenched into fists. Lan WangJi's expression hardened and helped Wei WuXian into his arms. Holding his face, he saw that, although Wei WuXian's eyes were still shut, his brows had knit closely together.

Over at the secret room, Wei WuXian didn't have to time react at all. Those of the deceased who held extreme resentment radiated such hateful energies and projected them onto the living, mitigating their anger and spreading their emotions. This was the cause of most hauntings. In fact, this was also the mechanism behind Empathy. If Wei WuXian were using his corporal body, a defense line to his soul, resentful energy definitely couldn't touch him if he didn't want it to. At the moment, however, he was possessing a flimsy piece of paper, which significantly impaired his defense ability. Not only was he close to the head, Nie MingJue's resentful energy was also unusually strong. Wei WuXian was affected within just a moment of inattention. One second ago, he had been thinking "oh no", and the next he could already smell the scent of blood.

He hadn't come across such a thick odor in years. Something buried in his bones immediately awakened, starting to simmer and stir. As soon as he had opened his eyes, he saw before him the glare of a blade, the shadow of spilled blood, and the head of a man, soaring across the sky, along with its fallen body.

The beheaded man wore a robe with the clan motif of flames and the sun. Wei WuXian watched „himself“ sheath his saber, a low voice coming out of his mouth, "Go get the head. Hang it up for the Wen-dogs to see."

Someone answered from behind him, "Yes!"

Wei WuXian realized who the beheaded man was.

He was the eldest son of the QishanWen Sect's leader Wen RuoHan—Wen Xu. He was killed by Nie MingJue in Hejian. His head was cut off with a single strike and hung up in front of the troops, in demonstration to the Wen Sect's cultivators. His corpse was cut into pieces by the enraged cultivators of the Nie Sect, then ground up and smeared below the earth.

Nie MingJue glanced at the corpse on the ground and kicked it to the side. Hand on the hilt of his saber, he looked calmly around.

ChiFeng-Zun was quite tall. When he Empathized with A-Qing last time, Wei WuXian's field of vision was rather short, but this time it was even taller than his usual view. Looking down, he saw countless casualties. Some wore sun-and-flames robes; some had the QingheNie Sect's beast-head crest on their backs; some didn't dress in any uniforms; each consisting of around one-third. With such a dire scene, the scent of blood suffused the air. He

scanned his surroundings as he strode forward, as though he still wanted to check if any of the Wen Sect's cultivators still had a breath of air left in them. Suddenly, a clashing noise came from

a tile-roof house on the side.

With a wave of his saber, a fierce blade of wind swept over. Hacking open the house's crude door, it revealed a mother and her daughter, both panic-stricken. Such a shabby house held very little possessions, its lack of hiding places allowing the pair only to take cover under the table as they held their breaths. As the young woman's round eyes caught reflection of Nie MingJue's blood-drenched and murderous appearance, tears immediately poured out. The girl in her arms had already opened her mouth, scared speechless.

As Nie MingJue saw that it was only an ordinary mother-and- daughter pair, likely two commoners who had failed to escape before battle broke out, his furrowed brows softened slightly. A subordinate, not knowing what had happened, approached from behind him, "Sect leader?"

The mother-and-daughter only knew that a few gangs of cultivators crashed into their workaday lives and battled the hell out of one another. Neither knew which was the good side and which was the bad. Fearing whomever that held a blade, they thought that they'd die for sure, faces distorting with fright. Nie MingJue took a look at them and curbed his killing intent, "It's alright."

He let down the hand that he held his saber with and paced to the other side of the room. The young woman instantly collapsed onto the ground, still embracing her daughter. After a moment, she couldn't help but begin to sob.

A few strides later, Nie MingJue suddenly stopped, questioning the subordinate behind him, "Who was the cultivator that kept guard at the end during the last battlefield clean-up?"

The subordinator hesitated for a second, "Kept guard at the end? I... don't think I remember."

Nie MingJue frowned, "Tell me when you remember."

He continued to walk forward. The cultivator hurried to ask other people. Not long later, he caught back up, "Sect Leader! I've asked. The cultivator who kept guard at the end during the last battlefield clean-up is called Meng Yao."

Hearing the name, Nie MingJue raised his brows, as though finding it somewhat surprising.

Wei WuXian knew why. Before Jin GuangYao was accepted into his clan, he was named Meng Yao, after his mother's last name. This wasn't a secret at all. In fact, the name used to be quite "well-known".

Although not many people saw with their own eyes how it was when Jin GuangYao, the one who would later become LianFang- Zun and stand upon Koi Tower with unequivocal power, first came upon the tower, the rumors had already explained things at large. Jin GuangYao's mother was renowned in one of Yunmeng's brothels. Back then, she boasted the reputation of being one of the most talented prostitutes. It was said that she could play the guqin well and wrote excellent calligraphy. She was so well- educated that she could almost pass as the young mistress of a wealthy clan. Of course, no matter how great the resemblance was, in the mouths of the people, a prostitute was still a prostitute.

When Jin GuangShan happened to visit Yunmeng once, he definitely dared not miss such a famous prostitute. He lingered around the Meng woman for days and returned with satisfaction after leaving her a keepsake. After he got back, he naturally behaved the same way as he had behaved countless times before this, forgetting all about the amorous woman.

In comparison, Mo XuanYu and his mother were rather favored. At least Jin GuangShan still remembered that he had such a son and brought him back to Koi Tower. Meng Yao, on the other hand, wasn't as lucky. The son of a prostitute was far from that of a good family. Just like Lady Mo, after she had given birth to one child for Jin GuangShan, she waited with much devotion for the cultivator to take her and her child back. She taught Meng Yao with care, preparing for his future entrance to the cultivation world. Yet, even when he grew past the age of ten, there was still no news of his father, while the Meng woman was already dangerously ill.

Before she passed away, she had given the keepsake that Jin GuangShan left her and told him to find his way out to Koi Tower. And thus, Meng Yao finished packing his belongings and left

Yunmeng. After an arduous journey, he arrived in Lanling. When he reached Koi Tower, Meng Yao wasn't allowed to enter, so he took out the keepsake and asked for the sect leader to be notified.

Jin GuangShan's keepsake was a pearl button. This wasn't in any way special in the LanlingJin Sect—one could find such objects everywhere. Their most common usage was as gifts to beautiful women, when Jin GuangShan traveled out to flirt. He'd pretend as though such a pretty little thing was a rare treasure, often in the accompaniment of pledges and vows as well. He gave and forgot about them however he pleased.

Meng Yao really did come at a bad time. The day just happened to be the birthday of Jin ZiXuan. Jin GuangShan and Madam Jin, along with various relatives, were celebrating their darling boy's special day. Six hours later, it was already late into the evening. As all of them were about to set out for the auspicious ignition of lanterns, the servant finally found a spare moment to notify them. As Madam Jin saw the pearl button and remembered Jin GuangShan's history, her face darkened at once. Jin GuangShan hurried to crush the pearl into dust and chastised the servant loudly, ordering him to chase away whomever that was outside in case they bumped into him on their outing.

And so, Meng Yao was kicked down Koi Tower. He rolled down the steps, all the way from the top to the bottom.

Allegedly, he didn't say anything after he got up. Wiping away the blood on his forehead, then dusting off the dirt that got onto his clothes, he picked up his belongings and walked away.

Right after the Sunshot Campaign began, Meng Yao joined the QingheNie Sect's troops.

The cultivators under Nie MingJue's command, both rogue cultivators and those from the QingheNie Sect, were stationed in various locations. One of these was a nameless mountain ridge in Hejian. Nie MingJue went up the mountain by foot. Before he was even close to the station, he saw a boy dressed in cloth leave the emerald forest, a bamboo tube in his hand.

The boy seemed as though he had just finished collecting water, legs betraying some fatigue. As he was about to enter the cave, he suddenly stopped. He stood outside the mouth of the cave and listened for a while, as if debating between whether or not to go in. In the end, with the bamboo tube still in his hand, he walked in another direction in silence.

After a while of walking, he found a spot on the side of the road and squatted down. He fished out some white-colored food from his provisions and washed it down with water.

Nie MingJue walked toward him. As the boy was eating, his head hanging low, he suddenly found himself enveloped in a tall shadow. He looked up, then put his food away and stood up, "Sect Leader Nie."

The boy's figure was on the smaller side. He had fair skin and dark brows, precisely those favor-gaining features of Jin GuangYao. At this point in time, he hadn't been accepted by his clan in Koi Tower yet, which was why he didn't have the bright mark of vermillion on his forehead. Nie MingJue clearly remembered the face, "Meng Yao?"

Meng Yao answered respectfully, "Yes."

Nie MingJue, "Why didn't you rest inside the cave like everyone else did?"

Meng Yao opened his mouth, but only smiled awkwardly, as

though he didn't know what to say. Seeing this, Nie MingJue went past him and walked in the direction of the cave. Meng Yao looked as he wanted to pull him back, though he didn't dare to.

Nie MingJue concealed his breathing so that nobody noticed him even as he arrived at the mouth of the cave. The people inside were still chatting loudly.

"... Yep, that's him."

"No way! Jin GuangShan's son? How can Jin GuangShan's son be living the same way we do? Why doesn't he go back and find his dad? He'd be relieved of such misery with just a point of his dad's finger."

"You think he doesn't want to go back? What do you think he was doing when he took the keepsake all the way from Yunmeng to Lanling?"

"Then he chose the wrong thing to do. Jin GuangShan's wife is scary."

"I mean, Jin GuangShan has so many children outside, at least an entire stack of sons and daughters. Have you seen him accept anyone? Making such a scene was asking for embarrassment."

"Well, people shouldn't hope for the hopeless. He got beaten to a pulp, and who's to blame? He can't blame anyone. He dug his own grave."

"He's such an idiot! With Jin ZiXuan, would Jin GuangShan ever think anything of another son? Much less one from a prostitute mounted by thousands. Who knows whose seed he was? In my opinion, Jin GuangShan probably didn't dare to accept him because he also had his doubts himself! Hahahaha..."

"Oh really? I bet he didn't even remember that he had such a thing with the woman."

"I'm actually feeling quite thrilled that Jin GuangShan's seed has resigned himself to getting water for us, hahaha..."

"Resigned your ass. He's put so much energy into this. Don't you see how hard he's working? Everyday he runs around trying to get on everyone's good sides. He's sick for hoping to accomplish something so that his dad accepts him."

A flame of anger sprout within Nie MingJue's heart, burning all the way into Wei WuXian. His hand immediately pressed onto the hilt of his saber. Meng Yao hurried to stop him, but failed. The saber had unsheathed already, and a boulder in front of the cave crashed down. A few dozens of cultivators originally sat resting within the cave. All of them jumped up and unsheathed their swords, surprised by the fallen boulder. The bamboo tubes in their hands scattered over the ground.

Without any hesitation, Nie MingJue scolded, "Drinking the water he brought you while speaking such spiteful words! Did you join my forces not to kill the Wen-dogs, but to make idle talk?!"

The entire cave was in a muddle. Everyone knew ChiFeng-Zun's personality—the more one tried to explain, the angrier he was.

Seeing that they probably couldn't escape punishment and would have to tell the truth, nobody dared to speak a word. Nie MingJue laughed coldly. He didn't walk inside the cave either. Instead, he turned to Meng Yao, "You, follow me."

He turned around and walked toward the foot of the mountain. Meng Yao followed. As the two walked, Meng Yao's head hung lower and lower. His pace had slowed as well.

He only spoke after some hesitation, "Thank you, Sect Leader Nie."

Nie MingJue, "A proper man should carry himself with proud righteousness. There's no need to care for the talk of those idlers."

Meng Yao nodded, "Yes."

Although he answered as such, his face still bore a streak of worry. By lending him a hand, today Nie MingJue was able to hold the others down for him. In the future, though, the cultivators would definitely make him pay a price tens or hundreds of times greater. How could he not be worried?

Yet, Nie MingJue continued, "The more these people talked drivel behind your back, the harder you're going to work to have them speechless. I've seen you on the battlefield. Every time, you're on the foremost lines and stay behind to help with the commoners in the end. Well done. Keep it up."

Hearing this, Meng Yao paused for a moment, his face blank. His head raised up slightly. Nie MingJue added, "Your sword work is quite nimble, but not solid enough. More work is needed." This was already an obvious encouragement. Meng Yao hurried, "Sect Leader Nie, thank you for your advice."

Wei WuXian, however, knew that it wouldn't be solid no matter how hard he practiced. Jin GuangYao wasn't like the other disciples. His foundation was so poor that he'd never reach new heights. Thus, with cultivation, he could only aim for quantity instead of quality. This was why

he rounded all of the sect leaders and learned their techniques. It was also why he was criticized as the “stealer of techniques”.

Hejian was not only a crucial location of the Sunshot Campaign, but also Nie MingJue’s main battlefield. As though a wall made of iron, it stood to the side of the QishanWen Sect, preventing it from invading anywhere. The QingheNie Sect and the QishanWen Sect were in a state of enmity to begin with, yet had always held it down. After the war began, both sides burst out. No matter small or large, each battle was to the death, often leading to severe bloodshed. The commoners in the Hejian area suffered heavy losses. The QishanWen Sect naturally didn’t care about such things, but the QingheNie Sect had to care.

Under such circumstances, Meng Yao, the one whom relentlessly cleared the battlefield and helped the commoners after each battle, received more and more attention from Nie MingJue. A few times later, Nie MingJue directly promoted him to his side to be his deputy. Meng Yao, on the other hand, also seized the opportunity, perfectly completing each task given to him. And thus, the current Jin GuangYao wasn’t like his future self, always being scolded by Nie MingJue. In fact, he was regarded quite highly. Wei WuXian had heard too much of those jokes of how “LianFang-Zun fled whenever he heard that ChiFeng-Zun arrived”. Every time he saw Meng Yao, who conversed with Nie MingJue peacefully, even impressively, he always felt that it was rather incredible.

On this day, Hejian’s battleground welcomed a certain guest.

During the Sunshot Campaign, stories of praise were told about all three of the Venerated Triad. The ones of ChiFeng-Zun were about how he swept over all obstacles, leaving not even a trace of the Wen-dogs after he finished. ZeWu-Jun—Lan XiChen— however, was different from him. After the situation of the Gusu area had settled down, Lan QiRen was able to defend it with great tenacity. Thus, Lan XiChen often travelled to aid others, saving lives from danger. In all of the Sunshot Campaign, he had countless times recovered lost territory and assisted narrow escapes. This was why people were ecstatic whenever they heard his name, as though they gained a ray of hope, a powerful trump card.

Every time Lan XiChen passed Hejian as he was escorting other cultivators, he would rest shortly, with Hejian acting as some sort of a transit station. Nie MingJue led him to a spacious, brightly-lit hall. A few other cultivators also sat within the hall.

Although Lan XiChen looked almost exactly the same as Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian could tell them apart with just a glance. Yet, when he saw the face, he still couldn’t help but noting their similarity, thinking to himself, I wonder what’s happening to my body right now. If the paper body is invaded by resentful energy, would anything happen to the real body as well? Would Lan Zhan notice that something’s wrong?

After an exchange of small talk, Meng Yao, who had been standing by Nie MingJue’s side, walked up and offered everyone teacups. In the frontlines, one person was used as though there were six; there wasn’t any space for maids and servants at all.

And so, these everyday trivialities had also been willingly accepted by Jin GuangYao, his deputy. A few of the cultivators hesitated as they saw his face, their expressions varied. JinGuangShan’s “intimate tales” had always been widespread conversation starters. Meng Yao had been a famous joke for a certain period of time, which was why a few recognized him. Likely thinking that the son of a prostitute perhaps also carried some unclean things with him, the cultivators didn’t drink from the cups that he had presented with both hands. Instead, they put the cups to the side and even took out white handkerchiefs. As though it felt too uncomfortable, they repeatedly wiped the fingers that they’d touched the teacup with, either intentionally or not. Nie MingJue wasn’t someone mindful to such things. Wei WuXian, though, caught sight of this through the corners of his eyes. Meng Yao acted as if he didn’t see anything, his smile unfaltering as he continued to pass around tea.

As Lan XiChen accepted his cup, he looked up at him and smiled, “Thank you.”

He drank a sip of the tea immediately afterward. Only then did he continue to converse with Nie

MingJue. A few cultivators began to feel uneasy as they saw the scene.

Nie MingJue had never been one for humor. However, in front of Lan XiChen, his expression eased, "How long is your stay?"

Lan XiChen, "Brother MingJue, I will have to stay at your place for the night. I am departing on the next morning, then meeting with WangJi."

Nie MingJue, "Where to?" Lan XiChen, "To Jiangling."

Nie MingJue frowned, "Isn't Jiangling still in the hands of the Wen-dogs?"

Lan XiChen, "Not since a few days ago. Currently, it is in the hands of the YunmengJiang Sect."

A sect leader spoke, "Sect Leader Nie, I don't think you've heard yet. Yunmeng's Sect Leader Jiang is quite powerful in the area."

Another person added, "How can he not be? Wei WuXian alone can face millions, so who'd he be scared of? He can just sit there controlling his area, unlike how we're always running for our lives. With such luck..."

Someone noticed that his words weren't in a good tone, "Well, good thing that ZeWu-Jun and HanGuang-Jun are helping everyone. Or else, I don't know how many sects and innocent commoners would fall into the hands of the Wen-dogs."

Nie MingJue, "Your brother's over there?"

Lan XiChen nodded, "He took the people over during the beginning of the month."

Nie MingJue, "Your brother's level of cultivation is quite high. He should be enough by himself. Then why are you still going?"

Hearing Nie MingJue praise Lan WangJi's level of cultivation, Wei WuXian felt a strange surge of happiness, ChiFeng-Zun, what a great eye!

Lan XiChen sighed, "It is quite embarrassing, but after WangJi went, it seems that he had some small conflicts with the YunmengJiang Sect's Young Master Wei."

Nie MingJue, "What happened?"

Someone spoke, "I think HanGuang-Jun only had a dispute with Wei WuXian because his methods were too unnatural. They say that HanGuang-Jun denounced Wei WuXian to his face, how he disgraced the corpses, how he's cruel and loves to kill, how he forgot his original intentions, and so on. But over there, everyone's talking about the battle of Jiangling. Wei WuXian is described in such an incredible way. I'd love see it for myself if luck allows it."

This person's story wasn't as bad as some others. The more exaggerated ones even told of how on the battlefield he and Lan WangJi fought with each other as they killed the Wen-dogs. In reality, back then, their relationship wasn't as utterly incompatible as the rumors say, but there were some trivial clashes. At the time, Wei WuXian went around digging graves all the time, while Lan WangJi always chose the most vexing of vocabulary, such as how it wasn't a righteous path and harmed both the body and the mind. He even straight up hindered Wei WuXian at times. What was more, they battled the Wen-dogs once every few days, both directly and secretively. Both of them were quite easily angered at the time, so they often parted on bad terms. Now, listening to

others bring this up, Wei WuXian felt that it was a lifetime ago, though he suddenly remembered—it was indeed a lifetime ago.

Someone speaks, "From my opinion, HanGuang-Jun really doesn't have to do this. Even the living is close to being dead, so why should we care about those corpses?"

Another person agreed, "Yes, we're in harsh times, right? Sect Leader Jiang is right. In terms of evil or not, who's eviler than the Wen-dogs? He's on our side anyways. I say it's fine as long as he's killing the Wen-dogs."

Wei WuXian thought, Well, that wasn't what you guys said when you brought the siege on me.

Soon afterward, Lan XiChen and the rest stood up. They were brought to their resting areas by Meng Yao. Nie MingJue, on the other hand, returned to his room. He fetched a slender-bodied saber and carried it with him as he went to find Lan XiChen.

Yet, before he was even close, he could already hear the two conversing inside the room. Lan

XiChen spoke, "What a coincidence. You joined MingJue-xiong's force and became his deputy." Meng Yao, "I'm too lucky to have earned ChiFeng-Zun's approval."

Lan XiChen smiled, "MingJue-xiong has quite a fiery personality. It must have been truly difficult for you to have earned his approval."

After a pause, he started again, "In these days, the LanlingJin Sect's Sect Leader Jin has been managing with much difficulty in

the Langya area. As of the current, he is trying to recruit more personnel."

Meng Yao hesitated shortly, "ZeWu-Jun, you mean..."

Lan XiChen, "There is no need for such reticence. I remember you once told me that you hoped to earn a proper place in the LanlingJin Sect, receive the approval of your father. Now that you already have a position and a future under MingJue-xiong's branch, does your wish still stand?"

Meng Yao seemed as though he considered the question closely, holding his breath. After a while of silence, he replied, "Yes, it does."

Lan XiChen, "I would assume so as well."

Meng Yao, "But now, I'm already Sect Leader Nie's deputy. I owe Sect Leader Nie a debt of gratitude. No matter what remains of my wish, I cannot leave Hejian."

Lan XiChen was silent for a moment, "That is indeed the case. Even if you want to leave, it would likely be difficult for you to bring up the topic. However, I believe that if you choose to ask, MingJue-xiong would respect your decision. Should he be unwilling to let you leave, I can attempt to convince him."

Nie MingJue suddenly asked, "Why would I not let you leave?"

He pushed the door open and entered the room. Lan XiChen and Meng Yao sat facing each other, both of their expressions solemn. Seeing his appearance, they were rather surprised. Meng Yao stood up at once, but before he had the chance to speak, Nie MingJue spoke, "Sit."

Meng Yao didn't move. Nie MingJue spoke again, "I'll write you a recommendation letter tomorrow."

Meng Yao, "Sect Leader Nie?"

Nie MingJue, "You can take the letter to Langya and find your father."

Meng Yao hurried, "Sect Leader Nie, if you heard everything, then you should've also heard me say that..."

Nie MingJue interrupted him, "I promoted you not because I wanted you to give back anything out of gratitude. I simply thought that you should stay in this position, since you are capable enough and your conduct is to my liking. If you really want to pay me back, just kill a few more of those Wen-dogs on the battlefield!"

Hearing this, Meng Yao was speechless despite his usual way with words. Lan XiChen grinned, "Look, I told you that MingJue-xiong would respect your decision."

Meng Yao's eyes were tinged red, "Sect Leader Nie, ZeWu-Jun... I..."

He lowered his head, "...I really don't know what to say."

Nie MingJue sat down, "If you don't know what to say, then don't say anything."

He put the other saber in his hand onto the table. Lan XiChen smiled as he saw it, "HuaiSang's saber?"

Nie MingJue, "Even though he's safe there with you, he shouldn't neglect his studies either. Tell others to supervise him when

they're free. Next time we meet, I'll examine his saber and heart scriptures."

Lan XiChen took Nie HuaiSang's saber into his qiankun sleeve, "HuaiSang has been using the excuse that he left his saber at home. Now he will have no excuses for lazing around."

Nie MingJue, "Speaking of it, what, have you met before?" Meng Yao, "ZeWu-Jun, I've met him before."

Nie MingJue, "Where? When?"

Lan XiChen smiled as he shook his head, "Let us not talk about it. It is the shame of a lifetime. MingJue-xiong, please do not ask any further."

Nie MingJue, "Why would you be afraid of losing face in front of me? Meng Yao, speak."

Meng Yao, "If ZeWu-Jun doesn't want to say it, then I'll have to keep the secret as well."

The three chatted back and forth, at times serious, yet at times light. The conversation was much more relaxed than when they had been in the living room. Listening to their chatter, Wei WuXian often wanted to get a word in as well, yet he was unable to do so.

He thought to himself, at this point in time, their relationship really isn't bad. ZeWu-Jun is actually quite good at holding conversations, so why is Lan Zhan so bad at it? Well, although this is the case, being quiet is great as well. I do all the talking, and he can just listen along and add in a few 'mnn'-s. What was this called again...

A few days later, carrying Nie MingJue's recommendation letter, Meng Yao set off toward Langya.

After he left, Nie MingJue switched to another deputy. Wei WuXian, however, felt that the new one was always a few beats slower. Meng Yao was an unusually clever talent. He could understand what wasn't said, and perform to the best with the simplest orders. He was efficient and never slacked. Anyone used to him wouldn't be able to refrain from comparing him with others.

Sometime later, the LanlingJin Sect in Langya was on the verge of collapse, having already been barely managing. Lan XiChen just happened to be assisting another area. Jin GuangShan asked for help from Hejian, and Nie MingJue arrived shortly afterward.

As the battle finished, Jin GuangShan came to express his thanks, still in a terrible state. Nie MingJue talked with him in a curt manner, then quickly began, "Sect Leader Jin, what's Meng Yao doing nowadays?"

Hearing him mention the name, Jin GuangShan replied, "Meng Yao? Uh... Sect Leader Nie, I don't mean any offense, but whois he again?"

Nie MingJue's brows immediately furrowed. Back then, the story that Meng Yao was kicked down Koi Tower passed around for quite a long time. Even others had known of such a farce, so there was no way that the person involved couldn't rememberthe name. Only someone with the thickest of faces would be able to play dumb in such a situation. It was just that, however, Jin GuangShan just so happened to be such a person.

Nie MingJue spoke coldly, "Meng Yao is my past deputy. I wrote a letter for him to bring."

Jin GuangShan continued to pretend as though he didn't knowa thing, "Really? But here I've never seen such a letter or such a

person. Oh well. If I had known that Sect Leader Nie sent over his deputy I would definitely receive him well. But did any accidents happen along the journey?"

He simply equivocated, saying that he couldn't remember if he had heard of the name or not. Nie MingJue's face grew colder and colder. He felt that something must be wrong, so he left without the slightest hesitation. After asking the other cultivators, he still found nothing. Nie MingJue chose a few places and started to walk around.

On his way was a small forest. The forest was rather quiet, rather secluded. It had just been through a surprise attack, and the

battlefield hadn't been cleaned up yet. Nie MingJue walked along the path. All throughout the path were cultivators" corpses, wearing the Wen Sect's, the Jin Sect's, and a few other sects" uniforms.

Suddenly, from in front of him came noises of tch, tch.

Nie MingJue put his hand on the hilt of his saber and approached furtively. Across the branches and leaves, he saw Meng Yao standing amid piles of corpses. Twisting his wrist, he pulled a long sword out of a cultivator's chest.

His expression was absolutely calm. Attacks both fast and steady, he was also careful, letting not even a droplet of blood stain his clothes.

The sword wasn't his own sword. The hilt had iron embellishments in the shape of flames—it was the sword of a Wen Sect cultivator.

The sword techniques were also those of the Wen Sect's. And the one who died under his sword wore a robe of Sparks Amidst Snow. He was a cultivator of the LanlingJin Sect.

Nie MingJue saw all of the scene. Without saying a word, he unsheathed his saber by an inch. A sharp ring pierced through the air.

Hearing the familiar sound of unsheathing, Meng Yao immediately trembled. He spun around, his soul almost evaporating, "... Sect Leader Nie?"

Nie MingJue pulled all of his saber out of its sheath. The body of the sword glared brightly, yet the blade itself vaguely glinted in the red shade of blood. Wei WuXian could feel the billowing anger from him, along with emotions of disappointment and hatred.

Meng Yao knew Nie MingJue's character more than anyone else. He dropped the sword with a clang, "Sect Leader Nie, Sect Leader Nie! Please wait, please wait! I can explain!"

Nie MingJue shouted, "What do you want to explain?!"

Meng Yao threw himself over, half rolling and half crawling, "I had no other choice, I had no other choice!"

Nie MingJue fumed, "What other choice did you not have?! What did I say when I sent you here?!"

Meng Yao kneeled before his feet, "Sect Leader Nie, Sect Leader Nie, just listen to me! I joined the LanlingJin Sect's force. This was my superior. During my time here, he always despised me. He often humiliated me and beat me..."

Nie MingJue, "So you killed him?"

Meng Yao, "No! Not because of this! What humiliation can't I put up with? What couldn't I endure, if it was only beatings and scoldings? It was just that every time we took over one of the Wen Sect's strongholds, I strategized with every single drop of my energy, I fought as well as I could, yet with just a few flimsy words, just a few light brushstrokes he'd make it his credit, saying that it had nothing to do with me. This isn't the first time. It was every single time, every single time! I reasoned with him, but he couldn't care less. I turned to others, but nobody was willing to hear me out. Just now he said that my mother was, that me mother was... I really reached my limit—the accident only happened since I was momentarily outraged!"

Under the shock and the terror, he spoke as though his words flew, fearing that Nie MingJue might start chopping before he could even finish his explanation. Despite this, his explanation still had clear logic. Every sentence was highlighting how horrible the others were, how poor he himself was. Nie MingJue snatched his collar and lifted him up, "You're lying!"

Meng Yao shuddered. Nie MingJue stared into his eyes, speaking one word at a time, "You reached your limit and were momentarily outraged? Would any outraged person kill someone with the expression that you had on? Would they purposely pick the discreet forest that had just been through a battle? Would they kill them with the Wen Sect's sword, the Wen Sect's technique in disguise as a Wen-dog's stealth attack to put the blame on someone else? You've clearly been deliberately planning this out!"

Meng Yao raised his hand in assurance, "I'm telling the truth! Each and every sentence!"

Nie MingJue raged, "Even if it's true, you still shouldn't kill him! It was only some trivial achievements! Do you care about such a handful of glory that much?!"

Meng Yao murmured, "Some trivial achievements?" He spoke in a shaking voice, "... What do you mean, some trivial achievements? ChiFeng-Zun, do you know how much work I put into such trivial achievements? How much I suffered? Glory? Without the handful of glory, I have nothing!"

Nie MingJue looked at him, who shivered as tears gleamed in his eyes. The contrast between the scene and how he calmly killed someone was too stark. The impact was so great that the image still hadn't faded from his mind. He spoke, "Meng Yao, let me ask you. The first time I saw you,

did you purposely act for me in that pitiful way, so that I'd come to your rescue? If I didn't, would you have done what you did today and killed all of those people?"

Meng Yao's Adam's apple bobbed, where a drop of cold sweat rolled off. Just as he was about to speak, Nie MingJue ordered, "Don't lie in front of me!"

With a quiver, Meng Yao swallowed the words he was about to say. Kneeling on the ground, his entire body shook. The fingers of his right hand dug deeply into the dirt.

After a while, Nie MingJue slowly put his sword back into its sheath, "I won't do anything to you."

Meng Yao looked up at once. Nie MingJue continued, "On your own, go confess to the LanlingJin Sect and receive your punishment. Let them deal with your whichever way they deem fit."

With a moment of hesitation, Meng Yao replied, "...ChiFeng-Zun, I can't give up now that I'm already here."

Nie MingJue, "To get here, you took the wrong path." Meng Yao, "You're going to be sending me to my death."

Nie MingJue, "If your words are true, it won't happen. Go, reflect, and turn over a new leaf."

Meng Yao whispered, "...My father hasn't seen me yet." It wasn't that Jin GuangShan didn't see him.

He simply pretended to not know his existence.

At last, under Nie MingJue's pressure, Meng Yao still replied "yes", though with great difficulty.

After a while of silence, Nie MingJue spoke, "Stand up."

As though his body was deprived of all energy, Meng Yao stood up in a trance. He staggered a few steps forward. Seeing that he was on the verge of falling, Nie MingJue helped him steady up. Meng Yao murmured, "...Thank you, Sect Leader Nie."

Watching his lifeless figure, Nie MingJue turned around. Yet, he suddenly heard him speak, "...I still can't."

Nie MingJue wheeled around. He didn't know since when, but a sword was in Meng Yao's hand. He pointed the sword at his stomach, face full of despair, "Sect Leader Nie, I'm unworthy of your kindness."

As he spoke, he thrust it inside with force. Nie MingJue's pupils shrunk abruptly. He reached to grab the sword, but it was already too late. In the instant, the sword in Meng Yao's hand pierced through his stomach and left through his back. His body collapsed into the pool of other people's blood.

Nie MingJue was shocked for a split second, then went forward. Half-kneeling on the ground, he turned Meng Yao's body over, "You're...!!!"

Meng Yao's face was colorless. He gave Nie MingJue a weak look, then forced a smile, "Sect Leader Nie, I..."

Before he finished his sentence, his head slowly dropped. Holding his body, Nie MingJue avoided the blade of the sword and pressed his palm onto Meng Yao's chest, passing him spiritual energy. Yet, Nie MingJue suddenly felt his body shudder. A cold, unceasing stream of energy came from his stomach.

Wei WuXian had known that there'd be a bluff, so he wasn't too surprised. Nie MingJue, however, likely never expected Meng Yao to really harm him. Thus, as he watched Meng Yao calmly stand up in front of him, still unable to move, he was still more shocked than angered.

Meng Yao had probably carefully worked out how to avoid the vital areas. With both caution and composure, he pulled the sword out of his stomach, producing a string of small, bloody splashes, and pressed the wound—this was all he did to treat it. Nie MingJue, on the other hand, still remained in the posture that he used when trying to help Meng Yao. Half-kneeling with his head raised, their eyes met.

Nie MingJue didn't say anything. Meng Yao didn't say anything either. He sheathed his sword, bowed toward Nie MingJue, and sprinted away without looking back.

He had just acknowledged his mistake and agreed to receiving his punishment before feigning suicide and setting up a trap. Now, he was already long gone. It was probably Nie MingJue's first time seeing such a shameless person, especially one that had just been the trusted aide whom he promoted himself. For this, he flew into a terrible rage, being especially fierce during the Wen Sect's battles. Even when Lan XiChen had the time to assist Langya, a few days later, his anger hadn't died down one bit. As soon as he came, Lan XiChen laughed, "MingJue-xiong, what a temper you seem to be in. Where is Meng Yao? Why does he not come and douse your flames?" Nie MingJue, "Don't mention such a person!"

Without any exaggeration, he told Lan XiChen of how Meng Yao killed and planned to blame someone else, then feigned death and ran away. After he heard the story, Lan XiChen was also surprised, "How could this be? Maybe there was a misunderstanding?"

Nie MingJue, "I caught him right on the spot. What misunderstandings could there be?"

Lan XiChen thought for a moment, "Judging from his words, the person whom he killed had definitely done wrong. However, he should not have taken his life either. We are in harsh times, so it is quite difficult to determine who was at fault. I wonder where he is now."

Nie MingJue spoke in a harsh tone, "He should hope that I don't catch him. If I do, I'll offer him as sacrifice to my saber!"

However, as though his words turned into a prophecy, during the next few years, it was almost as if Meng Yao had suddenly

disappeared, as if he had sunk like a rock into the ocean. No trace of him was left.

Now, Nie MingJue loathed him in the same manner that he had once valued him. Whenever the name was mentioned, he put on an angered face, expressing things hard to explain in speech.

When he was certain that no information could be found, he refused to discuss Meng Yao with another person ever again.

Nie MingJue was never close to people. He rarely opened up to anyone. Though he finally managed to obtain a competent, trustworthy subordinate, whose character and capabilities he approved, he found that the subordinate's true colors were nothing like what he had thought they were. It was only natural that his reaction was so extreme.

Just as Wei WuXian was thinking, his head suddenly began to ache, as though it was about to split open. The bones in his body felt as if they were crushed under a chariot. He couldn't move at all—just the slightest shift made his body creak and groan.

Opening his eyes, his sight was so blurry that he could only barely see many figures lie collapsed on the cold, jet stone floor of the hall. It seemed that Nie MingJue's head had been injured. The wound was already numb. Dried-up stains of blood had clotted over his eyes and his face. With a slight twitch, warm blood climbed down his forehead again.

Wei WuXian was astounded.

During the Sunshot Campaign, Nie MingJue won almost all battles. The enemy couldn't even approach him, much less cause him to be so badly injured.

What sort of a situation was this?!

A soft movement came from beside him. Wei WuXian glanced with the corner of his eye and saw a few vague figures. With great difficulty, he focused his gaze and saw that they were a couple of cultivators wearing robes of the sun and flames motif. They moved forward in an adept posture of kneeling on the ground.

Wei WuXian, "..."

All of a sudden, a bone-chilling sense of pressure surrounded him, reaching Wei WuXian through Nie MingJue's body. Nie MingJue lifted his head slightly. At the end of the jet stone tiles was a large seat made of jade. A person sat atop it.

The distance wasn't close, and Nie MingJue's eyes were hindered by the blood, so he was unable to see who the person was.

Nonetheless, he could guess who this was without using his sight.

The doors of the palace were abruptly opened. Somebody entered.

All of the disciples within the palace walked on their knees, yet this person only nodded in salutation as he first came in. Unlike the others, he walked forward nonchalantly. At the end of the hall, he seemed to bow down and speak a few words with the seated person before turning to this side.

With slow strides, he approached, quietly looking over Nie MingJue, who still remained standing even though he bathed in blood. It seemed as if he laughed, "Sect Leader Nie, long time no see."

And who could this be, except for Meng Yao himself?

## Chapter 49: Guile— Part Four

Wei WuXian could finally be sure of which scene he was looking it.

Back then, when Nie MingJue received the information, he began a surprise attack at Yangquan. Nie MingJue's attacks had almost always been successful. Yet, whether because of a mistake in the information or just pure luck, nobody had expected that the attack led them straight to the sect leader of the QishanWen Sect, Wen RuoHan.

Due to the miscalculation in their forces, the QishanWen Sect relinquished their passivity. It captured all of the cultivators who came and took them to the Nightless City.

Meng Yao half-kneeled to the side of Nie MingJue, "I never would've expected you to be in such a terrible situation."

Nie MingJue only spoke two words, "Get lost."

Meng Yao's laugh held a sense of pity, "Do you still think you're the king of Hejian? Look carefully—this is Sun Palace."

One of the cultivators on the side spat out, "Sun Palace? It's only the den of the Wen-dogs!"

Meng Yao's expression changed and he unsheathed his sword.

A line of blood instantly flew from the cultivator's neck. He died without a sound. Those from his sect wailed, screaming as they threw themselves over. Nie MingJue was enraged, "You!"

Another cultivator roared, "You Wen-dog! If you're so confident, why don't you kill me as well?"

Meng Yao didn't even move his brows. With another backhanded swing, blood bloomed from the cultivator's throat. Meng Yao smiled, "Sure."

Sword in his hand, he stood amid a pool of blood, the corpses of two white-robed cultivators at his feet. He asked, still smiling, "Does anyone else want to say the word?"

Nie MingJue replied coldly, "Wen-dog."

He knew that only death awaited him now that he was in Wen RuoHan's hands, which was why he didn't fear anything. If Wei WuXian were the one in such a situation, he would've also cursed as awfully as he wanted to before doing anything else—he'd die no matter what. Despite this, Meng Yao only smiled, not at all angered. With a snap of his fingers, one of the Wen Sect's cultivators came over on his knees. Both hands above his head, he positioned a long box before Meng Yao's hands.

Meng Yao opened the box and took out a certain object, "Sect Leader Nie, why don't you take a look at what this is?"

It was Nie MingJue's saber, Baxia!

Nie MingJue was infuriated, "Get lost, now!"

However, Meng Yao had already taken Baxia out and was holding it in his hand, "Sect Leader Nie, Baxia had been in my hands quite a few times in the past. Don't you think it's already too late for you to be angry now?"

Nie MingJue spoke one word at a time, "Take your hand off it!"

As though purposely trying to enrage him, Meng Yao weighed the saber in his hand and commented, "Sect Leader Nie, your saber, I'd say, can pass as a top-tier spiritual weapon. With that said, compared to the saber of your father, the previous Sect Leader

Nie, it's still somewhat inferior. Why don't you take a guess at how?

many times, Sect Leader Wen has to slap it for it to break this time?"

Within a split second, all of the blood in Nie MingJue's body rushed to his head. Wei WuXian's scalp was also numb by the sudden anger. He commented in silence, Just brutal.

The thing in Nie MingJue's life that he loathed and regretted the most was the death of his father.

Back then, when Nie MingJue was only a teenager and the leader of the QingheNie Sect was his father, someone gifted Wen RuoHan a rare saber. Wen RuoHan was pleased for quite a couple of days. He had asked the guest cultivators—what do you think of this saber of mine?

He had always been unpredictable, laughing one second and then hostile the next. Of course, everyone flattered him as he liked, praising how no saber in all of history could compare to this one. Unfortunately, though, one of the guests either held bitterness to the previous Sect Leader Nie or wanted to reply with a unique answer and gain attention. He had said—of course your saber is unparalleled, but, you see, I'm afraid that a certain person won't agree.

And, thus, Wen RuoHan wasn't pleased anymore. He asked who the person was. The guest replied—it's naturally the leader of the QingheNie Sect, a sect known for its saber cultivation; he's awfully arrogant, always boasting about how his prized saber is absolutely unrivaled, and how even in a hundred years no sword has been able compare to his. No matter how good one's saber was, he definitely won't admit it, and even if he did admit it out loud, he won't admit it in his heart.

Wen RuoHan laughed after he heard—are you sure about that? Well, I want to see.

And so, he immediately called over the previous Sect Leader Nie of Qinghe. Holding the saber, Wen RuoHan looked at it for a while, then replied with only one sentence—yes, it really is a good saber.

He slapped the saber a few times, and told Sect Leader Nie to take it back.

Back then, nothing seemed out of place. The previous Sect Leader Nie was also confused. He was only annoyed by the commanding attitude. However, during a night-hunt a few days after he returned, when battling a beast, his saber suddenly broke into pieces. Then he was severely injured by the horn of the beast.

Nie MingJue, who was night-hunting along with his father, saw the scene with his own eyes.

After Sect Leader Nie was brought back, he couldn't make peace with such an event no matter what, and his injuries didn't heal either. Having fallen ill for half a year, he finally left the world, from either the anger or the illness. The reason why Nie MingJue, along with the entire QingheNie Sect, detested the QishanWen Sect with such intensity was due to this.

Now, right before Wen RuoHan, Meng Yao held his saber and mentioned once again how both his father and his father's saber had been destroyed. It was as cruel as one could get!

With a smack of Nie MingJue's hand, Meng Yao staggered backward and coughed up a mouthful of blood. Seeing this, the figure on the jade seat shifted forward, as though wanting to move. Meng Yao immediately got up and kicked toward Nie MingJue's chest. Nie MingJue's previous attack was already beyond what he could manage. He fell heavily onto the ground. Finally, he couldn't hold back the boiling blood circulating within his chest any longer.

Wei WuXian, on the other hand, was shocked speechless.

There were so many versions to the rumors, but he had never thought that there was the marvelous detail of LianFang-Zun kicking ChiFeng-Zun!

With great force, Meng Yao stamped on Nie MingJue's chest, "How dare you act in such a way before Sect Leader Wen's eyes!"

As he spoke, he stabbed downward with his sword. Nie MingJue slapped Meng Yao's sword with his palm, causing it to shatter into pieces. Meng Yao had also fallen from the attack. Just as Nie MingJue prepared to strike the crown of Meng Yao's head, he felt his body get dragged toward another direction by an unusual force.

This direction was that of Wen RuoHan's seat. With great speed, Nie MingJue's body dragged a thirty-feet streak of blood along the jet stone tiles. The streak was still growing in length.

Nie MingJue reached for one of the kneeling Wen Sect disciples and threw him toward the jade seat. With a burst, crimson blood exploded in the air as if a watermelon had flown into pieces and the pulp had splattered all over the ground. Wen RuoHan had cracked the disciple's head with an airborne strike. However, this had still saved time for Nie MingJue. Anger had allowed a sudden surge in his strength. With a leap, he formed a hand seal, and Baxia flew to him at once. Meng Yao shouted, "Sect Leader, watch out!" A voice laughed madly, "Let it be!"

It was a youthful voice. Wei WuXian wasn't the least surprised. Wen RuoHan's level of cultivation was extremely high, so of course his corporal body was also perfectly maintained in

its prime. As soon as Nie MingJue's hand gripped Baxia's hilt, he slashed it forward. The dozens of Wen Sect's cultivators who came to encircle him were cut in half!

Countless deformed corpses lay in disorder on the coal-colored tiles. Suddenly, Wei WuXian felt a shiver down his spine.

Within the blink of an eye, a figure had appeared behind him. Nie MingJue slashed across fiercely, his spiritual power smashing some of the ground into fragments, yet he hit nothing. His chest, however, felt as though it had received a strong blow. He crashed into one of the golden pillars in the palace, coughing up warm blood. Blood had also trickled down his forehead, continuing to blur his sight. Sensing that someone was approaching, he waved his arm for another attack. This time, a fist had slammed into the center of his chest. His entire body sunk a few degrees into the tiled ground!

Wei WuXian's senses were connected with Nie MingJue's. As he was beaten up, he was secretly shocked.

Wen RuoHan's abilities really were overwhelmingly formidable!

Wei WuXian had never dueled Nie MingJue directly, so he didn't know who'd win or lose. However, from his observations, Nie MingJue's level of cultivation could be ranked top three out of all the people whom he had seen. Yet, in spite of this, he was still absolutely defenseless in front of Wen RuoHan! And, even if he

himself were here, he wouldn't dare say that the injuries he received would be any less than Nie MingJue's...

Wen RuoHan stepped onto Nie MingJue's chest. Wei WuXian's sight was beginning to darken. The taste of blood kept on travelling up his throat.

Meng Yao's voice was approaching, "Your subordinate is useless to have needed your presence, Sect Leader."

Wen RuoHan laughed, "You good-for-nothing."

Meng Yao laughed as well. Wen RuoHan asked, "He's the one who killed Wen Xu?"

Meng Yao, "That's right. It was him. Sect Leader, are you going to kill your foe right now, or drag him to the Fire Palace? My personal suggestion is to take him to the Fire Palace."

The "Fire Palace" was WenRuoHan's playground. It was where he collected thousands of torture devices for tormenting people. This meant that Meng Yao was unwilling to give Nie Mingjue a straightforward death. Meng Yao wanted to take him to Wen RuoHan's torturing grounds and forge him through the devices that he himself had made until he finally died.

Hearing the two of them joke around, talking about how to deal with him, Nie MingJue felt raging flames heat the seething blood in his chest. Wen RuoHan replied, "Why mop around with someone who's already half-dead?"

Meng Yao, "Now, that's not the way to go about this. With Sect Leader Nie's sturdy body, he might become all great and mighty again after just a few days of rest."

Wen RuoHan, "Do as you please." Meng Yao, "Yes."

Yet, as he responded, a cold light, thinner than thin, slashed out and across.

Wen RuoHan suddenly turned quiet.

Warm droplets of blood splashed onto Nie MingJue's face. He seemed as though he sensed something, trying to look up and see what was going on. Still, with his heavy injuries, his head sunk to the ground. He finally closed his eyes.

WeiWuXian didn't know how long had passed before he finally felt a streak of light in his sight. Nie MingJue slowly opened his eyes.

As soon as he awakened, he found that one of his arms was carried over Meng Yao's shoulder. Meng Yao managed forward, half-carrying, half-dragging him.

Meng Yao, "Sect Leader Nie?"

Nie MingJue, "Wen RuoHan has died?"

Meng Yao seemed as if his footing had slipped. He responded with a trembling voice, "He has probably...died."

He was also carrying something in his hand.

Nie MingJue spoke in a low tone, "Hand me the saber."

Wei WuXian couldn't see Meng Yao's expression. He could only hear the saddened smile from his voice, "Sect Leader Nie, at such

a point in time, just please don't keep on thinking about cutting me up with your saber..."

Nie MingJue was silent for a moment. Having refocused his strength, he snatched the saber. Even though Meng Yao was agile, pure power could subdue all skill. With the saber taken, he immediately leaped to the side, "Sect Leader Nie, you're still injured."

Saber in hand, Nie MingJue spoke coldly, "You killed them." The cultivators who were held captive alongside Nie MingJue.

Meng Yao, "Sect Leader Nie, you should understand. In that sort of situation... I had no choice."

What Nie MingJue hated the most were such irresponsible words. Fuming, he lunged with his saber, "You had no choice? Whether or not to do it was up to you, and so was whether or not to kill

them!"

Meng Yao dodged, protesting, "Was it really up to me? Sect Leader Nie, if we think from each other's perspective..."

Nie MingJue had known what he wanted to say. He interrupted, "We won't!"

Meng Yao also seemed as though his energy had run out. He tried to avoid the attacks, yet his feet had almost slipped, revealing how difficult of a situation he was in. After taking a while to catch his breath, it was as if he had finally exploded. He suddenly shouted, "ChiFeng-Zun!!! Don't you understand that if I didn't kill them, you'd be the one who died then?!!"

This was actually the same as saying, „I'm the one who saved your life so you can't kill me or else it'd be immoral. " However, Jin GuangYao was indeed worthy of his reputation. The same meaning but a different wording, and he was able to create a contained sense of frustration and a reserved sense of sorrow. As he had expected, Nie MingJue's movement halted. Veins stood out under his forehead.

Having paused for a while, he clenched the hilt of his saber and shouted, "Very well! I'll kill myself after I kill you!"

Meng Yao shrunk immediately after his previous outburst. Watching Baxia slash toward him, he sprinted off at once, scared lifeless. Of the two, one struck with madness and the other fled with madness. Both staggered, still soaked in blood. In such amusing circumstances, as Wei WuXian chopped at the future Chief Cultivator, in his heart he split his sides laughing. He thought that if not for how Nie MingJue was under heavy injuries and lacked spiritual power, Meng Yao would probably have been dead already.

Amid all the action, a surprised voice suddenly called out, "MingJue-xiong!"

A figure dressed in clean, white robes darted out of the forest. Meng Yao looked as if he had just seen a god from Heaven. He quickly scrambled over and hid behind the person's back, "ZeWu-Jun!!! ZeWu-Jun!!!"

Nie MingJue was in the middle of his rage. He didn't even have the chance to ask why Lan XiChen was there as he shouted, "XiChen move!"

Baxia's strikes were so menacing that Shuoyue had to unsheathe. Lan XiChen stopped him, half to support his figure and half to block his attacks, "MingJue-xiong, calm down! Why bother?"

Nie MingJue, "Why don't you ask what he did?!"

Lan XiChen turned around to look at Meng Yao, his face was full of terror. He stammered as if he didn't dare speak. NieMingJue, "Back then, after you fled from Langya, I was wondering why I couldn't find you no matter what! So, you became the Wen-dogs" underling and took sides with the tyrant in the Nightless City!"

Lan XiChen, "MingJue-xiong."

He rarely interrupted others. Nie MingJue hesitated. Lan XiChen continued, "Do you know who was the one that gave you the QishanWen Sect's maps of tactical formation these past few

times?"

Nie MingJue, "You."

Lan XiChen, "I was delivering them. Do you know who was the source of all that information?"

Under such circumstances, it wasn't difficult to see what he had meant. Nie MingJue glanced at Meng Yao, who stood behind him, head hanging low. His brows twitched uncontrollably, as though he couldn't believe the matter.

Lan XiChen, "There is no need to doubt. Today, as well, I have come here to aid you only after he contacted me. Or else, how would I just happen to appear here?"

Nie MingJue was unable to say anything.

Lan XiChen added, "After incident at Langya, A-Yao felt remorse, but he was afraid he might run into you. He could only manage to sneak into the QishanWen Sect and approach Wen RuoHan, then write me letters in secrecy. At first, I did not know whom the person sending the letters was, either. I only realized whom he was after discovering a few clues from a coincidence or two."

He turned to Meng Yao, then lowered his voice, "Did you not tell MingJue-xiong of these?"

"..."

Holding the wound on his arm, Meng Yao managed a smile,

"ZeWu-Jun, you saw as well. Even if I did say so, Sect Leader Nie wouldn't have believed me either."

Nie MingJue remained silent, while Baxia and Shuoyue continued. Meng Yao took a glimpse at the glares from the clashes of the saber and the sword, his gaze full of fear. After a while, however, he still took a step forward. He kneeled to Nie MingJue.

Lan XiChen, "Meng Yao?"

Meng Yao whispered, "Sect Leader Nie, back in Sun Palace, although it was to gain the trust of Wen RuoHan, I did indeed harm you and say inappropriate things. I purposely jabbed at your scar, knowing that the previous Sect Leader Nie hurts you deeply... Although I had no other choice, I'm still truly sorry."

Nie MingJue, "The one you should be kneeling to isn't me, but the cultivators that you killed with your own hands."

Meng Yao, "Wen RuoHan had a cruel character. Whenever there was any disobedience, he'd act as though he was mad. Since I

was pretending to be someone he could trust; how could I sit back when others humiliated him? So..."

Nie MingJue, "Good. Looks like you've been doing these things since some time ago."

Meng Yao sighed, "I was in Qishan."

Lan XiChen sighed as well, his attacks persisting, "MingJue-xiong, he was undercover in Qishan, and sometimes there would be some things that... could not have been helped. When he was doing these things, in his heart he was also..."

In his heart, Wei WuXian shook his head, ZeWu-Jun, he's still... too kind, too pure.

After a second thought, however, he concluded that he was only so guarded toward Jin GuangYao because he had already known about the various suspicions, whereas the Meng Yao in front of Lan XiChen was someone who had gone undercover without a choice, enduring humiliation alone. The two held different viewpoints, so how could their feelings be compared?

A moment later, Nie MingJue still raised his saber. Lan XiChen, "MingJue-xiong!"

Meng Yao shut his eyes. Lan XiChen also tightened his grip on Shuoyue, "Please excuse..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the silver light of the blade slashed down violently, onto a boulder on the side.

Meng Yao flinched from the thunder of the boulder splitting apart. Looking over, he saw that it had been sliced into two halves, from the top to the bottom.

Even in the end, the saber couldn't fall on him. Baxia unsheathed. Nie MingJue walked away and never turned around.

Now that Wen RuoHan had died, even though remnants of the QishanWen Sect still remained, they were already beyond hope—their defeat was set in stone.

And the sacrificial Meng Yao who had been undercover in the Nightless City for years became famous immediately after the battle.

Wei WuXian had once found it strange as well. Ever since Meng Yao betrayed the QingheNie Sect, the relationship between Nie MingJue and him hadn't been the same as before. Then why did they later become sworn brothers? From his observations, aside from how Lan XiChen brought it up, having always hoped that the two would reconcile, the most important factor was probably the gratitude of saving his life and writing the letters. To be precise, in his past battles, he had more-or-less depended on the information that Meng Yao sent over through Lan XiChen. He still thought that Jin GuangYao was a talented person whom one would rarely come upon, and intended on leading him back onto the right path. However, Jin GuangYao wasn't his subordinate anymore. Only after they became sworn brothers would he have the status and the position to urge Jin GuangYao, like how he disciplined his younger brother, Nie HuaiSang.

After the Sunshot Campaign had ended, the LanlingJin Sect set up a flower banquet that lasted for days, inviting countless cultivators, countless sects to come and celebrate together.

On Koi Tower, people came and went. Before Nie MingJue's high viewpoint, the crowd parted again and again, with both sides nodding at him in respect, calling him "ChiFeng-Zun". Wei WuXian thought, such a show of extravagance is going to reach

even the heavens. All these people both fear and respect Nie MingJue. There are quite a few people who fear me, though not a lot who respect me.

Jin GuangYao was standing right beside the base of the palace. Now that he had become sworn brothers with Nie MingJue and Lan XiChen, and been accepted into his clan, he had already painted between his brows the mark of vermilion and donned the white, golden-edged robes of Sparks Amidst Snow. Wearing a gauze cap, he was almost beyond recognition. As handsome as ever, his cleverness was the same, yet his air was calmer than it had ever been.

Beside him, Wei WuXian was surprised to find a familiar figure. Xue Yang.

At this point in time, Xue Yang was still quite young. Although his features were still childlike, he was already rather tall. He was also wearing a robe of Sparks Amidst Snow. Standing beside Jin GuangYao, it was as though a spring breeze blew over willow trees—he was full of youthful talent. They seemed to be talking about something amusing. Jin GuangYao smiled, gesturing with his hand. The two exchanged a look, and Xue Yang bursted into laughter. With nonchalance, he glanced at the cultivators who walked around. His eyes were filled with casual contempt, as though all of them were walking pieces of trash. When he saw Nie MingJue, he had none of the fear that others had. Instead, he grinned, flashing his canine teeth. Jin GuangShan noticed that Nie MingJue's expression wasn't too keen. With hurry, he suppressed his smile and whispered something to Xue Yang. Xue Yang waved his hands, then skipped over to another area.

Jin GuangYao walked over and spoke with a tone of respect, "Brother."

Nie MingJue, "Who was that?"

After a moment of hesitation, Jin GuangYao answered carefully, "Xue Yang."

Nie MingJue frowned, "Xue Yang of Kuizhou?"

Jin GuangYao nodded. Xue Yang had been infamous ever since he was young. Wei WuXian clearly felt Nie MingJue's brows knit even tighter. He spoke, "Why are you wasting your time with such a person?"

Jin GuangYao, "The LanlingJin Sect recruited him."

He didn't dare to protest any further. Excuse being that he needed to care for the guests, he scurried to the other side. Nie MingJue shook his head and turned around. With the turn, Wei WuXian immediately felt his eyes lit up. He felt as though snow had begun to fall from the sky, drifting toward a hall illuminated by moonlight. Side by side, Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi walked over.

The two jades of Lan stood together, one wearing the Xiao, the other carrying the guqin; one warmly gentle, the other coldly austere. Nevertheless, they were similarly stunning, similarly poised, truly the same color, yet two different airs. No wonder others had always stared and exclaimed with such a sight.

The current Lan WangJi still had some naivety at the edges, but the cold expression that kept everyone at arm's length was the same. Wei WuXian's gaze stuck to his face at once, unable to be moved away no matter what. Regardless of whether or not he

could hear it, Wei WuXian shouted happily, "Lan Zhan! I miss you so much! Hahahahahaha!" Suddenly, a voice spoke, "Sect Leader Nie, Sect Leader Lan."

Hearing the familiar voice, Wei WuXian's heart jumped. Nie MingJue turned around again. Jiang Cheng came over, dressed in purple, hand on his sword.

And the person standing beside Jiang Cheng was none other than Wei WuXian himself.

He saw himself walk with hands behind his back, wearing all black. A flute in the shade of ink stuck to his waist, hanging down with crimson-colored tassels. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Jiang Cheng, he nodded in this direction to show respect. Attitude slightly arrogant, he took on a profound, disdainful appearance.

As Wei WuXian saw the stance of his younger self, the root of his teeth even cringed in soreness. He felt that he really was pretentious, and itched to just beat the hell out of himself.

Lan WangJi also saw Wei WuXian, who stood beside Jiang Cheng. The tip of his brows twitched ever so slightly. Soon afterward, his light-colored eyes returned to where they were, still looking forward in that composed way. Jiang Cheng and Nie MingJue nodded at each other with grave faces. Neither had anything unnecessary to say. After a hasty greeting, the two walked their separate ways. Wei WuXian saw his black-clothed self-glance around as he finally saw Lan WangJi. He looked as if he was about to speak before Jiang Cheng came over and stood to his side. Heads down, they each said something, wearing serious expressions on their faces. Wei WuXian laughed aloud.

Still walking beside Jiang Cheng, he went toward another area. The people around them also moved to make quite some space for them.

Wei WuXian thought about it carefully—just what was it that they talked about? Originally, he couldn't recall it no matter what. He only remembered after scrutinizing the shape of their mouths

through Nie MingJue's sight. Back then, what he said was, „Jiang Cheng, ChiFeng-Zun is so much taller than you, haha.“

And what Jiang Cheng said was, „Gest lost. You want todie?“

Nie MingJue's gaze turned over again, "Why does WeiYing not carry his sword?"

Carrying one's sword was like wearing formal attire. In such gatherings, it was a non-negligible indication of etiquette. Those from prominent sects saw it as especially important. Lan WangJi responded in a lukewarm tone, "He had probably forgotten."

Ning MingJue raised a brow, "He can even forget something like this?"

Lan WangJi, "It is nothing out of the ordinary."

Wei WuXian, Well, well, bad-mouthing me behind my back. Now I've caught you.

Lan XiChen smiled, "Young Master Wei has said before that he does not want to care about any of the redundant formalities. Let alone carrying his sword, even if he does not wear his clothes, what can others do about him? How truly youthful."

Hearing from another person's mouth the arrogant words hehad once said did indeed bring up an indescribable feeling. Wei WuXian felt a bit ashamed, yet he couldn't really do anything either. Suddenly, he heard Lan WangJi mutter under his breath, "How frivolous."

He voice was extremely soft, as though it was directed at only himself. The two words knocked upon Wei WuXian's ears, somehow making his heart skip a few beats as well.

Lan XiChen looked at him, "Hmm? Why are you still here?"

Lan WangJi was a bit confused. With a straight face, he replied, "Brother is here, so of course I

am here as well.”

Lan XiChen, “Why have you not gone to converse with him yet? They will soon be far gone.” Wei WuXian found this rather strange, why did ZeWu-Jun bring this up? Might it be that Lan Zhan had something to say to me?

Before he could see how Lan WangJi reacted, a series of clamor suddenly came from the other end of the base. Wei WuXian heard his own raging shout, “Jin ZiXuan! Don’t you forget about what things you said and what things you did? What do you mean by this, now?!”

Wei WuXian remembered. So, it was this time!

On the other side, Jin ZiXuan also fumed, “I was asking Sect Leader Jiang, not you! The one I was asking about was also Maiden Jiang. How is that related to you?!”

Wei WuXian, “Well said! How is my shijie related to you? Back then, who was the one whose eyes grew on the back of their head?”

Jin ZiXuan, “Sect Leader Jiang—this is our sect’s flowerbanquet, and this is your sect’s person! Are you going to look after him or not?!”

Lan XiChen, “Why have they begun to argue again?”

Lan WangJi looked over there, yet his feet were still stuck to the ground. A while later, as if he was finally determined to do

something, he stepped forward. He was about to go over when Jiang Cheng’s voice came, “Wei WuXian, you can just shut your mouth. Young Master Jin, I’m sorry. My sister is doing quite well. Thank you for your concern. We can talk about this next time.”

Wei WuXian laughed coldly, “Next time? There is no next time! Whether or not she’s doing well isn’t any of his business, either! Who does he think he is?”

He turned around and started to leave. Jiang Cheng shouted, “Get back here! Where are you going?”

Wei WuXian waved his hands, “Anywhere is fine! Just don’t let me see that face of his. I never wanted to come, anyway. You can deal with whatever’s here yourself.”

Having been abandoned by Wei WuXian, Jiang Cheng’s face immediately clouded over. Jin GuangYao had been busying himself with all sorts of things in and out of the place. He faced all guests with smiles, all problems with action. Seeing that

something went wrong over here, he emerged again, “Young Master Wei, please wait!”

Hands behind his back, Wei WuXian walked at a fast pace. His face was dark, and he didn’t pay attention to anyone. LanWangJi walked a step toward him, but before he had a chance to speak, the two of them brushed shoulders and parted.

Jin GuangYao couldn’t catch up with Wei WuXian. He stomped his foot on the ground and sighed, “And there he goes. Sect Leader Jiang, just... just what should I do?”

Jiang Cheng stowed away the clouds on his face, “Don’t mind him. Look at how impolite he is. He’s used to such rudebehavior at home.”

He then began to converse with Jin ZiXuan.

Watching the two, Wei WuXian let out a long sigh in silence. The good thing was that Nie MingJue wasn’t too interested in the things going on here. He quickly looked away, and Wei WuXian wasn’t able to see them anymore.

The QingheNie Sect’s residence, the Unclean Realm—

Nie MingJue was sitting on a mat seat. A guqin lay horizontally before Lan XiChen as he brushed his fingers over the strings. When the song finished, Jin GuangYao laughed, “Well, now that I’ve heard Brother’s guqin skills, I might as well smash my guqin the moment I get home.”

Lan XiChen, “Your skills are also considered quite fine outside of Gusu. Were they taught by your mother?”

Jin GuangYao, “No. I taught myself by watching others. She never taught me such things. She only taught me reading and writing, and bought a handful of expensive sword and cultivation guides for me to practice.”

Lan XiChen seemed surprised, “Sword and cultivation guides?”

Jin GuangYao, "Brother, you haven't seen them before, have you? Those small booklets sold by the common folk. First jumbled sketches of human figures, then deliberately mystified captions."

Lan XiChen shook his head, smiling. Jin GuangYao shook his head as well, "All of them are scams, especially to fool women like my mother and ignorant children. You won't lose anything by practicing them, but you definitely won't gain anything either."

He sighed in a rueful way, "But how could my mother have known this? She bought them no matter how expensive they were, saying that if I returned to see my father in the future, I had to see him with as much competence as possible so that I don't fall behind. All of the money was spent on this."

Lan XiChen strummed the strings of the guqin, "You are very talented, having achieved so much from simply watching others. If a master could offer you advice, you would make rapid progress."

Jin GuangYao grinned, "The master is right before my eyes, but I'd never dare to trouble him."

Lan XiChen, "Why not? Young Master, sit, please."

And Jin GuangYao sat down in front of him, his back straight and still. He pretended as though he was a student humbly listening to advice, "Teacher Lan, what will you be teaching?"

Lan XiChen, "How about Sound of Lucidity?"

Jin GuangYao's eyes lit up, but before he could speak, Nie MingJue looked up, "Sound of Lucidity is one of the GusuLan Sect's exclusive teachings. It shouldn't be leaked."

Lan XiChen, though, didn't seem to mind. He smiled, "Sound of Lucidity is different from Sound of Vanquish in that its usage is to clear one's mind. How selfish must I be to withhold such a therapeutic technique? Besides, why would teaching it to our third brother be considered as a leakage?"

Seeing that his heart was set, Nie MingJue didn't sayanything further.

One day, the moment he returned to the main hall of the Unclean Realm, he saw about a dozen folding fans, all lined in gold, flattened out one next to the other in front of Nie HuaiSang, who was touching them tenderly, mumbling as he compared the inscriptions written on each one. Immediately, veins protruded from Nie MingJue's forehead, "Nie HuaiSang!"

Nie HuaiSang fell at once.

He really did fall to his knees from the terror. He only staggered up after he finished kneeling, "B-b-b-brother."

Nie MingJue, "Where is your saber?"

Nie HuaiSang cowered, "In... in my room. No, in the school grounds. No, let me... think..."

Wei WuXian could feel that Nie MingJue almost wanted to hack him dead right there, "You bring a dozen fans with you wherever you go, yet you don't even know where your own saber is!?"

Nie HuaiSang hurried, "I'll go find it right now!"

Nie MingJue, "There's no need! Even if you find it you won't get anything out of it. Go burn all of these!"

All of the color drained out of Nie HuaiSang's face. He rushedto pull all of the fans into his arms, pleading, "No, Brother! All of these were given to me!"

Nie MingJue slammed his palm onto a table, causing it to crack, "Who did? Tell them to scurry out here right now!"

Someone spoke, "I did."

Jin GuangYao walked in from outside the hall. Nie HuaiSang looked as though he saw a knight in shining armor, beaming, "Brother, you're here!"

In reality, it wasn't that Jin GuangYao could calm Nie MingJue's anger, but that since Jin GuangYao came, all of Nie MingJue's anger would be directed at him alone, having no time to scold others. Thus, there was nothing wrong with saying that he was Nie HuaiSang's knight in

shining armor. Nie HuaiSang was absolutely delighted. He greeted Jin GuangYao again and again as he grabbed the fans in haste. Seeing how his younger brother reacted, Nie MingJue was so outraged that he almost found it amusing. He turned to Jin GuangYao, “Don’t send him those useless things!”

In a hurry, Nie HuaiSang dropped a few fans on the ground. Jin GuangYao picked them up for him and put them into his arms, “HuaiSang’s hobbies are quite elegant. He’s dedicated to art and calligraphy, and has no propensity for mischief. How can you say that they’re useless?”

Nie HuaiSang nodded as fast as he could, “Yes, Brother is right!” Nie MingJue, “But sect leaders have no need for such things.”

Nie HuaiSang, “I’m not going to be a sect leader, though. You can be it, Brother. I’m not doing it!”

As his brother’s glance swept over, he shut his mouth at once. Nie MingJue turned to Jin GuangYao, “What did you come here for?”

Jin GuangYao, “Our second brother said that he gave you a guqin.”

The guqin was given when Lan XiChen was here to play Sound of Lucidity for Nie MingJue, in order to help him calm his temper. Jin GuangYao continued, “Brother, in the past few days, the GusuLan Sect is at a critical point in its reestablishment of the Cloud Recesses and you refuse to let him come, which was why he taught me Sound of Lucidity. I assume that even though I’m not as skilled as our second brother, I’d still be able to help calm you to a certain extent, Brother.”

Nie MingJue, “Just take care your own things.”

Nie HuaiSang, however, was rather interested, “Brother, what song? Can I listen? Let me tell you, the limited edition that you gave me last time...”

Nie MingJue shouted, “Go back to your room!”

Nie HuaiSang fled at once, not to his room, however, but to the living room for the presents that Jin GuangYao had brought him. With a few interruptions, Nie MingJue’s fury had mostly died. He turned around to look at Jin GuangYao, whose face seemed quite tired, robes of Sparks Amidst Snow covered in dust. He probably came here directly from Carp Tower. After a pause, Nie MingJue spoke, “Sit.”

Jin GuangYao nodded lightly and sat as he had been told,

“Brother, if you’re concerned for HuaiSang, softer words would do no harm. Why this?”

Nie MingJue, “Even when a blade’s at his neck he’s still like this. Looks like he’ll always be a good-for-nothing.”

Jin GuangYao, “It isn’t that HuaiSang is a good-for-nothing, but that his heart lies somewhere else.”

Nie MingJue, “Well you’ve really discerned where his heart lies, haven’t you?”

Jin GuangYao smiled, “Of course. Isn’t that what I’m the best at? The only person whom I can’t discern is you, Brother.”

He knew of people’s likes and dislikes so that he could find suitable solutions; he loved running errands and could do twice the work with half the effort. Thus, Jin GuangYao could be said to be quite a talent at analyzing others’ interests. Nie MingJue was

the only person whom Jin GuangYao couldn’t probe out any useful information about. Wei WuXian saw this already, back then when Meng Yao was working under Nie MingJue. Women, liquor, riches—he touched none; art, calligraphy, antiques—a pile of ink and mud; the finest green tea leaves and dregs from a roadside booth—there was no difference. Meng Yao tried everything he could think of yet still couldn’t find if he was interested in anything besides training his saber work and killing Wen-dogs. He really was a wall made of iron, impenetrable by even the sharpest blades.

Hearing that his tone was one of self-mock, Nie MingJue wasn’t as disgusted as he would’ve been, “Don’t help him build such a conduct.”

Jin GuangYao smiled slightly, then asked, “Brother, where’s our second brother’s guqin?”

Nie MingJue pointed him a direction.

Since then, Jin GuangYao would travel from Lanling to Qinghe every few days, playing Sound of Lucidity to help quell Nie MingJue rage. He tried his hardest, without speaking even a single word of complaint. Sound of Lucidity was indeed effective. Wei WuXian could clearly feel that the hostile energy within Nie MingJue was being suppressed. And, when playing the guqin, the way that the two conversed and got along even had a hint of the peace they had before they fell out. He began to think that maybe the so-called busy reestablishing the Cloud Recesses was just an excuse. Perhaps Lan XiChen simply wanted to give Nie MingJue and Jin GuangYao a chance to ease their tension.

Yet, just as he thought so, the next moment, a stronger rage had emerged.

Nie MingJue threw off two disciples who didn't dare stop him and walked straight into the Blooming Garden. Lan XiChen and Jin GuangYao were discussing something inside the study, their expressions solemn. A few blueprints lay on the desk before the two, covered in notes of all colors. Seeing how he barged in, Lan XiChen hesitated slightly, "Brother?"

Nie MingJue, "Don't move."

He then turned to Jin GuangYao, speaking in a cold voice, "Come out."

Jin GuangYao turned around to look at him, then looked at Lan XiChen again, smiling, "Brother, could you please help me go through this one? I have some private matters to discuss with our eldest brother. I'll have to ask for your explanation at a latertime."

Lan XiChen's face disclosed his worry, but Jin GuangYao stopped him, then followed Nie MingJue out of the Blooming Garden. As soon as they approached the edge of Carp Tower, Nie MingJue brought his palm down on him.

The disciples on the side were shocked. Jin GuangYao nimbly dodged the strike. He signaled for them to stay put as he spoke to Nie MingJue, "Brother, why the rage? Let's calm down."

Nie MingJue, "Where's Xue Yang?"

Jin GuangYao, "He's already been locked inside the dungeon, imprisoned for life..."

Nie MingJue, "What did you say to me back then?"

Jin GuangYao was silent. Nie MingJue continued, "I wanted him to pay blood with blood, yet you have him imprisoned for life?"

Jin GuangYao answered carefully, "As long as he receives his punishment and can't offend again, perhaps paying blood with blood and being imprisoned for life is..."

Nie MingJue, "The good things that the good guest cultivator whom you recommended has done! Things are already like this and you still dare defend him!"

Jin GuangYao protested, "I didn't defend him. I was also shocked by the case of the Changyang Yue Sect. How could I have known that Xue Yang would kill more than fifty people? But my father was set on keeping him..."

Nie MingJue, "Shocked? Who was the one that invited him? Who was the one that recommended him? Who was the one that regarded him highly? Don't use your father as excuse. How could you not have known what Xue Yang was doing?!"

Jin GuangYao sighed, "Brother, it really was my father's orders. I couldn't refuse. Now, if you want me to take care of Xue Yang, what would I say to him?"

Nie MingJue, "There's no need for explanations. Come back to me with Xue Yang's head in your hand."

Jin GuangYao still wanted to speak, but Nie MingJue had already lost all patience, "Meng Yao, don't speak such pretentious words in front of me. Your whole thing stopped working on me since a long time ago!"

Within a second, a few degrees of unease flashed over Jin GuangYao's face, as though someone with an unmentionable illness was suddenly exposed in the public. There was nowhere for him to hide.

He spoke, "My whole thing? Which whole thing? Brother, you've always yelled at me for calculating people and being too dishonorable. You say that you're a proud, righteous person,

that you aren't afraid of anything, that proper men shouldn't need to play with schemes. That's fine. Your background is noble and your cultivation is high. But what about me? Am I the same as you? First, my cultivation isn't as firm as yours. Ever since I was born, has anyone taught me? And second, I have no prominent background. Do you think that I'm in a steady position, here at the LanlingJin Sect? Do you think that I can rise into power the moment Jin ZiXuan dies? Jin GuangShan would rather bring another illegitimate child back than want me to succeed him! You think that I should be afraid of nothing? Well, I'm afraid of everything, even other people! He whose stomach is full believes not him who is starving."

Nie MingJue replied coldly, "In the end, all you mean is that you don't want to kill Xue Yang, that you don't want your position at the LanlingJin Sect to waver."

Jin GuangYao, "Of course I don't!"

He looked up, unknown fires dancing within his eyes, "But, Brother, I have always wanted to ask you something—the lives under your hands are in any regard more than those under mine, so why is it that I only killed a few cultivators out of desperation and you keep on bringing it up, even until now?"

Nie MingJue was so enraged that he began to laugh, "Good! I'll give you my answer. Countless souls who have fallen under my saber, but I've never killed out of my own desires, much less to climb up the ladder!"

Jin GuangYao, "Brother, I understand what you mean. Are you saying that all of the people you killed deserved their deaths?"

With courage gathered from nowhere, he laughed and walked a few steps closer to Nie MingJue. His voice raised as well, asking in an almost aggressive manner, "Then, may I ask, just how do you decide if someone deserves death? Are your standards absolutely correct? If I kill one but save hundreds, would the good outweigh the bad, or would I still deserve death? To do great things, sacrifices must happen."

Nie MingJue, "Then why don't you sacrifice yourself? Are you any nobler than them? Are you any different from them?"

Jin GuangYao stared at him. A moment later, as though he had finally either decided on something or given up on something, he replied calmly, "Yes."

He looked up. In his expression were some of pride, some of calmness, and some of a faint insanity, "I and they, of course we are different!"

Nie MingJue was infuriated by his words and his expression.

He raised his foot. Yet, Jin GuangYao neither avoided nor took defense. The kick landed right on him, and again he rolled like a pebble down Carp Tower.

Looking down, Nie MingJue shouted, "It's no wonder, coming from the son of a prostitute."

Jin GuangYao only landed after rolling down more than fifty steps. He didn't even stay on the ground for long before crawling up.

With a wave of his hand, he sent away the servants and disciples who surrounded him. Dusting off his robes, he slowly raised his head to look at Nie MingJue. His eyes were quite calm, almost indifferent. Just as Nie MingJue unsheathed his saber, Lan XiChen happened to leave the palace to see what was going on, concerned after having waited for long. Seeing the situation before him, he unsheathed Shuoyue as well, "What happened, this time?"

Jin GuangYao, "Nothing. Brother, thank you for your advice." Nie MingJue, "Don't hinder me!"

Lan XiChen, "Brother, sheath your saber first—your mind is in turmoil!"

Nie MingJue, "I am not. I know what I'm doing. He's beyond hope. If these keeps on going, he'll do the world harm for sure. The earlier he's killed, the earlier we can relax!"

Lan XiChen jolted in surprise, "Brother, what are you talking about? These past few days he has constantly been rushing to and from between Lanling and Qinghe. Is it only in exchange for your comment that he is beyond hope?"

To deal with people like Nie MingJue, bringing up the good and bad others had done to them

was a good tactic. As expected, he paused shortly and glanced at Jin GuangYao. Blood streamed down from his forehead, but aside from the wound from the fall, there was also an old wound from before, wrapped in bandages. It had been hidden only because he was wearing the black gauze cap. Now, both wounds gaped open, so he took off the bandages and used it to wipe the blood from the wounds, so that the clothes

weren't dirtied. Then, he tossed it onto the ground and stood there quietly, thinking about unknown matters. Lan XiChen turned around, "You can go back. I will talk to our eldest brother."

Jin GuangYao bowed in this direction and left. Feeling Nie MingJue's grip soften, Lan XiChen also took away his sword. He patted Nie MingJue's shoulder to lead him to the side.

Lan XiChen walked as he spoke, "Brother, I am afraid that you do not know. Our third brother really is in a terrible situation as of the moment."

Nie MingJue's voice was still cold, "In his words, he seems like he's always in awful situations." Although he was saying so, his saber was already sheathed. Lan XiChen continued, "Who says he is not? A moment ago, he talked back to you, did he not? Do you think he used to do this?"

It was true that he didn't, that his behavior was unusual. Jin GuangYao wasn't someone who couldn't hold down their emotions. He knew that the way to deal with Nie MingJue was to back down. The explosion-like argument indeed didn't seem like something that he'd do.

Lan XiChen, "His mother never liked him to begin with. After ZiXuan-xiong passed away, she often hit him and scolded him. These days, his father also refuses to listen to him. He returned all of his proposals."

Wei WuXian recalled the pile of blueprints on the table and knew, The lookout towers. Finally, Lan XiChen concluded, "For the time being, let us not force him with too much assertion. I trust that he knows what he should do, as long as we give him some more time."

Nie MingJue, "Hopefully so."

Wei WuXian had thought that, after receiving a kick from Nie MingJue, Jin GuangYao would probably stay put for some time. Yet, a few days later, he still came to the Unclean Realm as usual.

Nie MingJue was on the school ground, teaching and supervising Nie HuaiSang's saber work in person. He didn't acknowledge Jin GuangYao, so he stood at the edge of the field, waiting with respect. Since Nie HuaiSang was quite uninterested and the sun was bright, he was rather half-hearted, complaining that he was tired after just a few moves. He beamed as he got ready to go to Jin GuangYao and see what presents he brought this time. In the past, Nie MingJue would only frown at such things, but today he was angered, "Nie HuaiSang, do you want this strike to land on your head?! Get back here!"

If only Nie HuaiSang were like Wei WuXian and could feel how great Nie MingJue's rage was, he wouldn't grin in such a bold way. He protested, "Brother, the time is up. It's time to rest!"

Nie MingJue, "You rested just thirty minutes ago. Keep on going, until you learn it."

Nie HuaiSang was still giddy, "I won't be able to learn it anyways. I'm done for the day!"

He often said this, but today Nie MingJue's reaction was entirely different from his past reaction. He shouted, "A pig would've learnt this by now, so why haven't you?!"

Never expecting Nie MingJue to burst out so suddenly, Nie HuaiSang's face was blank with shock as he shrunk toward Jin GuangYao. Seeing the two together, Nie MingJue was even more provoked, "It's been one year already and you still haven't learnt this one set of saber techniques. You stand on the field for just thirty minutes and you're complaining that you're tired. You don't have to excel, but you can't even protect yourself! How did the QingheNie Sect produce such a good-for-nothing! The both of you should be tied up and beaten once every day. Carry out all those things in his room!"

The last sentence was spoken to the disciples standing by the side of the field. Seeing that they had gone, Nie HuaiSang felt as though he was on pins and needles. A moment later, the row of

disciples really did bring out all the fans, paintings, porcelain from his room. Nie MingJue had always threatened to burn his room, but he had never actually burned them. This time, though, he was serious. Nie HuaiSang panicked. He threw himself over, "Brother! You can't burn them!" Noticing that the situation wasn't good, Jin GuangYao also spoke, "Brother, don't act on impulse."

Yet, Nie MingJue's saber had already struck. All of the delicate objects piled at the center of the field erupted in roaring flames. Nie HuaiSang wailed and plunged into the fire to save them. Jin GuangYao hurried to pull him back, "HuaiSang, be careful!"

With a sweep of Nie MingJue's hand, the two blanc de chine antiques shattered into pieces in his palms. The scrolls and paintings had already turned into dust in a split second. Nie HuaiSang could only watch blankly as the much-loved items that he had gathered throughout the years vanish into ashes. Jin GuangYao grabbed his hands to examine them, "Are they burnt?"

He turned to a few disciples, "Please prepare some medicine first."

The disciples answered and left. Nie HuaiSang stood at the same place, his entire body trembling as he looked over at Nie MingJue, pupil encircled by veins. Seeing that his expression wasn't right, Jin GuangYao put his arm around his shoulders and whispered, "HuaiSang, how are you feeling? Stop watching. Go back to your room and have some rest."

Nie HuaiSang's eyes brimmed red. He didn't even make a sound. Jin GuangYao added, "It's alright even if the things are gone. Next time I can find you more..."

Nie MingJue interrupted, his words like ice, "I'll burn them each time he brings them back into this sect." Anger and hatred suddenly flashed across Nie HuaiSang's face.

He threw his saber onto the ground and yelled, "Then burn them!!!"

Jin GuangYao quickly stopped him, "HuaiSang! Your brother is still angry. Don't..."

Nie HuaiSang roared at Nie MingJue, "Saber, saber, saber! Who the fuck wants to practice the damn thing?! So, what if I want to be a good-for-nothing?! Whoever that wants to can be the sect leader! I can't learn it means I can't learn it and I don't like it means I don't like it! What's the use of forcing me?!"

## Chapter 50: Guile--- Part Five

He kicked his saber off to the side and ran out of the field. Jin GuangYao shouted from behind him, “HuaiSang! HuaiSang!”

Just as he was about to chase over, Nie MingJue ordered in a cold voice, “Stop!”

Jin GuangYao stopped in his tracks and turned around. Holding in his anger, Nie MingJue glared at him, “You still dare come?”

Jin GuangYao answered in a low voice, “I came to acknowledge my mistake.”

Wei WuXian, What a face—it’s even thicker than mine.

Nie MingJue, “Have you ever acknowledged your mistakes?”

Just as Jin GuangYao was about to speak, the disciples who had gone to bring medicine came back, “Sect Leader, LianFang-Zun, Young Master has locked the door and won’t let anyone inside.”

Nie MingJue, “Let me see how long he can lock himself up for. How dare he defy me?!”

Jin GuangYao spoke to the disciple with a kind countenance, “Thank you. Give me the medicine. I’ll take it to him afterwards.”

He took the bottle of medicine. After everyone had left, Nie MingJue turned to him, “Just what are you here for?”

Jin GuangYao, “Brother, have you forgotten? Today is when I play the guqin for you.”

Nie MingJue gave him a straightforward answer, “There’s no room for discussion as to Xue Yang’s matter. You don’t need to flatter me. It’s not working at all.”

Jin GuangYao, “First, I’m not flattering you. Second, if it’s not working, Brother, then why would you care if I’m flattering you or not?”

Nie MingJue was silent.

Jin GuangYao, “Brother, these days you’ve been stricter and stricter towards HuaiSang. Is it the saber spirit...?”

After a pause, he continued, “Does HuaiSang still not know about the saber spirit?”

Nie MingJue, “Why would I tell him so soon?”

Jin GuangYao sighed, “HuaiSang is used to being spoiled, but he can’t be Qinghe’s idle Second Young Master for his whole life.

One day he’ll realize that you’re doing this for him, Brother, just like how I realized that you’re doing this for me.”

Wei WuXian, Bravo, bravo. I wouldn’t be able to say such words even if given two lifetimes, but Jin GuangYao can adjust his tone

so that it doesn’t sound strange at all. It even sounds a bit pleasing to the ears.

Nie MingJue, “If you really do understand, then come see me with Xue Yang’s head in your hand.”

Yet, Jin GuangYao replied almost instantly, “Yes.”

Nie MingJue looked toward him. Jin GuangYao stared back, then repeated, “Yes. Brother, if you give me one last chance, in two months’ time, I’ll come see you with Xue Yang’s head in my hand.”

Nie MingJue, “If you’re unable to do it?”

Jin GuangYao’s tone was firm, “If I’m unable to do it, Brother, you can do whatever you want to me.”

Wei WuXian was almost starting to respect Jin GuangYao.

Even though he was always scared of Nie MingJue, in the end, he could still use a myriad of verbal techniques to make Nie MingJue give him another chance. The same night, as though nothing had happened, Jin GuangYao began to play Sound of Clarity in the Unclean Realm again.

His oath was as solemn as could be. However, Nie MingJue wasn’t able to wait the two months.

One day, the QingheNie Sect was hosting a martial arts conference. As Nie MingJue passed one of the annexes, he suddenly heard the hushed voice of somebody, possibly Jin GuangYao. Yet, a second later, he heard another familiar voice.

Lan XiChen, "Since Brother chose to make the oath with you, it means that he has indeed approved of you."

Jin GuangYao spoke with dejection, "But, Brother, didn't you hear what he said in the oath? Every sentence meant something more."

"Face a thousand accusing fingers, be torn from limb to limb"—this was clearly a warning for me. I... I've never heard of such an oath before."

Lan XiChen replied in a gentle voice, "He said „if one were to think otherwise“. Do you think otherwise? If not, then why should you worry over it so much?"

Jin GuangYao, "I don't, but Brother has already decided that I do, so what can I do?"

Lan XiChen, "He has always cherished your talent, hoping that you would choose the right path."

Jin GuangYao, "It's not that I don't know what's right and what's wrong, but that sometimes I really can't help. Nowadays, I have it bad no matter which side I'm on. I have to ensure that I'm on everyone's good sides. I wouldn't care if it were someone else, but have I mistreated our eldest brother in any way? Brother, you heard as well. What did he call me?"

Lan XiChen sighed, "His anger was simply too great for him to have thought before speaking. Brother's temper cannot compare to how it was in the past. You must not provoke him again. These past few days, he has been deeply troubled by the saber spirit, and HuaiSang has argued with him again. They still have not made up yet, even today."

Jin GuangYao was almost sobbing, "If he could say such a thing when he was angry, then just how does he think of me on a daily

basis? Is it that because I couldn't choose my background, because my mother couldn't choose her fate, I'll have to be humiliated by others throughout my whole life? If so, then how is Brother different from the people who look down on me? No matter what I do, in the end, just a sentence and I'm „the son of a prostitute".

Jin GuangYao was, at the moment, complaining to Lan XiChen, yet just last night he had been all soft and innocent as he talked with Nie MingJue, playing the guqin. Hearing how Jin GuangYao spoke ill of him behind his back, Nie MingJue burned with anger and kicked the door open. The raging flames within his head traveled throughout the entirety of his body. A thunder-like roar exploded in the air, "How dare you!"

Seeing him enter, Jin GuangYao immediately panicked and darted behind Lan XiChen. Standing between the two, Lan XiChen didn't even have the chance to speak as Nie MingJue lunged with his unsheathed saber. Lan XiChen blocked the attack with his sword, shouting, "Run!"

Jin GuangYao dashed out the door. Nie MingJue shook Lan XiChen off, "Don't get in my way!" He chased outside as well. As he passed a long corridor, he suddenly saw Jin GuangYao stroll toward him. He slashed with his saber and blood splattered out within an instant. But Jin GuangYao had clearly been running for his life. How could he have been walking back with such leisure?

After the strike, Nie MingJue rushed forward again, staggering. As he arrived at the square, he looked up, catching his breath. Wei WuXian could hear how rapidly his heart was beating.

Jin GuangYao!

On the square, all of people who walked around had the appearance of Jin GuangYao!

Nie MingJue had already encountered a qi deviation!

He was delirious, knowing only to kill, to kill, to kill, kill Jin GuangYao. He attacked anyone he came across. Shrieks surrounded the area. Suddenly, Wei WuXian heard somebody wail, "Brother!"

Nie MingJue shivered as he heard the voice, becoming slightly calmer. As he turned around, he could finally make out a different face from the blurry field of Jin GuangYao's features.

Holding an injured arm, Nie HuaiSang dragged his leg behind him, desperately shifting toward Nie MingJue. Seeing that he finally stopped moving, Nie HuaiSang beamed, tears in his eyes, "Brother! Brother! It's me, put down your saber, it's me!"

But, before Nie HuaiSang could move over, Nie MingJue had fallen to the ground.

Before he fell, Nie MingJue's eyes finally cleared up again and saw the real Jin GuangYao.

Jin GuangYao stood at the end of the corridor. Not even a trace of blood was on him. He looked over, two streams of tears pouring from his eyes.

The Sparks Amidst Snow bloomed wildly over his chest, however, they seemed to be smiling in place of him.

Suddenly, Wei WuXian heard a voice call for him from afar. The voice was both deep and cold. The first call was quite fuzzy. It sounded as though it was far, far away, between real and illusory.

The second call sounded a lot more tangible. He could even distinguish an unnoticeable tone of worry within the voice.

And, as for the third call, he could hear it loud and clear. "Wei Ying!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian instantly pulled himself out!

He was still the thin paperman, stuck to the helmet that sealed Nie MingJue's head. He had tugged loose the knot that tied the iron shells over Nie MingJue's eyes, revealing a bloodshot eye, opened wide with anger.

There wasn't much time left. He must return to his corporal body immediately!

Paperman WuXian flapped his sleeves, flying out as though he were a butterfly. Yet, just as he dove past the curtain, he saw somebody stand in the dark corner of the secret room. Jin GuangYao smiled. Without speaking a word, he pulled out a soft sword from his waist. It was the famous sword of his, Hensheng.

Back then, when Jin GuangYao worked undercover at Wen RuoHan's side, he had often hidden the sword at his waist, wreathed the sword around his arm to use during critical moments. Although the blade of Hensheng seemed to be soft to the extremity, attacking with lingering motions, it was in reality both sharp and haunting. Once the blade had wrapped around the opposition, Jin GuangYao would apply it with a bizarre spiritual power, and one would quickly be severed into pieces by the sword, despite its tender appearance. Quite a few famous swords had been battered into piles of scrap iron just like this. At the moment, the blade of the sword attacked as though it was a serpent with silver scales, biting at the paperman without any hesitation. Losing focus for one second, and Wei WuXian would be caught in the fangs!

Paperman WuXian darted here and there, dodging the attacks with agility, but this wasn't his own body, after all. After a few moves, the tip of Hensheng had almost sliced him. If this continued, he'd be pierced through for sure!

Suddenly, from the corner of his eye, he saw a sword lying silently in one of the wooden compartments on the wall. Nobody had polished the sword since a long time ago. Both the body of the sword and its surrounding area were covered in dust.

It was nothing else but his past sword, Suibian!

Paperman WuXian flew into the cabinet and stepped with force on Suibian's hilt. With a clang, the blade heeded his command and sprang from the sheath!

Suibian flew out of its sheath and began to battle against Hensheng's eerie sword glare. Seeing this, shock flashed across Jin GuangYao's face. He regained his composure at once and nimbly twisted his right wrist. Like a vine, Hensheng wrapped itself around Suibian's white, straight blade. He immediately let go of it, letting the two swords fight alone. With his left hand he flung a talisman toward Wei WuXian. The talisman ignited in midair, bursting into wild flames. Wei WuXian could feel the waves of heat as it approached him. Taking advantage of the blinding rays from the two swords fighting above them, he quickly flapped his sleeves and rushed out of the room!

The time was about to run out. Wei WuXian couldn't care less about hiding himself, flying all

the way back to the guest residences. By chance, Lan WangJi happened to open the door. And thus, with a struggling thrust, he threw himself onto Lan WangJi's face.

Paperman WuXian stuck like glue to half of Lan WangJi's face. It looked as though it was shivering. Lan WangJi's eyes were covered by its two wide sleeves. He let it shiver for a while before gingerly picking it up.

A while later, once his soul had returned successfully, Wei WuXian immediately took a deep breath. He raised his head, opened his eyes, and suddenly stood up. Yet, having not expected his body to still be disoriented, he felt dizzy and leaned forward. Seeing this, Lan WangJi caught him in his arms. Wei WuXian lifted his head once more, and the top of his head collided with Lan WangJi's chin. With a thud, both of them grunted in pain. Wei WuXian rubbed his head with one hand and felt Lan WangJi's chin with the other, "Ugh! I'm sorry. Lan Zhan, you alright?"

His chin having been stroked a couple of times; Lan WangJi lightly took Wei WuXian's hand away before shaking his head. Wei WuXian tugged him, "Let's go!"

Lan WangJi didn't ask for too many details, either. He stood up so that they could leave before finally asking, "Where to?"

Wei WuXian, "The Fragrant Palace! The bronze mirror in there is the entrance to a secret room. His wife found out some secret of his and he dragged her inside, and she should still be there as of now! And ChiFeng-Zun's head is in there as well!"

Jin GuangYao would definitely strengthen the seal on Nie MingJue's head again and move it somewhere else. However, even if he could move the head, he wouldn't be able to move his wife, Qin Su! After all, she was the mistress of Koi Tower. She

attended the banquet just a while ago. If such a respected person had suddenly disappeared into nowhere, it'd be impossible for anyone not to suspect something. By taking advantage of this opportunity and barging inside, they could use their speed to prevent Jin GuangYao from having time to weave lies or shut Qin Su up!

The two attacked with tremendous force, kicking to the side anyone who tried to stop them. Jin GuangYao had trained the disciples around the Fragrant Palace to be more than alert. As soon as someone intruded, they would shout the alert even if they couldn't defend anything, so that they could warn the master within the Fragrant Palace. However, at times like this, people often had the tendency to fall victim to their own wisdom. The louder the disciples' alerts were, the more disadvantageous the situation was to Jin GuangYao. It was because of how countless sects had assembled here today. Aside from cautioning Jin GuangYao to take guard against the intruders, the alerts would draw them over as well!

The first to hurry over was Jin Ling. His sword was already unsheathed in his hand as he asked, "Why are you here?"

As he spoke, Lan WangJi had already walked up three steps of the ruyi stairs and unsheathed Bichen. Jin Ling seemed guarded, "This is my uncle's bedchamber. Have you gone to the wrong place? No, you're the intruders, aren't you? What do you want?"

The cultivators who had gathered at Koi Tower also came over, one after another. All were surprised.

"What happened?"

"Why is there so much noise here?"

"This is the Fragrant Palace. Isn't it a bit unsuitable for us to...?" "I just heard the sound of the alerts..."

The cultivators both frowned and panicked. No sound came from within the palace. Wei WuXian readily knocked on the doors, "Sect Leader Jin? Chief Jin?"

Jin Ling fumed, "Just what do you want? Everyone is here because of you! This is my uncle's bedchamber, bedchamber, you understand?! Haven't I told you not to..."

Lan XiChen walked over, and Lan WangJi looked at him. As their eyes met, Lan XiChen's expression hesitated before immediately becoming more complex, as though he found something

unbelievable. It seemed that he already understood.

Nie MingJue's head was right inside of the Fragrant Palace.

Suddenly, a smiling voice echoed, "What's wrong? Is it that the reception during the day wasn't good enough, and everyone wants to host an evening banquet here at my place?"

Jin GuangYao walked calmly out of the crowd. Wei WuXian, "LianFang-Zun, what a good timing. If you came a bit later, then we wouldn't be able to see what's in the secret room of the Fragrant Palace."

Jin GuangYao paused, "Secret room?"

Everyone looked rather confused, unsure of what was going on. Jin GuangYao looked somewhat lost, "And? Are secret rooms a rarity? With a couple of scarcely used treasures, any sect would have treasure rooms, right?"

Just as Lan WangJi was about to speak, Lan XiChen interrupted.

He spoke, "A-Yao, would it be possible to let us in and allow us to take a look at your treasure room?"

Jin GuangYao looked as though he found the request both strange and difficult, "Brother, since it's called a treasure room, the things inside are best if put away. And you want me to open it all of a sudden. Well..."

Within such a short period of time, it was impossible for Jin GuangYao to have transported Qin Su somewhere else without anybody knowing. The transportation talisman could only transport the one using the talisman. Judging from Qin Su's current state, it was impossible for her to have either the spiritual power or the intention to use such a talisman. Which was why, as of the moment, Qin Su must still be in there.

Alive or dead—either way, it'd be a fatal to Jin GuangYao if found out.

Jin GuangYao put up a final struggle. He was still so calm, tossing excuses everywhere. Unfortunately, the more he refused, the more certain Lan XiChen's tone became, "Open it."

Jin GuangYao looked fixedly at him. All of a sudden, he grinned, "Since Brother is so intent on it, then I must open it for everyone to see, mustn't I?"

He walked to the front of the door, which opened at a wave of his hand. From amid the crowd, someone remarked coldly, "People say that the GusuLan Sect values conduct the most. Seeing from this, it seems that rumors are only rumors. Barging into the bedchamber of a sect leader is good conduct indeed."

Back when they were in the square, Wei WuXian heard the Jin Sect's disciples receive the certain person with much respect, calling him "Sect Leader Su". This was the sect leader of the rising MolingSu Sect—Su She. Su, she wore white robes. With slender eyes, fine brows, and thin lips, he was quite handsome, somewhat arrogant as well. Yet, although his air and features could be described as fair, they weren't anything special.

Jin GuangYao, "Forget it, forget it. It's not as though there are any disreputable things."

The tone that he spoke with had been controlled with great care. Others would think that he had a nice temper, and yet could also hear a slight degree of awkwardness. Jin Ling followed behind him. Indignant at how his uncle's bedchamber had been barged in, he gave quite a few glares to Wei WuXian.

Jin GuangYao spoke again, "You would like to look at the treasure room, right?"

He put his hand over the bronze mirror. Drawing formless incantations on the mirror, he was the first one to pass through. Following closely behind him, Wei WuXian entered the secret room again. He saw the curtain covered in incantations hanging over the cabinet. He saw the iron table of cutting corpses apart.

He also saw Qin Su.

Qin Su stood by the table with her back to them. Lan XiChen was somewhat stunned, "Why is Madam Jin here?"

Jin GuangYao, "All of our possessions are shared. A-Su often comes in here to look at things as well."

Seeing Qin Su, Wei WuXian was also surprised, So Jin GuangYao didn't transfer her somewhere else or kill her? Isn't he scared that Qin Su might say something?

Worried, he turned to Qin Su to scrutinize the side of her face. Qin Su was not only still alive, but in fact living quite well. There was nothing unusual about her at all. Although her expression was blank, Wei WuXian was certain that she had neither undergone some sort of an enchantment nor drunk any strange poisons. Her mind was conscious.

But the more conscious she was, the stranger the situation was. He saw with his own eyes just how strong Qin Su's emotions were, how much she resisted Jin GuangYao. How could Jin GuangYao have reached an agreement with her and silenced her mouth within such a short period of time?

A foreboding feeling grew in Wei WuXian. He immediately decided that this wasn't as smooth as they had thought. He walked toward the treasure cabinet and quickly lifted the curtain.

Behind the curtain, there wasn't any helmet, much less anyhead. There was only a dagger.

The dagger shone coldly, emitting strong killing intent. Lan XiChen had been staring at the curtain as well, but he hadn't made his mind to lift it or not. Seeing that it wasn't what he thought it was, he seemed to let out a sigh of relief, "What is this?"

"This," Jin GuangYao walked over and played with the dagger in his hand, "Is something rare. The dagger was the weapon of an assassin. It killed countless people and it's extremely sharp. Look at the blade of the dagger—if you look closely, you'll see that the reflection inside it isn't yourself. Sometimes it's a man, sometimes it's a woman, sometimes it's an elder. Every one of those

reflections are a spirit that had died in the assassin's hands. Its energy is too strong, which is why I hung a curtain there to seal it."

Lan XiChen frowned, "This must be..."

Jin GuangYao replied calmly, "That's right. It belonged to Wen RuoHan."

Jin GuangYao was clever indeed. He had expected that one day somebody might discover the secret room. Thus, aside from Nie MingJue's head, he had also placed a number of other treasures here, such as swords, talismans, stone tablets, spiritual weapons—it was full of rare items. The secret room looked exactly like the average treasure room. The dagger, as he had said, was a rare item that held intense dark energy. Many sects had the habit of collecting such weapons, much less a war trophy from killing the leader of the QishanWen Sect.

Everything looked as normal as ever.

Qin Su stood beside Jin GuangYao. As she watched him play with the dagger, she suddenly reached out and snatched it from his hands!

His features began to twist and tremble, along with her face.

Others couldn't read such an expression, but Wei WuXian could, having seen the argument she had with Jin GuangYao.

Pain, anger, humiliation!

Jin GuangYao's smile froze, "A-Su?"

Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian both went for the dagger. However, within a flash, the edge of the dagger had already sunk deeply into her stomach.

Jin GuangYao wailed, "A-Su!"

He rushed forward and grabbed Qin Su's limp body. LanXiChen immediately took out medicine. Yet, not only was the dagger's blade sharper than usual, its energy was heavy as well. Qin Su died within the blink of an eye!

Nobody had expected such an incident; everyone was shocked. Jin GuangYao called his wife's name mournfully. His eyes were wide open as he cupped her face with one hand. Tears ceaselessly splashed onto her cheeks. Lan XiChen, "A-Yao, Madam Jin... I am sorry."

Jin GuangYao looked up, "Brother, what is going on? Why would A-Su suddenly take her own life? And, why would you gather in front of the Fragrant Palace and demand me to open my treasure room? Is there anything that you haven't told me?"

Jiang Cheng, having arrived late, spoke in a cold voice, “ZeWu- Jun, please explain this. All of us are still in the dark.”

Everyone agreed with him. Lan XiChen could only begin,

“Some time ago, a few of the GusuLan Sect’s disciples were on a night-hunt. When they passed Mo Village, they were met with the attack of a left arm that had been dismembered. Both its resentful energy and its killing intent were heavy. Led by it, WangJi had been investigating. However, after we had gathered all parts of the corpse, we discovered that the corpse was... our eldest brother.”

All of the people in and out of the treasure room bursted into an uproar!

Jin GuangYao was more than shocked, “Brother? Hadn’t Brother been buried? Both you and I saw it with our own eyes!”

Nie HuaiSang thought that he might have heard wrong, “Brother?

Brother XiChen? You mean my brother? And also, your brother???”

Lan XiChen nodded heavily. Nie HuaiSang’s eyes rolled up. He collapsed on the ground with a thud. A circle of people immediately began to shout.

“Sect Leader Nie! Sect Leader Nie!” “Where’s the medic?!”

Jin GuangYao’s eyes still held tears, but appeared as if they were red with anger. He clenched his hands into fists and shouted with both grief and resentment, “Dismembered... Dismembered! Who in this world could’ve done such an insane act?!”

Lan XiChen shook his head, “I do not know. When we were searching for the head, the clues disappeared.”

Jin GuangYao paused, as though he finally knew what was going on, “The clues disappeared... so you came to search me?”

Lan XiChen was silent. Jin GuangYao looked as if he didn’t believe it. He asked again, “You wanted me to open the treasure room, because you were suspicious... that Brother’s head is at my place?”

A look of guilt passed over Lan XiChen’s face.

Jin GuangYao’s head hung low, Qin Su’s corpse still in his arms. After a while, he spoke, “... Forget it. Drop the matter. But, Brother, how did HanGuang-Jun know that such a treasure chamber was inside my bedchamber? And how was it decided that Brother’s head is inside my room? Koi Tower is quite fortified. If this really was my doing, would I have let Brother’s head be discovered so easily?”

Hearing his questions, Lan XiChen couldn’t seem to find any answers. Not only he, Wei WuXian couldn’t answer them either. Who could’ve expected that, within such a short time, Jin GuangYao was not only able to move the head somewhere else, but also prompt Qin Su to take her own life before everyone’s eyes?!

As his thoughts spun with desperation, Jin GuangYao sighed, “XuanYu, did you tell this to Brother and all those people? What’s the use of making up this sort of easily exposable lies?”

One of the sect leaders asked, “LianFang-Zun, who are you talking about?”

Somebody spoke coldly, “Who? The one standing beside HanGuang-Jun, of course.”

Everyone turned to look at him. The person who spoke was Su She. He continued, “The people who aren’t from the LanlingJin Sect might not have heard of who he is. His name is Mo XuanYu. He used to be a disciple of the LanlingJin Sect. Back then, because of his indecent conduct, he was thrown out for the reason of harassing LianFang-Zun. Yet, speaking from the hearsay nowadays, he has proven himself to the likings of HanGuang-Jun, even following him wherever he goes. Why would HanGuang-Jun, who has always been known for his grace and righteousness, keep such a person by his side? It truly is difficult to understand.”

Listening to him speak, Jin Ling’s face darkened. Amid the chatters of the crowd, Jin GuangYao lay down Qin Su’s corpse and slowly stood up. One hand on the hilt of Hensheng, he walked a step closer to Wei WuXian, “I won’t bring up anything from the past, but please explain in all

honesty. A-Su's bizarre death—are you involved in this at all?"

When Jin GuangYao lied, it really was unashamed and full of vigor! As others heard this, of course they'd think that MoXuanYu had slandered LianFang-Zun and caused Madam Jin to take her own life since he held hatred toward him. Even Wei WuXian couldn't think of anything to say in refutation. What could he say? How he saw Nie MingJue's head? How he snuck into the secret room? The name of the person whom Qin Su saw before she died? The odd letter that could easily be argued as fictitious and fabricated? Such refutation would only make him look even more suspicious! As he tried to think of a plan, Hensheng had already unsheathed. Lan WangJi stood in front of him as Bichen blocked the attack.

As the other cultivators saw, they unsheathed their swords as well. Two swords came at him from the side. Wei WuXian had no weapons in his hands, and so he was unable to defend himself.

Turning around, he happened to see Suibian lie atop the cabinet. He immediately grabbed it and unsheathed the sword!

Jin GuangYao's expression froze as he exclaimed, "It's the YiLing Patriarch!"

Within the instant, all of the blades of the LanlingJinSect's disciples turned to point at him. Jin Ling did as well!

His identity having suddenly been exposed; Wei WuXian stared at Jin Ling's disordered expression. Facing Suihua's blade, he was still confused. Jin GuangYao spoke again, "What a surprise that Patriarch YiLing has returned to this world and decided to make an appearance here. Apologies for the lack of reception."

Wei WuXian still felt puzzled, having not the slightest clue how he revealed himself. Nie HuaiSang spoke dizzily, "Brother? What did you call him? Isn't this Mo XuanYu?"

Jin GuangYao pointed Hensheng at Wei WuXian, "HuaiSang, A- Ling, come over. Everyone, please be careful. Since he pulled his sword out, he's most definitely the YiLing Patriarch— Wei WuXian!"

Because of how the name of Wei WuXian's sword was too embarrassing to say, when people mentioned it, they always referred to it as "this sword", "that sword", "his sword", and so on. The words "the YiLing Patriarch" evoked even more fear than how ChiFeng-Zun had been dismembered. Even the people who didn't intend on fighting had involuntarily unsheathed their swords, circling this side of the secret room. Wei WuXian glanced across at the field of sword glares in front of him, saying nothing.

Nie HuaiSang, "Don't tell me that whoever pulls out the sword must be the YiLing Patriarch. Brother, HanGuang-Jun, I'm guessing that there's some sort of a misunderstanding between the two sides, right?"

Jin GuangYao, "There are no misunderstandings. He's Wei WuXian for sure."

Jin Ling suddenly shouted, "Wait! Uncle, wait! D-didn't my uncle hit him with Zidian back at Dafan Mountain? His soul didn't get whipped out, so it must mean that he didn't possess this body, right? And so, he can't be Wei WuXian, right?!"

Jiang Cheng's face looked very dark. He didn't speak as his hand pressed onto the hilt of his sword, as though he was thinking about what to do. Jin GuangYao, "Dafan Mountain? That's right.

A-Ling, now that you reminded me, I've also remembered just what had appeared on Dafan Mountain. Wasn't he the one who summoned Wen Ning as well?"

Seeing that he not only couldn't prove anything but was also refuted, Jin Ling's complexion paled. Jin GuangYao continued,

"I'm sure that none of you know this, but back when XuanYu was still at Koi Tower, he had seen a copy of the YiLing Patriarch's manuscript at my place. The manuscript recorded a dark technique that „sacrificed" one's body. With the price being the soul and the body, one could summon a powerful spirit to seek revenge in place of themself. Sect Leader Jiang wouldn't be able to test it even if he hit him with a hundred more strikes. It's because the person who used

the technique sacrificed their body willingly. It doesn't count as a possession at all!"

The explanation was fair and reasonable. Hatred grew in Mo XuanYu after he was thrown out of Koi Tower. Recalling the technique that he had seen; he asked for a ferocious ghost to befall and summoned the YiLing Patriarch. Everything that Wei WuXian did was to seek revenge for Mo XuanYu, so the dismembering of ChiFeng-Zun's corpse must've been due to Wei WuXian as well. In any case, before the truth could be determined, the biggest possibility was that it was all part of the YiLing Patriarch's sinister plot!

But some people still doubted, "Since the technique of sacrifice can't be proven, then according to your judgement, LianFang-Zun, we aren't able to conclude anything, are we?"

Jin GuangYao, "It is true that body sacrifice cannot be proven, but whether or not he is the YiLing Patriarch can. Ever since the YiLing Patriarch had received the cultivation backlash and been torn to dust by his ghouls on the top of the Burial Mounds, his sword was collected by the LanlingJin Sect. But, not long afterwards, the sword sealed itself."

Wei WuXian was surprised, Sealed itself?

A foreboding sense of worry stirred up within him. Jin GuangYao, "I believe that I don't need to go into great depths to explain how a sword seals itself. This sword is spiritual. It refuses to let anyone apart from Wei WuXian use it, which was why it sealed. Aside from the YiLing Patriarch himself, nobody can pull it out. But just a second ago, „Mo XuanYu" here pulled out, in front of everyone's eyes, the sword that had been sealed for thirteen years!"

Before he even finished talking, dozens of sword glares shot toward Wei WuXian.

Lan WangJi blocked off all of the attacks. Bichen threw some people to the side to make out an unobstructed path for them. Lan XiChen, "WangJi!"

A few of the sect leaders who had keeled over from Bichen's cold energy were fuming, "HanGuang-Jun! You..."

Wei WuXian didn't even say one unnecessary word. Pressing his right hand on the window lattice, his body lightly flipped outside.

As soon as he landed, he began to sprint, thinking, When Jin GuangYao saw the strange paperman and saw Suibian being unsheathed, he must've guessed who I was right there. And so, he quickly made up a series of lies, causing Qin Su to take her own life, and then purposely force me to the cabinet with Suibian inside so that I could unsheathe my sword and reveal my identity. Scary, scary. Who could've known that his reaction was so fast and his lies so flawless?

Suddenly, somebody came from behind him. It was Lan WangJi, who had followed him without speaking a word. Wei WuXian's reputation had always been terrible, so it wasn't his first time in such a situation. This life, his mindset was different from when he was in his past life. He could already face these situations calmly.

He should get away first. There might be a chance of a counterattack in the days to come. He wouldn't push it even if no such chance came. If he stayed, all that would come out of it were more than hundreds of slashes from the swords. Saying that he was actually innocent was even more of a joke. Everyone believed with utmost certainty that he'd return to seek revenge sometime in the future. Having destroyed countless sects, nobody would listen to his explanation, especially when Jin GuangYao would be there fanning the flames. Lan WangJi, though, was different from him. He wouldn't even have to explain, and people would explain for him, such as how HanGuang-Jun had been deceived by the YiLing Patriarch.

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, you don't have to follow me!"

Lan WangJi looked straight in front of him, saying nothing in reply. The two left behind them a crowd of cultivators shouting to kill.

Amid the chaos, Wei WuXian spoke again, "You really want to go with me? Think carefully. After you walk out this door, your reputation will be destroyed!"

The two had already dashed down the steps of Koi Tower. Lan WangJi grabbed his wrist, as though he was about to speak. Yet, suddenly, a white light flashed before their eyes. Jin Ling

stopped them in their tracks.

Seeing that it was Jin Ling, Wei WuXian let out a sigh of relief. Just as the two were about to go around him, Jin Ling slashed his sword and blocked their way again, asking, "You're WeiYing?!"

His expression was a in a disarray. There was anger, there was hatred, there was doubt, there was hesitation, there was distress. He shouted again, "You really are Wei Ying, Wei WuXian?"

Seeing how he looked, the pain in his voice infinitely greater than the hatred, Wei WuXian felt his heart shake. But only a few seconds needed to pass before the crowd behind him would catch up. He couldn't pay attention to him any longer. Clenching his teeth, he could only try for the third time to go around him. All of a sudden, a coldness passed through his stomach. As he looked down, Jin Ling had already pulled the white blade—now red with blood—out of him.

He didn't expect that Jin Ling really would come at him.

The thought in Wei WuXian's mind was, He could be like anyone, yet he just so happened to have taken over his uncle Jiang Cheng. They even like to stab the same places.

He couldn't quite clearly remember what had happened next. He felt that he tried to attack. Everything around them seemed frenzied. Not only noisy, their escape seemed to bump and jolt as well. He didn't know how long had passed, but when he hazily opened his eyes again, Lan WangJi flew on Bichen, while he was carried on Lan WangJi's back. Blood had spilled onto half of his snow-colored cheeks.

In truth, the wound at his stomach didn't hurt too much. But itwas a hole in his body, after all. In the beginning, he had managed for a while, as though nothing happened. It was likely, though, that

the body hadn't received many injuries before. As the woundbled, he couldn't help but feel light-headed, and this wasn't something that he could control.

Wei WuXian called out, "... Lan Zhan."

Lan WangJi's breathing wasn't as placid as usual, feeling somewhat rushed. It was probably from carrying Wei WuXian while fending off attacks and being on the run for too long.

The tone in which he replied, however, was still the single syllable, as steady as ever, "Mnn."

After the "mnn", he added, "I am here."

Hearing the words, something that Wei WuXian had never felt before sprouted within his heart. It was like sorrow. His chest hurt a bit, but also felt a bit warm.

He could still remember how, back in Jiangling, Lan WangJi came all the way to assist him, yet he didn't appreciate the kindness at all. With all kinds of disputes, the two of them often parted with disapproval.

But what he hadn't expected was that when everyone feared him and flattered him, Lan WangJi scolded him right in his face; when everyone spurned him and loathed him, Lan WangJi stood by his side.

Suddenly, Wei WuXian spoke, "Ah, I remember now." Lan WangJi, "What do you remember?"

Wei WuXian, "I remember now, Lan Zhan. Just like this. I... really have carried you before."

## Chapter 51: Courage—Part One

Yunmeng was abundant in lakes. The YunmengJiang Sect's "Lotus Pier", the residence of the greatest sect here, was built near a lake as well.

Starting from the end of Lotus Pier, after just a while of paddling, one would see a large lotus lake, more than a hundred miles in length. The wide, verdant leaves and the smooth, pink blossoms

brushed shoulders against one another. As a breeze blew over, the petals and the leaves swayed as if they nodded their heads. Amid the purity and grace, one could also feel a naive sense of clumsiness.

Lotus Pier wasn't as other-worldly as the other sects' residences, shutting their doors and refusing to let commoners come within a boundary mile away. The docks right in front of Lotus Pier's entrance often bustled with vendors selling seed pods, water chestnuts and all kinds of pastries. Runny-nosed children from households nearby could also sneak into Lotus Pier's fields to watch the cultivators practice their swords. They wouldn't be scolded even if they got caught, either. They could sometimes even play around with the Jiang Sect's disciples.

When Wei WuXian was young, he often shot kites at the bank of Lotus Lake.

Jiang Cheng stared fixedly at his own kite, glancing at Wei WuXian's once in a while. Wei WuXian's kite had already flown high up in the sky, but he still had no intention of drawing his bow.

With his right hand at his brows, he grinned as he looked up, as though he still felt that it wasn't far enough.

Seeing that the kite had almost drifted out of the area where he was certain he'd succeed in shooting it down, Jiang Cheng clenched his teeth. He positioned his arrow and drew the bow. The white-feathered arrow shot out. The kite painted like a one-eyed monster was pierced right through the eye and fell downward. Jiang Cheng's brows lifted, "It hit!"

Right after, he asked, "Yours has flown so far already. You sure you can hit it?"

Wei WuXian, "Wanna guess?"

He finally pulled out an arrow and aimed. As the bow was drawn to the utmost, he swiftly let go. A hit!

Jiang Cheng's brows scrunched up again. A hump came through his nose. All of the boys put away their bows and went to pick up their kites so that they could rank the distances. The closest kite would receive the lowest ranking. Every time, the last one was the shidi who was the sixth eldest. As usual, they'd spend some time laughing at him. His face was quite thick, though, so he didn't care at all. Wei WuXian's was the farthest. The closest one to him, the one ranked second, was Jiang Cheng's kite. Both Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng felt too lazy to go fetch the kites. The boys rushed into the winding hallway built over the water's surface. They were playing around, jumping up and down, as two young, slender women appeared before them.

Both of them were dressed as armed maids, carrying with them short swords. The taller maid, holding a kite and an arrow, blocked their path. She asked coldly, "Whose are these?"

All of the boys silently cursed their luck as they saw the two women. Wei WuXian touched his chin and stepped forward, "They're mine."

The other maid snorted, "You're an honest one, aren't you?"

They parted and revealed between them a purple-clothed woman, also carrying a sword.

The woman had creamy skin and was rather beautiful, though her delicate features displayed some fierceness. The corners of her lips lay between a frown and a smile—she was a natural at sneering, just like Jiang Cheng. Her flowing purple robes wrapped around her thin waist. Both her face and her right hand, which rested on the hilt of her sword, were as cold as jade stone. A ring embellished with amethyst was worn on the index finger of her right hand.

Jiang Cheng smiled as he saw her, "Mom!"

Meanwhile, the rest of the boys greeted her with respect, "Madam Yu."

Madam Yu was Jiang Cheng's mother, Yu ZiYuan. Of course, she was Jiang FengMian's wife, and used to cultivate with him as well. Naturally, she should be called Madam Jiang. But, for some reason, everyone had always called her Madam Yu. Some people guessed that it was because she didn't want to take on her husband's surname due to her assertive personality. On this matter, neither the husband nor the wife in question had ever argued either.

Madam Yu came from the prominent MeishanYu Sect. She was ranked third in her clan, so was also called Third Lady Yu. In the cultivation world, she went by the name "Violet Spider". Just bringing up the name could scare quite a few away. Ever since she was young, she'd had a cold personality and never came off as likeable when conversing with others. Even after she married Jiang FengMian, she had always been out on night-hunts, not overly fond of staying at the Jiang Sect's Lotus Pier. On top of that, where she lived at Lotus Pier was different from where Jiang FengMian did. She had her own area, where only she and a few of the family members she'd brought from the Yu Sect lived. The two young women, JinZhu and YinZhu, were both her trusted maids. They never left her side.

Madam Yu gave Jiang Cheng a sideways glance, "Fiddling about again? Come, let me see you."

Jiang Cheng went to her side. Madam Yu squeezed his arm with her slender fingers, then slapped his shoulder loudly, scolding, "There's isn't any improvement in your cultivation at all. You're seventeen already, yet you're still like an ignorant child, fooling around with others all the time. Are you the same as others? Who knows which sewers other people will be splashing in, but you're going to be the leader of the Jiang Sect!"

Jiang Cheng stumbled from the slap, head lowered, not daring to protest. Wei WuXian understood—it went without saying that she was scolding him again, whether obvious or not. On the side, one of his shidi secretly stuck out his tongue toward him. Wei WuXian raised a brow at the shidi. Madam Yu, "Wei Ying, what trouble are you stirring up this time?"

Wei WuXian stood forward, accustomed to it. Madam Yu scolded, "You're like this again! If you yourself don't seek progress, then don't drag Jiang Cheng along to fool around with you. You're going to be a bad influence to him."

Wei WuXian looked startled, "I don't seek progress? Why, am I not the one with the most progress in the entire Lotus Pier?"

Young people were never too patient. They wouldn't feel satisfied unless they talked back. Hearing this, an air of hostility appeared over Madam Yu's forehead. Jiang Cheng hastened, "WeiWuXian, shut up!"

He turned to Madam Yu, "It's not that we want to shoot kites in Lotus Pier but, right now, isn't it that none of us are allowed to leave? The Wen Sect assigned all of the night-hunt areas to itself. Even if I wanted to night-hunt, there isn't anywhere for me to go."

To stay at home and not go outside to provoke or fight for prey with the Wen Sect—isn't this what you yourself made clear to Father?"

Madam Yu smirked bitterly, "I'm afraid that this time, even if you don't want to leave, you'll have to anyway."

Jiang Cheng didn't understand. Madam Yu didn't pay them any more attention and walked through the hallway, holding her chin high. The two maids behind her shot Wei WuXian fierce glares, and followed their mistress away.

When evening came, they finally understood what had been meant by „even if you don't want to leave, you'll have too anyway."

It turned out that the QishanWen Sect had ordered for envoys to pass out messages. For the reason that other sects taught badly and wasted talent, the Wen Sect demanded all of the sects to each dispatch at least twenty disciples to Qishan within three days, so that they could let experts teach them.

Jiang Cheng was shocked, "The Wen Sect's people really said this? They know no shame, do

they?"

Wei WuXian, "Well, they think they're the sun shining above all sects. It's not the first time that the Wen Sect is so shameless. Taking advantage of their large sect and strong influence, it had been prohibiting the other sects from night-hunting ever since last year. Just how much prey, how much land has it stolen?"

Jiang FengMian was sitting at the foremost seat, "Watch your words and eat."

There were only five people within the large hall. In front of everyone was a small, square table, on top of which were a few dishes of food. Head lowered; Wei WuXian only had a few mouthfuls as somebody tugged at the corner of his sleeve.

Turning around, he saw Jiang YanLi pass over a small dish.

Inside the dish was a dozen peeled lotus seeds, soft and white, fresh and succulent.

Wei WuXian's voice was soft, "Shijie, thank you."

Jiang YanLi smiled. Those somewhat mild features immediately lit up with color. Yu ZiYuan spoke coldly, "Eat? A few days after this, when they're at Qishan, we won't even know if they give them any food. Why not go a few meals hungry starting from now? Let them get used to it!"

This demand of the QishanWen Sect was one that they couldn't turn down. Countless precedents could prove that if any sect dared defy their orders, it would be accused of strange things such as being „rebellious" or „destructive." And, with these as reasons, they would wipe it out fair and square.

Jiang FengMian replied in a lukewarm voice, "Why fret over it? No matter what comes in the future, today's meal should still be eaten."

Madam Yu was out of patience. She slammed the table, "I'm fretting? Of course, I'm fretting! How can you still be so indifferent? Did you not hear what the person from the Wen Sect said? A mere maid servant dares to hold up her head before me! The twenty disciples that are sent must include a disciple from the clan. What does that mean? It means that between A-Cheng and A-Li, one of them must be included! Sent there to do what? To be taught? How each sect teaches their own disciples—since when is it the Wen Sect's turn to meddle?! This is sending people for them to play with, for them to hold against us!"

Jiang Cheng, "Mom, don't be so angry. I'll just go."

Madam Yu scolded, "Of course you'll go! Or else would your sister go? Look at her, still happily peeling lotus seeds. A-Li, stop peeling them. Who are you peeling them for? You're the mistress, not somebody's servant!"

Hearing the word „servant", Wei WuXian didn't mind much. He had finished all of the lotus seeds in the dish all at once, chewing as the soft, refreshing sweetness filled his mouth. Jiang FengMian, on the other hand, raised his head slightly, "My lady."

Madam Yu, "What, something I said? Servant? You don't want to hear the word? Jiang FengMian, let me ask you—this time, do you intend to let him go?"

Jiang FengMian, "It's up to himself. He can go if he wants to." Wei WuXian raised his hand, "I want to go."

Madam Yu laughed harshly, "How wonderful. He can go if he wants to. If he doesn't want to, it's definitely possible for him to stay. Why is it that A-Cheng has to go no matter what? Raising someone else's child with such passion, Sect Leader Jiang, you really are a very nice person!"

There was resentment within her heart. She simply wanted to let out the rage, even if it made no sense. All the rest were quiet as they endured her temper. Jiang FengMian, "My lady, you're tired. Why don't you go back and rest?"

Jiang Cheng sat still as he looked up at her, "Mom."

Madam Yu stood up and mocked, "What do you want me to do? Like your father, you want me to hold my tongue? You really are an idiot. I've told you long ago that you'll never in your whole life be able to surpass the one sitting beside you. Not over cultivation,

not overnight-hunting, even over shooting kites, you can't surpass him! It can't be helped. Who could change the fact that your mom is worse than another's? Worse it is, then. Your mom feels

injustice for you, tells you countless times not to fool around with him, yet you're still defending him. Just how did I give birth to a son like you?!"

She walked out, alone, leaving Jiang Cheng sitting there, his complexion switching between purple and pale. Jiang YanLi quietly put a dish of already-peeled lotus seeds on his table.

Having sat for a while, Jiang FengMian spoke up, "Tonight, I'll count eighteen more people. You'll depart together nextday."

Jiang Cheng nodded, hesitant on whether or not he should say anything else. He never knew how to converse with his father, while Wei WuXian was proficient. Finishing his soup, he replied, "Uncle Jiang, don't you have anything to give us?"

Jiang FengMian smiled, "I've given them long ago. Yourswords are by your side, and the adage is in your hearts."

Wei WuXian, "Oh! To „attempt the impossible", right?"

Jiang Cheng immediately warned, "This doesn't mean that you should stir up trouble even though you know that you'll makea mess!"

The air among them finally lifted.

The next day, before departure, Jiang FengMian only spoke one sentence after he informed them of the necessities, "The disciples of the YumengJiang Sect aren't as weak as to crack under just one of the outside world's waves."

Jiang YanLi saw them off, staying with them road after road. She filled everyone's arms with all sorts of snacks, afraid that they'd starve at the QishanWen Sect. Clothes brimming with food, the twenty boys set off from Lotus Pier. Within the time that the Wen Sect had set, they arrived at the appointed sector of indoctrination located at Qishan.

A number of disciples came from each sect, whether large or small. All of them were juniors. Among the hundreds of people, quite a few of the boys knew one another. In groups of threes or sevens, everyone conversed quietly, none of their faces agreeable. It seemed that they were all gathered here using not the most pleasant of means. Glancing around, Wei WuXian remarked, "As expected, people came from Gusu as well."

He didn't know why, but all of the boys sent from the GusuLan Sect looked somewhat pallid. Lan WangJi's face was especially pale, but his expression was still as frosted as usual, distancing him from everyone else. The sword Bichen on his back, he stood alone, with nobody around him. Wei WuXian had wanted to go up to him and say hello, but Jiang Cheng warned him, "Don't cause any trouble!"

And so, he could only forget about it.

Suddenly, a person shouted commands from in front of them, ordering all of the disciples to gather into formation before a tall platform. A few of the Wen Sect's disciples came and chided, "Silence, all of you! Don't talk!"

The person on the platform wasn't too much older than them, appearing about eighteen or nineteen. Chest puffed out, he had features that only barely crossed paths with the word "handsome". But, like his hair, they felt a bit greasy, for some reason. This was the youngest child of the QishanWen Sect, Wen Chao.

Wen Chao really enjoyed showing his face. He had flaunted himself before the other sects in quite a number of events, which was why people weren't strangers to how he looked. Behind him stood two people, one on the left and the other on the right. On the left was a glamorous girl, her stature slim. With long brows, large eyes, and lips of fiery red, the only blemish was the black mole above her upper lip. It sat on an awkward spot, as though it was always inviting others to dig it out. On the right was a tall, broad-shouldered man, appearing to be in his twenties. His face showed only indifference, surrounded by an air of coldness.

Standing on the taller half of the hill, Wen Chao looked down at everyone. Looking quite pleased with himself, he waved his hand, "From now on, one by one, hand over your swords!"

A commotion began among the crowd. Someone protested, "Swords should always accompany those who cultivate. Why do you want us to hand over our swords?"

Wen Chao, "Who was the one that spoke? From which sect? Stand forward on your own!" The person who spoke was immediately too afraid to speak. The crowd below the platform finally quieted, and Wen Chao was finally satisfied, "It's exactly because there are still disciples like you, who know nothing of conduct, of compliance, of humility, that I'm here to indoctrinate you so that your cores don't rot away."

You're already so ignorantly audacious. If your customs aren't straightened up now, in the future, there'd naturally be those who attempt to challenge the authority and climb above the Wen Sect's head!"

Although everyone knew that he asked for their swords with ill intentions in mind, with the QishanWen Sect like the sun at high noon, all of the sects were treading on thin ice, daring not to defy

it in the slightest way. Everyone was afraid that if they caused him any displeasure, they'd be given some accusation along with their sect, and so they could only submit to him.

Jiang Cheng held Wei WuXian firmly. Wei WuXian asked with a lowered voice, "What are you holding me down for?"

Jiang Cheng snorted, "Don't do unnecessary things."

Wei WuXian, "You're thinking too much. Even if this one is so greasy that it's gross, no matter how much I want to beat him up, I won't pick such a time and cause our sect trouble. Don't worry."

Jiang Cheng, "You want to stuff him into a bag and beat him up again? I'm afraid that wouldn't work. You see that guy beside Wen Chao?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes. His cultivation is high, but his youth isn't maintained well enough. Looks like he was a late bloomer."

Jiang Cheng, "His name is Wen ZhuLiu, also known as the „Core-melting Hand". He's servant kept by Wen Chao's side, specially to protect him. Don't provoke him."

Wei WuXian, "The „Core-melting Hand"?"

Jiang Cheng, "That's right. His pair of palms is quite scary. And he's an aid to the tyrant. Before, he helped Wen..."

The two looked straight ahead as they whispered. Seeing one of the Wen Sect's servants' approach to take away their swords, they were silent at once. With confidence, Wei WuXian unstrapped his sword and handed it over. At the same time, he couldn't help but glance across at the GusuLan Sect's side. He originally thought that Lan WangJi would definitely refuse to hand it over.

Unexpectedly, even though Lan WangJi's face was frighteningly cold, he unstrapped his sword anyway.

The mockery of Madam Yu had become a prophecy. Receiving the "indoctrination" in Qishan, the meals everyday really were bland. All of the snacks that Jiang YanLi had hung around their bodies were taken away long ago. On top of that, among the young disciples, none had practiced inedia yet. One couldn't say that it wasn't difficult.

The so-called "indoctrination" of the QishanWen Sect included only handing out copies of "Quintessence of the Wen Sect", booklets full of the stories and quotes of the Wen Sect's past leaders and best cultivators. Everyone had one. They were demanded to memorize them well and keep them in mind at all times. Wen Chao, on the other hand, stood above them every single day. He'd give a speech to everyone and request that they cheer for him, make him the role model to every word, every action. During night-hunts, he would bring the disciples with him and make them run at the very front. They'd scout the path, distract the demons and beasts, and battle with all their effort, while he'd appear at the last moment and easily knock down the prey that had already been beaten to a pulp by others. After he cut off its head, he'd go around boasting that it came from the victory he had achieved alone. If there were anyone whom he found especially displeasing, he'd pull them out and scold them in front of everyone, as though

said person was lower than even swine.

Last year, attending the Discussion Conference of the QishanWen Sect, Wen Chao also entered the grounds along with Wei WuXian and the others, on the day of the archery competition. He was completely sure that he'd win the first place, thinking that it was only natural for other people to yield to him. As consequence, of the first three shots, the first was a hit, the

second missed, and the third shot down the wrong paper mannequin. He should've exited the grounds immediately, but he refused to, and the others were hesitant of calling him out. In the end, after the calculations, the four with the best results were Wei WuXian, Lan XiChen, Jin ZiXuan, and Lan WangJi. If it weren't for having to leave early, Lan WangJi could've done even better.

Wen Chao felt greatly humiliated, and so he resented these four the most. Lan XiChen couldn't come this time, so he was fixated on the other three, scolding them every day, exhibiting his power.

The one who suffered the most was Jin ZiXuan. He grew up having been cupped within the palms of his parents. He had never undergone such humiliation before. If not for how the other disciples of the LanlingJin Sect stopped him and the fact that Wen ZhuLiu wasn't easy to deal with, he would have willingly killed himself along with Wen Chao on the first day. On the other hand, Lan WangJi seemed to be in a state of inner peace and absolute indifference, as though his soul had already risen out of his body. And, WeiWuXian had been through years of Madam Yu's diverse methods of scolding when he was at Lotus Pier. He began to laugh whenever he stepped off the platform, hardly blinking an eye to such moments.

Today, as usual, the group was hustled awake by the WenSect's disciples again. Like a group of livestock, they were driven toward the next destination of their night-hunts.

The place that they were going this time was called Dusk-Creek Mountain.

The deeper they went into the forest, the thicker the branches over their heads became, and the larger the shadows below them grew. Aside from the sounds of leaves and footsteps, they couldn't hear anything else. The calls of birds, beasts and beetles were unusually perceivable amid the silence.

After a while, the group met with a creek. Scattered throughout the gurgling water were maple leaves that floated along. The harmony of the sound and the sight imperceptibly diluted the atmosphere of desolation. Bouts of giggling laughter could even be heard from in front of them. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng walked while muttering insults at the Wen-dogs in every way possible. Inadvertently, he turned around, glanced, and saw a figured clothed in white. Lan WangJi was not far away from him.

Due to his slow pace, Lan WangJi was toward the back of the line. Within these past few days, there were many times when Wei WuXian wanted to approach him and catch up on what had been happening. However, Lan WangJi turned away whenever he saw him and Jiang Cheng had also beat it into him not to mess around. Now that they were closer, he couldn't help but pay more attention. Wei WuXian suddenly realized that, although Lan WangJi tried to walk as normally as possible, one could still see that his right leg contacted the ground lighter than his left, as

though he couldn't put any pressure on it.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian slowed down so that he was beside Lan WangJi. Walking shoulder to shoulder with him, he asked, "What happened to your leg?"

## Chapter 52: Courage—Part Two

Lan WangJi stared straight at the front, "Nothing."

Wei WuXian, "We're already familiar with each other, aren't we? How cold—you don't even bother giving me a single look. Your leg really is fine?"

Lan WangJi, "We are not familiar."

Wei WuXian turned around and walked facing the back, determined on making Lan WangJi look at his face, "Don't force yourself if it's not fine. Is your leg hurt or broken? When did it happen?"

Just as he was about to say, „do you want me to carry you", a fragrant breeze suddenly wafted around his nose. Wei WuXian turned around and looked to the side. His eyes immediately lit up. Seeing that he had stopped talking abruptly, Lan WangJi followed his gaze. He saw about half a dozen girls walking together. The one in the center wore a layer of chiffon over her coat of pale scarlet. As wind blew across, the chiffon swayed. Her figure looked exceptionally good from the back.

This figure was what Wei WuXian had been looking at.

One of the girls laughed, "MianMian, your perfume sachet truly is something special. After I wore it, bugs really did stop coming over. The scent is nice too. I seem to feel much more awake after I smell it."

The voice of the girl called MianMian was indeed soft and sweet, "Inside of the sachet is filled with minced medicinal plants. It can be useful in quite a lot of ways. I've still got a few here. Do any of you want one?"

Wei WuXian swept over like a foreboding gust of wind, "MianMian, save me one too."

The girl was surprised. She didn't expect to hear a stranger's voice barge in so suddenly. Turning around, she revealed a fair face, which frowned slightly as she asked, "Who are you? Why do you call me MianMian as well?"

Wei WuXian grinned, "I heard all of them call you MianMian, so I thought that it's your name. What, it's not?"

Lan WangJi watched them coldly. Seeing that he was at it again, Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes with emphasis.

MianMian's cheeks flushed, "You can't call me that!"

Wei WuXian, "Why not? How about this: if you tell me your name, I won't call you MianMian anymore. What do you think?"

MianMian, "Why do I have to tell you just because you asked? Before you ask for somebody else's name, you should tell them your name first, shouldn't you?"

Wei WuXian, "Sure, if you want my name. Remember, my name is „YuanDao".

MianMian silently pronounced the name „YuanDao" a few times. She couldn't remember if the young master of any sect had such a name. But, judging from the boy's air and appearance, she didn't think he was the average disciple. Looking at the teasing smile at the corners of Wei WuXian's lips, she didn't know what was going on.

Suddenly, Lan WangJi's low voice came from beside them, "A play on words."

She realized at once that it had been taken from the poetry line

„its ceaseless bounds yearn for miles and miles on" and he was making fun of her. She stomped her feet in spite, "Who's yearning for you? You have no face!"

The girls collapsed into a laughing mess, chirping, "Wei WuXian, you really have no face!"

"I've never seen someone as annoying as you!" "Let me tell you, she's called..."

MianMian dragged them away and turned to leave, "Let's go, let's go! You can't tell it to him."

Wei WuXian shouted from behind, "You can go, but give me a sachet, won't you?! You're ignoring me? You don't want to? If you don't, I'll find other people and ask for your name. There must be someone out there who's willing to tell me..."

Before he finished, a perfume sachet flew over from in front of him. It landed right in the middle of his chest. With an „ouch”, Wei WuXian pretended as though his heart hurt, spinning the sachet around his hand with its ribbons around his finger. Even as he walked back to Lan WangJi, he was still spinning the sachet around, grinning. Watching Lan WangJi’s expression growcolder, he asked, “What? You’re looking at me like that again. Right, where were we again? Let’s continue. How about I carry you on my back?”

Lan WangJi looked at him quietly, “Do you behave in such a frivolous way towards everyone?”  
Wei WuXian thought for a second, “I think so?”

Lan WangJi looked at the ground. He only replied a moment later, “How impudent!”  
He spoke the two words through clenched teeth, along with some strange hatred. He didn’t even deem it worthy to give WeiWuXian another glare. Lan WangJi strained to speed up and walk faster.

Seeing that he was forcing himself again, Wei WuXian hurried, “Fine. You don’t have to walk this fast. I’ll just go.”

Combining three strides into two, he quickly caught up to Jiang Cheng.

Yet, Jiang Cheng didn’t give him any good looks either. He spoke menacingly, “You’re so ridiculous!”

Wei WuXian, “It’s not like you’re Lan Zhan or anything, so why do you say ridiculous like he does? His face today is worse than how it used to be. What’s wrong with his leg?”

Jiang Cheng spoke in a sour voice, “You still have the time to pay attention to him? Why don’t you pay attention to yourself!? I don’t know what tricks that idiot Wen Chao is planning this time, making us search for some cave entrance here in Dusk-Creek Mountain. Hopefully it’s not like last time when he made us circle up and be shields of flesh.”

One of the disciples beside them whispered, “Of course his face isn’t so great. Last month, the Cloud Recesses was burnt down. You didn’t know yet, did you?”

Hearing this, Wei WuXian jolted, “Burnt down!?”

In the past few days, Jiang Cheng had heard too many of these stories, so he wasn’t as surprised as Wei WuXian was, “By the Wen Sect’s people?”

The disciple, “You can say that. You can also say... that the Lan Sect itself burnt everything down. The eldest son of the Wen Sect, Wen Xu, went to Gusu. He accused the Lan Sect’s leader of something and forced the Lan Sect’s people to burn down their own residence! It was given pretty names like cleaning up the place so that it’s reborn from the firelight. Most of the Cloud Recesses and its surrounding forest has been burnt down. Just like that, the hundreds of years old paradise had been destroyed. The leader of the Lan Sect was heavily injured. We don’t even know if he’s still alive. Well, well...”

Wei WuXian, “Is Lan Zhan’s leg related to this?”

The disciple, “Of course. The first place that Wen Xu ordered them to burn down was the Library Pavilion. He declared that he’ll teach anyone who wasn’t willing to do it a lesson. Lan WangJi refused. He was attacked by Wen Xu’s people and they broke one of his legs. It hadn’t even been healed yet, and he was dragged out here again. Who knows what they’re trying to do!?”

Wei WuXian thought carefully. Within these days, aside from being scolded by Wen Chao, Lan WangJi really didn’t walk around much. He had always been either standing or sitting, saying nothing at all. He was someone who valued proper conduct beyond anything, so naturally he didn’t let anyone see that his leg had been injured.

Seeing that he seemed like he wanted to go over to Lan WangJi again, Jiang Cheng pulled Wei WuXian away, “What’s wrong with you, now?! You still dare provoke him? You really are digging your own grave!”

Wei WuXian, “I’m not going to provoke him. Look at his leg. He’s been on the go for so many days—the state of his injury must’ve worsened. It became noticeable probably only because he really couldn’t hide it any longer. If he walks on like this, it’s likely that he won’t ever be able to

use his leg again. I'm gonna carry him."

Jiang Cheng pulled him even closer, "It's not as if you're familiar with him! Don't you see how much he hates you? You're going to carry him? He probably doesn't even want you a step closer to him."

Wei WuXian, "It's alright if he hates me—I don't hate him. I'll get him onto my back the second I get hold of him. Could he possibly choke me to death while on my back?"

Jiang Cheng warned, "We aren't even able to care for ourselves; how do we have the time to care about the trivialities of others?"

Wei WuXian, "First, this isn't a triviality. Second, things like this, somebody will have to care about them, sooner or later!"

As the two argued with lowered voices, one of the Wen Sect's servants came over and scolded, "Don't talk amongst yourselves. Watch what you do!"

After the servant came and went, a dainty girl approached them. Her name was Wang LingJiao. She was one of the servants that Wen Chao kept by his side. Exactly how she served him, though, everyone knew without the need of explaining. She used to be a maid of Wen Chao's principal wife. Since she had quite the look, she got into his bed after exchanging a few looks with her

mistress. As one's position elevates, those around them receive blessings as well. In the world of cultivation, a certain

"YingchuanWang Sect" had also appeared.

Since her spiritual power was weak, she couldn't use upper-level swords, which was why she held a long branding iron in her hand. All of the Wen Sect's servants had one of these branding irons.

Without the need to be heated, it gave a painful brand to whomever it touched.

Holding it in her hand, Wang LingJiao scolded pompously, "Young Master Wen told you to search for the entrance, so what are you doing, whispering to each other?"

At such a time, even a mere maid who had earned her position by crawling into another's bed sheets could bloat with such arrogance before them. They weren't sure whether to laugh or frown.

Suddenly, somebody shouted from the side, "Found it!"

Wang LingJiao didn't have the time to pay them any more attention. Having rushed over, she took a look at it, then beamed, "Young Master Wen! They found it! The entrance!"

It was a hole in the ground, hidden quite well beneath an old banyan tree with a trunk as large as the hug of three men. The first reason as to why they couldn't find it was that entrance was rather small, not even five feet in width, and the second that the thick, tangled roots and vines weaved a firm web, blocking the entrance. Above it, there was also a layer of leaves and branches, mud and stone, and thus it was almost unnoticeable.

Pushing aside the rotten leaves and mud, cutting away the roots, and the dark, eerie hole had been revealed.

The entrance led to deep underground. The cold air plunged into everyone's face, sending chills down their back. Nothing was heard of the pebble that had been tossed inside. It was as though it had sunk into the sea.

Wen Chao was ecstatic, "This must be it! Quick, everyone, get down there!"

Jin ZiXuan couldn't hold it any longer. He spoke coldly, "You brought us here, saying that we'll be hunting a beast. Then, if I may ask, what sort of a beast is it? Informing us beforehand would allow us to cooperate with more efficiency so that we wouldn't be as confused as last time."

Wen Chao, "Inform you?"

He stood up, first pointing at Jin ZiXuan and then at himself, "Just how many times do I have to make myself clear for you to

remember? Don't get it wrong. You are only the cultivators who serve me. I'm the one who gives the orders. I don't need others to tell me their suggestions. I am the only one who directs the

battle and commands the troops. I am also the only one who can conquer the beast!"

He spoke the words „only one" with great emphasis. The lofty voice and arrogant tone evoked both laughter and hatred within the ones who listened. Wang LingJiao scolded, "Didn't you hear what Young Master Wen said? Get down there, quick!"

Jin ZiXuan was standing at the very front. Holding back his anger, he lifted the hem of his robe, grabbed one of the thickest vines, and jumped without any hesitation into the endless hole.

This time, Wei WuXian could relate to his feelings on a profound level. No matter what creatures haunted this cave, facing them would be much more comfortable than facing Wen Chao and the others. If he let this hell of a pair damage his eyes any longer, he was afraid that he really might choose to perish alongside them!

The people following Jin ZiXuan entered the hole one by one.

Since the group of forcibly gathered disciples had their swords taken away, they could only crawl down slowly. The vines grew along the wall of the hole. They were quite sturdy, thick as the wrists of young children. Clinging to it, Wei WuXian silently calculated how deep they were going as he lowered himself at a leisurely pace.

His feet finally touched the ground after sliding down for almost thirty feet.

Wen Chao shouted a few things from above ground. Having ensured that it was safe underground, he flew easily down, sword

under his feet, Wang LingJiao in his arms. A while after, the disciples and servants also landed one by one.

Jiang Cheng whispered, "Hopefully the prey he wants to hunt this time won't be anything too difficult. I don't know if there are any other exits here. If the ghoul or beast flips out inside of here, such a long vine might break in half and it'd be hard for us to even run away."

The rest of the group was thinking the same thing. They couldn't help but look up at the small, white spot that was the entrance.

Everyone was worried.

Wen Chao leaped off his sword, "What are you doing just standing there? Do you need me to teach you what to do? Go!"

The group of the boys were chased into the depths of the cave.

Since they needed to scout the path at the front, Wen Chao ordered his servants to provide them with a few torches. The ceiling of the cave was both high and broad, unreachable by the light of the torches. Wei WuXian paid attention to the echoes. He felt that the deeper they went, the more spacious the echoes sounded. It was likely that they were already more than a hundred feet below ground.

The people at the front maintained high alert. They didn't know how long had passed when they had finally arrived before a deep pool of water.

Even if the pool was above ground, it'd be considered a vast lake. The water was eerily black. Stone islets of all sizes were also protruding from the surface.

And there was no other path before them.

But even though the path was at an end, they still hadn't found the prey of their night-hunt. They didn't even know what exactly it was. Everyone's heart was filled with uncertainty, still stiffly maintaining their vigilance.

As he hadn't seen the beast that he was expecting, Wen Chao also felt irritated. After cursing a few words, he suddenly had an

„idea", "Find somebody, hang them up, and let out some blood to lure the thing out."

Beasts usually craved blood more than anything. It'd definitely be lured out by the scent of the blood and the immobile human being hanging mid-air!

Wang LingJie answered and immediately pointed to a girl. She ordered, "How about her?"

The girl was the one who gave out perfume sachets on their way here, „MianMian". Suddenly having been chosen, her mind went completely blank. Although this choice of Wang LingJiao's appeared random, she'd actually been planning it for a long time. Most of the people that the

sects sent here were boys. Thus, toward the few girls, Wen Chao couldn't help but pay more attention, especially MianMian. She looked fair and had been harassed a few times by Wen Chao, though could only suffer in silence. Yet, Wang LingJiao had seen and loathed everything.

MianMian realized that she really was the one who had been chosen. With a face brimming with fear, she staggered a few steps back. Seeing that this girl was the one Wang LingJiao chose, Wen Chao remembered that he never had the chance to have her yet and felt that it'd be a pity, "This one? How about someone else?"

Wang LingJiao looked as though she'd been wronged, "Why someone else? I choose this one. Don't tell me that you'll miss her?"

She let loose her coquetry, and Wen Chao was over the moon with delight, half of his heart having already melted. Then, turning to look at the way MianMian dressed, he was certain that she wasn't part of the sect's clan. She was at most a disciple, so she'd surely be the perfect bait, as even if she was gone the sect wouldn't come pester him, "Nonsense. Why would you think that? I'll miss her? Do whatever you want. Everything is up to JiaoJiao!"

MianMian knew that if she was hung up, she probably wouldn't be able to come back down alive. She tried to run away, but wherever she fled, the people dispersed around her. Just as Wei WuXian twitched, Jiang Cheng held him firmly down. MianMian suddenly noticed that two people remained still. She hid behind their backs at once, shivering.

The two were Jin ZiXuan and Lan WangJi.

As the Wen Sect's servants that were about to tie MianMian up saw that the two didn't intend on moving, they shouted, "Move to the side!"

Lan WangJi was silent with indifference.

Seeing that the situation wasn't good, Wen Chao warned, "Why are you standing there? You can't understand human speech? Or do you want to save the damsel in distress?"

Jin ZiXuan lifted his brows, "Is that enough? It wasn't enough for people to be flesh shields for you, and now you want live humans to bleed for you to use as bait?!"

Wei WuXian found this somewhat surprising, So Jin ZiXuan really does have some nerve.

Wen Chao pointed at them, "Are you rebelling against me? Let me warn you, I've been tolerating you for a very long time. Right now, hang the brat up with your own hands! Or else none of the people from your sects can expect to return!"

Jin ZiXuan sneered and refused to budge. Lan WangJi also looked as though he had heard nothing, so motionless that he seemed to be meditating.

However, one of the GusuLan Sect's disciples on the side had been trembling as he listened to Wen Chao's threatening words. He finally couldn't hold it any longer as he rushed over, grabbing MianMian, and prepared to tie her up. Lan WangJi's brows stiffened. He immediately struck the disciple to the side.

Although he didn't say anything, the way he looked at the disciple was more than imposing. What such a look meant was clear to everyone—it truly is a shame that the GusuLan Sect has taught a disciple like you!

The disciple's shoulders quivered as he backed off slowly, unable to face the others' eyes. Wei WuXian whispered to Jiang Cheng, "Uh-oh. Judging from Lan Zhan's personality, this won't go well."

Jiang Cheng clenched his fists as well.

In such a situation, it was almost impossible to care for oneself only and hope that no blood would be lost!

Wen Chao was enraged, shouting, "How dare you! Kill them!"

A few of the Wen Sect's disciples unsheathed their swords, rushing toward Lan WangJi and Jin ZiXuan. The „Core-melting Hand", Wen ZhuLiu, stood behind Wen Chao with his hands folded behind him. He never attacked, as though he thought that he didn't need to do so. He was right, seeing that the two boys were at a loss in terms of both weaponry and sheer numbers.

Even more, after the past days of being constantly on the move, they were in quite a bad state, not to mention that Lan WangJi had been injured. They definitely wouldn't be able to last long. Watching his subordinates fight with the two, Wen Chao looked as if his mood was much better. He spat, "Talking back to me— what did you think you are? People like you really do deserve to be killed."

A grinning voice came from the side, "That's right. All those who oppress others and do evil relying on the power of their clan should be killed. Not only that, they should be beheaded for tens of thousands to revile so that those to come would beware."

Hearing this, Wen Chao spun around, "What did you say?"

Wei WuXian pretended to be surprised, "Do you need me to repeat it? Sure. All those who oppress others and do evil relying on the power of their clan should be killed. Not only that, they should be beheaded for tens of thousands to revile so that those to come would beware. You heard it this time?" Hearing this, Wen ZhuLiu seemed to ponder as he glanced at Wei WuXian. Wen Chao erupted, "How dare you say such absurd, outrageous, and pretentious words!"

Wei WuXian first lifted the corners of his mouth with a „pfft“, then immediately burst into unbridled laughter. Under everyone's shocked eyes, he laughed so hard that he was out of breath, clutching Jiang Cheng's shoulder as he spoke, "Absurd? Outrageous? I'd say you're the one who's all of those! Wen Chao, do you know who was the one that said those words? I'm sure you don't, do you? Let me tell you. This was said by the most, most, most famous cultivator of your sect, the one who founded the entire thing, Wen Mao. You dared say that one of your ancestor's remarks are absurd and outrageous? Well said, very well said! Ahahahaha..."

Within the Quintessence of the Wen Sect that had been given out, even the most ordinary of Smalltalk comments could be analyzed over and over, their deep meanings boasted with exceptional extravagance. Let alone memorizing it well, Wei WuXian felt disgusted after just flipping through its pages. However, he found this quote of Wen Mao's quite ironic, which was why he could recall it with ease. Wen Chao's complexion switched between red and white. Wei WuXian added, "Right, what was the accusation given to those who insult famous cultivators of the Wen Sect again? How should they be punished? I remember that it was execution, right? Yes, very well, you can go die now." Wen Chao couldn't hold himself back any longer, unsheathing his sword and lunging at Wei WuXian. With that, he lunged out of Wen ZhuLiu's range of protection.

Wen ZhuLiu had always been used to defending against the attacks of others. He had never expected Wen Chao to leave by his own will. Facing the sudden difficulty, he somehow couldn't react in time. On the other hand, as Wei WuXian provoked Wen Chao, he was precisely waiting for the moment of uncontrollable rage. The smile by his lips didn't falter at all as he attacked with the speed of lightning. In a split second, he had snatched the sword and reversed the situation, subduing Wen Chao with just one move!

One hand gripping Wen Chao, he leaped a few times and landed on one of the islets above the pool, keeping his distance from Wen ZhuLiu. With his other hand he pressed the sword onto Wen Chao's neck, warning, "Nobody move. If you're not careful, I might just decide to let some blood out of your Young Master Wen!"

Wen Chao screeched, "Stop moving! Stop moving!"

The disciples surrounding Lan WangJi and Jin ZiXuan finally ceased their attacks. Wei WuXian shouted, "Core-melting Hand, you're not moving either! You know how the temper of the Wen Sect's leader is. Your master is in my hand. If he loses just one drop of blood, then not one of the people here should hope to live on, including you!"

Wen ZhuLiu put his arms down as Wei WuXian had expected. Seeing that the situation was under control, Wei WuXian was about to speak when he suddenly felt that the entire ground below him had trembled. He was on guard at once, "Jiang Cheng! Is it an earthquake?"

They were currently inside of an underground cave. If an earthquake or a landslide happened, it'd be extremely terrifying whether their entrance was blocked or they were buried alive. Yet,

Jiang Cheng replied, "No!"

But Wei WuXian felt that the shaking of the ground had intensified. The blade almost touched Wen Chao's throat quite a couple of times, making him scream. Jiang Cheng immediately shouted, "It's not an earthquake—what's moving is the thing under your feet!!!"

Wei WuXian had noticed as well. It wasn't that the ground was trembling, but that the islet that he landed on. Not only was it trembling, it was also rising and rising. The area above the surface of the water grew larger and larger.

He had finally realized. This wasn't an islet, but a large creature that had been hidden within the depths of the pool—right now, he was standing on the shell behind the back the beast!

## Chapter 53: Courage—Part Three

The „islet“ moved quickly toward the shore.

The approach of the foreign beast brought upon them formless tension. Aside from a few—Lan WangJi, Jin ZiXuan, Jiang Cheng, and Wen ZhuLiu—everyone else kept on staggering backward.

Just as everyone thought that the underwater creature would flip out any moment, it halted. The dormant beast had been awakened because Wei WuXian jumped onto its back. Now, Wei WuXian didn't dare move rashly. He remained where he was and waited.

Above the dark water that surrounded the „islet“ were a few maple leaves of an unusually bright shade of red, slowly floating by.

Below the leaves, within the depths of the pool, was something that looked like a pair of glowing bronze mirrors.

The bronze mirrors grew larger and larger, nearer and nearer. Wei WuXian exclaimed under his breath. Dragging Wen Chao, he stepped back just as the surface below his foot shook and suddenly began to rise. The „islet“ rose into the air. The large, coal-black head of a beast, atop it the couple of maple leaves, soared out of the water!

Under the screams varying in pitch, the beast slowly turned its head around, staring with its massive eyes the two humans on its back.

The round head of the beast appeared rather strange, similar to both a turtle's and a snake's. Simply looking at its head, it'd be more like a gigantic snake, but looking at its body, which had largely risen out of the water already, it seemed more like a...

Wei WuXian, "... What a large... tortoise..." This wasn't the average tortoise.

If the tortoise were to crash onto the Lotus Pier's training ground, its shell alone could fill up the entire martial arts field. Even three burly men wouldn't be able to put their arms around its dark crown. Much less, the average tortoise couldn't extend out of its shell a snake's long, winding head, within it a full mouth of yellow, crisscrossed fangs, let alone grow four sharp claws that seemed quite agile.

Wei WuXian met the pair of large, golden eyes. Its pupil was just a slit, its thickness shifting, as though its eyes were switching in and out of focus, not completely able to tell what exactly was on its back.

It seemed like that the beast had the eyesight of a snake as well—not too good. As long as they didn't move, maybe it wouldn't be able to notice.

Suddenly, two streams of water vapor shot out of its hole-like nostrils.

The maple leaves that had been floating in the water just happened to be near its nose. It spurted out the air likely because

they were itching it. Wei WuXian was still motionless, standing as if he was a statue. However, the slight movement scared the life out of Wen Chao.

Wen Chao knew that the beast craved slaughter more than anything. Seeing that it suddenly shot vapor from its nose, he thought that it was about to go into a rage. Disregarding the sword by his neck, he screamed toward Wen ZhuLiu, who was at the shore, "Why aren't you helping me yet?! Help me now! What are you waiting for?!"

Jiang Cheng cursed through clenched teeth, "That idiot!"

Among the two strange things before its eyes, one suddenly started twitching like a worm and let out ear-piercing sounds. The beast was provoked at once. Its snake-like head pulled back quickly before immediately springing up. Its yellow and black fangs parted wide as it lunged for its back! Wei WuXian flicked his arm. Wen Chao's sword flew with the speed of an arrow toward where the heart of the beast should be.

However, as it was covered in black scales, the head of the beast was as hard as armor. As though it had hit a piece of iron, the blade of the sword sent off a trail of sparks with a clang

before it plummeted into the water. The beast seemed to hesitate. Its large eyeballs turned down to look at the slender object that glowed even when it was underwater. Grabbing the opportunity, Wei WuXian pushed down with his legs and lept into the air along with Wen Chao, onto one of the other islets, thinking to himself, please don't tell me that this one is a huge tortoise as well!

Suddenly, he heard Jiang Cheng call out, "Watch your back! The Core-melting Hand is coming!" Wei WuXian spun around only to see a pair of large hands loom over him without a sound. Involuntarily, he struck out to fend against Wen ZhuLiu's attack. He could feel a power come from Wen ZhuLiu, unusually forceful and dark, as though something was about to be sucked out of his arm. Wei WuXian instinctively took his hand back, while Wen ZhuLiu used the chance to snatch Wen Chao away, landing back on the shore. Wei WuXian cursed under his breath and followed them to the shore. All of the Wen Sect's disciples took down the bows that had been on their backs and retreated as they aimed at the beast. Arrows shot through the air as though they were rain, clinking as they hit the beast's scales and its shell. Sparks flew everywhere. Although the battle appeared to be quite intense, in reality, there was no use. Not a single arrow had proven a fatal hit. They did nothing more than scratch the beast's itches. The large head waved left and right.

The skin outside of its shells seemed to be black rocks, filled with lumps. Even if arrows hit, they couldn't go any deeper.

Wei WuXian watched one of the Wen Sect's disciples pant as he set an arrow onto his bow. Struggling to draw the bow, he just couldn't pull it all the way back. Finally, unable to tolerate it, Wei WuXian grabbed the bow and kicked the disciple to the side.

Three arrows were left in the quiver. He set them onto the bow all at once, drew the string to the fullest, and aimed. The string of the bow squeaked by his ear. Just as he was about to let go, a cry suddenly came from behind him.

The cry was full of fear. Turning around, Wei WuXian saw Wang LingJiao give orders to three servants. Two of them brutishly held MianMian in place, clenching her face, while the other raised the branding iron in his hand and thrusted it toward her face!

The tip of the iron was so heated that it sizzled and shone with red light. Wei WuXian was some distance away from them.

Seeing what was happening, he immediately shifted the direction of the arrows and let go of the string.

The three arrows shot out at once and hit each of the three people. Without making a noise, they fell backward onto the ground. Yet, before the bowstring even ceased to vibrate, Wang LingJiao suddenly grabbed the iron that had fallen as well.

Gripping MianMian's hair, she again shoved it toward her face!

Even though Wang LingJiao's level of cultivation was extremely low, her move was both swift and cruel. If she really did it, even if MianMian could keep her eye, her face would be completely ruined. A woman like her, even under such dangerous circumstances where people were prepared to flee at amoment's notice, still kept her persistent thoughts of harming others!

All of the other disciples were setting up their arrows, handling the beast with all of their attention. Nobody was near these two.

There were no more arrows on Wei WuXian and there wasn't enough time to grab someone else's. Under the urgency of these circumstances, he rushed over, one hand striking away the arm

that Wang LingJiao grabbed MianMian's hair with and the other landing forcefully at her chest. Having undertaken the strike, Wang LingJiao heaved up a mouthful of blood and flew backward.

However, the tip of the iron had already pressed onto Wei WuXian's chest.

Wei WuXian caught the odor of clothing and skin being scorched, along with the horrifying scent of cooked meat. Below his collarbone, near his heart, came a pain that drowned out

everything else.

He gritted his teeth, but still couldn't hold back the aching roar, finally letting it out of his throat. His strike wasn't in the least soft. Wang LingJiao flew out, blood spurting everywhere, and wailed as soon as she hit the ground. Jiang Cheng's palm went toward the crown of her head. Wen Chao screeched, "JiaoJiao! JiaoJiao! Quick, get JiaoJiao back here!"

Wen ZhuLiu frowned slightly. He didn't say anything as he hurried over, fended off Jiang Cheng, and carried Wang LingJiao back,

tossing her at Wen Chao's feet. Wang LingJiao threw herself into his arms, still retching blood as she bawled her eyes out. Jiang Cheng chased over to fight Wen ZhuLiu. Wen Chao saw that his eyes were bloodshot and had on a terrifying expression. The rest of the disciples had also been excited, and there was still a gigantic beast inside the pool, the front-left claw of which had already stepped onto the shore. Wen Chao finally began to fear, "Retreat, retreat. Retreat right now!"

Those who served him had been holding it up with much effort, waiting for him to give orders of retreat since a long time ago.

Hearing those words, they hopped onto their swords and flew away at once. Wen Chao's sword was thrown by Wei WuXian into the water, so he grabbed someone else's and leapt onto the sword with Wang LingJiao in his arms. With a whoosh, they disappeared within the blink of an eye. All of the disciples and servants followed closely behind him. Jin ZiXuan shouted, "Stop fighting! Let's go!"

The disciples had never intended to continue the fight anyway, especially against the beast that was like a mountain of boulders. But, dashing along, as they arrived at where the hole was, they found the vine that they had used to climb down in a pile on the ground like a dead snake.

Jin ZiXuan fumed, "Those dog-thieves! They cut off the vine!"

Without the vine, they had no way of climbing up the steep dirt wall. The hole was a little more than thirty feet above their heads, its white light hurting the eye. Not long afterward, half of the light had withered, as though the tiangou had taken a bite out of the moon.

Somebody cried, "They're blocking up the entrance!"

Just as he had finished speaking, the rest of the white light had been blocked up as well.

Deep underground, all that was left was a couple of burning torches, igniting the young, hesitant faces. Nobody could say anything.

A while later, Jin ZiXuan's cursing broke the dead silence, "That hell of a couple can really do such things, can't they?"

One of the boys murmured, "It's alright even if we can't get out... My father and mother will come find me. If they hear of this, they'll definitely search for me here."

A few of the people agreed. Immediately after, somebody replied in a quivering voice, "They must think that we're still undergoing indoctrination at Qishan. How could they possibly search for us...? Besides, after the Wen Sect's people ran away, they definitely won't tell the truth. They'll definitely make up some excuse... And we can only stay down here..."

"We can only wait down here in the cave... without any food... along with a beast..."

As Jiang Cheng slowly walked over, propping Wei WuXian up, they happened to hear the "without any food" part of the conversation. Wei WuXian, "Jiang Cheng, there's a piece of cooked meat here. You want to eat it?"

Jiang Cheng, "Get lost! You really haven't learned your lesson, have you? Just what situation do you think we're in? You don't know how much I want to sew your lips together."

Lan WangJi's light-colored eyes landed on them. Immediately after, they landed on MianMian, who followed behind them, at a loss as to what to do. Tears stained her face as she continued to sob, hands clutching her robe as she said „I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry" over and over again. Wei WuXian plugged his ears, "Hey, stop crying, alright? I'm the one who was burned, not you. Don't tell me that you want me to cheer you up? How about you cheer me up? Okay, enough, Jiang Cheng, stop carrying me. It's not like my leg is broken."

The girls circled around MianMian and began to sniffle together. Lan WangJi's gaze returned as he turned around to leave.

Jiang Cheng, "Young Master Lan, where are you going? The beast is still waiting in the pool."

Lan WangJi, "Return to the pool. There is a way to leave."

After the boys had heard that there was a way to leave, even the crying stopped. Wei WuXian, "What is it?"

Lan WangJi, "There are leaves within the pool."

Although the sentence sounded rather strange, Wei WuXian understood at once.

Atop the dark pool that the beast dwelled in, there were indeed a few leaves. But, inside of the cave, there were neither maple trees nor the trace of any human activity and, near the entrance, there was only a banyan tree. The maple leaves, however, were as red as fire, flaunting how fresh they were. When they came up the mountain, they had also seen the sight of leaves drifting along water in a creek.

Jiang Cheng had realized as well, "At the bottom of the pool, it's likely that there's a hole connected with water from the outside. That would've brought in the maple leaves in the forest creek."

Someone spoke in a timid voice, "But... How do we know if the hole is large enough to let people through? What if it's really small and it's only a slit?"

Jin ZiXuan frowned, "And the beast is still watching stubbornly over the pool."

Wei WuXian lifted the lapel of his robe, one of his hands fanning at the wound under his clothes, "If there's hope, then let's move. No matter what, it's better than waiting for our parents here and doing nothing. So, what if it's watching over the pool? We can just lure it out."

After some negotiation, a while later, the group of boys again went off the same way they had come.

Hiding in a hole within the cave, they quietly peeped at the beast.

Most of its body was still soaked in the pool. The long body of a snake extended from its turtle shell. It approached the shore, opened its jaw, and softly clenched the corpse between its teeth before it shrunk back, dragging the corpse back into its dark, castle-like shell. It was as though it wanted to savor it in there.

Wei WuXian tossed out a torch. It crashed into one corner of the cave.

The sound was especially exaggerated within the dead silence of the underground. The head of the beast slid out of its shell at once. Its thin pupils reflected the eagerly burning torch.

Instinctively attracted to things that gave light and heat, it slowly extended its neck out.

Behind it, Jiang Cheng noiselessly dove into the water.

The YunmengJiang Sect settled near water. The swimming abilities of its disciples were all exceptional. The moment that Jiang Cheng had dived, the ripples disappeared immediately. The surface of the water didn't even do so much as to crease.

Everyone stared at the water, glancing at the beast at times. Seeing that the large, black head had always been hesitantly circling around the torch, debating between approaching or not, everyone's hearts tightened.

Suddenly, as though having finally decided to get a taste of what this really was, it moved its nose close. Yet, it was slightly scorched by the searing flames.

The neck of the beast shrunk away at once. Two streams of water vapor shot out with rage from its nostrils, putting the torch out.

At this point in time, Jiang Cheng just happened to have swum out of the water and took in a deep breath. Sensing that its territory had been intruded, it shook its head and plunged toward Jiang Cheng.

Noticing the situation at hand, Wei WuXian bit his finger and drew something illegible on his palm. Rushing out of the hole they hid

in, he slapped his palm onto the ground. As his he removed his hand, a fire as tall a person sprouted from the ground!

Surprised, the beast turned around and looked over. Jiang Cheng used the opportunity to climb ashore, shouting, "There's a hole at the bottom, not too small!"

Wei WuXian, "How small is not too small?"

Jiang Cheng, "About half a dozen can pass at a time!"

Wei WuXian shouted, "Everyone, listen up. Follow Jiang Cheng and swim into the underwater hole. Those who aren't injured watch out for those who are, those who can swim watch out for those who can't. Half a dozen can pass at a time, so nobody rushes. Now, go!"

As soon as he finished speaking, the flame that had sprouted slowly died down. He backed off ten-or-so steps into another direction, then hit the ground with his palm again, letting out another bout of fire. The beast's golden eyes appeared reddish through the light of the flames. Burning mad, it waved its limbs and climbed toward the fire, dragging above it its mountain of a body.

Jiang Cheng raged, "What are you doing?!"

Wei WuXian, "What are you doing?! Get them down there!"

He had already successfully lured the beast out of the water and onto the shore. If they didn't leave now, what were they waiting for? Jiang Cheng clenched his teeth, "Everyone, come here. Those who can swim alone, stand on the left; those who can't, stand on the right!"

Wei WuXian was inspecting the area of the cave as he backed away with the fires. Suddenly, pain burst through his arm. Looking down, he saw that he had been shot by an arrow. It turned out that the Lan Sect disciple that Lan WangJi had glared at picked up one of the bows the Wen Sect had left and shot at the beast.

However, perhaps realizing how fearsomely agile it was, his hand had slipped and the arrow had lost its aim, landing on Wei WuXian instead. Wei WuXian had no time to pull it out, hitting the ground with his palm again. He only cursed after the flame had appeared, "Back off!! Don't cause me any trouble!"

The disciple had originally wanted to hit the beast's vital spot with just one shot, so that he could save some of the face that he had lost. However, he never expected it to turn out like this. Face paler than ever, he threw himself into the water and fled as fast as he could. Jiang Cheng hurried Wei WuXian, "Get over here!"

Wei WuXian, "I will!"

Jiang Cheng still had three disciples who couldn't swim beside him. This could be considered the last batch. He knew that they weren't able to wait and had to dive into the water without Wei WuXian. Wei WuXian only realized after he had pulled the arrow out of his arm, Oh no!

The scent of blood had provoked the beast. Its neck suddenly grew in length faster than ever and its fangs had opened wide!

Before Wei WuXian could think of what to do next, his body tilted as somebody shoved him to the side.

Lan WangJi had pushed him out of the way.

With this opportunity, the jaws of the beast had closed, biting down on his leg.

Wei WuXian's right leg hurt from simply watching the scene. Lan WangJi's face was still expressionless. He had only frowned slightly. Afterward, he was immediately dragged away!

Judging from the size and the bite strength of the beast, it could easily be able to sever a person from the waist into two pieces.

Fortunately, it seemed that it didn't like to eat broken ones. After it had bitten someone, it would shrink into its shell, no matter if the person was dead or alive, so that it could savor it slowly. Or else, if its jaw had just used some strength, Lan WangJi's leg would've been broken already. Its shell was extremely hard, impenetrable by any blade. If it dragged Lan WangJi inside, then he'd most likely never come out again!

Wei WuXian broke into a sprint. Just as the head was about to shrink inside, he threw himself over, clinging to one of the teeth on its upper jaw.

His strength could never have been able to compete with such a monster's. Yet, under the life-

or-death situation, superhuman strength had exploded within him. His feet were propped up against the shell of the beast while his hands clung onto the fang no matter what. Like a prick of some kind, he used his body to block its path, preventing it from shrinking inside, from getting the chance to enjoy the delicacy.

Lan WangJi didn't expect that he could catch up even undersuch circumstances. He was utterly shocked.

Wei WuXian was afraid that the beast might break out, either eating them alive or biting off Lan WangJi's leg. His righthand

continued to grab onto the upper fang while his left hand clenched onto a lower fang. His hands pushing in opposite directions at the same time, he forced strength into his arms as though his life

depended on it, the vein at his forehead protruding so much that it seemed to be on the verge of bursting. His face was blood-red.

The two rows of fangs were already deep into Lan WangJi's blood and bones. Yet, its jaws really were being slowly forced open!

Its jaws ceased to be able to clench its prey. Lan WangJi fell into the pool. Seeing that he was safe now, the almost deity-like strength of Wei WuXian disappeared at once. Unable to hold the beast's jaws in place any longer, he suddenly let go. The jutting fangs from both rows bit down on each other, creating an echo as loud as the fissure of a boulder!

Wei WuXian had fallen into the water as well, landing beside Lan WangJi. With just a flip, he had positioned himself and, holding Lan WangJi in one hand, he swam with the other. In an instance, he had travelled a few feet forward, creating a long, sweeping wave within the pool. Rolling onto the shore, he threw Lan WangJi onto his back and began to run at once.

Lan WangJi blurted out, "You?"

Wei WuXian, "It's me! You're pleasantly surprised?"

Hovering on his back, Lan WangJi's voice possessed therare emotional fluctuation, "How could this be pleasant?! Let me down!"

Wei WuXian's mouth refused to rest even as he was running for his life, "If I let you down just because you say so, doesn't that really make me lose face?"

The roar of the beast that had come from behind them vibrated within their ears and their chests. Both felt blood rush up their throats. Wei WuXian hurried to shut his mouth so that he could

focus on running away. In prevention of the beast catching up with fury, he purposely chose to duck into thin holes that the turtle shell couldn't pass through. Without having any rest, he didn't even know how long he had run. He had finally slowed, after unable to hear anymore sounds.

His guard lowering, as soon as his speed decreased, Wei WuXian could smell the scent of blood. Feeling behind him backhandedly, his right hand was covered in a wet crimson.

Wei WuXian, oh no, Lan Zhan's injury will worsen again.

## Chapter 54: Courage—Part Four

Feeling that they were probably far enough away for their location to be safe, Wei WuXian spun around and laid Lan WangJi gently onto the ground.

His leg injury wasn't completely healed to begin with, and now that it had been bitten by the beast's fangs and soaked in water. Lan WangJi's white clothes were dyed red by smears of blood everywhere. It could be seen with the physical eye, the rows and rows of punctures from the fangs. He couldn't stand at all, falling to the ground as soon as he was let go of.

Wei WuXian bent down for a moment to inspect the wounds. Standing up again, he circled the cave a few times. A couple of shrubs could be found growing underground. Having finally found a few thicker, straighter branches, he rubbed the grime off the surface using a corner of his clothes and squatted before Lan WangJi, "You have a rope or a ribbon? Hey, your forehead ribbon might do the trick. Come on, take it off."

Before Lan WangJi could respond, Wei WuXian quickly reached out and took off his forehead ribbon. With a flick of his wrist, he used the forehead ribbon as a bandage, straightened up Lan WangJi's leg, and fixed it firmly onto the branch.

Suddenly robbed of his forehead ribbon, Lan WangJi opened his eyes wide, "You...!"

With nimble hands, Wei WuXian had already finished tying the knot. Patting his shoulder, he consoled, "What do you mean „me“? Let's not worry about it, given our current situation. No matterhow much you like the forehead ribbon, it can't be more important than your leg, can it?"

Lan WangJi leaned back, either too tired to sit up or simply angered speechless by his words. Suddenly, Wei WuXian caught

a faint, herbal scent. Reaching into his lapel, he fished out a small sachet of perfume.

The wet sachet hung from its tassels, delicate yet somewhat pitiful. Recalling how MianMian said that it was filled with medicinal plants, he opened it up at once and found that there were indeed herbs, along with a few small flowers, half-dried and quite chopped up. He urged, "Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, stop sleeping.

Sit up for one second. There's a perfume sachet here. Seeif there are any herbs that we can use." Dragging and tugging and refusing to give up, he eventually made Lan WangJi sit up, however exhausted he was. After looking through the herbs, they really did find a few that could stop blood or remove poison.

Wei WuXian spoke as he picked them out, "I can't believe thatthe girl's perfume sachet ended up so useful. I'll have to thank her properly when we go back."

Lan WangJi responded coldly, "Are you sure you do not mean to harass her properly?"

Wei WuXian, "What are you talking about? It doesn't count as harassing if I'm the one doing it. It only counts if the one doingit looks as greasy as Wen Chao. Go on, strip."

Lan WangJi frowned slightly, "What?"

Wei WuXian, "What do you think? Strip your clothes!"

He did exactly what he said. Hands grabbing each of Lan WangJi's lapels, he peeled them to the side, revealing a chest and shoulders the color of snow.

Lan WangJi had suddenly been pushed onto the ground; shirt forcibly stripped. His face was almost green, "Wei Ying! What do you want to do?!"

Wei WuXian took off all of his clothes and tore them to shreds, "What do I want to do? Right now, we two are the only ones here. I'm already making it so obvious—what do you think I want to do?"

As he finished, he stood up and drew away his belt sash. As though reciprocating out of courtesy, he revealed his own chest as well.

With deep-set collarbones, the lines of his torso flowed smoothly. Although it almost flaunted its adolescence, it was full of youthful energy and strength.

Watching his movements, Lan WangJi's complexion switched between pale, dark, and flustered. His blood seemed to boil to the point of having to burst out from between his lips. Wei WuXian smiled and walked one step closer. Right in front of Lan WangJi's face, he took off his own drenched coat. He raised it up with one hand before releasing his grip, letting it fall to the ground.

Wei WuXian shrugged, palms facing out, "Now that the shirts are gone, it's time for the trousers."

Lan WangJi wanted to get up, but his leg was injured. Due to the fight that they had gone through and the fury within him, the more anxious he was, the more he couldn't do it. His entire body felt worn out. With an intense rage, he really did cough up a mouthful of blood.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian immediately squatted down and tapped a few of the acupoints on his chest, "Alright, the bad blood is out. No need to thank me!"

After the mouthful of blackish blood had been spat out, Lan WangJi immediately felt the pain and irritation within his chest lift away. Looking back on what Wei WuXian did, he finally realized.

As they climbed up Dusk-creek Mountain, Wei WuXian found that Lan WangJi looked worse than usual. It must've been that an energy of gloom had collected within his chest, so he purposely tried to scare and provoke him, so that he could let out the blood that he had been holding in.

Although he knew that it was out of good will, Lan WangJi still seemed a bit annoyed, "... Can you not make this kind of joke again?!"

Wei WuXian protested, "It's very unhealthy for blood like this to be held in. It gets out with just a scare, though. Don't worry—I don't like men; I won't take advantage of the opportunity and do anything to you."

Lan WangJi, "Ridiculous!"

Wei WuXian found out long ago that Lan WangJi's temper was especially bad today. He didn't protest any further and waved his hand, "Okay, okay. Ridiculous it is. I'm ridiculous. I'm the most ridiculous there is."

As he spoke, the cold, underground air climbed up his spine, causing him to shudder. He immediately stood up, gathered a pile of dead leaves and branches, and drew the fire talisman on his palm again.

The leaves and branches crunched into flames, letting off a few sparks once in a while. Wei WuXian ground up the herbs that he had picked out. Ripping the trouser leg open, he sprinkled them evenly over the three hideous holes that had just barely ceased to bleed.

Suddenly, Lan WangJi raised his arm and stopped him. Wei WuXian asked, "What's wrong?"

Without speaking a word, Lan WangJi took out some of the herbs from his palm and pressed them onto Wei WuXian's chest.

Wei WuXian's entire body trembled as he exclaimed, "Ah!"

He had forgotten that there was a fresh wound on himself as well, created by the iron. It was also still bleeding and had also been soaked in water.

Lan WangJi took his hand away. Wei WuXian hissed a few times, then peeled away, bit by bit, the herbs that had been pressed onto his chest, tossing them onto Lan WangJi's leg again, "Don't mind me. I get hurt a lot, and I play in Lotus Lake as usual even when I'm hurt. I got used to it a long time ago. How many herbs can there be inside a small perfume sachet? There isn't enough to begin with. I think that those three holes of yours need them more... Ah!"

Lan WangJi's face was dark. A moment later, he replied, "If you know that it hurts, do not be so rash next time."

Wei WuXian, "It's not like I had any other choice, right? Do you think I enjoy being burned? Who would've known that Wang?"

LingJiao is so heartless. She almost pressed the iron into the eye. MianMian is a girl, and quite a pretty girl, at that. If she was blind

in an eye or such a thing gets onto her face, it wouldn't be able to come off for the rest of her life. How bad would that be?"

Lan WangJi spoke in a thin voice, "The thing on your body right now will not be able to come off for the rest of your life either."

Wei WuXian, "That's different. It's not on the face. And I'm a man—what am I scared of? In a man's life, how can he not get a few wounds and earn a few scars?"

His upper body bare, he was squatting on the ground as he picked up a branch and poked at the flames for it to burn brighter, "And, if you think from another perspective, even though this won't be able to come off, it represents the fact that I protected a maiden. And the maiden will definitely remember me after this."

She won't be able to forget me for the rest of her life. Now that I think about it, it's actually quite..."

Suddenly, Lan WangJi shoved him hard, raging, "So you also know that she will not be able to forget you for the rest of her life!!!"

Collapsed on the ground, he broke into a cold sweat from the pain, moaning with his neck stretched forward, "... Lan Zhan, you... Have I done something to you?! ... This would be enough revenge to pay for killing your father!"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi clenched his fists.

A moment later, he relaxed, seeming as if he wanted to help Wei WuXian up. However, Wei WuXian sat up on his own and shrunk backward a couple of times, "Fine, fine! I know you don't like me. Then I'll sit farther away. Don't come here! Don't push me again. It's so painful."

The wound was on his left side, so it began to hurt whenever he raised his left arm. Wei WuXian shrunk to the side. Picking up the white clothes that had been torn into strips, he tossed them toward Lan WangJi using his right hand, "You can bind it yourself. I'm not gonna go over."

Then, he moved the clothes that he had taken off to the fire for them to dry up.

A while had passed, and neither had spoken. Wei WuXian began again, "Lan Zhan, you really are so strange today. You're rude. And you aren't talking like yourself either."

Lan WangJi, "If you do not have those intentions, then do not flirt with others. You are doing as you please, yet others will be in turmoil."

Wei WuXian, "It's not like you're the one whom I'm flirting with, so it wouldn't be you who's in turmoil either, unless..."

Lan WangJi asked harshly, "Unless what?"

Wei WuXian, "Unless, Lan Zhan, you like MianMian!"

A moment later, Lan WangJi replied in a cold voice, "Please do not speak nonsense."

Wei WuXian, "Alright, then, I'll speak one-sense."

Lan WangJi, "Is it amusing, trifling with empty words?"

Wei WuXian, "It's very amusing. But, believe me, my words are as much a trifle as my moves are, which means not at all."

"..." Lan WangJi muttered to himself, "Why am I sitting here having such a useless conversation with you?"

Somehow, Wei WuXian had moved beside him again and sat down, speaking without a care for the consequences, "Because there's no other choice. We're the only two unfortunate souls left here, aren't we? If you don't have useless conversations with me, then who will you have them with?"

Lan WangJi glanced at him, who seemed to forget all past pain as soon as the wounds had healed. Just as Wei WuXian was about to give him a large grin, he suddenly saw Lan WangJi lower his head.

Wei WuXian wailed, "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh stop!!! Stop stop stop!!!!!"

Lan WangJi was buried into the crescent of his elbow, biting firmly into his arm. Hearing Wei WuXian, not only did he not stop, his teeth sunk deeper inside.

Wei WuXian, "Are you gonna stop?!?! I'll kick you if you don't! Don't think that I won't kick you just because you're injured!!!!!"

Wei WuXian, "Stop biting! Stop biting! I'll go away! I'll go away!!! I'll go away, I'll go away if you stop, I'll go away!!!!!"

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan you're mad today!!!!!! You're a dog!!! You're a dog!!!!!!! Stop biting!!!!"

When Lan WangJi had finally finished his fit and felt satisfied, Wei WuXian sprang up and scrambled to the other side of the cave, "Don't come over!"

Lan WangJi straightened his back slowly. Fixing his hair and his clothes, he spoke nothing, eyes looking down calmly. It was as if the certain someone who shoved and shouted and sunk his teeth into other people's flesh had nothing to do with him. Wei WuXian glanced at the bite marks on his arm and squatted down, still shaken. Curled up in the corner, he continued to poke at the flames, not at all comprehending the situation, how could Lan Zhan do this? Even though he saved me, you can say that I saved him as well, didn't I? It's not that I want him to thank me or anything, but why is it that we still can't be friends, even after so much has happened? Don't tell me that... that I'm really as annoying as Jiang Cheng makes it to be?!

Just as he was doubting himself, Lan WangJi spoke up, "Thanks."

Wei WuXian thought that he heard wrong. He looked at Lan WangJi, who was also looking at him. In all seriousness, he repeated himself, "Thanks."

Seeing how he lowered his head slightly, Wei WuXian was scared that he might worship him by kneeling. He quickly darted to the side, "There's no need, there's no need. There's a problem with me that I'm unable to stand it when others thank me, especially when people like you thank me so seriously. It's so creepy that

I'm even getting goosebumps. Kneeling worship, of course, is even more so unnecessary."

Lan WangJi replied with indifference, "You are thinking too much. Even if I wanted to worship you, I would not be able to move."

It seemed that he was finally back to normal, and he even thanked Wei WuXian two times. Wei WuXian was sodelighted that he couldn't help but want to move over again. He wasthe type of person who loved to be shoulder-to-shoulder with others, but the slight pain from the bite marks on his arm reminded him

that Lan Zhan had just thrown a fit a moment ago, and maybe he'd be at it again just a moment later. He gained control over himself at once and stared at the black ceiling of the cave, speaking in a straight voice, "Now that Jiang Cheng and the others escaped, it'd take them one or two days to go down the mountain. After they get down, they'd definitely return to wherever they live instead of reporting to the Wen Sect. But since their swords were taken, I don't know how long it'd take for them to find help. I'd say that we'll probably have to stay here underground for quite a while. We'd need to search for ways to solve a few issues." After a pause, he continued, "The good thing is that the monster stays in the pool and doesn't chase after us. But the bad thing is also that it doesn't come out. With it guarding the hole under the pool, we won't be able to get out either."

Lan WangJi, "It is perhaps not a monster. What does it looklike, to you?"

Wei WuXian, "A tortoise!" Lan WangJi, "There is one divine creature that takes on such a form."

Wei WuXian, "The divine beast Xuanwu?" The Xuanwu, also called the Nether Xuanwu, was a combination of turtle and snake. It was a water deity that dwelled in the North Sea. Since the Nether was also in the North, the creature was known as the God of the Northern Sky.

Lan WangJi nodded. Wei WuXian flashed his teeth, "How can a divine beast look like thiis? It's got a mouthful of fangs and eats human flesh. It seems a bit too different from the legends."

Lan WangJi, "Of course it is not the proper Divine Xuanwu. Rather, it is a semi-completed result of failing to rise to divinity and being transformed into a yao. In other words, it is a deformed Divine Xuanwu." Wei WuXian, "Deformed?" Lan WangJi, "I have read of it in an ancient text. Four hundred years ago, a „fake Xuanwu" appeared and rampaged amid Qishan. It was large in size and consumed live humans. One cultivator named it the „Xuanwu of Slaughter".

Wei WuXian, “The creature that Wen Chao led us to hunt is a four-hundred-years-old beast—the Xuanwu of Slaughter?”

Lan WangJi, “Its size appears larger than what is recorded in the text, but it should be the one.” Wei WuXian, “It’s been four hundred years already, so of course it has grown. Hadn’t the Xuanwu of Slaughter been killed back then?” Lan WangJi, “No. A few cultivators had joined alliance and prepared to kill it, but on one winter day that year, there happened to be heavy snowfall, and the weather was unusually cold. Then, the Xuanwu of Slaughter disappeared and was never seen again.” Wei WuXian, “It was hibernating.”

## Chapter 55: Courage—Part Five

After a pause, Wei WuXian added, “But even if it was hibernating, it didn’t need to sleep for four-hundred-years, did it? You said that the Xuanwu of Slaughter eats live humans—just how many has it eaten?”

Lan WangJi, “The book records that back then, whenever it appeared, the number of humans consumed ranged from hundreds to entire villages and cities. From the handful of times when it rampaged, it consumed at least five thousand alive.”

Wei WuXian, “Oh, so it overate.”

The beast seemed to enjoy taking the entire person into its shell, perhaps fond of hoarding humans to savor them slowly. It was possible that four hundred years ago it hoarded too much food into its shell at once, and even now it hadn’t digested everything.

Lan WangJi didn’t acknowledge him. Wei WuXian continued, “Speaking of eating, have you practiced inedia? Those like us can probably last three to four days without eating or drinking. But if after a few days, nobody comes to save us, our energy, strength, and spiritual power will probably start to drop.”

It wouldn’t be so bad if Wen Chao and his people chose to stand by and ignore them after they had fled. If they waited for three to four days, the assistance of other sects could potentially arrive in time. What they were afraid of was that not only would the Wen Sect’s people not provide them with assistance, but instead add to the fire. The YunmengJiang Sect and the GusuLan Sect would be the only „other sects”. If the Wen Sect hindered them, the time of „three to four days” might have to double.

Wei WuXian took back the branch and sketched out a map on the ground, linking a few places together, “From Dusk-Creek Mountain to Gusu is a bit shorter than from Dusk-Creek Mountain to Yunmeng. It’s probably your sect’s people who will come first.”

Let’s just be patient. Even if they don’t come, the most that we’ll have to wait is one or two days before Jiang Cheng arrives at Lotus Pier. Jiang Cheng is quite clever. The Wen Sect’s people won’t stop him. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Lan WangJi’s eyes were downcast. He seemed worn out as he whispered, “They will not come.”

Wei WuXian, “Hm?”

Lan WangJi, “The Cloud Recesses has been burnt down already.”

Wei WuXian probed, “... Is everyone still there? Your father, your brother?”

He had thought that even if the leader of the Lan Sect, Lan WangJi’s father, was heavily injured, Lan QiRen and LanXiChen would probably still be there to take control of the situation. Yet, Lan WangJi’s voice was monotone, “Father is almost gone.”

Brother is missing.”

The branch that Wei WuXian was scribbling on the ground with froze.

When they were going up the mountain, the disciple said that the Lan Sect’s leader was heavily injured, but he never thought that the injuries were so heavy that the leader was „almost gone”.

Maybe Lan WangJi himself just found out about it in the past few days, receiving news that his father was dying.

Although the Lan Sect’s leader was practicing secluded meditation most of the time, minding nothing out of his own world, he was still Lan WangJi’s father. And, combined with the fact that Lan XiChen had gone missing, it was only natural that today Lan WangJi was especially gloomy and easily-angered. Wei WuXian immediately felt a sense of awkwardness and didn’t know what to say.

Yet, as he turned around amid the muddle, Wei WuXian felt his entire body become paralyzed. The glow of the firelight reflected against Lan WangJi’s face as though he was made of warm jade. It illuminated, with utmost clarity, the tear streaks that ran down his cheek, as well.

Wei WuXian was shocked speechless, thinking to himself, Oh no!

With people like Lan WangJi, throughout their entire lives, there would probably only be a handful of instances when they'd cry.

And, this time, he just so happened to have come upon one of those instances. He was someone who just couldn't look at other people cry. He couldn't stand the tears of women. Whenever he saw them cry, he'd want to go over and joke around so that he could make them laugh. The tears of men, though, were what he really couldn't stand. He had always felt that coming upon an instance when a man who was usually strong happen to cry was even scarier than accidentally seeing a chaste girl bathe. The thing was that he couldn't even comfort him.

Under the blows of his residence being burned down, his sect being persecuted, his father dying, his brother going missing and he, himself, being injured, any sort of comfort would be pale and powerless.

Wei WuXian didn't know what to do, so he turned his head the other way. A while later, he spoke, "Um, Lan Zhan."

Lan WangJi responded with coldness, "Shut up." Wei WuXian shut up.  
The fire cracked.

Lan WangJi spoke quietly, "Wei Ying, you really are an awful person."  
Wei WuXian, "Oh..."

He thought to himself, with so many things that have happened to him, Lan Zhan's mood is at its worst right now, but there's still me flashing around his sight. So that's why he's so angry. He didn't have the energy to hit me because his leg is hurt, so he could only bite me... I guess I should leave him some peace and quiet.

He held it in for a while, then added, "It's not that I want to annoy you... I just wanted to ask if you're cold or not. The clothes have dried. You can have the undergarments. I'll keep the robe." The undergarments were what he wore next to his body. It never would've been suitable for Lan WangJi to wear. However, his robe was already hideously dirty. All of the GusuLan Sect's people loved to be clean. Giving such an item of clothing to Lan WangJi seemed to be a bit offensive. Lan WangJi didn't say anything. He didn't look at him either, so Wei WuXian tossed the white, dried-out undergarment toward him. He donned the robe himself and left in silence.

The two waited for an entire three days.

There was no sun or moon within the cave. They only knew that it had been three days because of the creepy sleep pattern of the Lan Sect's people—sleeping and waking involuntarily when the times came. Thus, it was be possible to calculate the time from how many times Lan WangJi had slept.

With the past three days of conserving energy, the injury on Lan WangJi's leg didn't worsen and was slowly healing. He was able to sit in the lotus position to meditate soon afterward.

Within these days, Wei WuXian hadn't been flashing before his sight. After Lan WangJi returned to a calm state of mind and

adjusted his mood, he was the poker-faced Lan Zhan once more, and so Wei WuXian finally returned as though nothing had happened, pretending with a thick face that he had seen and heard nothing on that night. With much discretion, he didn't tease him anymore either. The two's interaction was lukewarm, though peaceful.

During the time, the two had scouted around the pool a couple of times. The Xuanwu of Slaughter had already dragged all of the corpses into its shell. The large, black shell floated in the water like a huge, impenetrable warship. In the beginning, heavy chewing noises often came from within. Later on, though, the noises ceased, replaced by what sounded like it was asleep and snoring. The snores were like roars of thunder.

The two had thought about sneaking underwater while the beast was asleep to find the hole where they could escape. However, they could only roam underwater for thirty minutes before their movements were noticed by the beast. And, although they had searched a few times, they couldn't find the hole that Jiang Cheng had mentioned. Wei WuXian suspected that it might be

covered up by a part of the beast's body. Though he wanted to lure it out of the water again, the beast seemed as though it became tired after the big ruckus and didn't want to move anymore. They gathered all of the arrows, bows, and iron rods that lay scattered on the shore and took them back to count. There were over a hundred arrows, around thirty bows, and a little over ten iron rods.

This was already the fourth day.

Lan WangJi picked up a bow with his left hand, attentively examining the material. His right hand strummed across the bowstring. It somehow managed to create the sonorous clang of metal.

This was a weapon used by the cultivation world to hunt down beasts and demons. The material used for the bows and arrows were nothing of the norm. Lan WangJi broke off all of the bowstrings from the bows and tied them from top to bottom into a long chord. With both hands he stretched the chords taut and immediately flicked his wrists. The chord shot out as though it was lightning. A flash of white light flared across and a rock ten feet away was smashed into pieces.

Lan WangJi retrieved the chord. The bowstring broke with a sharp cry through the air.

Wei WuXian, "Chord Assassination?"

Chord Assassination was one of the techniques unique to the GusuLan Sect. It was created by and passed down from the granddaughter of the sect's founder, Lan An—the third sect leader, Lan Yi. Lan Yi was also the only female sect leader of the Lan Sect, cultivating with the guqin. Her guqin had seven strings that could be joined and dismantled within moments. The seven strings were arranged from the most slender to the thickest. One moment she'd be playing noble melodies over them with her soft, fair fingers, and one moment later they'd be able to cut through flesh and bone as though cutting through mud, transformed into lethal weapons within her hands.

Lan Yi created Chord Assassination originally to assassinate dissidents, which was why she was often criticized. The GusuLan Sect was also quite ambivalent on its comments of such a sect leader. Undeniably, though, Chord Assassination was one of the most powerful, most versatile fighting techniques of the GusuLan Sect.

Lan WangJi, "Breach through within."

The turtle shell was as solid as a fortress. Its surface was extremely hard, seemingly impossible to penetrate. But the more that this was true, the weaker the parts that it hid within its shell could turn out to be. Wei WuXian had also thought of this throughout the past few days. He knew what Lan WangJi meant.

What he knew with greater clarity was their current situation. After three days of rest, their physical conditions had just reached their peak. If they waited any longer, however, it'd begin to decline.

And, the fourth day had already passed, and help still hadn't come.

Instead of waiting for their death, it'd be much better to put up one last fight with all that they had. If the two could kill the Xuanwu of Slaughter together, they'd be able to escape from the hole under the pool.

Wei WuXian, "I agree as well. We should attack from the inside.

But from what I've heard of your sect's Chord Assassination

technique, it wouldn't be the most useful it can be if it's inside the cramped environment inside the shell. And your leg injury still hasn't healed yet. It probably wouldn't be as put to good use as usual, would it?"

This was the truth, and Lan WangJi understood. Both of them understood that forcing themselves to do things that they weren't able to do would be useless except for dragging others down.

Wei WuXian, "Listen to me."

A small half of the Xuanwu's shell was still above the surface of the water.

Its head, its tail, and all four of its limbs had shrunken inside. There was a large hole in the front, and five smaller holes lined up all around. It looked like an island or a small mountain, its body black and uneven, covered in moss and even long, dark green algae that hung down.

Without making a noise, carrying on his back a bundle of arrows and iron rods, Wei WuXian dove into the area before the head-hole of the Xuanwu of Slaughter as though he was a thin, silver fish.

The smaller half of the hole was submerged in the water of the pool, so Wei WuXian swum over along the flow of the water. After he passed through the hole, he flipped into the inside of the shell. Wei WuXian landed on both feet with a thud, as if he stepped into a thick layer of rotten mud mixed with water. The stench was so overwhelming that he almost cursed.

The stench was rancid though sickeningly saccharine. It reminded Wei WuXian of a fat dead rat that he had seen beside one of Yunmeng's lakes. He pinched his nose, what a hell of a place... Good thing that I didn't let Lan Zhan come in here. With such dislike towards even the water used to wash clothes, wouldn't he start throwing up the second he smelled this? Even if he didn't, he'd definitely pass out.

Gentle snores came from the Xuanwu of Slaughter. Wei WuXian walked while holding his breath, his feet sinking in deeper and deeper. After three steps, the sludge-like substance had already risen past his knees. Within the mud and the water, there seemed to be a few lumps as well. Wei WuXian bent down slightly and felt around. His hand suddenly came into contact with something fuzzy.

It seemed to be human hair.

Wei WuXian took his hand away. He knew that this was probably one of the people dragged inside by the Xuanwu of Slaughter.

Feeling around some more, he found a boot. The half of a leg within the boot had already rotted to a point of being half-flesh and half-bone.

It seemed that the beast didn't take to cleanliness at all. The leftovers that it either didn't finish or couldn't finish leaked out from between its fangs and into its shell. The more it ate, the more there were. Throughout the hundreds of years, it had piled into a thick layer. And, as of the moment, Wei WuXian was standing right amid the corpse sludge composed of broken limbs.

After crawling around for the past few days, he was already so grimy that it was painful to look at. Wei WuXian didn't care at all that he'd become even filthier. He carelessly wiped his hands on his trousers and continued to walk.

The snores of the beast sounded louder and louder. The waves of air became heavier, and the corpse sludge under his feet became thicker. Finally, his hand came into contact with the beast's rough skin. He felt around as he slowly walked forward, along the skin.

As he had expected, scales covered the head and the neck, but beneath that was a thick, uneven surface. The deeper he went, the thinner and more delicate the skin became.

At this point, the sludge had already risen to Wei WuXian's waist. Most of the corpses here hadn't been finished yet, the bodies left remaining in larger pieces. It shouldn't be called a corpse sludge anymore, but rather a corpse mound. Wei WuXian reached behind his back, preparing to take out the arrows and the rods, but suddenly found that the bundle of rods seemed to be stuck to something and couldn't be removed.

He clenched the handles of the rods and finally pulled it out, using all of his strength. At the same time, the front of the rods took out something with it from within the mound, letting out a soft clang.

Wei WuXian froze at once.

A few moments had passed, and no noise came from around him. The beast hadn't lashed out either. He finally let out a breath of relief, the rods seemed to be stuck to something. Judging from

the sound that it made, it's also made of iron? And it's quite long. Let's see if it can be useful. I'm

short of something to use as weapon. It'd be great if it's a high-level spiritual sword!

He reached out and felt for the object. Its shape was long, though it was dull and covered in rust. The second that he grabbed it; shrill screams sounded within Wei WuXian's ears.

It was as if hundreds of thousands of people were wailing their lungs out in desperation right into his ears. Immediately, cold air travelled up his arm through his entire body. With a shiver, Wei WuXian pulled his hand away, what is this? Its energy of resentment is so strong!

Suddenly, his surroundings lit up. A light, orange glow casted out Wei WuXian's shadow, illuminating a pitch-black sword made of iron in front of him. Slantedly, the sword pierced through where the heart of his shadow was.

This was the inside the shell of the Xuanwu of Slaughter—how could there be any light?

Wei WuXian spun around. As he had thought, a large pair of golden eyes was inches away from him.

He had just realized that the thundering snores had disappeared, while the orange glow was coming right out of the pair of Xuanwu eyes!

The Xuanwu of Slaughter flashed its crisscrossed fangs, an arrangement of black and yellow, and roared through its open mouth.

Wei WuXian was standing just between its fangs. Attacked face- front by the waves of the roar, his ears felt as though they were about to explode and even his entire body began to hurt.

Watching as it lunged toward him, Wei WuXian stuffed the bundle of iron rods into its mouth. Both the timing and position was just right. Not a second over or an inch under, it locked into the upper and lower jaws of the beast!

While the beast was unable to close its mouth, Wei WuXian stabbed an entire bundle of arrows into the most delicate part of its skin. Although the arrows were thin, Wei WuXian had tied five into one bundle and stuck it so deep into the beast's flesh so that even the feather fletching had sunk in. It was as though they were a poisoned needle. Under the extreme pain, the Xuanwu forced its mouth shut so much that all of the iron rods between its fangs curved. The half-a-dozen straight rods were immediately pressed into the shape of a hook by its intense bite. Wei WuXian stuck a few more bundles of arrows into its soft skin. Ever since it was born, the beast had never been at so great of a disadvantage. It was mad with pain. Its snake-like body writhed as hard as it could within its shell and its head smashed around as well, causing the mound of corpses to churn with the force of a landslide. Wei WuXian was almost entirely submerged in the rancid limbs. The Xuanwu of Slaughter widened its eyes, magnifying the hideous yellow. Mouth opening, it seemed as though it wanted to swallow everything up. The corpse mound slid toward its mouth at the speed of a flood. Wei WuXian was struggling, swimming against the current, when he suddenly grabbed onto an iron sword. His heart sank. The piercing wails sounded within his ears again.

Wei WuXian's body was already sucked into the mouth of the Xuanwu. Seeing that the beast was about to close its mouth, sword in hand, Wei WuXian used the same technique again and stuck it between the jaws of the beast.

The internal organs of hundred-year-old beasts like this one were usually capable of erosion. If one were to be swallowed, they'd melt into a wisp of smoke in an instant!

Wei WuXian grabbed firmly onto the sword. Like a pick, he was fixed to its mouth, unable to go either way. The Xuanwu of Slaughter slammed around for a while. It couldn't swallow the pick no matter what, unable to close its mouth, but it didn't want to loosen its mouth either. It finally shot out of its shell!

It was afraid of how Wei WuXian stung it while it was within its shell. As though it wanted to escape, it tried as hard as it could to squeeze its body out, so hard that the delicate flesh that had been hidden under its armor was revealed as well. And Lan WangJi had already positioned the chord before the hole of its head. He had been waiting since long ago. As soon as the Xuanwu rushed outside, he pulled the chord tight and strummed across it. The bowstring vibrated and cut into its flesh!

The beast could neither go in nor come out, suppressed by the two's attacks. It was a deformed beast and not truly divine. It

never had much intelligence to begin with. Under the pain, it had gone completely insane, waving its head and its tail as it rampaged within the dark water. It tumbled inside a large whirlpool, stirring up crashing waves. But, no matter what it did, one of the two stuck firmly to its mouth so that it couldn't eat anything while the other used a chord to strangle its thin vital region, cutting into its inch by inch. As the cut deepened, its bleeding also worsened!

Lan WangJi pulled tightly on the chord, refusing to loosen up for even a split second. He held for six hours.

Six hours later was when the Xuanwu of Slaughter finally ceased to move.

The vital region of the beast had almost been parted with the rest of its body due to Lan WangJi's chord. Having overexerted his strength, his own palms were also covered in blood and gashes. The titan of a shell floated above the water. The pool had already been dyed a purple shade of red visible to the naked eye. The odor of blood was so thick that it could be mistaken for a pond from purgatory.

With a plop, Lan WangJi leaped into water and swam toward its head. The Xuanwu's eyes were wide open. Its pupils had already dimmed, yet its mouth still bit down tightly.

Lan WangJi, "Wei Ying!"

No sound came from within the beast's mouth.

Lan WangJi reached out at once, grabbing the two rows of fangs and forcing them apart. Swimming in water without anything that he could use to support himself, he could only open them after straining for quite a while. Inside, he saw a black iron sword stuck within the mouth of the beast. Both the tip and the handle had pierced deep into its flesh. The blade had already been forced into a curvature.

Wei WuXian's entire body was curled up in the shape of a shrimp. Head facing down, his hands still clenched onto the not-so-sharp

blade of the sword. He had almost slid into the throat of the Xuanwu. Lan WangJi grabbed his lapel at once and pulled him out. As soon as the Xuanwu's jaws loosened, the iron sword slipped into the water and sunk to the bottom.

Eyes tightly shut, Wei WuXian lay limply over Lan WangJi's body, one arm around his shoulder. Holding his waist, Lan WangJi floated over the bloody water with him, "Wei Ying!"

His hands trembled slightly. Just as he was about to touch Wei WuXian's cheek, Wei WuXian suddenly shivered and woke up, "What's happening? What's happening? Is it dead? Is it dead?!" He flopped lightly, causing both of their bodies to sink deeper into the water. Lan WangJi's arm tightened around his waist, "It is!"

Wei WuXian's gaze was blank, as though he had trouble realizing what was going on. He only replied after thinking for a while, "It's dead? It's dead... Great! It's dead. Earlier on it kept on screaming, screaming as it rolled around, and then I fainted. Oh right, the hole! The hole underwater. Quick, let's go. Let's get out through the hole."

Lan WangJi sensed that his behavior was strange, "What is wrong?"

Wei WuXian was suddenly energetic, "Nothing! Let's get outas soon as possible. There's no time to lose."

There was indeed no time to lose. Lan WangJi nodded, "I will take you."

Wei WuXian, "There's no need..."

Yet, Lan WangJi's right arm was still wrapped like an iron belt around his waist, stating in an irrefutable tone, "Breathe in."

Going underwater in such a daze was probably not the best idea. Wei WuXian didn't like to force himself, either, and nodded. The two took in a deep breath and dove into the water.

A moment later, two splashes bursted from the purple-red water. The two slunk out again.

Wei WuXian spat out a mouthful of the bloody water and wiped his face, covering it with the purplish red. He looked even worse than before, "What's wrong?! Why isn't there a hole?!"

Jiang Cheng had indeed said that there was a hole in the bottom of the pool able to let half a dozen people pass through at once, and the other disciples did indeed already escape from the hole. Wei WuXian had originally thought that it couldn't be found because it was blocked by the Xuanwu's body, but the corpse of the Xuanwu was already in a different place, yet there was still no hole where its body used to be.

Water dripped down Lan WangJi's wet hair. He didn't answer. The two looked at each other. Both thought of a daunting possibility.

It was likely that... Under the intense pain, when the Xuanwu of Slaughter was madly waving its limbs, it either shook the underwater rocks or kicked into a certain place, coincidentally causing the only hole that they could escape from... to be blocked.

Wei WuXian struggled out of Lan WangJi's arm. He plunged into the water. Lan WangJi followed. Yet, after searching for a long while, they still couldn't find any holes. Not even one that could let a single person through. Wei WuXian, "What do we do now?"

After a while of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "Let us go up first." Wei WuXian waved his hands, "... Let's go up."

Both were drained of all energy. They swam slowly toward the shore. When they rose out of the water, both were covered in a bloody shade of purple. Wei WuXian took off his clothes. Wringing them dry and flinging them around in the air, he couldn't help but curse, "Are we being toyed with or what? I was thinking that if nobody came to help us, we wouldn't be able to kill it even if we wanted to, and that was why I went for it. And now, we finally have it dead, and the son-of-a-bitch made the hole collapse.

Fuck!"

Hearing the „fuck", Lan WangJi's brows twitched. He wanted to say something, but held it in. Wei WuXian flung his clothes around as he cursed. Suddenly, his legs gave out. Lan WangJi lunged forward in time to catch him.

Leaning against his hand, Wei WuXian spoke, "It's fine, it's fine. Used up all my energy. Oh, right, Lan Zhan, did you see that I was holding a sword when I was in its mouth? Where did the sword go?"

Lan WangJi, "It sank underwater. Is there anything about it?" Wei WuXian, "It sank? Never mind, then."

When he was clutching onto the sword, he kept on hearing a deluge of screams beside his ears. His body felt cold and his head spun. The iron sword must've been something special. The Xuanwu of Slaughter had consumed at least five thousand people. When the people were dragged into its shell, body still intact, there had to be some that were still alive. The sword might have belonged to a cultivator who had been eaten. It had been hidden for at least four hundred years within the corpse mound of the shell. Tainted with the pain and resentment of countless humans, both dead and alive, it had heard their screams.

Wei WuXian had wanted to keep the sword and examine the iron properly. Now that it had sunk, however, and they were stuck here, unable to escape, it seemed appropriate to let the matter drop. If he mentioned it too much and Lan WangJi picked up on what he was getting at, they'd be at odds with each other allover again. Wei WuXian waved his hands, there really isn't anything good about this, is there?

He continued to drag his legs forward. Lan WangJi followed behind him in silence. A few steps later, WeiWuXian's legs gave out again.

And Lan WangJi caught him again. This time, he put one hand against his forehead. After contemplating for a few moments, he spoke, "Wei Ying, you... are so warm."

Wei WuXian put his hand to his forehead as well, "Lan Zhan, you're also really warm."

Lan WangJi took his hand away, speaking in a tepid tone, "That is because your hand is cold."

Wei WuXian, "I think I do feel a bit dizzy."

About four to five days ago, he put all of the herbs in the perfume sachet onto Lan WangJi's leg. He only wiped the brand mark on his chest a few times. In the past few days, he hadn't rested well, and he had just been rummaging through the corpse mound and the pool water. His injury had finally worsened.

Wei WuXian had a fever.

After managing for a while, Wei WuXian felt dizzier and dizzier. He couldn't walk any longer, so he decided to just sit down where he was, musing, "How could I get a fever so easily? I haven't gotten a fever in years."

Lan WangJi didn't feel like expressing his opinion on the "so easily" part of his words, "Lie down."

Wei WuXian did as he was told. Lan WangJi took his hand and began to pass him spiritual energy.

Though he had been lying for a while, Wei WuXian soon sat up again. Lan WangJi told him, "Lie down properly."

Wei WuXian drew his hand back, "You don't need to give me any. You don't have much left yourself."

Lan WangJi grabbed his hand again and repeated, "Lie down properly."

A few days ago, Lan WangJi was drained of energy and got both scared and teased by him. This time, it was Wei WuXian's turn to be drained of energy for him to do whatever he wanted.

But, even when lying down, Wei WuXian didn't like loneliness. Soon afterward, he began to complain, "It's too hard, it's too hard."

Lan WangJi, "What do you want?"

Wei WuXian, "I want to lie somewhere else."

Lan WangJi, "Where would you want to lie, at such a place?"

Wei WuXian, "Let me borrow your lap for a while, won't you?"

Lan WangJi spoke with an expressionless face, "Stop fooling around."

Wei WuXian, "I'm serious. My head is so dizzy. You're not a girl; why can't I borrow it for a bit?"

Lan WangJi, "Even if I am not a girl, you cannot just lie on it."

Seeing that he began to frown, Wei WuXian responded, "I'm not fooling around. You're the one who should stop fooling around. I refuse to accept this. Lan Zhan, tell me, why?"

Lan WangJi, "What why?"

Wei WuXian managed to flip around and lay stomach down on the ground, "Of all the other people, there isn't anyone who

doesn't secretly like me despite saying that I'm annoying. Why is it that, whenever it's you, you never give me any good looks? We count as having lived through death with each other, don't we?"

You don't even want to lend your lap for me to lie on and you're lecturing me again. Are you an old man or what?"

Lan WangJi replied with a thin voice, "You are delirious."

Perhaps he was indeed delirious. Not long after, Wei WuXian had fallen asleep.

When he was sleeping, he felt that his lying position wasn't too bad. It seemed that he really was lying on someone's lap. A cold

hand rested over his forehead. It felt quite comfortable. Happily, he rolled around as much as he wanted to, and there wasn't anybody who scolded him. When he rolled onto the ground, his head was even gently stroked before he was picked up and put onto the lap again.

But, when he woke up, he was still lying on the ground. What had replaced the lap was a pile of leaves behind his head, which felt somewhat better than before. Lan WangJi was sitting quite a distance away from him. A fire had been started. The firelight reflected against his cheeks as though he was jade, warm and gentle.

Wei WuXian thought to himself, Of course it was a dream.

The path that the two had wanted to escape through was severed. Stuck within the cave, they

had to wait for the YunmengJiang Sect to rescue them, and spent two more days. Within the two days, Wei WuXian had always been under a low fever, sleeping before waking before sleeping again. It all depended on Lan WangJi to pass him spiritual energy that he could manage to maintain his current condition and ensure that it didn't worsen.

Wei WuXian, "Ugh. It's so boring." Wei WuXian, "It really is so boring." Wei WuXian, "It's too quiet." Wei WuXian, "Ahhh."

Wei WuXian, "I'm hungry. Lan Zhan, why don't you get up and make me something? Make me some of that tortoise meat."

Wei WuXian, "Never mind, I'd rather not. The meat of man-eating beasts like this one is definitely rotten. You shouldn't move after all."

Wei WuXian, "Why are you like this, Lan Zhan? You're so boring. Your mouth is closed and your eyes are closed; you don't talk to me and you don't look at me. Are you in Zen or are you a monk or something? Right, your founder really was a monk. I forgot."

Lan WangJi, "Be quiet. You are still fevered. Do not talk. Conserve your strength."

Wei WuXian, "You finally responded to me. How many days have we been waiting for? Why hasn't anyone come to rescue us yet?"

Lan WangJi, "It has not even been one day."

Wei WuXian covered his face, "Why is it so difficult? It must be because I'm with you. Jiang Cheng should've been the one who stayed. Even arguing with him would be more interesting than being like this with you. Jiang Cheng! Where the hell are you?! It's almost been seven days!!" Lan WangJi stabbed a branch into the fire, somehow managing to give it the air of a sword. Spreading everywhere, the sparks danced through the air. He spoke coldly, "Rest."

Wei WuXian curled up into a shrimp again, facing him, "Are you serious? I just woke up and you're telling me to rest. Do you really hate seeing the awake version of me so much?"

Taking the branch away, Lan WangJi replied calmly, "You are thinking too much."

Wei WuXian, absolutely nothing works on him. He's not at all as interesting as how he was a few days ago, face as dark as the bottom of a pan, speaking with actual tone, even biting others when he was mad. But one shouldn't hope to see such a Lan Zhan so easily. I probably wouldn't be able to see it again until the end of my life.

He spoke, "I'm so bored. Lan Zhan, let's chat. You can start." Lan WangJi, "When did you usually sleep?"

Wei WuXian, "Your start is so boring. It's so dry that it reaaaally makes me not want to continue. But I'm still gonna give you some face and continue. Let me tell you—in Lotus Pier, I've never slept before one in the morning. I often stay up all night."

Lan WangJi, "Improper conduct. A bad habit."

Wei WuXian, "You think that everyone is like your sect's people?" Lan WangJi, "It needs to stop."

Wei WuXian covered his ears, "I'm sick. I'm feverish, Brother, can't you say something nicer? And make poor, poor me feel better?"

Nothing came out of Lan WangJi's closed mouth. Wei WuXian, "You don't know what to say? Fine, I should've known. Then, if you don't know what to say, can you sing? How about you sing a song?"

It had originally been an offhand remark. He was chatting with Lan WangJi to pass the time and didn't at all expect him to agree. Yet, after a few moments of silence, a low yet mild voice echoed softly through the hollow cave.

Lan WangJi really did begin to sing.

Wei WuXian closed his eyes, turned around, and spread out his limbs, "It sounds nice."

He asked, "What's it called?"

Lan WangJi seemed to murmur something. Wei WuXian opened his eyes, "What was it called again?"

## Chapter 56: Poisons—Part One

He still didn't hear clearly what the name was. Blood rushed up to his face. Both his head and the joints of his limbs ached from the heat. The ringing noise within his ears went on and on.

When he woke up again, as Wei WuXian opened his eyes, what he saw was neither the black ceiling of the underground cave nor Lan WangJi's pale yet handsome face, but rather a wooden board. Drawn on the board was a funny series of kissing heads.

These were the sketches that he drew on his own bed at Lotus Pier.

Wei WuXian was lying on his own bed. Jiang YanLi was reading a book, her head tilted downward. Seeing that he woke up, her mild brows immediately lifted, laying her book down, "A-Xian!"

Wei WuXian, "Shijie!"

He managed to get up from his bed. His limbs stopped burning, but they still felt weak. His throat was a bit dry as well. Wei WuXian asked, "I'm back? When did I come out of the cave? Did Uncle Jiang take people to rescue me? Where's Lan Zhan?"

Where's Jiang Cheng?"

The wooden door opened. Jiang Cheng came in with a white porcelain jar hanging from his hand, his voice harsh, "What are you shouting for?"

After he spoke, he turned to Jiang YanLi, "Sister, the soup that you boiled. I brought it over."

Jiang YanLi took the jar over and ladled the contents inside of it into a bowl. Wei WuXian, "Jiang Cheng, you bastard, come over here!"

Jiang Cheng, "Why would you want me to come over? You wanna kneel down and thank me?"

Wei WuXian, "You got here after an entire seven days—did you want to kill me?!"

Jiang Cheng, "You've been killed? Then who's talking to me right now?"

Wei WuXian, "I'm sure it only takes five days for you to go from Dusk-Creek Mountain to Yunmeng!"

Jiang Cheng, "Are you stupid? You only counted the time to return and not the time to go there? Let alone the fact that after I got there, I had to lead people and search through the entire mountain for the old banyan tree, then dig open the hole that got blocked up by Wen Chao and his people, and rescue you within seven days. Where's your gratitude?!"

Thinking about it, Wei WuXian realized that he really did forget to count the time needed to get there. He was rendered speechless, "It seems that this really was the case. But why didn't Lan Zhan remind me?"

Jiang Cheng, "He's annoyed by just the sight of you, and you expect him to catch everything you said?"

Wei WuXian, "You have a point!"

Jiang YanLi had finished with the soup and passed it into his hands. Within the soup were lotus roots and ribs chopped into pieces, both a fleshy pink, surface having already been boiled soft. A rich aroma rose out of the piping hot soup. Wei WuXian hadn't eaten anything for days inside of the cave. He couldn't eat anything too solid too soon, so this was just right. After thanking his shijie, he immediately began to eat, hugging the bowl to him, "Where's Lan Zhan? He's also been saved, hasn't he? Is he here? Or did he go back to his sect in Gusu?"

Jiang Cheng, "What nonsense. It's not like he's from our sect, so why'd he come here? Of course, he went back to Gusu."

Wei WuXian, "He went back alone? Over in Gusu, his sect..."

Before he could finish, Jiang FengMian stepped inside. Wei WuXian put down the bowl, "Uncle Jiang!"

Jiang FengMian, "Sitting is fine."

Jiang YanLi passed a handkerchief for Wei WuXian to wipe his mouth, "Is it good?"

Wei WuXian didn't take the handkerchief. Instead, he pouted his mouth with exaggeration,

“Yes!”

Jiang Cheng, “Don’t you have hands yourself?!”

With a smile, Jiang YanLi wiped Wei WuXian’s mouth and chin, and walked happily out with the bowl in her hands. Jiang FengMian sat down where she had been sitting. Glancing at the porcelain jar, he seemed as if he wanted to taste it as well, but the bowl had already been taken away by Jiang YanLi.

Jiang Cheng, “Father, are the WenSect’s people still not returning the swords?”

Jiang FengMian tore away his gaze, “They have been celebrating for the past few days.”

Wei WuXian, “Celebrating what?”

Jiang FengMian, “That Wen Chao had single-handedly killed the Xuanwu of Slaughter.”

Hearing this, Wei WuXian almost rolled off his bed, “The Wen Sect killed it?!”

Jiang Cheng sneered, “Or what? Did you think that they’d sayyou killed it?”

Wei WuXian, “Those Wen dogs are talking nonsense, they have no face. Lan Zhan was clearly the one who killed it.”

Jiang FengMian gave him a smile, “Really? What a coincidence. The second young master of the Lan Sect told me that you were the one who killed it. So, who was it, really?”

Wei WuXian, “I guess both of us did something. But he was the main one. I only went into the beast’s shell and chased it out. Lan Zhan was waiting for it alone outside. It only died after it dragged on for six entire hours.”

He described to Jiang Cheng and his father the things that had happened during the past few days. Jiang Cheng’s expression was complicated after he had finished listening. He only spoke a while later, “It’s pretty much the same as what Lan WangJi said. So, it seems that both of you killed it together. What’s yours is yours. Why would you give him all the credit?”

Wei WuXian, “I didn’t. I just feel that, compared to him, Ireally didn’t do much.”

Jiang FengMian nodded, “Well done.”

He was able to kill a four-hundred-year-old beast at the mere age of seventeen. It was much more than a „well done”.

Jiang Cheng, “Congratulations.”

The tone of his congratulations sounded quite strange. Seeing how he folded his hands and raised his brows, Wei WuXian knew that those sour feelings were at him again. Jiang Cheng, right now, must be making a fuss in silence, defiantly asking himself why he wasn’t the one who had stayed in the cave to kill the beast. If it had been him, he could definitely also do this and do that.

Wei WuXian laughed, “What a pity that you weren’t there aswell. Or else, you’d be able to share some of that credit as well. You’d also be able to chat with me and chase the boredom away. Good Heavens, sitting face-to-face with Lan Zhan these days almost bored me to death.”

Jiang Cheng, “It served you right to be bored to death. You shouldn’t have played the hero and you shouldn’t have cared for such a hell of a thing. If in the beginning you didn’t...”

Suddenly, Jiang FengMian spoke, “Jiang Cheng.”

Jiang Cheng paused, knowing that he had said too much. He was quiet at once.

Jiang FengMian didn’t look as if he was blaming him of anything, but his expression had turned from calm to more solemn, “Do you know in which ways what you just said is not appropriate?”

Jiang Cheng’s head hung low, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian, “He’s just angry and speaking without care.”

Seeing how Jiang Cheng’s mouth and heart were still at odds, how he still felt defiant, Jiang FengMian shook his head, “A- Cheng, there are some things that can’t be said even if you’re angry. If you said them, it means that you still don’t understand the motto of the Jiang Sect, that you still don’t...”

The harsh voice of a woman came from outside the door, “Yes, he doesn’t understand, but what does it matter, as long as Wei Ying understands?!”

Like a purple bolt of lightning, Madam Yu swept inside, bringing in with her a cold breeze. She

was standing five steps away from Wei WuXian's bed, brows raised, "To attempt at the impossible" is exactly how he is, isn't it? Fooling around even though he knew that it'd bring trouble to his sect?!"

Jiang FengMian, "My lady, what are you doing here?"

Madam Yu, "What am I doing here? What a joke that I am asked of such a thing! Sect Leader Jiang, do you still remember that I'm also the leader of Lotus Pier? Do you still remember that every inch of the earth here is my territory? Do you still remember, between the one lying there and the one standing here, which one is your son?"

Such questions he had heard countless times throughout the years. Jiang FengMian answered, "Of course I do."

Madam Yu laughed bitterly, "You do remember, but there's no use if you simply remember. Wei Ying, he really can't take it unless he stirs up some trouble, can he? If I had known, I would've made him stay in Lotus Pier properly and not go outside. Could Wen Chao really have dared to do anything to the two young masters of the GusuLan Sect and the LanlingJin Sect?"

Even if he did, it'd mean that they ran out of luck. Since when was it your turn to play the hero?"

In front of Jiang FengMian, Wei WuXian had to give the madam some face. He didn't protest at all, though he thought to himself, He couldn't have dared to do anything to them? That's not for certain.

Madam Yu, "I'm saying this right now. You can just wait. One day, he'll definitely get our sect into some big trouble!"

Jiang FengMian stood up, "Let's talk when we get back."

Madam Yu, "Talk about what? Get back to where? I'll be talking about it right here. I have nothing to be ashamed of, anyways!"

Jiang Cheng, come over here."

Jiang Cheng was stuck between his father and his mother. After a moment of hesitation, he moved to his mother's side. Holding his shoulders, Madam Yu pushed him forward for Jiang FengMian to see, "Sect Leader Jiang, it seems that some things I have to say. Look carefully—this, is your own son, the future head of Lotus Pier. Even if you frown upon him just because I was the one who bore him, his surname is still Jiang! ... I don't believe for one second that you haven't heard of how the outside people gossip, that Sect Leader Jiang has still not moved on from a certain Sanren though so many years have passed, regarding the son of his old friend as a son of his own; they're speculating if Wei Ying is your..."

Jiang FengMian shouted, "Yu ZiYuan!"

Madam Yu shouted as well, "Jiang FengMian! Do you think that anything will change just because you raised your voice?! Do you think that I don't know you?!"

The two debated the issue outside. On the way, Madam Yu's angered voice was louder and louder. Jiang FengMian argued as well, suppressing his rage. Jiang Cheng stood blankly where he was. A while later, he glanced at Wei WuXian, and suddenly turned to leave as well.

Wei WuXian, "Jiang Cheng!"

Jiang Cheng gave no answer. With a few steps, he had already turned the corner of the hallway. Wei WuXian could only roll out of bed and chase over, dragging with him his stiff, sore body, "Jiang Cheng! Jiang Cheng!"

Jiang Cheng walked forward without a care for anything else. Wei WuXian was so mad that he threw himself over and clenched his neck, "Answer me if you heard me! Are you looking for a fight?!"

Jiang Cheng spat, "Go back to your bed and lie down properly!"

Wei WuXian, "I can't do that, we need to get things straight! You really mustn't listen to those messed-up nonsense."

Jiang Cheng spoke coldly, "What messed-up nonsense?"

Wei WuXian, "Those things dirty your mouth even if you just say them. Both of my parents are real people in this world. I don't want others assigning me to other households!"

Arm around Jiang Cheng's shoulder, he managed to drag him to the wooden fences on the other side of the hallway. They sat down together, "Let's be honest, don't hide things so sulkily in your heart. You're Uncle Jiang's own son, the future leader of the Jiang Sect. Of course, Uncle Jiang would be stricter towards you."

Jiang Cheng gave him a sideway glance.

Wei WuXian continued, "But I'm different. I'm the son of someone else. Both of my parents are good friends of Uncle Jiang. Of course, he'd cut me slacker. Such a reason you do understand, don't you?"

Jiang Cheng snorted, "He's not strict towards me, he just doesn't like me."

Wei WuXian, "How can there be anyone who doesn't like his own son? Stop thinking such things! Those who have loose mouths I'll beat them up whenever I see them, beat them up so hard that

their mothers wouldn't even be able to recognize them."

Jiang Cheng, "There is, though. He doesn't like my mom, and so he doesn't like me either."

This one really was difficult to refute.

The entirety of the cultivation world knew that third lady Yu had cultivated together with Jiang FengMian when they were young. Jiang FengMian's character was gentle, yet Yu ZiYuan's personality was harsh. The two didn't share too many interactions. Thus, although their backgrounds matched, nobody associated the two as a pair. Later, ZangSe SanRen came from the mountains, passed by Yunmeng, and happened to become friends with Jiang FengMian. They had even night-hunted together on multiple occasions. Both thought highly of each other. People supposed that it was very likely for ZangSe SanRen to become the next mistress of Lotus Pier.

However, soon afterward, the MeishanYu Sect proposed an alliance through marriage to the YunmengJiang Sect.

The leader of the Jiang Sect back then was quite interested, but Jiang FengMian had no such intentions. He didn't like Yu

ZiYuan's conduct and felt that the two wouldn't be an appropriate match. He had politely refused the offer a handful of times.

However, the MeishanYu Sect set about multiple factors, putting pressure on Jiang FengMian, who was at the time still fairly young and had nothing to lean on. Along with the fact that, not long later, ZangSe SanRen had become cultivation partners with the most loyal servant at Jiang FengMian's side, Wei ChangZe, and rode off into the sunset, roaming around the world, Jiang FengMian finally gave up.

Although Jiang and Yu were married, they had ever since been a grudging couple. They had always been living apart and held the most disagreeable of conversations. Aside from the strengthening of their sect's powers, nobody knew what other benefits they had attained.

The founder of the YunmengJiang Sect, Jiang Chi, was born a rogue cultivator. The ways of the sect were honest and unrestrained. Madam Yu's manners were the exact opposite. And, both Jiang Cheng's looks and personality took after his mother. He hadn't ever been to Jiang FengMian's liking. Since birth, he taught him in many ways, yet he still couldn't change, which was why Jiang FengMian had always seemed as though he didn't favor him too much.

Jiang Cheng pulled Wei WuXian's hand away and stood up, letting out his anger, "I know! I know that I don't have the

personality he likes, that I'm not the heir he wants. He thinks that I don't deserve to be Sect Leader, that I don't understand the motto of the Jiang Sect, that I don't have the air of the Jiang Sect in me at all! Those are all true!"

He raised his voice, "You killed the Xuanwu of Slaughter together with Lan WangJi, bathing in blood! How great is that?! But what about me?!"

He punched his fist into a pillar in the hall, clenching his teeth, "... I have also been running around for days, completely exhausted, with not one second of rest!"

Wei WuXian, “So what if there’s the motto?! Do you have to follow it just because it’s a motto? Look at the rules of the GusuLan Sect—there are over three thousand. If people followed every single one of them, would they even be alive at this point?”

He hopped off the fence, “And, who said that being a sect leader means that you have to go along with the style of the sect? There have been so many sect leaders in the YunmengJiang Sect, I don’t believe at all that everyone was the same. Even the GusuLan Sect had an outlier like Lan Yi, but who would deny her position and her abilities? When talking about the famous cultivators of the Lan Sect, who could skip over her? Who could skip over her Chord Assassination technique?”

Jiang Cheng was silent, as though he had finally become calmer. Wei WuXian put his hand on his shoulder again, “In the future, you’ll be the sect leader, and I’ll be your subordinate, like your father and my father. So, what if the GusuLan Sect has its Two Jades? The Yunmeng Jiang Sect will have its Two Prides! So, shut up. Who said that you don’t deserve to be the sectleader? Nobody can say this, even you can’t either. If you do, you’re looking for a beating.”

Jiang Cheng snorted, “You see how you are right now? Who can you beat up?” As he spoke, he slapped right at the middle of Wei WuXian’s chest. Although medicine and bandages had already been applied to the branded wound, being slapped out of the blue still brought immense pain. Wei WuXian roared, “Jiang Cheng!!! Come to your death!!!”

Jiang Cheng ducked from his strike and shouted, “You’re hurting so much now, but why did you play the hero back then?! Serves you right! Teaches you your lesson!”

Wei WuXian, “Was I playing the hero?! I had no other choice either, I was moving faster than I could think! Stop running, I’ll let you off this once. I need to ask you something! ... I had a perfume sachet somewhere around my waist. It was empty. Did you see it?”

Jiang Cheng, “The one that MianMian gave you? I didn’t.”

Wei WuXian exclaimed his regret, “I’ll find her for anotherone later.”

Jiang Cheng frowned, “You’re at it again. You don’t really like her, do you? The girl does look fine, but it’s obvious that she doesn’t have much background. Maybe she isn’t even a disciple. She seems like the daughter of a servant.”

Wei WuXian, “What’s wrong with servants? I’m also the son of a servant, aren’t I?”

Jiang Cheng, “How can you compare to her? Whose servant is like you, having your master peel lotus seeds for you and boil you soup. I didn’t even get to have some!”

Wei WuXian, “If you want some just ask Shijie to cook you more. Right, we were talking about Lan Zhan. Did Lan Zhan not leave a message for me? Has his brother been found? How’s the situation at his sect?”

Jiang Cheng, “You expected him to leave you a message? You’re lucky that he didn’t leave you with a stab. He went back. Lan XiChen hasn’t been found yet. Lan QiRen is exhausted from working.”

Wei WuXian, “What about the Lan Sect’s leader? How is he?”

Jiang Cheng, “He passed away.”

## Chapter 57: Poisons—Part Two

Wei WuXian paused, “He passed away.”

All of a sudden, Lan WangJi’s tear-streaked face, reflecting the firelight, flashed within his mind. He blurted out, “How’s Lan Zhan?”

Jiang Cheng, “How could he be? He went back. Father originally wanted to ask people to take him to Gusu. He refused. Judging from how he was, he should’ve known long ago that the day would come. After all, with the situation at hand, no sect is better than any other.”

The two sat down on the wooden fence again. Wei WuXian, “Then what’s going on with Lan XiChen?”

Jiang Cheng, “The Wen Sect was going to burn down their Library Pavilion, wasn’t it? Tens of thousands of ancient books and music scores. The Lan Sect’s people saved some. They probably gave them to Lan XiChen and told him to run away with them.

They protected whatever they could, or else everything’d be gone. This is what everyone is guessing.”

Looking at the sky, Wei WuXian spoke, “How disgusting.” Jiang Cheng, “Yeah. The Wen Sect is too disgusting.”

Wei WuXian, “For how long are they going to jump around like this? We’ve got so many sects. Can’t we join together and...”

Suddenly, a series of footsteps came. A group of boys wearing training clothes leaped across the hallway like monkeys, shouting, “Shixiong!!!”

The youngest shidi beamed, “Shixiong!!! You’re alive now!!!”

Wei WuXian, “What do you mean I’m alive now? I’ve never died to begin with!”

“Shixiong, I heard that you killed a beast over four hundred years old?! Is it true? You killed it?!”

“Compared to this, what I really want to know is, Shixiong, did you really go without food for seven days?!”

“You really haven’t secretly practiced inedia behind our backs?!”

“Just how big really was the Xuanwu of Slaughter? Would it fit inside Lotus Lake?!”

“The Xuanwu of Slaughter was just a tortoise, right?!”

“Shixiong, you spent the entire seven days with Lan WangJi from Gusu? And he didn’t beat you to death?!”

The atmosphere that had been somewhat solemn was immediately smashed into a ruckus.

Wei WuXian’s injuries weren’t too heavy to begin with. He just didn’t apply medicine in time and suffered from both fatigue and hunger. But the physique of his body was quite good. After medicine had been applied to the brand mark on his chest, his fever soon died down. He was lively again with just a few days of rest. After the chaos of the Xuanwu of Slaughter in Dusk-Creek Mountain, the „Sector of Indoctrination” that the Wen Sect had set up at Qishan had disintegrated completely. All of the disciples

returned to their sects. On the other hand, Wen Chao didn’t follow up immediately either. Taking the opportunity, Madam Yu gave Wei WuXian a harsh talking-to and ordered him not to take one step out of the gates of Lotus Pier, not even to play in the lake.

Thus, he could only shoot kites with the JiangSect’s disciples, day after day after day.

No matter how fun a game was, playing it every day would eventually become tedious. And so, about half a month later, the boys’ interest dwindled. Wei WuXian hadn’t been in the mood, either. He shot without any care and even let Jiang Cheng get first place a couple of times.

On one day, after the last round had been shot down, Wei WuXian used his right hand to form shade between his brows and looked into the sunset, “Let’s wrap things up and stop playing this. Food’s waiting at home.”

Jiang Cheng, “So early today?”

Wei WuXian tossed the bow to the side and sat on the ground, disappointed, "It's boring. Let's stop. Which ones were last in the round we just did? Go get them with our sixth shidi."

One boy said, "Shixiong, you're so tricky. You make others get them every time. That's shameless."

Wei WuXian waved his hands, "I have no other choice either. Madam Yu doesn't let me go outside. She's at home right now. Maybe JinZhu and YinZhu are watching from some corner, ready to turn me whenever possible. If I went out, Madam Yu's gonna whip a whole layer of skin off me."

The shidi who performed the worst bantered, laughing as they set off to get the kites. Jiang Cheng was standing, while Wei WuXian sat on the ground. The two were chatting. Wei WuXian asked, "Uncle Jiang went out so early in the morning—why hasn't he come back yet? Would he make it in time for dinner?"

In the morning, Jiang FengMian and Madam Yu had an argument again. To call it an argument didn't seem quite right. Madam Yu alone lost her temper, while some of Jiang FengMian's bearing remained throughout the entire exchange. Jiang Cheng answered, "He's at the Wen Sect for our swords again, isn't he?"

Whenever I think that my Sandu might be held in the hands of a Wen-dog right now, I..."

His face revealed disgust. Wei WuXian, "What a shame that our swords don't have that much spiritual energy yet. If they could sheath themselves, then nobody would be able to use them."

Jiang Cheng, "If you cultivate for another eighty years, then maybe it'd be possible."

Suddenly, a few boys rushed into the training fields of Lotus Pier, shouting with urgency, "Something's happened! Shixiong, Shixiong, something's happened!!!"

These were the shidi who had gone to fetch the kites. Wei WuXian jumped up, "What's wrong?"

Jiang Cheng, "Where's the youngest one? Why is there one missing?"

It was true. The youngest shidi was the one running in front of everyone when they had left, and now he was nowhere to be seen. One of the boys panted, "Our shidi was taken away!"

"Taken away?!"

Wei WuXian picked up his bow as well. Weapon in hand, he asked, "Who took him? Why was he taken away?!"

The boy answered, "We don't know! We don't know why they took him!"

Jiang Cheng was anxious as well, "What do you mean you don't know?"

Wei WuXian, "Nobody worry. Tell us clearly."

The boy, "When, when we were getting the kites, the kite went over there, really far away. When we went over, we saw a few dozen people, all from the Wen Sect, wearing their uniform. There were disciples and servants. The one leading them was a young woman. She's holding a kite in her hand and there was an arrow on the kite. She asked us whose kite it was when she saw us."

Another boy continued, "The kite was our youngest shidi's, so he said that it was his. Then the woman suddenly got angry and shouted „how dare you”, and then she told her people to take him away!"

Wei WuXian, "Just like that?"

The boys nodded, "We asked her why they were taking him away, and the woman kept on saying that he committed treason and had hidden motives, and she ordered her people to detain him. We couldn't do anything about it so we ran back."

Jiang Cheng cursed, "They don't even have a reason for taking him away! Just what does the Wen Sect want to do?!"

"Yeah! There's just no reason!"

Wei WuXian, "Nobody talk. The Wen Sect's people could be knocking at our doors every second from now. Don't let them hear anything we say that could be used to hold against us. Let me ask you, the woman, was she not wearing a sword? Does she look kind of pretty, with a mole above her lips?"

The shidi, "Yes! That's her!"

Jiang Cheng spoke with hatred, "Wang LingJiao! That..."

Suddenly, the cold voice of a woman came, "Why the noise? Can't I have just one day of peace and quiet?!"

Madam Yu strode over with her flowing violet robes. JinZhu and YinZhu were still armored, following behind her, one on the left and the other on the right. Jiang Cheng called, "Mom, the Wen Sect's people are here. Our youngest shidi was taken by them!"

Madam Yu, "You all were shouting so loudly that I heard everything from inside. So what? He was taken away, not killed, and you're already so worked up. Are you still what a future sect leader should be? Calm down!"

As she finished, she turned to face the gates before the training fields. About a dozen of the Wen Sect's cultivators, dressed in the sun-patterned robes, entered one after another. Behind these cultivators, a woman in vibrant clothes walked inside with deliberate steps.

The woman's figure was graceful. Her features were enchanting as well. With amorous eyes, fiery lips, and a small, black mole above her lips, she was quite an outstanding beauty. Yet, clad in rings and rings of jewelry, she seemed as if she wanted to clothe herself in the entire jewelry shop and all of the passion that her lover gave her; it really diminished her charm. This was Wang LingJiao, who had been stricken by Wei WuXian so hard that she retched up blood, back in Qishan.

Wang LingJiao smiled, "Madam Yu, I'm here again."

Madam Yu displayed no expression, as though she felt that saying anything extra to her would dirty her mouth. Wang LingJiao walked down the stairs of the main gates. Only then did Madam Yu speak, "Why did you take a disciple of my YunmengJiang Sect?"

Wang LingJiao, "Take? You mean the one I took outside? That'd be a long story. Why don't we take our time to talk about it after we sit down inside?"

A servant, without neither notification nor request, walked through the gates of another sect and demanded without any hesitation to go inside and „talk about it" after they sat down inside. Madam Yu's face grew colder. The finger on her right hand that wore the silver ring of Zidian twitched a few times. On the back of her hand, veins had slightly risen from her fair skin.

She questioned, "Talk about it after we sit down inside?"

Wang LingJiao, "Of course. I didn't have the time to come have a seat inside the last time I came to give out orders. Please."

Hearing the word „orders", Jiang Cheng snorted coldly. JinZhu and YinZhu's expressions also seemed angered. However, Wang LingJiao was still a favorite of Wen Chao's side. At the moment,

they couldn't offend her. And so, although Madam Yu's face was covered with ridicule, her tone dripping with sarcasm, she still replied, "Sure, then, why don't you go inside?"

Wang LingJiao gave her a smile. She really did walk inside.

However, although she said she had wanted to sit, she didn't sit at once. Instead, she sauntered with curiosity around Lotus Pier in a circle, putting her opinions everywhere:

"Lotus Pier really is quite nice. It's so big. It's just that all of the houses are a bit old."

"All of the wood is black. The color is so ugly. It's not bright enough."

"Madam Yu, you aren't a good mistress at all. Don't you know to decorate the place a bit? Next time, hang up some more red curtains. It'd only be prettier that way."

Walking along the path, she pointed around as if it was her own back garden. Madam Yu's brows twitched so much that Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng thought she could kill someone any moment from now.

After they had finished the tour, Wang LingJiao finally arrived at the main hall. Without anyone's invitation, she presumed her seat at the head table. She sat for a while. Seeing that nobody was going to serve her, she slammed the table with a frown, demanding, "Where's the tea?"

Although she was enveloped in luster, her mannerisms showed no courtesy at all. She acted like

a complete buffoon. Having spent the journey with her, everyone was used to seeing this. Madam Yu sat down one seat lower. The wide hem of her robe and sleeves spread out, making her figure appear to be even more slender, her posture even more graceful. JinZhu and YinZhu stood behind her, both wearing light smirks on their faces.

YinZhu replied, "There is no tea. Get it yourself if you want any."

Wang LingJiao widened her eyes, shocked, "Don't the Jiang Sect's servants ever do anything?" JinZhu, "The Jiang Sect's servants have more important things to do. Nobody ever needs others to do things like pouring tea.

They're not crippled."

Wang LingJiao examined them, "Who are you?" Madam Yu, "My personal maids."

Wang LingJiao spoke with disdain, "Madam Yu, your Jiang Sect really is outrageous. This can't be the case. Even maids dare interrupt a conversation in the main hall. Servants like this have their faces slapped in the Wen Sect."

Wei WuXian, As the person saying this, you're a servant as well, aren't you?

Madam Yu replied without any hesitation, "JinZhu and YinZhu aren't the usual servants. They've been staying with me ever since I was young. They've never served for anyone aside from me, and there hasn't been anyone who can slap them. They can't, and they don't dare to."

Wang LingJiao, "Madam Yu, what are you talking about? In a prominent sect, there has to be a clear distinction between the superior and the inferior for it to be not in chaos. Servants should be what servants ought to be."

Madam Yu, however, seemed to deeply understand the phrase

„servants should be what servants ought to be". Glancing at Wei

WuXian, she happened to concur, responding loftily, "That's right."

Immediately after, she questioned, "Just why did you take the disciple from my YunmengJiang Sect?"

Wang LingJiao, "Madam Yu, it's best if you draw a clear line between yourself and that brat. He has hidden intentions, but he's already been caught red-handed by me and transferred to wherever he'll be taken care of."

Madam Yu raised a brow, "Hidden intentions?"

Jiang Cheng blurted, "What hidden intentions could our youngest shidi have?"

Wang LingJiao, "I have proof. Bring me it!"

One of the Wen Sect's disciples handed over a kite. Wang LingJiao shook the kite, "This is the proof."

Wei WuXian laughed, "The kite is just the everyday one-eyed monster. What proof could this be?"

Wang LingJiao sneered, "Do you think I'm blind? Look carefully."

The nail of her index finger, painted red with the mace of nutmeg, pointed here and there on the kite, analyzing presumptuously, "What color is this kite? Golden. What shape is the one-eyed monster? Round."

Madam Yu, "And so?"

Wang LingJiao, "So? Madam Yu, haven't you realized yet? Golden and round—what does it look like? ... A sun!"

Under everyone's gaping mouths, she continued triumphantly, "Out of so many designs, why did he make it a one-eyed monster? Why did he paint it golden? Couldn't he have made it any other shape? Why isn't it any other color? Are you going to say that this is a coincidence? Of course, it isn't. He must've done it on purpose. Shooting down such a kite is actually implying

„shooting down the sun"! He wants to shoot down the sun! This is great disrespect towards the Wen Sect. Isn't this a hidden intent?"

Watching how she performed such a far-stretched theory, so full of herself, Jiang Cheng finally couldn't take it any longer, "Even though the kite is golden and round, it's as different from a sun as it can be. Just how are they similar? They aren't similar at all!"

Wei WuXian, "Then, according to you, you can't eat tangerines either. Aren't tangerines also golden and round? But I've seen you eat them many times before, haven't I?"

Wang LingJiao glared at him. Madam Yu spoke coldly, "So, such a kite is what you came here for today?"

Wang LingJiao, "Of course not. Today, I'm representing the Wen Sect and Young Master Wen, here to punish someone."

Wei WuXian felt his heart skip a beat.

As he had thought, the next moment, Wang LingJiao pointed at him, "On Dusk-Creek Mountain, this brat made rude remarks when Young Master Wen was fighting with the Xuanwu of Slaughter, causing many disturbances. He made Young Master Wen tired, almost losing to the beast—he even lost his sword!"

Hearing how she talked black into white and made-up stories, Jiang Cheng was so furious that he laughed. Wei WuXian remembered Jiang FengMian, who went out earlier, and thought, they purposely chose to come at such a time. Or, rather, they purposely led Uncle Jiang out of here!

Wang LingJiao, "How lucky! The Heavens blessed Young Master Wen. Even though he lost his sword, he was able to safely take down the Xuanwu of Slaughter. But this brat, we really can't tolerate him any longer! Today, I'm here under the orders of Young Master Wen. Madam Yu, please punish him harshly and make him an example to the rest of the YunmengJiang Sect!"

Jiang Cheng, "Mom..."

Madam Yu, "Shut your mouth!"

Watching Madam Yu's reaction, Wang LingJiao was quite pleased, "Wei Ying, if I remember correctly, is a servant of the YunmengJiang Sect, isn't he? At the moment, without the presence of Sect Leader Jiang, I'm sure that, Madam Yu, you know what'd be the best to do. Or else, if the YunmengJiangSect insists on defending him, it'd really make people suspect... if certain rumors... are really true... Hee hee."

Sitting at the frontmost seat where Jiang FengMian had always sat, she giggled, covering her mouth. Madam Yu moved her gaze over, face dark. Jiang Cheng heard that her words hinted at something. He fumed, "What rumors?!"

Wang LingJiao continued to giggle, "You ask, what rumors? It has to be those old romantic ties of Sect Leader Jiang..."

Seeing that such a woman dared to make up stories of Jiang FengMian right in front of them, flames bursted from within Wei WuXian, "You..."

However, pain suddenly shot out from his back. His knees couldn't help but buckle. Madam Yu had suddenly stricken him with her whip.

Jiang Cheng broke out, "Mom!"

Madam Yu had already stood up. Zidian had turned into its whip form, sizzling between her hands of cold jade. She shouted, "Jiang Cheng, move out of the way, or you'll be kneeling too!"

Wei WuXian tried to get up, pushing against the ground, "Jiang Cheng, move over! Don't worry about me!"

Madam Yu lashed out her whip again, forcing him back onto the ground. She ground her teeth together, "... I've said long ago, that you... you unruly thing! Would bring trouble to the Jiang Sect, sooner or later!"

Wei WuXian pushed Jiang Cheng away. He clenched his teeth as he suffered, unspeaking and unmoving. In the past, although Madam Yu had always come at him with harsh words, she had never truly been cruel to him. The most that he'd been through were two or three strikes and being grounded. He'd also be let out by Jiang FengMian soon later. This time, however, he endured dozens of heavy strikes. His back burned and his entire body was numb with pain. He couldn't bear it, but he had to bear it. Today, if the punishment didn't satisfy Wang LingJiao, the matter at hand would never end!

Wang LingJiao watched with a smile on her face. After Madam Yu had finished, she retracted

Zidian at once. Kneeling on the ground, Wei WuXian's body swung forward, as though he was about to collapse. Jiang Cheng wanted to help him, but Madam Yu ordered, "Stand back. Don't help him!"

Jiang Cheng was held firmly back by JinZhu and YinZhu. Wei WuXian had managed for a while before falling to the ground, motionless.

Wang LingJiao was surprised, "It's over?" Madam Yu snorted, "What did you think?" Wang LingJiao, "That was it?"

Madam Yu raised her brows, "What do you mean, „that was it"? Which level of spiritual weaponry do you think Zidian is at?"

Having had the beating, he won't heal even after next month. It'd be enough for him to savor!"

Wang LingJiao, "But there'd come a time when he ishealed, wouldn't there?"

Jiang Cheng raged, "What else do you want?!"

Wang LingJiao complained, "Madam Yu, since it's a punishment, you must make him remember it for the rest of his life, regret it for the rest of his life, dare not to make the same mistake again. If all that he got was a few whips, he'd be jumping around againafter a while of rest. Then what sort of punishment would that be? Boys his age are the easiest to forget pain after the wounds have healed. There'd be no use at all."

Madam Yu, "What do you think, then? Chop off both of his legs so that he can't jump around again?"

Wang LingJiao, "Young Master Wen is kind. He wouldn't do something as cruel as chop off both of his legs. If only his right hand is chopped off, then he wouldn't ever care about thisagain."

This woman was doing nothing more than flaunting her connections. With the support of Wen Chao, she wanted revenge for the strike that Wei WuXian had given her in the cave at Dusk-Creek Mountain!

Madam Yu glanced at Wei WuXian through the corner of her eye, "Cut off his right hand?"

Wang LingJiao, "That's right."

Yu ZiYuan stood up. Circling Wei WuXian, she began to walk, as though she was considering such an idea. Wei WuXian was in so much pain that he couldn't even raise his head. Jiang Cheng fought out of the arms of JinZhu and YinZhu. He crashed to his knees, hovering over Wei WuXian, "Mom, Mom, please don't... The things aren't how she said it to be at all..."

Wang LingJiao raised her voice, "Young Master Jiang, are you saying that I'm fabricating?"

On the ground, Wei WuXian couldn't even flip himself around, Fabricating? What's fabricating? And he suddenly

realized, It's fabricating! The woman used to be a maid of Wen Chao's wife. She hasn't been educated and doesn't know many words, but she purposely wanted to pretend like she has a vocabulary. She used an unfamiliar word, pretending that she knew it, and said the wrong thing! The situation at hand was clearly more urgent than ever, but the more urgent the situation was, the more people were likely to have disordered heads, unable to focus on tasks at hand with too many erratic thoughts. Having thought of this, Wei WuXian found it worth a laugh.

Wang LingJiao didn't know that she had made a fool of herself at all, "Madam Yu, think this through. The matter at hand, the Wen Sect will definitely get to the bottom of it. With his hand chopped off for me to bring back, it'd be good enough an explanation, and the YunmengJiang Sect would be fine. Or else, the next time when Young Master Wen asks, things wouldn't be so simple anymore!"

A cold light flashed through Madam Yu's eyes. Her voice was eerie, "JinZhu, YinZhu, quick, go close the doors. Don't letthe others see the blood."

As long as they were Madam Yu's orders, JinZhu andYinZhu followed all of them. Both kneeled on the ground, answering, "Yes!" They shut the doors to the main hall tight.

As Wei WuXian heard the sound of the doors closing, the light on the ground disappeared as well. Wei WuXian felt fear arise, don't tell me that she really is gonna chop off one my hands?

Jiang Cheng was scared to death. He hugged his mother's leg, "Mom? Mom! What are you

doing? Please don't cut off his hand!"

After the fear had passed, Wei WuXian clenched his teeth, his heart set, ... Let it be, then! If it's in exchange for the peace of the sect... a hand is just a hand. Fuck, if worst comes to worst, I'll just practice the left-handed sword from now on!!!

Wang LingJiao clapped her hands together, "Madam Yu, I knew that you must be the most obedient subordinate of the QishanWen Sect! Somebody, hold this brat down!"

Madam Yu, "There is no need."

JinZhu and YinZhu walked over. Wang LingJiao, "Oh, so you're having your maids hold him down? That'd work too."

Jiang Cheng, "Mom! Mom listen to me! I beg you! Don't cut off his hand! If Father knew..."

It was all fine until he had mentioned Jiang FengMian. The second he mentioned him, Madam Yu's expression changed at once, shouting, "Don't talk to me about your father! What could happen if he knows? Could he kill me?!"

Wang LingJiao beamed, "Madam Yu, I just admire you so much! It looks like that from now on, in the supervision office, we'll get along well as well!"

Madam Yu pulled back her leg and her violet dress hem, which Jiang Cheng had been clutching. She turned around, brows raised, "Supervision office?"

Wang LingJiao smiled, "That's right, supervision office. This is the second matter that I came to the YunmengJiang Sect for. The new supervision orders that came from our QishanWen Sect, calling for supervision offices to be built at every city. From now on, I declare that Lotus Pier is the supervision office of the Wen Sect at Yunmeng."

So that was why she kept on going about Lotus Pier, as though treating it as her own residence. So, she really did already take Lotus Pier as her office at Yunmeng!

Jiang Cheng's eyes were red, "What supervision office?! This is my sect!!!"

Wang LingJiao scrunched her brows, "Madam Yu, you must discipline your son properly. Since hundreds of years ago, all of

the sects have been under the Wen Sect. In front of the Wen Sect's envoy, how could he say things like your sect and my sect? I had originally been hesitating. Lotus Pier is so old and it had brought out quite a few dissidents, so could it really take on the heavy responsibility of being a supervision office? But seeing how obediently you followed my orders and how your personality suits my taste, I've still decided to give this great honor to..."

Before she could finish, Madam Yu gave her an echoing slap.

The slap was shocking both in sound and in force. Wang LingJiao was slapped with such force that she spun around a few times before finally falling to the ground. Blood gushing out of her nose, she widened her eyes.

The few of the Wen Sect's disciples within the main hall were alarmed at once. All of them unsheathed their swords. With a wave of Madam Yu's hand, a brilliant ring of purple light shot out of Zidian. A large portion of the disciples collapsed immediately.

With all her elegance, Madam Yu walked toward Wang LingJiao and looked down on her. Suddenly, she bent down and grabbed Wang LingJiao's hair. Pulling her up, she gave her another slap of wrath, "How dare you?!"

She had been enduring this for too long. Right now, her face was twisted as she advanced toward Wang LingJiao. Face swollen; Wang LingJiao began to scream. Without holding back at all, Madam Yu gave her another slap, cutting off her ear-piercing scream. She shouted, "You look at its owner before you hit a dog! You barged into my sect, and you want to punish my person in front of my face? What a thing you are, how dare you be so undisciplined?!"

As she finished, she threw Wang LingJiao's head to the side. Like she considered it dirty, she took out her handkerchief and wiped at her hands. JinZhu and YinZhu stood behind her, faces bearing the same smile of disdain as she bore. Wang LingJiao covered her face with shaking hands, cheeks stained with tears, "How... How dare you do something like this... Neither the QishanWen Sect nor the YingchuanWang Sect will let you go!"

Madam Yu tossed her handkerchief on the ground before kicking her over, cursing, “Shut up! Such a scum of a maid—my MeishanYu Sect has roamed the cultivation world for hundreds of years, and I’ve never heard of some YingchuanWang Sect! Of which gutter did this menial sect crawl out?! Is it full of things like you? You mentioned the superior and the inferior before me? Then let me teach you what superiority and inferiority means! I am the superior, you are the inferior!”

On the side, Jiang Cheng was already in the middle of helping Wei WuXian up. Watching the scene unfold, both of them were shocked speechless.

## Chapter 58: Poisons—Part Three

Madam Yu looked behind her. JinZhu and YinZhu understood. Both unsheathed a long sword and circled the hall. With fast, merciless moves, they had killed all of the Wen Sect's disciples within seconds. Wang LingJiao saw that it'd soon be her turn. She threatened with the last of her strength, "You... You think that you can silence me? You think Young Master Wen doesn't know that I'm here today? You think that he'll let you go, after he knows about this?!"

YinZhu sneered, "You sound as if he has let us go already."

Wang LingJiao, "I'm close to Young Master Wen, I'm the closest one! If you dare do anything to me, he'll..."

Madam Yu gave her another slap. She mocked, "He'll do what? Cut our hands or our legs off? Or burn down our residence? Or lead thousands of people to raze Lotus Pier to the ground? Build a supervision office?"

JinZhu approached, sword in hand. Wang LingJiao's eyes were filled with fear. Kicking her legs, she shrunk back as she shrieked, "Somebody! Help! Wen ZhuLiu! Help me!"

Madam Yu's expression hardened. With one foot on Wang LingJiao's wrist, she unsheathed her sword. Just as the blade was about to fall, it suddenly bounced away.

Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng turned to look. The doors to the hall had already been blown apart, and a man of a tall physique barged inside. He wore black clothes and had on him a grave expression. It was Wen Chao's personal guard, a cultivator of very high level, Wen ZhuLiu.

Her sword having fallen, Madam Yu held Zidian across her cheek, "Core-Melting Hand?"

Wen ZhuLiu's voice was cold, "Violet Spider?"

One of Wang LingJiao's hands was still under her foot. She felt so much pain that her features looked twisted, tears smeared all over, "Wen ZhuLiu! Wen ZhuLiu! Help me, help me now!"

Madam Yu snorted, "Wen ZhuLiu? Core-Melting Hand, isn't your original name Zhao ZhuLiu? Your surname clearly wasn't Wen, but you wanted to change your surname no matter what.

Everyone's rushing like ducklings. Is the surname of those Wen- dogs really that precious? Turning back on your ancestors—how laughable!"

Wen ZhuLiu remained unswayed, seemingly indifferent, "Each serves their own master."

The two of them had just exchanged a few words, yet Wang LingJiao began to scream again, unable to bear it, "Wen ZhuLiu! Don't you see what I look like?! Why are you chit-chatting instead of killing her right now?! Is this how Young Master Wen told you to protect me?! Watch out or else I'll denounce you!"

Madam Yu ground her foot into her arm. Wang LingJiao broke into a wail. Wen ZhuLiu, on the other hand, knit his brows. He was protecting Wen Chao under Wen RuoHan's orders. He'd never liked Wen Chao's character to begin with. Yet, there were no worst circumstances, but only worse circumstances. Wen Chao ordered him to come protect Wang LingJiao. The woman was not only shallow and conceited but also cruel at heart, gaining much dislike from him. However, no matter how much he didn't like her, he couldn't go against Wen RuoHan and Wen Chao's orders and kill her. The good thing was that Wang LingJiao loathed him as well. She ordered that he could only follow from a distance, prohibited from appearing in her sight unless she told him to, so that she wouldn't be as annoyed. Yet, in such a situation, the woman was on the verge of losing her life. If he did nothing, Wen Chao would definitely fly into a rage and refuse to let him go. And if he refused to let him go, then Wen RuoHan wouldn't leave the matter at that either.

Wen ZhuLiu, "Excuse me."

Zidian flew out. Madam Yu shouted, "How pretentious!"

Wen ZhuLiu's large hand waved. He grabbed Zidian without any concern!

When Zidian was in its whip form, it was covered in the flow of spiritual energy. The energy's power could be either strong or weak, fatal or insignificant, dependent on the control of its

master. Madam Yu had been holding an intent of killing since long ago, not only wanting to destroy all of the Wen-dogs but also in caution of Wen ZhuLiu. Thus, the energy flow was at more than maximum power when Wen ZhuLiu grabbed it without any difficulty!

Within the years of it being in use, Zidian had never met such an opponent. After it had been grabbed, Madam Yu paused for the

lightest moment. Wang LingJiao used the chance to scramble out. She took out a cylinder of fire-light from her lapels and shook it a few times. A light shot out of the cylinder. Along with a sharp whistle, it rushed out of the wooden window and exploded in the sky outside. Then, she fumbled out a second one, a third one.

Hair tangled, she mumbled, "Come... Come... Come here... Everyone, come here!"

Through the pain, Wei WuXian pushed Jiang Cheng, "Stop her from sending any more signals!"

Jiang Cheng let go of Wei WuXian and lunged in the direction of Wang LingJiao. Yet, at the same time, Wen ZhuLiu was closing in on Madam Yu. He looked as if he was about to knock her down.

Jiang Cheng hurried, "Mom!"

He immediately gave up on Wang LingJiao and threw himself over. Wen ZhuLiu didn't even turn his head as he struck, "Not even close!"

Jiang Cheng's shoulder suffered the attack. Blood immediately burst from his mouth. Wang LingJiao had already let out all of the signal fire-lights. Sharp whistles and bright sparks filled the entire grey-blue sky.

Seeing that Jing Cheng was injured, Madam Yu roared. The light over Zidian grew in intensity, becoming almost white in color!

Wen ZhuLiu was blasted into the wall by Zidian's sudden eruption. JinZhu and YinZhu pulled out two long, sizzling whips from their waists as well, and began to fight Wen ZhuLiu. The two maids had been close to Madam Yu ever since she was young.

All of them were taught by the same person. Their combined attacks were by no means to be reckoned with. With the opportunity, Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian, both still unable to move, were picked up by Madam Yu with each hand as she rushed out of the hall. Many disciples still surrounded the training field. Madam Yu commanded, "Get dressed and armed, now!"

With the two in her hands, she rushed onto the pier. The pier of Lotus Pier always had a few small boats docked in it, to be used by the Jiang Sect's disciples for roaming within the water. Madam Yu tossed them onto the boat. She jumped into it herself as well. Holding Jiang Cheng's hand, she helped him regain himself.

Jiang Cheng had only coughed up a mouthful of blood. His injuries weren't too severe. He asked, "Mom, what do we do?"

Madam Yu, "What do you mean what do we do?! Can't you see yet? They came here prepared. Today's fight couldn't have been avoided. Soon afterwards there'll be herds of those Wen-dogs arriving. Leave first!"

Wei WuXian, "Then what about Shijie? Shijie went to Meishan the day before yesterday. If she comes back..."

Madam Yu glowered, "Shut your mouth! It's all because of you little...!"

Wei WuXian could only stay quiet. Madam Yu took off the Zidian ring that she wore on her right hand and put it onto Jiang Cheng's right index finger. Jiang Cheng was shocked, "... Mom, why are you giving me Zidian?"

Madam Yu, "I've given it to you, so it'll be yours from now on! Zidian has already recognized you as its master."

Jiang Cheng was confused, "Mom, won't you be leaving with us?"

Madam Yu stared at his face. Suddenly, she embraced him and kissed his hair a few times. With him in her arms, she murmured, "Good boy."

She hugged him so tight that it seemed as if she wanted to turn Jiang Cheng into a baby and stuff him back into her stomach, so that nobody could hurt him, nobody could tear them apart. Jiang

Cheng had never been hugged by his mother like this, much less kissed. His head was buried in her chest but his eyes were wide open, not knowing what to do.

One hand holding him, Madam Yu grabbed Wei WuXian's lapels with her other hand as though to strangle him to death. She spoke through clenched teeth, "... You damn little brat! I hate you! I hate you more than anything else! Look at what our sect has gone through for your sake!"

WeiWuXian's chest heaved up and down. He said nothing. This time, it wasn't that he held back his words or that he had unspoken comments, but that he really couldn't say anything.

Jiang Cheng hurried to ask, "Mom, won't you be leaving with us???"

Madam Yu let go at once. She pushed him onto Wei WuXian.

She leaped onto the dock. The boat rocked side to side amid the water of the river. Jiang Cheng finally understood. JinZhu, YinZhu, all of the disciples, and all of the treasure that YunmengJiang Sect had passed down from one generation to the next were still inside Lotus Pier, unable to be evacuated within a short period of time. After this, a grim battle would have to happen. As the mistress, Madam Yu couldn't flee, yet she worried about her child. Perhaps selfish, she could only let these two escapes first.

Knowing that there'd be immense danger after they parted, Jiang Cheng was more than scared. He stood up and tried to leave the boat as well, but currents suddenly shot out of Zidian. A rope of lighting tied the two tightly to the boat. They couldn't move at all. Jiang Cheng shouted, "Mom, what are you doing?!"

Madam Yu, "Don't make such a fuss. It'll loosen up when you're somewhere safe. If anyone attacks you on the journey, it'll protect you as well. Don't come back. Go to Meishan straight away and find your sister!"

After she finished, she turned to Wei WuXian and pointed at him, "Wei Ying! Listen to me! Protect Jiang Cheng, protect him even if you die, do you understand?!"

Wei WuXian, "Madam Yu!"

Madam Yu raged, "Did you hear me?! Don't talk nonsense to me, I'm only asking you—did you hear me?!"

Wei WuXian couldn't struggle out of Zidian. He could only nod his head. Jiang Cheng shouted, "Mom, Father isn't back yet. If anything happens can't we manage through it together first?!"

Hearing him mention Jiang FengMian, for a split second, Madam Yu's eyes seemed to turn red. Immediately, she cursed with a loud voice, "So what if he's not coming back? Can't I do anything without him?!"

After this, she cut off the rope that leashed the boat with her sword and kicked the side of the boat hard. The water was fast and the wind was heavy. Along with the kick, the boat drifted yards away at once. With a few spins, it sailed quickly yet steadily toward the center of the river. Jiang Cheng wailed, "Mom!"

He shouted for dozens of times. However, Madam Yu and Lotus Pier were farther and farther, smaller and smaller. After the boat was far into the distance, sword in hand, Madam Yu went back within the gates of Lotus Pier with a flash of her purple robes.

The two struggled as hard as they could. Zidian had almost sunk into their flesh, yet it still remained.

A mad roar rang from Jiang Cheng's throat as he continued to struggle, "Why won't it break?! Why won't it break?! Break!

Break!"

Wei WuXian had just been whipped over ten times by Zidian. His body was still hurting. He knew that they wouldn't be able to struggle out of this and that all of their effort would go to waste.

Remembering that Jiang Cheng was still injured, he spoke through the pain, "Jiang Cheng, calm down first. Facing the Core- Melting Hand, it's not for sure that she'd lose. Back then, didn't she hold Wen ZhuLiu back?"

Jiang Cheng roared, "How do you want me to calm down?! How could I calm down?! Even if Wen ZhuLiu is killed, that despicable woman has already sent out the signals. What if the Wen-dogs saw them and are leading people to lay siege on our sect?!"

Wei WuXian knew as well that there was no way for them to calm down. But, between the two, one of them had to have a clear head. Just as he was about to continue, his eyes suddenly lit up. He shouted, "Uncle Jiang! It's Uncle Jiang coming back!"

As he had said, a larger boat sailed toward them over the river.

Jiang FengMian was standing at the head of the boat. Around a dozen disciples was also standing on the boat. He was staring in

the direction of Lotus Pier, robes flapping in the wind. Jiang Cheng shouted, "Father! Father!"

Jiang FengMian saw them as well. He looked somewhat surprised. One of the disciples rowed the oar, and the boat approached. Jiang FengMian still didn't know what had happened as he mused, "A-Cheng? A-Ying? What happened to you two?"

The boys at Lotus Pier often played strange games. Even lying in the water with faces covered in blood pretending to be floating corpses wasn't out of the norm. Thus, Jiang FengMian couldn't immediately decide if they were playing some new game or not.

He didn't pick up on the severity of the circumstances. Jiang Cheng, however, was so happy that he almost cried. He hurried to explain, "Father, Father let us go!"

Jiang FengMian, "This is your mom's Zidian. Zidian knows its masters. I don't think it'd let me..."

As he spoke, he touched Zidian with his hand. However, just as he came into contact with it, Zidian retracted obediently. It immediately turned into a ring and wrapped itself around one of his fingers.

Jiang FengMian froze at once.

Zidian was Yu ZiYuan's best weapon. Yu ZiYuan's intention was its most important command. Zidian could recognize multiple masters, but there was an order. Madam Yu was undoubtedly the primary master of Zidian. Her command was to tie Jiang Cheng up until he was safe, which was why even though Jiang Cheng was also its master, he couldn't struggle out of its constraint. Nobody knew when, but Jiang FengMian had been recognized as the secondary master of Zidian. In front of him, Zidian determined them to be safe, and thus it loosened.

But Madam Yu had never said that she let Zidian recognize Jiang FengMian as its master as well. Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian had finally broken apart. They collapsed to each side. Jiang FengMian asked, "What is going on? Why would you two be tied onto a boat by Zidian?"

As though he saw something that could save them, Jiang Cheng clutched him, "Today the Wen Sect's people were at oursect.

Mom had an argument with them and started fighting with the Core-Melting Hand! Mom might be at a disadvantage. Later, there might be even more enemies. Father, let's go back and help her! Let's go!"

Hearing this, all of the disciples looked shocked. Jiang FengMian asked, "The Core-Melting Hand?!"

Jiang Cheng, "Yes, Father! We..."

Before he could finish, a purple light flashed, and Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian were tied up again. In the position that they had been, the two collapsed onto the smaller boat. Jiang Cheng's face was blank, "... Father?!"

Jiang FengMian, "I'll go back. You two leave. Don't turn in any way. Don't return to Lotus Pier. After you reach the shore, try to go to Meishan as soon as possible to find your sister and your grandmother."

Wei WuXian, "Uncle Jiang!!!"

As the shock passed, Jiang Cheng kicked the side of the boat furiously. The boat kept on shaking. "Father let me go! Let me go!"

Jiang FengMian, "I will go back to find Third Lady."

Jiang Cheng glowered at him, "We can go back and find her together, can't we?!"

Jiang FengMian stared into his eyes. Suddenly, he reached out. Only after pausing in the air did he finally touch Jiang Cheng's head, slowly, "A-Cheng, be well."

WeiWuXian, "Uncle Jiang, if anything happens to you, he won't be well."

Jiang FengMian turned his eyes to him, "A-Ying, A-Cheng... you must look after him."

He returned to the larger boat. The two boats brushed against each other before parting and drifting farther and farther away. Jiang Cheng shouted in despair, "Dad!!!"

The boat drifted down the current.

They didn't know how long had passed before Zidian loosened. It became a silver ring around Jiang Cheng's finger.

The two had been shouting for the whole ride. Their throats were already hoarse. After they had been unbound, they didn't say anything and began to sail back. They didn't have oars, so they paddled with their hands, against the flow of the river.

Madam Yu said that the lashes he had received wouldn't heal in less than a month. However, right now, Wei WuXian felt that

although where he had been whipped still burned and tingled, it didn't affect his ability to move too much. With the determination of somebody on the verge of death, the two of them paddled as though their lives depended on it. Two hours later, using nothing but their hands, they finally returned to Lotus Pier.

It was already late into the night.

The gates of Lotus Pier were tightly shut. Outside, lights glowed brightly. Fragments of moonlight flowed along the crystalline water. Dozens of large lanterns in the shape of nine-petaled lotuses floated by the dock in silence.

Everything was the same as before. Yet, it was because of how everything was the same as before that it tormented the heart.

The two stopped when they arrived at the middle of the lake. Poised in the water, they felt their hearts thump loudly. Neither dared approach the dock and rush up shore to see what exactly was going on inside.

Tears swirled within Jiang Cheng's eyes. Both his arms and his legs were shivering. A while later, Wei WuXian spoke, "... Let's not enter from the gates right now."

Jiang Cheng somehow managed to nod. Without making a noise, the two paddled the boat onto the other side of the lake. An old willow tree grew there. Its roots were buried inside the dirt of the shore, but its broad trunk grew sideways along the surface of the lake. Its branches dipped into the water. In the past, the boys of Lotus Pier often walked down the trunk of the willow tree all the way until its tip to sit there and fish.

After the two docked the boat behind the boughs of the willow, they went ashore under the cover of the branches and the

darkness of the sky. Wei WuXian had always been used to flipping over walls. He tugged at Jiang Cheng and whispered, "This way."

Jiang Cheng was both shocked and scared. He had almost no sense of direction as he walked against the wall behind Wei WuXian. After they had moved for a while, hiding themselves, they stealthily climbed up one of the walls. A row of beast heads lined the top of the wall, making it rather easy to peek inside.

Back then, it was always the people outside who peeked at them. Now, they were the ones peeking inside.

Wei WuXian raised his head and looked within. His heart sank at once.

On the training field of Lotus Pier, rows and rows of people were standing.

All of them wore robes of the blazing sun. The flame patterns on their collars, lapels, and sleeves were in such a crimson shade that it hurt the eye more than blood did.

Aside from those who stood, there were also those who lay. All of the people collapsed on the ground had been moved to the northwest corner of the field, piled together without any order.

One person stood with their back to the two of them. Head lowered, he seemed to be examining the people of the Jiang Sect. They didn't know whether they were alive or dead.

With much fervor, Jiang Cheng was still searching with his eyes for the figures of Yu ZiYuan and Jiang FengMian. Wei WuXian, however, felt his eyes tear up at once.

Among the people, he saw many familiar silhouettes.

His throat was both dry and in pain. His temples felt as if they had been stricken by iron hammers, while his entire body was cold.

He didn't dare think about Jiang FengMian and Yu ZiYuan any longer. Just as he was about to take a closer look at whether or not the thin boy lying on top was his youngest shidi or not, the person standing at the northwestern corner with his back to them seemed to have picked up on something and turned around.

Wei WuXian immediately lowered his head along with Jiang Cheng's.

Although he ducked in time, he still saw what the person looked like.

It was a boy about the same age as them. He had a slender physique and delicate features, though his pale complexion contrasted against his deep-black eyes. Although he was wearing the sun-and-flames robes, he didn't have that imposing of a demeanor. He seemed a bit too gentle. Looking at in which rank his sun patterns placed him, he was probably a young master of the Wen Sect.

## Chapter 59: Poisons—Part Four

Wei WuXian felt his heart skip a beat; did he see us? Do we run right now? Or did he not see us? Suddenly, a thin crying voice came from over the wall. Among the sound of footsteps, a man spoke in a gentle voice, "Don't cry.

Your face is all smeared."

This voice was familiar to both Jiang Cheng and Wei WuXian—it was Wen Chao!

Soon after, Wang LingJiao sniffed, "Is it that you won't like me anymore if my face is all smeared?"

Wen Chao, "How could that be? No matter what JiaoJiao looks like, I will like her."

Wang LingJiao spoke emotionally, "I'm really so, so scared... Today I really... I was so close to really believing that I'd be killed by that bitch and won't ever get to see you again... YoungMaster Wen... I..."

Wen Chao seemed to have embraced her, comforting, "Stop talking, JiaoJiao. It's alright now. What a good thing that Wen ZhuLiu protected you."

Wang LingJiao complained, "You're still mentioning him?! Wen ZhuLiu, I hate him. If it weren't for him arriving so late today, I wouldn't have suffered so much at all. Even now my face still hurts so, so much..."

She clearly was the one who had ordered Wen ZhuLiu not to flash before her sight and caused herself to get beaten up. Now, though, she was turning the matter upside down again. Wen Chao loved listening to her complain in such a pitiful way, "Itwon't hurt. Here, let me touch it... You don't like how slow he was, but you mustn't challenge his limit. His level of cultivation is really high. My father has said many times that he's a rare talent. I'm still hoping that I can use him for another few years."

Wang LingJiao wasn't convinced, "So what... So, what if he's a talent? There are so many renowned cultivators, so many talents under Sect Leader Wen, at least thousands. What could happen if he's gone?"

He was hinting at Wen Chao to punish Wen ZhuLiu for her to feel better. Wen Chao chuckled. Despite how much he cherished Wang LingJiao, it wasn't to the point that he'd punish his personal guard for the sake of a woman. After all, Wen ZhuLiu had stopped many attempts at assassination for him. He didn't speak too much either. With such tight lips, he definitely wouldn't betray his father, which meant that he definitely wouldn't betray him. A strong yet loyal guard like this was truly rare.

Seeing that he didn't seem too concerned, Wang LingJiao added, "Look at him. He's clearly only a mere subordinate under your command, yet he's so arrogant. Back then, I wanted to slap that Yu bitch on the face, and he didn't even let me. She's dead already—it's only a corpse! He's looking down on me, so it means that he's also looking down on you, doesn't it?"

Jiang Cheng couldn't properly cling on to the wall, and so he slid down. Wei WuXian quickly grabbed the back of his lapels.

Both of them had tear-filled eyes. The tears rolled down along their cheeks, splashing onto the back of their hands and eventually the ground.

Wei WuXian remembered that this morning, when Jiang FengMian left, he had an argument with Madam Yu. The last words that passed between them weren't anything nice or gentle. He wondered if they could look at each other one last time, if Jiang FengMian had the chance to tell Madam Yu one more sentence.

Wen Chao didn't care for the matter, "That's just how his personality is, quite odd. It was something along the lines of

"death over humiliation". He was the one who killed her, so what was the point of talking about such things?"

Wang LingJiao agreed, "That's right. What hypocrisy!"

Wen Chao loved to hear her agree with him. He laughed. Wang LingJiao gloated, "That bitch Yu, she had it coming. Back then, she forced the man to marry her with the power of her sect. And in the end? What's the use of their marriage? He still doesn't like her. She'd been an abandoned wife for over ten years with everyone laughing at her behind her back. Even then she didn't know to restrain herself and kept on being so arrogant. How it turned out in the end was karma indeed."

Wen Chao, "Really? Her looks aren't too bad. Why didn't Jiang FengMian like her?"

In his knowledge, as long as a woman looked fair, there wasn't any reason for a man not to like her. Those who should be cast aside were either women who looked average or women who didn't let him sleep with. Wang LingJiao answered, "It's really quite obvious if you think about it. Bitchy Yu is so aggressive.

She's clearly a woman yet she brandishes her whip and slaps others all the time. She has no manners at all. Jiang FengMian has been burdened so much even after he married her. He's the unluckiest man ever."

Wen Chao, "That's right! Women, they should all be like my JiaoJiao, obedient and gentle, caring for nobody but me."

Wang LingJiao giggled. Hearing such unbearably vulgar words, Wei WuXian felt both desolate and enraged, his entire body shivering. He feared that Jiang Cheng would burst out, but perhaps due to the extreme grief, he was so motionless that he seemed to have passed out. Wang LingJiao spoke quietly, "Of course I care for nobody but you... Who else could I care for?" Suddenly, another voice barged in, "Young Master Wen! All of the houses have been searched already. Over two thousand four hundred treasures have been counted. They're being categorized at the moment."

Those belonged to Lotus Pier, those belonged to the Jiang Sect!

Wen Chao laughed, "Well done, well done! At such a time, we should have a grand celebration. Tonight, why don't we set up a banquet here? Make the best use of everything!"

Wang LingJiao spoke in a tender voice, "Young Master Wen, congratulations for moving into Lotus Pier."

Wen Chao, "What Lotus Pier? Change the name. Bring down any door carved with the nine-petaled lotus crest and replace them with those with the QishanWen Sect's sun crest! JiaoJiao, come dance for me your best song!"

Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng couldn't listen to this any longer. They flipped back down the wall. Stumbling, they staggered out of Lotus Pier. Even after they had run for a long while, the laughter of the crowd at the training field still couldn't be wiped away. The coquettish voice of a woman sang happily above Lotus Pier. Like a blade doused in poison, it cut into their ears and their hearts again and again and again.

They had been running for over a mile before Jiang Cheng abruptly stopped.

Wei WuXian stopped as well. As Jiang Cheng turned around, Wei WuXian grabbed him, "Jiang Cheng, what are you doing?! Don't go back there!"

Jiang Cheng shook his hand away, "Don't go back there?! Are you serious? You're telling me not to go back there? My parents' bodies are still in Lotus Pier—could I leave just like this? Where could I go if I don't go back?!"

Wei WuXian's grip tightened, "What could you do if you go back now? They've killed even Uncle Jiang and Madam Yu. All that's waiting for you is death!"

Jiang Cheng shouted, "Death it is, then! If you're scared of death then get lost—don't block my path!"

Wei WuXian lunged for him, "Revenge is never too late. We must bring back the bodies but not now!"

Jiang Cheng dodged to the side before attacking, "When does not now mean? I've had enough of you—get lost right now!"

Wei WuXian shouted, "Uncle Jiang and Madam Yu said for me to look after you, for you to be

well!"

"Shut up!" Jiang Cheng shoved him hard, roaring, "Why?!"

Wei WuXian was pushed into the bushes. Jiang Cheng threw himself over. He grabbed Wei WuXian's collar and shook, "Why?! Why?! Just why?! Are you happy?! Are you satisfied?!"

He clenched Wei WuXian's neck, eyes bloodshot, "Why did you save Lan WangJi?!"

Under the grief and the fury, Jiang Cheng had lost his mind. He couldn't control the strength that he used at all. Wei WuXian pulled at his wrist, "Jiang Cheng..."

Holding him on the ground, Jiang Cheng continued to roar, "Why did you save Lan WangJi?!" Why did you have to speak up?! How many times have I told you not to stir up trouble! Not to strike! Do you really want to play the hero so much?! Have you seen what happened when you played the hero?! Huh?! Are you happy now?!"

"Lan WangJi and Jin ZiXuan and those people can just die! Just let them die! What's their deaths got to do with us?! To do with our sect?! Why did this have to happen?! Why?!"

"Go die, go die, go die! Everyone!!!"

Wei WuXian's face had turned red. He shouted, "Jiang Cheng!!!" The hand around his neck suddenly loosened.

Jiang Cheng glowered at him. Tears rolled down his cheeks. The depths of his throat let out a cry of dying man, a painful sob.

He spoke through tears, "... I want my parents, my parents..."

He was asking Wei WuXian for his father and his mother. Yet, no matter whom he asked, he wouldn't be able to have them back again.

Wei WuXian was crying as well. The two of them sat collapsed amid the bushes of grass, watching each other bawl.

In his heart, Jiang Cheng knew clearly that back in the cave of the Xuanwu of Slaughter at Dusk-Creek Mountain, even if Wei

WuXian hadn't saved Lan WangJi, the Wen Sect would have found some reason to come over sooner or later. But he had always felt that, if the whole thing with Wei WuXian didn't happen, maybe it wouldn't have been so soon, maybe there would've been some way to turn things around.

It was this torturing thought that filled his heart with hatred and wrath. Unable to be let out, they cut up his innards.

When the day began to light up, Jiang Cheng had almost numbed.

Throughout the night, he had somehow managed to sleep a couple of times. The first reason was that, having been too tired from crying himself weak, he couldn't help from passing out. The second reason was that he still had the hope that this might be a nightmare. He couldn't wait to wake up after some rest and open his eyes to find himself lying inside of his room back in Lotus Pier. His father would be wiping his sword in the main hall. His mother would be angry again and complaining, scolding Wei WuXian who winked in a funny way. His sister would be in the kitchen, thinking as hard as she could about what to make today. His shidi would be refusing to do their morning lessons properly and jumping around.

Not to wake up in a bush of weeds with his head almost bursting apart, having been through an entire night of cold wind, and discovering that he was still curled up behind a barren little hill.

The first to move was Wei WuXian.

Hands on his legs, he managed to bring himself up. He spoke with a hoarse voice, "Let's go."

Jiang Cheng didn't move at all. Wei WuXian pulled at him and repeated, "Let's go."

Jiang Cheng, "... Go where?"

His throat was dry as well. Wei WuXian replied, "To the MeishanYu Sect. To find shijie."

Jiang Cheng waved his outstretched hand away. A few moments later, he finally sat up on his own and slowly got up.

The two set off in the direction of Meishan. They went by foot.

Along the way, both of them summoned whatever energy they had left. Their footsteps were

heavy, as though they carried with them thousands of pounds.

Jiang Cheng's head had always been lowered. Hugging his right hand, he pressed Zidian onto his chest where his heart was, feeling over and over again the only remnant of his family that was left. He'd also often looked back toward where Lotus Pier was, staring at what used to be his home and had now become a den of demons. Again, and again, it was as though he'd never get enough of it, as though he'd never lose that last spark of hope.

However, the tears within his eyes could never be contained either.

They had fled on a hurry, without taking with them any food. From the day before to today, they had spent quite a lot of strength as well. After they had walked for half a day, both of them began to feel dizzy. They left the desolated fields into a small city. Wei WuXian looked at Jiang Cheng. Seeing how tired, unwilling to move that he looked, he spoke, "You can sit. I'll go find something to eat."

Jiang Cheng neither answered him nor nodded. Along the way here, he had only said a few words to Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian told him multiple times not to move before finally walking away. He had often tucked spare money into corners of his clothes, and now it became of use—at least he had money to buy things. Walking around, he bought a bunch of food, especially dried ones to eat on the way. In less than thirty minutes, he quickly returned to where they parted.

However, Jiang Cheng was gone.

Holding steamed buns, flatbreads, and fruits in his hands, Wei WuXian felt his heart skip a beat. He forced himself to calm down. Even after he searched through the neighboring streets, he still didn't see Jiang Cheng. He finally began to panic. Grabbing a cobbler on the side, he asked, "Mister, there was a young master about the same age as me sitting here. Did you see where he went?"

The cobbler licked the thick end of a thread, "The one that was with you?"

Wei WuXian, "Yeah!"

The cobbler, "I was in the middle of doing something so I didn't really see. But he kept on spacing out, staring at the people on the street. And then when I looked up at where he was again, he suddenly disappeared. Maybe he left."

Wei WuXian murmured, "... He left... He left..." He probably left for Lotus Pier to steal the bodies!

As though he had gone mad, Wei WuXian sprinted immediately toward the direction that they had come from.

He held in his hands the food that he had just bought, their weight slowing him down. A while later, he left them behind him. After he had run for some distance, however, he began to feel faint and weak, on top of how much he was panicking. As his legs gave out, he collapsed onto the ground.

As he collapsed, his face plummeted into the dirt. He could taste soil within his mouth.

An overwhelming mixture of hatred and helplessness rose from Wei WuXian's chest. He slammed his fist hard onto the ground and shouted before he finally crawled up. He turned around and ran the other way. After he picked up one of the steamed buns that he had dropped, he wiped it on his clothes before he swallowed it in just a few bites. He chewed as if he was tearing flesh with his teeth. As he gulped, he felt a lump at his throat, creating a dull pain. He picked up a few more and stuffed them inside his lapel. Holding one in his hand, he ate as he ran, hoping that he'd stop Jiang Cheng midway.

However, even until he arrived at Lotus Pier, when the moon and the stars shone in the night sky, he still hadn't caught sight of Jiang Cheng along his journey.

Wei WuXian stared at the brightly-lit Lotus Pier from afar. Hands on his knees, he panted unstoppably. The taste of blood climbed up his chest and his throat, the kind that occurred after an extended period of running. Mouth full of the rusty taste, he felt his sight flash black.

He thought to himself, why hadn't I caught up to Jiang Cheng? Even after I ate food this was the

fastest, I could run. He was more tired than me and he's going through something worse. How could he have run faster than me? Did he really come back to Lotus Pier? But if he didn't come back here, where would he go? Go to Meishan alone without me?

After a while of rest, he still decided to go to Lotus Pier to confirm first. Walking along the series of walls, a voice sounded within Wei WuXian's heart, praying with what was close to despair, this time, please don't let there be anyone talking about Jiang Cheng's corpse on the training field. Or else, or else I'll...

Or else?

Or else what could he do?

He could do nothing. He was powerless. Lotus Pier had been destroyed, both Jiang FengMian and Madam Yu were gone, and Jiang Cheng had disappeared as well. He was the only one left, alone, with not even a sword in his hands. He didn't know anything; he couldn't do anything!

For the first time, he discovered how little his power was. In front of something as large as the QishanWen Sect, it was the same as a mantis trying to stop a chariot.

Wei WuXian's eyes felt so warm that he was about to tear up again. He turned around the corner when, suddenly, a shadow dressed in the sun-and-flame robes walked toward him.

With the speed of lighting, Wei WuXian had held the person down.

His left hand locked both of the person's hands while his right closed around their neck. Lowering his voice, he threatened with

the most ruthless tone that he could conjure, "Don't make any noise! Or else I can break your neck at once!"

Held down firmly by him, the person hurried, "Y-Young Master Wei, it's m-me!"

It was the voice of a boy. Hearing this, Wei WuXian's first reaction was, maybe it's one of the people I know, wearing the Wen Sect's robes to spy amongst them?

But the voice was completely unfamiliar. He rejected the thought at once and his grip tightened, "Don't play any tricks!"

The boy, "I... I don't play any tricks. Young Master Wei, y-youcan look at my face."

Wei WuXian, Look at his face? Maybe he's hidden something inside his mouth and he's prepared to spit it out?

Keeping his guard up, he turned the person's face around. The boy's features were delicate. A youthful handsomeness surrounded him. This was the young master of the QishanWen Sect whom they had seen when peeking yesterday.

Wei WuXian was indifferent, I don't know him.

He turned the boy's face back around and continued to hold his neck, ordering in a low voice, "Who are you?!"

The boy seemed a bit disappointed, "I... I'm Wen Ning." Wei WuXian frowned, "Who is Wen Ning?"

In silence, though, he thought, who cares who he is? No matter what, he's someone with a rank. With him in my hands, maybe I could do an exchange!

Wen Ning spoke slowly, "I... A few years ago, during the Discussion Conference at Qishan, I... I... was shooting arrows..."

Hearing how slow he was, impatience rushed up Wei WuXian. He fumed, "You what?! Are you a stutterer?!"

Wen Ning was so scared that flinched within Wei WuXian's grip, as if wanting to roll into a ball with his hands around his head. He whispered, "Yes... Yeah."

Wei WuXian, "..."

Seeing how timid, pitiful, yet stammering he was, Wei WuXian seemed as though he had finally remembered something, The Discussion Conference at Qishan two years ago... The Discussion Conference... Shooting arrows... Ah, there really was someone like him!

Wei WuXian sounded him out, "You're that... Wen... Wen something, the one who's quite good

at archery?"

Wen Ning nodded quickly, beaming, "T-that's me! Yesterday... I saw you, Young Master Wei, along with Young Master Jiang, so I thought that you might be back again..."

Wei WuXian, "You saw me yesterday?" Wen Ning, "I-I did."

Wei WuXian, "You saw me but you didn't tell anyone?"

Wen Ning, "I won't! I won't tell anyone!"

This was the rare sentence where he didn't stammer. On top of that, his tone was so determined that it seemed like he was taking an oath. Wei WuXian was between shock and doubt. Wen Ning added, "Young Master Wei, you're here to find Young Master Jiang, aren't you?"

Wei WuXian, "Is Jiang Cheng inside?!" Wen Ning answered obediently, "He is..."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian's mind spun quickly, Since Jiang Cheng is inside, it seems I'll have to go into Lotus Pier. How?

Take Wen Ning hostage? That wouldn't work. It's likely that Wen Chao doesn't like Wen Ning. What if it's no use with him hostage?! And is he actually lying or not? Isn't he someone from the Wen Sect? But yesterday he really did see us and didn't tell on us. If I let him go, would he betray me as soon as he could?

How could there be someone so nice amongst the Wen-dogs??? To ensure that I'm on the safe side, I could only...

Killing intent flashed before Wei WuXian.

He had never been someone with bloodlust. But after his sect had been destroyed, wrath and hatred had pooled within him in the past few days. The extremity of the situation didn't allow him to take any kindness along with him. If his right hand clenched up, he could snap Wen Ning's neck in half at once!

As he was thinking, Wen Ning spoke, "Young Master Wei, are you here to save Young Master Jiang?"

Wei WuXian's fingers curled slightly. He spoke in a coldvoice, "What do you think?"

For some reason, Wen Ning smiled nervously, "I knew it. I... I can help you get him out of there."

For a split second, Wei WuXian thought that he had heard wrong. He was shocked, "... You? You'll help me get him out?!"

Wen Ning, "Yeah. R-right now, I can take him out really quickly. Wen Chao and the others happened to have gone out!"

Wei WuXian clenched him tightly, "You really can?!"

Wen Ning, "I can! I-I'm also a clan disciple of the Wen Sect. There's also a group of disciples who follow my orders."

Wei WuXian's voice was harsh, "Follow your orders? Followyour orders and kill people?"

Wen Ning hurried, "N-N-No! My disciples never kill people at random. The Jiang Sect's people, I haven't killed any either. I only hurried here after I heard that something happened to Lotus Pier. It's true!"

Wei WuXian stared at him, just what does he want? Is he lying? Is he being insincere? But this lie really is too ridiculous! Does he think that I'm an idiot?!

The scary thing was that a desperate ecstasy really did sprout from somewhere in the bottom of his heart.

He gave himself a harsh scolding in silence—he was stupid, useless, ridiculous, it was bizarre, unimaginable. Yet, he was alone, without a sword or any tools, and on the other side of the wall there were thousands of Wen Sect's cultivators, perhaps Wen ZhuLie as well.

He wasn't scared of death. He was only scared that after he died, he wouldn't be able to save Jiang Cheng and betray the trust that Jiang FengMian and Madam Yu left him. In such circumstances, the only one he could place his hope on was a person of the Wen Sect whom he had met only three times in total!

Wei WuXian licked his chapped lips, speaking in a dry voice, "... Then... could you... could you

help me... take the bodies of Sect Leader Jiang and Madam Yu..."

Without him noticing, he had begun to stammer as well. Before he finished, he remembered that he was still seizing Wen Ning in a threatening posture. He quickly let him go, but he still left himself a way out. If Wen Ning began to run or shout as soon as he let him go, he'd split open Wen Ning's skull at once. However, Wen Ning only turned around, his voice serious, "I... I'll try my best."

Wei WuXian waited; a bit muddleheaded. He walked around at the same spot as he thought, What's wrong with me? Am I crazy? Why would Wen Ning help me? Why would I trust him? What if he's lying to me and Jiang Cheng isn't inside at all? No, what a relief it'd be if Jiang Cheng isn't inside!

Before half an hour had passed, with someone on his back, Wen Ning really did silently walk outside.

The person was covered in blood. His face was ashen and his eyes were shut, motionless on Wen Ning's back. It was Jiang Cheng indeed.

Wei WuXian whispered, "Jiang Cheng?! Jiang Cheng?!"

He reached out. Jiang Cheng was still breathing. Wen Ning held out his hand toward Wei WuXian and put something in his palm, "Y-Young Master Jiang's Zidian. I brought it."

Wei WuXian didn't know what else he could say. Remembering that the intent of killing Wen Ning had just crossed his mind, he spoke with hesitation, "... Thank you."

Wen Ning, "You're welcome... Mr. Jiang and Madam Jiang's bodies, I've already told people to move them. I'll pass them to you afterwards. T-This isn't a good place to stay. First..."

Without needing him to say anything else, Wei WuXian took Jiang Cheng over, wanting to carry him on his own back. Yet, only one glance and he saw the bloody whip wound across Jiang Cheng's chest.

Wei WuXian, "The discipline whip?!"

Wen Ning, "Mhm. Wen Chao, he got hold of the discipline whip of the Jiang Sect... There should be other injuries on Young Master Jiang as well."

Wei WuXian only felt around for a couple of times. At least three of Jiang Cheng's ribs were broken. He didn't know how many injuries there were that he couldn't see. Wen Ning continued, "After Wen Chao returns and discovers this, he'll definitely start

searching for you along the Yunmeng area... Young Master Wen, if you believe me, I can first take you to a safe place to hide."

Right now, Jiang Cheng was heavily injured. He needed medicine and rest urgently, so they definitely couldn't run around like they had done, not knowing when their next meal would be. The situation that they were in was almost impossibly hopeless. They couldn't go anywhere. Aside from relying on Wen Ning for support, somehow, Wei WuXian couldn't think of a single other solution!

The day before, he definitely wouldn't have expected that he and Jiang Cheng would require the help of a Wen Sect's disciple to escape, possibly even dying out of the unwillingness to surrender. As of the moment, however, Wei WuXian could only say, "Thanks!"

Wei Ning waved his hands, "There's... There's no need. Young Master Wei, walk this way. I-I have a ship..."

Carrying in Jiang Cheng, Wei WuXian found the ship that Wen Ning had hidden beforehand and placed Jiang Cheng within the cabin. Wen Ning first cleaned Jiang Cheng's wounds and simply applied bandages over some ointment. Watching his familiar movements, Wei WuXian couldn't help but recall how he was back during the Discussion Conference at Qishan.

The Discussion Conference was the year when Lan WangJi, Lan XiChen, Jin ZiXuan, and he ranked top four in archery.

On that day, before the archery competition began, he was strolling around the Nightless City alone. As he strolled, he passed through a small garden and suddenly heard the sound of a bowstring vibrating from in front of him. Wei WuXian brushed through the leaves and branches.

He saw a boy stand there, dressed in white, soft fabric. He drew a bow in the direction of a target before him and let go. The side of the boy's face seemed to be quite handsome. His drawing posture was both standard and beautiful. On the target, feathered arrows had already thickly dotted the red center. This arrow had hit the center as well. None had been off the center. Wei WuXian exclaimed, "Bravo!" After the boy shot the arrow, he took out a new arrow from the quiver behind him. Head lowered; he was about to set it onto his bow as he suddenly heard an unfamiliar voice from toward the side. Surprised, his hands quivered and his arrow fell to the ground. Wei WuXian walked out from behind the garden, grinning, "Which of Wen Sect's young masters are you? Well, well, beautiful, your shots are amazing. I haven't seen anyone from your sect with such good..."

Before he could finish, the boy had already disappeared, leaving behind him his bow and arrows. Wei WuXian was speechless. He felt his chin, Am I really so charming? So charming that I scared him away?

He didn't take the matter seriously either. He just thought that he saw something cool as he returned to the square. The

competition was almost starting. Over on the Wen Sect's side, there was much clamor. Wei WuXian asked Jiang Cheng, "How could they make such a fuss over their Discussion Conference? They have something going on every single day. What's happening today?"

Jiang Cheng, "What do you think? The spots are limited. They're fighting over the people to let into the arena." After a pause, he continued with disdain, "These Wen Sect's... archery skills are the same level of bad. Wouldn't it be the same no matter who goes? What difference would be fighting over it make?"

Wen Chao shouted from the side, "Another one! Another one, we're still short one! The last one!"

Amid the crowd beside him, the white-clothed boy was also there. Looking left and right, he finally raised his hand. But his hand wasn't raised tall enough. He didn't dare shout his name like the

others did either. After a while of pushing around, somebody finally noticed him, musing, "QiongLin? You want to participate as well?"

The boy called „QiongLin" nodded his head. Somebody else laughed, "I haven't even seen you pick up a bow. Why do you want to participate?! Don't waste the spot."

Wen QiongLin seemed as if he wanted to protest for himself. The person said, "Alright, alright. Don't be so curious. The rank is recorded. If you go up there and lose your own face it wouldn't be my problem."

Wei WuXian, Lose face? If anyone in the Qishan Wen Sect could find some face for you all, he'd be the one.

The scorn in the person's voice was too as a matter of course.

Wei WuXian wasn't too pleased. He raised his voice, "Who said that he's never picked up a bow? He has, and his archery is quite good!"

Everyone looked at him, somewhat surprised. They then turned to look at the boy. Wen QiongLin's face was rather pale to begin with. Because of how everyone's eyes centered on him, it immediately became bright red. Those pitch-black eyes stared at Wei WuXian. Wei WuXian walked over, hands behind his back, "Back then, weren't you doing quite well in the garden?"

Wen Chao turned around as well, doubting, "Really? You? Good at archery? Why haven't I ever heard of this?"

Wen QiongLin's voice was low, "... I... I only started practicing recently..."

His voice was not only low but also staggering. It sounded as if it could be stopped at any moment, and it was indeed often stopped. Wen Chao interrupted impatiently, "Alright, there's a target over there. Quickly shoot an arrow for us to see. If it's good then go, if it's not good then don't."

The area around Wen QiongLin was immediately emptied. The hand that he clutched the arrow with tightened as he looked around, seemingly looking for help. Watching how unconfident he looked, Wei WuXian patted his shoulder, "Relax. Just do as you did before."

Wen QiongLin looked at him gratefully. With a deep breath, he drew his bow.

Unfortunately, with the draw of the bow, Wei WuXian shook his head secretly, Uh-oh.

It was likely that Wen QiongLin had never shot an arrow in front of other people. He was shaking all the way from his arm to his fingertips. The arrow flew out. It didn't even land on the target.

The Wen Sect's people that watched from aside all laughed mockingly, "How is this good?!"

"I can shoot better than this with my eyes closed."

"Okay, okay, stop wasting time. Let's quickly pick somebody to enter the arena!"

Red seeped through Wen QiongLin's face to even the bottom of his ears. There was no need for others to beckon him away; he fled self-consciously. Wei WuXian chased after him, "Hey, don't run! Uh... QiongLin-xiong right? Why are you running?"

Hearing his name called from behind him, Wen QiongLin finally stopped. Head hanging low, he turned around. It seemed as though shame rippled from his head to his toes as he stammered, "... I'm sorry." Wei WuXian mused, "Why are you telling me you're sorry?"

Wen QiongLin replied with guilt, "You... You recommended me... but I made you lose face..."

Wei WuXian, "How did it make me lose face? You haven't really shot in front of other people, have you? You were nervous?" Wen QiongLin nodded. Wei WuXian continued, "Have some confidence. Let me tell you the truth—you shoot better than everyone in your sect. Out of all of the disciples whom I've seen, no more than three people are better in archery than you."

Jiang Cheng walked over, "What are you doing this time? Three of what?"

Wei WuXian pointed at him, "There, this one, for example, he's not as good as you."

Jiang Cheng raged, "Do you want to die?!"

Wei WuXian suffered a strike from him. Face unchanging, he continued, "Really. There isn't anything to be nervous about, to be honest. You'll get used to it after practicing a few more times in front of other people. Next time, you'll definitely impress everyone." Wen QiongLin was probably one of Wen Clan's disciples furthest in bloodline. His status was neither high nor low, yet his personality was timid. He didn't dare do anything and even his speech stuttered. Through much practice, he had finally conjured up the courage to enter the competition, but he blew it because he was too nervous. If he didn't receive the right guidance, perhaps the boy would hide his true self more and more from now on and never dare to perform in front of other people again. Wei WuXian encouraged him a couple of times and touched on a few areas of growth, correcting some minuscule problems that he had when he was shooting in the garden. Wen QiongLin listened so

attentively that he didn't even turn his eyes away, nodding uncontrollably.

Jiang Cheng, "Where did you find so much nonsense? The competition is starting soon. Get into the arena right now!" Wei WuXian spoke to Wen QiongLin in a serious tone, "I'll be off to the competition now. Later, you can see how I shoot when I'm in the arena..."

Jiang Cheng dragged him away, short of patience. He spat as he dragged, "See how you shoot? Do you think that you're a model or something?!"

Wei WuXian thought for a moment before replying, "Yeah. Am I not?"

"Wei WuXian! I haven't seen anyone as shameless as you!"

...

As he recalled this, Wei WuXian's gaze turned from Wen Ning toward Jiang Cheng, whose body was covered in blood and eyes were tightly shut. His fingers couldn't help but clenched into fists. They first went through the water path and down the river. When they arrived ashore, they travelled in the carriage that Wen Ning had prepared. The second day, they had arrived in Yiling.

## Chapter 60: Poisons—Part Five

Wen Ning called over a few dozens of disciples and protected them in person until they arrived at a large, beautiful residence. He snuck inside from the back door and led Wei WuXian to a smaller building.

However, just after Wen Ning turned around and closed the door, before he could even stop and take a break, Wei WuXian grabbed his neck again and questioned in a hushed voice, "Where is this place?!"

Even though he had been saved by Wen Ning, he couldn't let down all of the guard he held against the Wen Sect's people just like that. He had always been alert. Back then, following Wen Ning through the large residence, they had passed by many rooms.

Most of the people inside spoke with Qishan accents. He caught all of the fragments of conversations that had passed through the window slits and heard the words „supervision office"!

Wen Ning quickly waved his hands, "No... I..."

Wei WuXian, "What do you mean no? This isn't the supervision office set in Yiling? Which unfortunate sect's region did you take this time? Just what do you want to do by bringing us here?"

Wen Ning tried hard to protest, "Young Master Wei, I-listen to me. This is a supervision office. But... But I really don't have any intention of harming you. If I wanted to, last night after I entered Lotus Pier, I could've gone back on my word right away. I-I wouldn't have had to lead you here."

Wei WuXian had always been maintaining high alert. He hadn't relaxed at all and was ready to explode any moment. His head was dizzy. Hearing this, he still didn't believe him fully. Wen Ning continued, "This really is a supervision office. If there's anywhere that the Wen Sect's people won't search, it'd be here. You two can stay here. But you mustn't let anyone find you..."

After a pause, Wei WuXian finally forced himself to let go. In a low voice, he said to him „thank you" and „sorry" before laying Jiang Cheng's body flat onto the wooden bed inside the room.

However, suddenly, the doors of the house suddenly opened. The voice of a woman called, "I was just searching for you! Explain to me properly..."

Just as he said not to let anyone find them, they were discovered at once!

Wei WuXian immediately broke into a cold sweat. He quickly blocked himself in front of the bed. Wen Ning was so scared that he couldn't even say anything.

Frozen, the two stared at the woman standing before the entrance. Or, one could call her a maiden. Her skin was on the dark side. Although her features were sweet, her expression was with utmost arrogance. The sun robe that she wore glowed red, its flames almost dancing around her sleeves and her collar.

The rank was extremely high, the same level as Wen Chao!

The three stood still for a few seconds. A series of hurried footsteps came from outside. Wei WuXian mustered up courage. Just as he was about to attack, the maiden moved before he could and, with a boom, she slammed the door shut.

A voice asked from outside the door, "Office Leader Wen, what's wrong?"

The maiden spoke with indifference, "Nothing's wrong. My brother is back. He's feeling down again. Don't wake him up. Let's go. We can talk on our way."

The people outside answered and followed her away. Wen Ning let out a breath of relief, explaining to Wei WuXian, "My... My elder sister."

Wei WuXian, "Wen Qing is your elder sister?"

Wen Ning nodded, somewhat embarrassed, "My sister. She's really powerful."

She was indeed powerful.

Wen Qing could be considered a famous cultivator of the QishanWen Sect. She wasn't a

daughter of the QishanWen Sect's leader, Wen RuoHan, but instead the daughter of one of Wen RuoHan's cousins. Although they were far cousins, Wen

RuoHan had always had a close relationship to this cousin of his. On top of that, Wen Qing was exceptional in the liberal arts and studied medicine as well. She was a talent, and thus she was rather favored by Wen RuoHan. She often followed Wen RuoHan to the banquets of the QishanWen Sect, which was why Wei WuXian found her face familiar. She was a beauty, after all. He had also heard from somewhere that she had an elder or younger brother. But perhaps because he wasn't as talented as Wen Qing, not many people talked about him.

Wei WuXian exclaimed, "You really are the younger brother of Wen Qing?"

Wen Ning thought that what he was surprised at about was how such an excellent, well-known sister could have such an average brother. He admitted, "Yeah. My sister is really good. I... I'm not."

Wei WuXian, "No, no. You're really good as well. What I find surprising is that your sister is Wen Qing, the Office Leader, and you dared take us..."

Suddenly, Jiang Cheng shifted on the bed. He scrunched his eyebrows lightly. Wei WuXian immediately turned around to check on him, "Jiang Cheng?!"

Wen Ning hurried, "He's awake. He needs medicine. I'll go get some."

After he walked out, he closed the door behind him. Having been passed out for so long, Jiang Cheng finally woke up. Wei WuXian had originally been ecstatic. But, soon afterward, he knew that something was wrong.

Jiang Cheng's expression was rather strange. It was calm, almost too calm.

He stared at the ceiling, as though he wasn't at all interested in the situation that he was in, as though he didn't care about where he was either.

Wei WuXian didn't expect him to react in such a way. Sadness, happiness, anger, shock—he had none of these. His heart skipped a beat, "Jiang Cheng, can you see me? Can you hear me? Do you know who I am?"

Jiang Cheng glanced at him. He didn't say anything. Wei WuXian asked him a few more questions. Arm supporting himself, he finally sat upright. He looked down at the mark of the discipline whip on his chest before laughing bitterly.

If the discipline whip struck, it'd be impossible to wipe away the mark of shame. Wei WuXian comforted him despite this, "Stop looking at it. There has to be a way to get it off."

Jiang Cheng slapped him. His strike was so weak, so powerless that Wei WuXian didn't even flinch, "Hit me. As long as you'll feel better."

Jiang Cheng, "Did you feel it?"

Wei WuXian paused, "What? Feel what?" Jiang Cheng, "Did you feel my spiritual power?"

Wei WuXian, "What spiritual power? You didn't use any spiritual power at all."

Jiang Cheng, "I did."

Wei WuXian, "Just what... are you talking about?"

Jiang Cheng repeated, biting down on each word, "I said, I did. When I hit you, I used all of my spiritual power. I'm asking you. Did you feel it?"

Wei WuXian looked at him. After a while of silence, he spoke, "Hit me once more?"

Jiang Cheng, "There's no need. No matter how many more times I hit you, it'll be the same. Wei WuXian, do you know why the Core-Melting Hand is called the Core-Melting Hand?"

The heart had completely sunk.

Jiang Cheng continued on his own, "Because his pair of hands can melt away the golden core, so that you can't ever form a new core again, your spiritual power will disperse, and you'll become an average person.

"And an average person who descended from a cultivating sect is no different from a good-for-nothing. Your whole life will be spent doing worldly business. You aren't allowed to dream about being at the top ever again.

"Mom and Father had their golden cores melted away by Wen ZhuLiu first and lost the ability to

resist before they were killed by him.”

Wei WuXian’s head was in a complete mess. He didn’t know what to do, murmuring, “... The Core-Melting Hand... The Core-Melting Hand...”

Jiang Cheng laughed, “Wen ZhuLiu, Wen ZhuLiu. I want revenge, I want revenge, but, how could I? I don’t even have my core anymore. I won’t ever be able to form a core again. How can I seek revenge? Hahahahahaha, hahahahahahahahaha...”

Wei WuXian collapsed onto the ground. Watching how crazed Jiang Cheng seemed to be, he couldn’t say anything.

Nobody knew more than him how much of an ambitious person Jiang Cheng was, what high regard he held his cultivation and spiritual power in. But now, with the strike of the Core-Melting Hand, his cultivation, his self-esteem, his hope of revenge had all been smashed to dust! Like a lunatic, Jiang Cheng laughed for a while. He lay down onto the bed again and opened his arms, speaking as though he had given up on everything, “Wei WuXian, why did you save me? What’s the use of saving me? Let me live in this world, watch the Wen-dogs go rampant, see how I can’t do anything?”

At this point in time, Wen Ning entered through the door. On his face was a smile that almost looked fawning. He walked with bowl of medicine in his hand toward the bed. Before he could say anything, those sun robes reflected against Jiang Cheng’s eyes.

His pupils suddenly shrunk.

Jiang Cheng kicked Wen Ning, toppling over the bowl of medicine. The black liquid all spilled onto Wen Ning. Wei WuXian wanted to take the bowl of medicine. He pulled up Wen Ning as well, who had been shocked speechless. Jiang Cheng roared at him, “What’s wrong with you?!” Wen Ning was so scared that he stepped back a couple of times. Jiang Cheng grabbed Wei WuXian by the collar and shouted, “You see a Wen-dog and you don’t kill him?! And you wanted to pull him up? Do you want to die?!”

Although he used as much strength as he could, his arms were still weak. Wei WuXian struggled out of them quickly. Jiang

Cheng finally noticed where he was. He glanced around and asked in alarm, “Where is this?”

Wen Ning answered from far away, “The supervision office at Yiling. But it’s very safe...”

Jiang Cheng spun toward Wei WuXian, “Supervision office?! You walked yourself into their trap?”

Wei WuXian, “No!”

Jiang Cheng spoke in a harsh voice, “No? Then what are you doing in a supervision office? How did you get here? Don’t tell me that you went to the Wen-dogs for help?!”

Wei WuXian grabbed him, “Jiang Cheng, calm down first. It’s very safe here! Wake up. It’s not for certain that the Core-MeltingHand can’t...”

Jiang Cheng couldn’t listen to anyone’s words anymore. He was already half-mad. Hands around Wei WuXian’s neck, he laughed, “Wei WuXian, hahahahahahaha Wei WuXian! You! You...”

Suddenly, a red shadow kicked the door open and darted inside. With a strike of her palm, a silver light flashed by. A needle went into Jiang Cheng’s head, and he lay back down at once. Wen Qing turned around to shut the door before scolding in a low voice, “Wen Ning, how stupid are you? You let him shout and laugh and be so loud?! Do you want him to be discovered?”

As though he saw his savior, he shouted, “Sister!”

Wen Qing, “Calling me your sister now? I haven’t asked you yet. Since when have you been so bold? How dare you hide people! I’ve already snuck a few questions earlier on. So that was why you suddenly wanted to go to Yunmeng! How full of yourself are you? Who gave you so much courage? If Wen Chao knows about this wouldn’t he tear you too apart? If he really is set on killing someone, do you think that I can stop him?”

She spoke quickly and clearly. Her forceful tone allowed for no objections. Wei WuXian couldn’t find anywhere at all to interrupt her. Wen Ning’s face was as pale as snow, “Sister, but Young

Master Wei..."

Wen Qing continued, voice stern, "I won't say anything too much seeing that you did it out of gratitude and that's an understandable reason. However, these two must not stay here for long! You came suddenly and left suddenly, meanwhile Wen Chao lost the two of them. Do you think Wen Chao is that much of an idiot? Their search will reach here sooner or later. This is the supervision office under my command, and this is your house.

What accusation do you think it'll be if they discover that you're hiding them? Think carefully!"

She explained so clearly what was at stake for them, so clearly

that it was as though she pointed at Wei WuXian's nose and told him to get lost quickly and not to stay here and burden them. If Wei WuXian were the one injured or if somebody else had saved them, he'd immediately say farewell and leave at once, full of determination. However, right now, Jiang Cheng was the one who had been injured. Not only was he injured, he had lost his core as well. He wasn't in his right mind. No matter what, Wei WuXian couldn't find any determination. And the Wen Sect was what caused them to be in such a situation to begin with. It was only natural for him to feel unwilling to give up. He could only clench his teeth and stay quiet.

Wen Ning, "B-But the Wen Sect people..."

Wen Qing cut him off, "What the Wen Sect does doesn't represent what we do. We don't need to be responsible for the Wen Sect's wrongdoing. Wei Ying, there's no need to look at me like that. There's a beginning to all debts. I'm the office leader of Yiling, but I was ordered to take the position. I'm a medic, an

apothecary, I've never killed anyone, much less touched the blood of the Jiang Sect."

It was true. Nobody had heard of any lives lost by Wen Qing's hands. There were always many cases that people wanted her to take over. It was because Wen Qing was one of the Wen Sect's people whose way of doing things was actually normal. At times she could even put in a few good words for people in front of Wen RuoHan. Her reputation had always been good.

All were silent within the room.

A few moments later, Wen Qing spoke again, "Don't pull out the needle. The brat would start throwing a fit if he wakes up. His shouting voice could be heard from even outside. Pull it out after his injuries have healed. I really don't want to deal with Wen Chao, especially that woman around him. It disgusts me!"

She went out the door as soon as she finished. Wei WuXian spoke, "She... means that we can't stay for long, but we can still stay for a few days... right?"

Wen Ning nodded, "Thank you, Sister!"

A pack of medicinal herbs was tossed in from outside the door. Wen Qing spoke from afar, "If you really are grateful then put in some effort! What a hell kind of medicine did you just make? Brew it again!"

Although the pack of herbs smacked right onto Wen Ning, he spoke happily, "The medicine that my sister prepared will definitely turn out good. Hundreds of times better than mine. It'll be good for sure."

Wei WuXian finally felt relief, "Thank you."

He understood the fact that one of these siblings deciding to turn a blind eye to them and the other deciding to outright help them meant that they were placing themselves in extreme danger. Just as Wen Qing said, if Wen Chao truly wanted to kill anyone, it was unlikely for Wen Qing to be able to stop him. Perhaps she'd be affected as well. After all, children of others could never compare to children of one's own.

With the needle in Jiang Cheng's head, he slept for three days.

Both his bones and the exterior injuries had healed already. All

that was left and couldn't be healed were the eternal marks from the discipline whip and the golden core that he'd never be able to take back.

Wei WuXian had also been thinking for three days.

Three days later, Wei WuXian said goodbye to Wen Ning. Carrying Jiang Cheng on his back, he walked for a while and borrowed a small house from a forest guard.

He closed the door and pulled out the needle in Jiang Cheng's head. He opened his eyes only after a long time had passed.

He did wake up, but he didn't move at all. He was so uninterested that he didn't even turn around or ask „where is this“. He didn't drink any water; he didn't eat any food. It seemed that all he sought for was death.

Wei WuXian, "Do you really want to die?"

Jiang Cheng, "I can't seek revenge even when I'm alive. Why shouldn't I die? Maybe I'll be able to turn into a ferocious ghost."

Wei WuXian, "You've been undergoing soul-calming ceremonies ever since you were young. You won't be able to turn into a ferocious ghost even after you die."

Jiang Cheng, "If I can't seek revenge no matter if I'm dead or alive, then what's the difference between the two?"

After he said this, he wouldn't speak again no matter what. Wei WuXian sat by the bed. He looked at him for a while.

Slapping his knees, he stood up and began to busy himself.

When evening came, he had finally finished making a meal. He placed everything onto the table, "Get up. It's time for dinner."

Of course, Jiang Cheng ignored him. Wei WuXian sat in front of the table. He picked up his own chopsticks, "If you don't replenish your strength, how can we go take back your golden core?"

Hearing the words „golden core“, Jiang Cheng finally blinked. Wei WuXian continued, "That's right. Don't doubt it. You didn't hear wrong. What I said is to „take back your golden core“."

Jiang Cheng moved his lips. His throat was dry, "... You know how?"

Wei WuXian spoke in a calm voice, "I do."

He turned around, "You've known since a long time ago that my mother, ZangSe SanRen, was a pupil of BaoShan SanRen, haven't you?"

The sentence was only a few words long. However, it immediately lit up the lifeless eyes of Jiang Cheng.

BaoShan SanRen, a legendary celestial who had lived for hundreds of years, a secluded master who was said to be able to revive the dead, give flesh to bones!

His voice trembled, "You mean... You mean..."

Wei WuXian spoke clearly, "I mean that I know in the name

„BaoShan“ which mountain is being embraced. This means that I can take you to BaoShan SanRen."

Jiang Cheng, "... But, but isn't it that you can't remember the things from when you were young?!"

Wei WuXian, "It isn't that I can't remember anything. There are a few fragmented pieces having been repeated many times that I haven't forgotten yet. I've always remembered the voice of a woman repeating something to me, telling me a location and many other things. The voice said that if I find myself in an absolutely desperate situation, I can go up the mountain and ask the immortals on the mountain for help."

Jiang Cheng rolled off the bed.

He threw himself over to the table. Wei WuXian pushed the bowl and the chopsticks in front of him, "Eat."

Clinging onto the table, Jiang Cheng was thrilled, "I..."

Wei WuXian, "Eat. We can talk while eating. Or else I won't say anything."

Jiang Cheng could only bring himself onto the stool. Chopsticks in hand, he swept food into his mouth. He had been feeling utterly hopeless, yet he suddenly found that it could still turn around and the world was beautiful behind him. He was so excited that he felt as though flames

lit up around him. Unsettled, he didn't even know that he held his chopsticks from the wrong end. Seeing that he finally began to eat, however distracted, Wei WuXian continued, "I'll take you there in a few days." Jiang Cheng, "Today!"

Wei WuXian, "What are you scared of? Over a hundred-year-old Immortals, could they disappear in just these few days? It's a few days later because there are many taboos in this. I'll have to tell them about you carefully. Or else, if you do something that's forbidden, it'll be all over if you anger the master. Both of us would be over."

Jiang Cheng stared at him, eyes wide open, hoping that he'd tell him some more. Wei WuXian continued, "When you go up the mountain, you can't open your eyes and look around, you can't remember the scenery on the mountain, you can't see the people there. Remember, no matter what they tell you to do, you have to do it."

Jiang Cheng, "Okay!"

Wei WuXian, "And, here's the most important point. If you're asked who you are, you have to say that you're the son of

ZangSe SanRen. You can't reveal your true identity!" Jiang Cheng, "Okay!"

It was likely that no matter what things Wei WuXian told him to do, Jiang Cheng would say yes with watering eyes. Wei WuXian concluded, "Alright, let's eat. Replenish our strength and boost our energy. I'll have to prepare during the next few days."

Jiang Cheng had finally realized that he held his chopsticks wrong. He turned them over and ate a few more mouthfuls. It was so spicy that his eyes grew red. He still couldn't help but curse, "... Tastes terrible!"

After days of continuously being asked about the details of BaoShan SanRen, Wei WuXian set off with Jiang Cheng. After a long journey, they arrived at the bottom of one of the remote mountains in Yiling.

The mountain was lively with green plants. Its top was surrounded by cloud and mist. There was indeed some sense of heavenliness to it. Yet, it was still somewhat far away from the celestial mountain that everyone thought it was. During the past few days, Jiang Cheng had always been suspicious. He sometimes suspected that Wei WuXian was lying to him, and at other times suspected that Wei WuXian had heard wrong or remembered wrong from when he was young, he was constantly worrying

whether or not they'd be able to find it. When he saw the mountain, he began to suspect again, "Is this really where BaoShan SanRen lives?"

Wei WuXian sounded certain, "It's definitely here. Is there any use of me lying to you? So that you can be happy for a few days and then receive an even bigger disappointment?"

Similar conversations had already happened countless times between the two. Wei WuXian walked up half of the mountain with him, "Alright. Now, I won't be able to go any further up with you."

He took out a piece of cloth and covered Jiang Cheng's eyes with it. He told him over and over again, "You must never, never open your eyes. There aren't any beasts on the mountain. I'd rather you walk slower. Even if you fall, you can't pull the cloth away. You must not be curious. Remember, just say that you're Wei WuXian. You know how to answer the questions?"

The matter was crucial as to whether or not he could form a core again and seek revenge. Of course, Jiang Cheng didn't dare be careless. He nodded nervously.

He turned around and slowly began to walk up the mountain. Wei WuXian, "I'll be waiting for you in the town back there!"

After he watched Jiang Cheng's slowly moving silhouette for a while, he turned around as well and walked onto another of the mountain paths.

Jiang Cheng had been in the mountain for seven days.

The town that they had agreed to meet in was built amid the mountains. It was rather remote.

There weren't many people inside. The roads were both thin and bumpy. There weren't even any street vendors on the side.

Wei WuXian was squatting on the side of the road. He glanced at the direction of the mountain. There was still no sight of Jiang Cheng. Hands on his knees, he stood up before feeling his head spin. Wobbling for a few moments, he walked toward the only teahouse in the town.

The teahouse was likely the only building in the town that wasn't crude. Just as he entered, a waiter went up to him with a smile, "What would you like?"

Wei WuXian was immediately alarmed.

Within the past few days, he'd been on the run and never had the time to clean himself up. He could almost be described as grimy.

When most teahouse waiters saw such a look, he'd be lucky if they didn't kick him out right away. Coming over with such enthusiasm seemed a bit too fake.

He quickly scanned around the shop. The accountant stood behind the counter, appearing as though he wanted to bury his face into the account booklet. Around half a dozen people sat scattered around ten tables. Many of them were wearing capes, drinking tea with their heads low as if they were hiding something.

Immediately, Wei WuXian spun around to leave. However, just one step outside of the teahouse, a tall, dark shadow had hovered over him and struck him hard in the chest.

Wei WuXian smashed into two tables. The waiter and the accountant ran outside, panicking. All of the people inside took off their capes, revealing the sun robes that they wore inside. Wen ZhuLiu stepped over the threshold and stood in front of Wei WuXian. Looking at how he struggled to get up and then at his palm, he seemed to be thinking. Somebody kicked at the bent of Wei WuXian's knees, forcing him to hit the ground.

Wen Chao's face appeared in his sight, full of cruel excitement, "You're down already?! You brat, didn't you jump around quite a bit back in the cave of the Xuanwu of Slaughter? You're finished with just a strike? Hahahaha, keep on jumping, look at how arrogant you were!"

Wang LingJiao's impatient voice appeared as well, "Quick! Young Master Wen, chop off his hand! He still owes us an arm!"

Wen Chao, "No, no, no, let's not hurry. We've finally found the brat. Chopping off his hand causes too much bleeding. If he dies soon afterwards then it wouldn't be fun anymore. First melt his core. I want to hear him scream like how that little bastard Jiang Cheng did!"

Wang LingJiao, "Then melt his core first, then chop off his hand!"

As they were discussing on the side, Wei WuXian spat out some blood, "Sure! Whatever torture techniques you've got, bring them out!"

Wang LingJiao grinned, "Mark your words."

Wen Chao scorned, "You're so close to your death and you're still playing the hero!"

Wei WuXian laughed coldly, "It's precisely because I'm close to my death that I'm so happy! What I'm scared of is that I won't die. If you have the guts then torture me! The more cruel the better.

After I die, I'll definitely become a ferocious ghost and haunt the Qishan Wen Sect day and night, cursing all of you!"

Hearing this, Wen Chao actually hesitated. After all, disciples of famous clans, like Jiang FengMian and Yu ZiYuan, had been affected by their clan and their clan's treasures since they were young. When they grew up, they'd receive countless soul-calming ceremonies so that there was only a minuscule chance of them becoming ferocious ghosts. But Wei WuXian was different. He was the son of a servant. He didn't grow up in the Jiang Sect since birth, either. He didn't have the chance to go through so many ceremonies. If after he really died with too much resentful energy and became a ferocious ghost to haunt them, it'd be quite a pain. And, of the torture that he had received when he was alive, the greater in number, the more scattered, the more cruel

they were, the fiercer, the more difficult that the ghost he formed after he had died would be.

Seeing this, Wang LingJiao hurried, “Young Master Wen, don’t listen to his nonsense. Not everyone can become ferocious ghosts after they die. Time, place, situation—all of these need to be just right. Besides, even if he really did become one, couldn’t the QishanWen Sect handle this single ghost? We’ve been trying to catch him for so long. Wasn’t it all to punish him? Don’t tell me that just because of him boasting for a while that you’ll let him go?”

Wen Chao, “Of course not!”

Knowing that he’d definitely die, Wei WuXian somehow grew calmer. The bone-deep hatred within him settled into iron-cold determination. Looking at his expression, although Wen Chao was annoyed, he somehow felt fear. He kicked his stomach, “You’re still putting on the act! Who do you want to scare?! Whose hero are you pretending to be?!”

The group of disciples beat up Wei WuXian with him. After he felt that it was enough, Wen Chao finally ordered, “Enough!”

Wei WuXian spat out another mouthful of blood. His heart was set, it’s time to kill me? It won’t be much different even if I die. It won’t be any worse than living, and there’s a one-in-three chance for me to become a ferocious ghost and seek revenge!

Thinking of this, he felt an unparalleled thrill.

Yet, Wen Chao spoke, “Wei Ying, you’re always thinking that you’re not scared of anything, that you’re brave and you’re mighty, aren’t you?”

Wei WuXian answered in surprise, “Huh, so even Wen-dogs can speak the human tongue?”

Wen Chao slammed his fist down. His smile was hideous, “Just keep on showing off, showing off how good with words you are.

I’d like to see just how much longer you can keep up the hero act for!”

He ordered for his subordinates to hold Wei WuXian down. Wen ZhuLiu walked over and pulled him up from the ground. Wei WuXian managed to raise his head. He looked at the person who killed Jiang FengMian and Madam Yu, and destroyed Jiang Cheng’s golden core. He seared his face and his cold expression into his heart.

Along with him, the Wen Sect’s people flew with their swords. The town and the mountains grew farther and farther away. Wei WuXian thought, even if Jiang Cheng went down, he wouldn’t be able to find me anymore... Why are they taking me so high into the air? Let me fall to my death when they’re high enough?

After a while of flying, a black mountain suddenly broke through the layers of snowy clouds.

The mountain emitted a foreboding air of death. As though it was a large corpse thousands of years old, just looking at it made one’s blood run cold.

Wen Chao stopped over the mountain. He spoke, “Wei Ying, do you know where this is?” He sneered, “This place is called Burial Mound.”

Hearing the name, a burst of cold air climbed up Wei WuXian’s spine and to the back of his head.

Wen Chao continued, “Burial Mound is right in Yiling. You Yunmeng people have probably heard of its name as well. It’s a mountain of corpses, an old battleground. If you find a spot wherever on the mountain and dig your shovel into it, you’ll be able to dig out a corpse. Any nameless corpses would be tossed here as well, wrapped in a mat only.”

The sword array descended slowly, approaching the black peak. Wen Chao, “Look at the dark air. Tsk tsk tsk, the hostile energy is strong, isn’t it? And the resentful energy is thick, isn’t it? Even us at the Wen Sect weren’t able to do anything about it. We could only surround it and prevent people from going in. This is still daytime. At night, really any—thing can be found in there. When a living person goes in here, both the body and the soul, they cannot return, unable to get out for all of eternity.”

He grabbed Wei WuXian’s hair. A grotesque grin on his face, he spoke one word at a time, “And you won’t be able to get out for all of eternity either!”

As he finished, he threw Wei WuXian down. “Ahhhhhhhhh...!”

## Chapter 61: Evil— Part One

“Ahhhhhhh...!!!”

Wang LingJiao sat up from her bed with a scream. Wen Chao, who was reading a letter by the desk, slammed its surface, enraged, “What are you howling at again in the middle of the night?!” Wang LingJiao panted as if she still hadn’t overcome the shock, “I... I dreamed of Wei again, I dreamed of him again!”

Wen Chao, “It’s been three months since I threw him into Burial Mound. Why are you still having dreams of him? Just how many times has it been?!”

Wang LingJiao, “I... I don’t know why either. These days I’ve been dreaming of him a lot.”

Wen Chao had already been annoyed while he was reading the letter. He didn’t have the time to pay attention to her. He didn’t care much for holding her and comforting her like he had used to do either. He spoke impatiently, “Then don’t sleep!”

She got out of bed and threw herself over to Wen Chao’s desk, “Young Master Wen, I... The more I think about it, the more

scared I am. I feel like... back then, did we make a big mistake?

... He was thrown into Burial Mound, but is it possible that he didn’t die? Is it possible that he...?”

The vein by Wen Chao’s temple pulsated, “How could it be possible? Before this, how many cultivators have our sect sent to clean Burial Mound up? Did any one of them come back alive? Now that he’s been thrown inside, his corpse has probably rotted away already.”

Wang LingJiao, “It’s scary even if he’s dead! If he really did what he said and became a ferocious ghost and comes back to haunt us...”

As she spoke, both of them remembered that day, what Wei Ying’s face was like as he fell, what his expression was like. Both of them shivered involuntarily.

Wen Chao immediately refuted her, “It’s impossible even if he’s dead! The people who died in Burial Mound, all of their souls would be shackled there. Don’t scare yourself. Can’t you see that I’m annoyed?!”

He crumpled up the letter in his hand into a ball and tossed it out, his voice filled with hatred, “What Sunshot Campaign? Some Sunshot it is. Want to shoot down the sun? Dream on!”

Wang LingJiao stood up. She carefully poured him a cup of tea. In her heart, she thought over some flatterings words before speaking in a sweet voice, “Young Master Wen, those few sects could only keep on doing what they want for a couple more days. Sect Leader Wen would definitely...”

Wen Chao cursed, “Shut up! What do you know?! Get lost, stop annoying me!”

Wang LingJiao felt wronged, but she felt hatred as well. She put down the teacup. Fixing her hair and her robes, she walked outside with a smile.

Just as she went out the door, the smile on her face faltered. She opened up the paper ball within her hand. Back then, when she exited, she secretly picked up the letter that Wen Chao had tossed away. She wanted to see just what news he had received for him to be so irritated. She couldn’t read too well. After looking at it for a while, she could finally guess what the letter said: the eldest son of Sect Leader Wen, Wen Chao’s elder brother Wen Xu, had been beheaded by one of the dissidents’ leading sect leaders and was displayed at the tip of a sword as a sign of power in front of the battle array!

Wang LingJiao had frozen.

The GusuLan Sect was burnt down, the YunmengJiang Sect was destroyed, and many other sects, whether large or small, were cracked down upon. It wasn’t that there hadn’t been any defiant voices, but that they had always been quickly suppressed by the QishanWen Sect. For this, three months ago, the sects Jin, Nie, Lan, and Jiang formed an alliance and led the revolt. When they emerged under the banner of the „Sunshot Campaign”, nobody took them seriously.

Sect Leader Wen spoke up back then. Among the four sects, the LanlingJin Sect was on the fence—watching how all of the sects were angrily going on some expedition, it wanted to take part as well, but if it suffered more defeats than victories, it'd soon realize that there was no good in it, perhaps even coming back to hug the Wen Sect's leg and worship it once more; the QingheNie Sect's sect leader was so stiff that he'd easily snap in half—soon afterward, no need for others to move and he'd die in his own people's hands sooner or later; the GusuLan Sect had been burnt

into ruins—although Lan XiChen was here to inherit the position of sect leader after he had moved the Library Pavilion, he was only a junior and couldn't do anything much; the most laughable one was the YunmengJiang Sect, the people of which either had been killed or had scattered, leaving only Jiang Cheng, who was younger than even Lan XiChen and was still a child born yesterday, who had nobody in his hands but still dared call himself sect leader, holding up the banner of rebellion as he recruited new disciples.

It could be concluded with two words: unpromising and overconfident!

Everyone who stood on the Wen Sect's side took the Sunshot Campaign as a joke. However, three months later, the

circumstances didn't turn out the way they expected them to at all!

Many places in Hejian and Yunmeng had been taken over, but that wasn't the most important. Today, even Sect Leader Wen's eldest son had been beheaded.

In the hall, Wang LingJiao worried for a while. Uneasy, she returned to her room. Her eyelids kept on twitching. One hand rubbing her eyelids, she pressed her other hand onto her chest, trying to come up with a route of retreat.

She had been following Wen Chao for almost half a year. Half a year was the most time that Wen Chao could spend on a woman, from loving her to becoming tired of her. She had thought that she was different, that she was the one who could stay until the end.

However, Wen Chao's growing irritation during the past few days had told her already. She was no different from the other women.

Biting down on her lip, Wang LingJiao thought for a while. She then squatted down and took out a small chest from beneath her bed.

The chest held all of the valuables and weapons that she had managed to hoard during the half-year of staying by Wen Chao's side. Valuables she could spend, weapons she could protect herself with. Although she didn't want it to, the day had finally come.

She wanted to count how much was in her inventory. She dug out a minuscule key from her belt and muttered as she opened the lock, "What a scum of a man. You greasy thing will die sooner or later. Now that I won't have to serve you anymore, I'm the one who should be happy... Ah!"

She collapsed onto the ground.

Back then, the second that she opened the chest, she saw what was inside.

There was none of her beloved treasures, only a pale-skinned, curled-up child!

Wang LingJiao was so shocked that she screamed. Kicking her legs, she couldn't help from shifting back. She had always kept the chest locked. The only key she wore on her at all times. How could there be a child inside? She didn't even open it up once a month. If a child had been hiding inside, then how could she have not known? How was the child still alive?!

The chest had been kicked over by her. Its mouth was on the ground and its bottom faced here. For a few moments, nothing happened.

Wang LingJiao crawled up from the ground with shivering legs. She wanted to go nearer and take another look at it, but she didn't dare to, thinking to herself, There's a ghost, there's a ghost! Her cultivation was extremely low. She wouldn't be able to deal with it even if there was a ghost. Suddenly, she remembered that this was a supervision office. Talismans were stuck outside of the gates and every house. If there was a ghost, the talismans would certainly be able to protect her. She quickly rushed outside, tore down the talisman outside of her room, and stuck it in front of her chest.

With the talisman on her body, it was as though her mind had been set at ease. She snuck into the room, found a long clothing pole, and flipped the chest over from afar. Inside of it, her treasure rested neatly. There was no child at all.

Wang LingJiao let out a breath of relief. The pole in her hands, she squatted down. Just as she was about to start counting, she suddenly realized that two white lights shone under her bed. It was a pair of eyes.

A white-colored child lay prone under her bed, staring into her eyes.

This was the third time tonight that Wen Chao had heard Wang LingJiao's screams. The fire within him grew stronger as he yelled, "You bitch! You're too neurotic, can't you fucking let me be a little less annoyed?"

If not for how there had always been irritating news coming in these past few days and he didn't have time to find new beauties, afraid that he found dishonest, untrustworthy female assassins from those minor sects but still wanted somebody to warm up his

bed, he would've told the woman to fuck off long ago. Wen Chao shouted, "Somebody! Make her shut up for me!"

Nobody answered. Wen Chao kicked over a stool. He was even more furious, "Where did all of you fuckers go off to?!"

Suddenly, the doors opened. Wen Chao, "I told you to shut the bitch up for me, not to come in..." As he turned around, part of the sentence was stuck in his throat. He saw a woman standing in front of his house.

The woman's features were all distorted, as though they had been smashed and then pieced together again. The two of her eyes were looking in different directions, the left upward and the right downward. Her entire face was hideously twisted.

Wen Chao tried with much effort before he could finally manage to recognize her from her rather revealing robe. This was Wang LingJiao!

Wang LingJiao's throat was gurgling. She walked a few steps toward him and reached out, "... Help... Help... Help me..."

Wen Chao shouted. He unsheathed his new sword and sliced at her, "Go away! Get lost!"

Wang LingJiao's shoulder had been gashed by the sword. Her features were even more twisted as she shrieked, "Ahhhhh... It hurts, ahhh... It hurts, ahhh!!!"

Wen Chao didn't even dare pull his sword away. Grabbing a stool, he hurled it toward her. After it hit her, it broke into pieces. Wang LingJiao staggered before kneeling down and collapsing onto the

ground, as though she was kowtowing someone, mumbling, "... I'm sorry... I'm sorry... Let me go, let me go, let me go..."

As she knocked her head on the ground, blood dripped from her qiqiao. With her blocking the entrance, Wen Chao couldn't leave. He could only open the window, shouting his lungs out, "Wen ZhuLiu! Wen ZhuLiu!!!"

On the ground, Wang LingJiao had already picked up one leg of the stool, frantically stuffing it into her mouth, laughing as she did, "Fine, fine, I'll eat it, I'll eat it! Haha, I'll eat it!"

An entire chunk of the leg had been stuffed down by her!

Wen Chao was almost dead from the shock. Just as he was about to jump out the window and flee, he suddenly realized that in the courtyard, a black silhouette stood amid the pool of moonlight on the ground.

At the same time.

Jiang Cheng was standing before a forest. Noticing that somebody approached, he turned his head slightly. The person was dressed in all white. Wearing a forehead ribbon, its ends swept behind him along with his hair. His face, more handsome than anything, was as fair as jade. Under the moonlight, his entire body seemed to be enveloped in a soft glow.

Jiang Cheng spoke in a cold voice, "Second Young Master Lan."

Lan WangJi's expression was solemn. He nodded, "SectLeader Jiang."

After the two acknowledged each other, they didn't say anything else. Each carrying their cultivators, they flew on their swords in silence.

Two months ago, the Two Jades of Lan cooperated in a surprise attack with Jiang Cheng. They took back the swords that had been gathered from each sect's disciples at Wen Chao's „sector of indoctrination”, bringing them back to their owners. Only then did Sandu and Bichen return to them.

Lan WangJi's light eyes glanced at the other sword at Jiang Cheng's waist. He turned his gaze away.

A few moments later, staring straight in front of him, he asked, "Has Wei Ying still not appeared yet?"

Jiang Cheng looked at him, as if surprised that he had suddenly asked about Wei Ying. He answered, "No."

He looked at Suibian, which hung by his waist, "The people on my side still haven't gotten news of him yet. But when he returns, he'll find me for sure. After he appears, I'll give him his sword."

Soon later, leading a group of cultivators, the two arrived at the supervision office where Wen Chao hid, preparing for a night attack. Before they entered, Lan WangJi's faces stiffened. Jiang Cheng frowned.

Dark and resentful energy was almost spilling out of the place.

However, the talismans on both sides of the doors were still intact. Jiang Cheng signaled for the cultivators that he led to scatter around and hide below the walls. He, on the other hand, swung Sandu. The sword energy attacked and broke open the doors.

Before he went in, Lan WangJi's eyes swept over the talismans beside the doors.

The scene inside of the supervision office was more than horrifying.

Within the courtyard, corpses lay everywhere. Not only there, the bushes, hallways, fences, and even roofs were piled up with corpses.

All of the corpses wore sun robes. They were disciples of the Wen Sect. Using Sandu, Jiang Cheng flipped over one of the corpses and saw lines of blood crisscross over the pale face, "Bleeding from the qiqiao."

Lan WangJi stood on the other side, "This one is not."

Jiang Cheng walked over. He saw that the corpse's eyes had rolled back. Its face had been destroyed. Yellow bile dripped from its mouth. It had been scared to death.

One of the disciples under him reported, "Sec Leader, we've finished inspecting. All of them are dead. And, every corpse died a different way."

Strangled, burnt, drowned, poisoned, frozen, slit at the throat, pierced at the head... After Jiang Cheng finished listening, he spoke in a chilling tone, "Looks like something else has helped us finish tonight's task."

Lan WangJi didn't say anything. He was the first to step into the house.

The doors to Wen Chao's room were wide open. Only one female corpse remained in the room. The corpse wore light clothes. Half

of the leg of a stool had been stuffed down her throat. She had killed herself by forcing herself to swallow the stool leg into her stomach.

Jiang Cheng turned the corpse's twisted face over. After he had scrutinized it for a while, he gave out a cold laugh. Holding the stool leg, he shoved it into her mouth, somehow managing to stuff the half that had been outside into her body as well.

With red eyes, he stood up. Just as he was about to speak, he saw Lan WangJi ponder over something, standing in front of the door. He walked over. Following Lan WangJi's eyes, he saw a yellow, red-painted, talisman stick to the door.

Although the talisman didn't seem any different at first glance, after taking a closer look at it, one would discover a few slight places that caused much discomfort.

Lan WangJi, "Too many."

Jiang Cheng's grew stern, "As expected."

They were able to memorize the technique of drawing this type of residential talismans when they were fifteen or sixteen. However, amid the vermillion scrawl over the talisman, there seemed to be a few extra brushstrokes. These brushstrokes were the ones that entirely changed the pattern of the talisman. Now, looking at it, the talisman stuck to the door seemed to be the face of a person, smiling eerily.

Wen Chao and Wen ZhuLiu's corpses couldn't be found within the supervision office. Speculating that they fled toward the direction of Qishan, Jiang Cheng immediately led the people out of the abandoned supervision office and chased after them on their swords. Lan WangJi, however, returned to Gusu first.

The second day, Lan WangJi had finally caught up to Jiang Cheng. He took out the talisman from last time, "This talisman has been reversed."

Jiang Cheng, "Reversed? What does reverse mean?"

Lan WangJi, "Normal talismans repel evil. This one attracts them."

Jiang Cheng was shocked, "Talismans... could attract evil? I haven't heard of anything like it."

Lan WangJi, "It is indeed unheard of. But, according to the testing, it does prove to have the ability to attract evil."

Jiang Cheng took over the talisman and examined it closely, "Only a few brushstrokes were added, and the entire function of the talisman was reversed? Was this a human deed?"

Lan WangJi, "Four brushstrokes were added. It was drawn using human blood. All of the residential talismans in the supervision office have been altered. The strokes were those of the same person."

Jiang Cheng, "Then who could this person possibly be? Amongst all of the renowned cultivators, I haven't heard of any who can do such a thing."

Immediately after, he continued, "But no matter who they are, it's fine as long as their objective is the same as ours—to kill all of the Wen-dogs!"

The two went up North according to the information. Everywhere they went, they heard talk of strange corpses appearing there. All of the corpses were cultivators of the Wen Sect, dressed in sun robes. All of them were high in both rank and cultivation. In spite of so, all of them died in gruesome yet diverse ways, and all of them had been left in the public where many could see.

Jiang Cheng, "Do you think that these people were killed by that person as well?"

Lan WangJi, "The dark energy is quite heavy. They should have been done by the same person."

Jiang Cheng snorted, "Dark? In this world, could there be anything darker than the Wen-dogs?!"

The had been chasing until late into the fourth night. The two had finally caught sight of Wen ZhuLiu in the courier station of a remote mountainous city.

The courier station was two stories tall. A stable was right next to the building. When Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng arrived, they happened to see a tall shadow rush inside and lock the doors behind him. Afraid of Wen ZhuLiu's „Core-Melting Hand" technique, the two decided not to alert the enemy and flipped onto the roof instead of entering through the door. Jiang Cheng forced back the towering hatred within him. Clenching his teeth, he stared without a blink down through a slit between the roof tiles.

Wen ZhuLiu seemed to have been travelling. In his arms was another figure. As though dragging his legs, he walked to the second floor and placed the person beside the table. He then ran to all of the windows and closed the curtains so that not even a breeze could pass through. He finally returned to the table and lit up the oil lamp.

The faint light illuminated his face. It was still pale, still cold, but two dense smears of black were under his eyes. The other person by the table was covered entirely. Even their face was hidden in a

cape. As though inside of a fragile cocoon, the person shivered within the cape, panting as he suddenly exclaimed, "Don't light the lamp! What if he finds us?!"

Lan WangJi looked up, exchanging a look with Jiang Cheng. Both of them had the same

confused look. This person had to be Wen Chao. But how did Wen Chao's voice become like this? So thin and so sharp, it didn't seem to be Wen Chao at all?

Head down, Wen ZhuLiu searched through the belongings within his sleeves, "Is it that if we don't light the lamp, he won't be able to find us?"

Wen Chao panted, "W-We've run so far, for so long. H-He shouldn't b-be able to catch us, right?"

Wen ZhuLiu appeared to be indifferent, "Perhaps."

Wen Chao fumed, "What do you mean perhaps?! If we haven't outrun him why did you stop?!"

Wen ZhuLiu, "You need ointment. Or else you'll be dead for certain."

As he spoke, he took off Wen Chao's cape. Both of the two on the roof were shocked.

Under the cape, it wasn't Wen Chao's arrogant, greasily handsome face, but rather a bald head enwrapped in bandages!

Wen ZhuLiu peeled off the bandages layer by layer, revealing the skin of the bald man. On the face, scars and burn marks scattered without order, making him look as if he'd been cooked. Ugly,

hideous, they couldn't see at all the shadow of whom he used to be!

Wen ZhuLiu took out the bottle of medicine. He first fed him a couple of round pills before he took out some ointment and applied it to the burn marks on his head and his face. Wen Chao whimpered in pain, though Wen ZhuLiu stopped him, "Don't cry. Or else the tears would make the wounds fester and worsen the pain."

Wen Chao could only hold back his tears, unable to even cry. By the flickering light of the fire, a bald man covered in burn marks contorted his face, strange, muffled noises coming out of his mouth. The flame was on the verge of dying, a dim yellow. The sight was beyond frightening.

Suddenly, Wen Chao shrieked, "The flute! The flute! Is it the flute?! I heard him play the flute again!" Wen ZhuLiu, "No! It was the wind."

However, Wen Chao was so scared that he had fallen to the ground, wailing. Wen ZhuLiu picked him up again. It seemed that something had happened to Wen Chao's legs and he couldn't walk on his own. After Wen ZhuLiu finished applying the ointment, he took out a few buns from his lapel and put one in his hand, "Eat. We'll continue after you finish."

With shaking hands, Wen Chao cupped it in his hands and took a bite out of it. Seeing this, Jiang Cheng remembered what a plight he and Wei WuXian were in the day when they fled. They didn't even have any food. Such a situation was karma indeed!

Heart filled with joy, the corners of his curled lifted and he broke into mad but soundless laughter.

Suddenly, Wen Chao looked as if he had bitten something that caused him react with such a petrified expression. He threw the bun away and screamed, "I'm not eating meat! I'm not! I'm not! I'm not eating meat!"

Wen ZhuLiu passed him another one, "This one isn't meat."

Wen Chao, "I'm not eating it! Take it away! Get lost! I want to find my dad. When can we get back to my dad?!"

Wen ZhuLiu, "At this speed, two more days."

His words were quite honest, neither emphasized nor faked. However, the honesty created much torment on Wen Chao's part, "Two days? Two days?! Do you see how I am right now? If I wait for two more days, how would I be then?! You useless thing!"

Wen ZhuLiu suddenly stood up. Wen Chao flinched from fear. He thought that he wanted to flee alone and was immediately scared. All of the guards died in front of him one by one. Wen ZhuLiu was both his strongest and his last support. He quickly changed his words, "No, Wen ZhuLiu, Brother Wen! Don't go, don't leave me behind. If you can take me back to my dad, I'll let him promote you to the highest-level guest cultivator! No, you saved me, so you're my brother—I'll let him recognize you into the main clan! From now on you'll be my elder brother!"

Wen ZhuLiu stared in the direction of the stairs, "There's no need."

Not only had he heard, both Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng heard as well. Footsteps, one after another, came from the stairs of the courier station. Somebody was walking up the stairs, one step at a time.

All of the excess blood had drained from Wen Chao's burnt face. Trembling, he moved his hands out of the cape and covered his face with them, as though he was so scared that he wanted to cover his eyes to protect himself, pretending that nothing was happening. The pair of palms, on the other hand, was bare, without a single finger on it! Tap, tap, tap.

The person slowly walked upstairs. He was covered in black. With a slender physique, he had a flute at his waist, hands behind his back. On the roof, both Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng pressed their hands onto the hilts of their swords.

However, when the person strolled up the stairs and turned around, smile on his face, Lan WangJi's eyes opened wide, having seen those bright features before.

## Chapter 62: Evil— Part Two

His lips trembled, saying something in silence. Jiang Cheng stood up almost immediately. It was Wei WuXian!

However, apart from the face, from top to bottom, this person was nowhere like the past Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian had clearly been a bright, high-spirited boy. The tips of his eyes and eyebrows had always retained the hint of a grin, always refusing to walk properly. Yet, this person was entirely enveloped in a cold, dark energy. He was handsome, yet pale-faced, his smile eerie.

The sight before their eyes was too surprising. The situation was still unclear, and they couldn't act rashly. Even though the two on the roof were flabbergasted, neither rushed inside. They only forced their heads lower and inched closer to the slit between the roof tiles.

Inside the room, Wei WuXian, clothed in black, turned around slowly. Wen Chao covered his own face. Now, only the raspy breath of his voice could be heard, "Wen ZhuLiu... Wen ZhuLiu!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian's eyes and lips curled up, "Even now, you still think that calling him would be of any use?"

He walked a few steps nearer and kicked into a white object by his foot. He looked down. It was the meat bun that Wen Chao had tossed away.

Wei WuXian raised a brow, "What, you're a picky eater?"

Wen Chao fell from his stool, screeching, "I'm not eating it! I'm not eating it! I'm not eating it!" As he bawled, he crawled on the ground with his finger-less hands. The long black cape slid down the lower half of his body, revealing his legs. The two legs dangled from his torso as if they were burdensome accessories. Even wrapped within bandages, they were still unusually thin. Due to his violent movements, the bandages stretched out to form gaps. Inside were ghastly white bones, crimson blood and strands of flesh still hanging from them.

All of the flesh on his legs had been sliced off, piece by piece. And, likely... all of the flesh had been eaten by himself!

Wen Chao's sharp screams echoed within the empty courier station. Wei WuXian looked as though he didn't hear anything. Lifting up the hem of his robe, he sat down at another table.

The second oil lamp lit up. Before the bright yellow of the flame, half of Wei WuXian's face was in the light, the other half in the dark. He dropped his hand down. An ashen face appeared out of the darkness under the table. Soon, there came the crunching sounds of chewing.

A white child squatted by his feet. Like a young, carnivorous beast, it was gnawing on something that Wei WuXian fed it.

Wei WuXian took his hand away after patting on the white ghoul child's sparse-haired head. Holding what he had fed it in its mouth, it turned around and sat down. Hugging his leg, it chewed fiercely as it glowered at Wen ZhuLiu with cold, glistening eyes.

What he was chewing were two human fingers. Needless to say—they must be Wen Chao's fingers!

Lan WangJi stared at the ghastly ghost child along with a ghastly Wei WuXian. His grip tightened around Bichen's hilt.

Wen ZhuLiu was still in front of Wen Chao. Wei WuXian's head looked down, his expression unable to be seen, "Wen ZhuLiu, do you really think that you can protect his dog life from my hands?"

Wen ZhuLiu, "Better die trying."

Wei WuXian laughed coldly, "What a loyal Wen-dog."

Wen ZhuLiu, "I can't fail to repay the debt I owe their generosity."

Wei WuXian's expression darkened at once. His voice was harsh as well, "What a joke! Why is it that the debt you owe has to be repaid at the expense of others!"

Before he even finished speaking, from behind Wen ZhuLiu came Wen Chao's piercing wails.

Wen Chao had crawled to a corner and was trying as hard as he could to press into the wooden boards as though he could squeeze out from in between them.

However, a red shadow suddenly dropped from the ceiling. A long-haired woman in red clothes, her face blue, fell heavily onto him. The dark face, bright red clothes, and black hair created a chilling contrast. Her fingers wrapped around the bandages around Wen Chao's head and tore! The bandages were just wrapped again after Wen ZhuLiu had applied ointment to Wen Chao's face. The ointment, the skin, and the bandages were still stuck together. Burned skin was naturally weak to begin with. With the violent tear, the scabs that hadn't peeled off yet tore off along with a thin layer of flesh. Even his lips were torn off. The uneven, bald head immediately became a bloody, bald head.

Wen Chao passed out at once. As soon as he heard the scream, Wen ZhuLiu turned around to help him. On the roof, Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng clenched their swords as well, prepared to attack. However, they heard another scream. The ghoul child by Wei WuXian's feet had thrown itself over. Wen ZhuLiu's right hand struck at the ghoul child's forehead before he felt a sharp pain on his palm. The ghoul child had opened its two rows of sharp teeth and bit into him.

Wen ZhuLiu couldn't shake it off, so he ignored it and went straight to Wen Chao. The ghoul child, however, had bit out an entire chunk of the flesh on his hand and spat it out. He continued to devour the palm. Wen ZhuLiu grabbed the child's head with his left hand, as though to put so much force on the small, cold head that it exploded. The blue-faced woman threw the bloodstained bandages on the ground and, like a four-limbed creature, she crawled to Wen ZhuLiu's side almost instantly.

A swing of her arm and there were ten lines of blood. The two dark beings, one large and one small, wrangled with him incessantly. Wen ZhuLiu couldn't attend to both sides at the same time, blundering amid the chaos. As he looked to the side and saw Wei WuXian's cold smile, he threw himself at him.

Both of the two on the roof frowned. Lan WangJi smacked down. The tiles shattered and the roof collapsed. Through the roof, he descended into the second floor of the courier station and blocked Wen ZhuLiu from Wei WuXian. Taking advantage of Wen

ZhuLiu's surprise, a whip flickering with purple light swept over and around his neck, wrapping itself three entire times around his throat before lifting up. Wen ZhuLiu's large, heavy body had been lifted up by the surging whip and was now dangling in the air.

Immediately, there came the crunching sounds of his neck bones cracked. At the same time, Wei WuXian's pupils shrunk. He took out a flute from beside his waist and spun around, standing up.

The ghoul child and blue-faced woman who had been tearing at

Wen ZhuLiu quickly backed off to his side and stared with vigilance at the two strangers.

Behind them, Wen ZhuLiu hadn't died yet. His face flushed red and his entire body twitched, struggling against his will. His eyes were opened so wide that it seemed as though they were about to burst out of their sockets. The ghoul child snarled at Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng, not at all hiding its enmity. Wei WuXian raised his hand slightly for it to withdraw its fangs. His gaze swept back and forth between Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng. Among the three, nobody spoke up.

A few moments later, Jiang Cheng waved his arm and tossed something over. Wei WuXian caught it without a second thought. Jiang Cheng, "Your sword!"

Wei WuXian's hand slowly dropped.

He looked down at Suibian and only responded after a pause, "... Thank you."

Again, a short while passed before any words were spoken. Suddenly, Jiang Cheng walked over and struck him, "You brat! Where have you run off to in these three months?!"

Although the sentence itself seemed to scold him, his tone was full of joy. Although Lan WangJi didn't step forward, his eyes had always been locked onto Wei WuXian. With the slap, Wei WuXian paused blankly. A few moments later, he struck him as well, "Haha, it's a long story, it's

a long story!"

The cold air that had been on him was in some ways watered down by the two strikes. There was anger within Jiang Cheng's joy. He hugged him tightly before shoving him back, yelling, "Didn't we agree to meet at the lousy town down the mountain? I waited for almost six days and didn't even see a shadow of you! If you died it wouldn't even have been in front of my eyes! For the last three months I've been so busy that my head's even gotten bigger!"

Wei WuXian lifted the hem of his robe and sat down again, waving his hand, "I've already said that it's a long story. Back then a bunch of Wen-dogs were searching everywhere for me as well. They were waiting for me, caught me right there, and threw me to some hell of a place to suffer." As he spoke, the blue-faced woman crawled toward him using both her arms and her legs. When she had been fighting, her face was almost hideous, but now, with her dark face against Wei WuXian's lap, she somehow seemed to be a charming concubine, obediently pleasing her master. Giggling laughter came from her mouth as well. Wei WuXian sat leaning to one side, his right hand stroking her soft, long hair over and over again.

As he watched his movements, Lan WangJi's face grew even colder. Although the scene made Jiang Cheng feel somewhat uncomfortable, at the moment, he was more shocked than anything else, "What hell of a place? I've carefully asked the people in the town, so how was it that everyone said they hadn't seen you?!"

Wei WuXian, "You asked the people in the town? They're all a bunch of naive farmers scared of bringing themselves trouble, so who'd dare tell you the truth? And the Wen-dogs have definitely done something to shut their mouths. Of course, all of them said that they hadn't seen me."

Jiang Cheng cursed, "Those old idiots!" He quickly added, "What hell of a place? Qishan? The Nightless City? Then how did you get out? And you've become like this. What are... these two things of yours? They actually listen to your command. A while ago Second Young Master Lan and I took the task of assassinating Wen Chao and Wen ZhuLiu at night, but somebody had gone before us. I can't believe that it was you! You were the one who changed those talismans as well?"

From the corner of his eye, Wei WuXian saw that Lan WangJi had always been looking at them. He smiled, "Pretty much. If I say that I found a mysterious cave somewhere and there was a mysterious book that a mysterious expert had left, and then when I came out, I was this powerful, would you believe me?"

Jiang Cheng spat, "Wake up. You've read too many legends in those picture books, haven't you? How could there be so many experts in the world? With secret caves and books everywhere!"

Wei WuXian turned his palms up, "You see? You don't believe me even if I say it. I'll tell you about it if I ever get the chance to."

Jiang Cheng glanced at Lan WangJi. He knew that it was probably something that shouldn't be said in front of disciples from other sects and wiped the joy from his face, "Alright, then. You can tell me about it later. It's all good as long as you're back."

Wei WuXian, "Yep. As long as I'm back."

Jiang Cheng murmured the words „as long as you're back" a couple of times before hitting him again, "You really are...! You live on even after being captured by Wen-dogs!"

Wei WuXian gloated, "Of course. Who am I?"

Jiang Cheng couldn't help but scold him, "What are you proud of?! You're alive and you didn't come back sooner!"

Wei WuXian, "I just got out, hey? I heard that both shijie and you were fine, and you were rebuilding the YunmengJiang Sect and forming an alliance, so I went to kill a few Wen-dogs first to lighten up your burden, and do some contributions. In these three months, you've been working hard."

Hearing the last part, Jiang Cheng remembered the past three months of rushing about and

working day and night. He felt somewhat moved, but quickly put on a harsh face, “Put away your shabby sword! I’ve been waiting for you to take it away. I don’t want to be carrying two swords all the time and get asked that many questions any longer!”

Lan WangJi suddenly spoke up, “Wei Ying.”

He had been standing quietly at the side. As he spoke, both Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng turned to him. It was as though Wei WuXian finally remembered to greet him. He nodded slightly, “HanGuang-Jun.”

Lan WangJi, “Were you the one who has been killing the Wen Sect’s disciples?”

Wei WuXian, “Of course.”

Jiang Cheng, “I knew it was you. Why did you kill them one at a time? It’d be so much of a hassle.”

Wei WuXian, “To play around, play with them until they die. Straight up killing all of them at once would be too easy on them. Much better killing them in front of one another one by one, one slice after another. Of course, with Wen Chao, I hadn’t tortured him enough yet. Wen ZhuLiu, however, he’d received the guidance of Wen RuoHan and joined the Wen Sect with his surname changed, protecting Wen RuoHan’s precious son under

his orders.” He laughed coldly, “He wanted to protect him, but I wanted to make him see how in his hands, Wen Chao would become more and more distorted, unlike a man but also unlike a monster.”

The smile was somewhere among cold, cruel, and pleased. Lan WangJi watched with clarity in his expression. He walked one step forward, “What means do you use to control such dark creatures?”

The curvature of Wei WuXian’s lips dropped slightly as he glanced at him. Jiang Cheng had also heard the dissonant tone, “Second Young Master Lan, what do you mean by this?”

Lan WangJi’s eyes were glued to Wei WuXian, “Answer me.”

The ghoul child and the blue-faced woman began to stir. Wei WuXian turned around and looked at them. They backed off slowly, reluctant, and sunk into the darkness. Wei WuXian finally turned to Lan WangJi again and raised his brows, “If you will... what would happen if I don’t answer?”

Quickly, he ducked to the side, dodging Lan WangJi’s sudden attack. He walked three steps back, “Lan Zhan, we’ve just met each other again after so long and you’re already trying to catch me. That’s not nice, is it?”

Lan WangJi moved without saying anything. Wei WuXian blocked whatever attack he threw at him. Both of them were fast. The third time he moved Lan WangJi’s hand away, he spoke, “I thought that we could be considered familiar with each other. You starting a fight with me without saying anything does sound a bit

heartless, doesn’t it?”

Lan WangJi, “Answer me!”

Jiang Cheng blocked himself between the two, “Second Young Master Lan!”

Wei WuXian, “Second Young Master Lan, what you’re asking about really can’t be explained in a short amount of time. And it’s kind of strange. If I were to ask you about the GusuLan Sect’s secret techniques, would you answer me?”

Lan WangJi walked past Jiang Cheng and came straight at him. Wei WuXian crossed his flute in front of him, “That’s too much, isn’t it? Why so unfriendly? Lan Zhan, just what in the world do you want to do?”

Lan WangJi spoke one word at a time, “Go back to Gusu with me.”

Hearing this, both Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng were surprised.

Quickly afterward, Wei WuXian laughed, “Go back to Gusu with you? To the Cloud Recesses? Why go there?”

He immediately seemed to realize, “Oh. I forgot. Your uncle Lan QiRen hates crooked people like me. You’re his proudest disciple, so of course you’re the same as him, haha. I refuse.”

Jiang Cheng stared at Lan WangJi, cautious, "Second Young Master Lan, all of us understand the Lan Sect's ways. However, Wei WuXian saved you in the cave of the Xuanwu in Dusk-Creek Mountain, much less your friendship of having fought together.

Now, to mercilessly denounce him straight away would be too unreasonable, wouldn't it?"

Wei WuXian, "Look at you. What a Sect Leader." Jiang Cheng, "You can shut up."

Lan WangJi, "It is not that I want to denounce him."

Jiang Cheng, "Then why do you want him to go back to Gusu with you? Second Young Master Lan, at such a point in time, the GusuLan Sect doesn't work with the others to kill the Wen-dogs and is instead still hanging onto its inflexible ways?"

One against two, Lan WangJi still refused to back off. He gazed at Wei WuXian, "Wei Ying, for cultivating an evil path you would eventually have to pay. Throughout time, there has not been a single exception."

Wei WuXian, "I can pay."

Seeing how unconcerned he seemed to be, Lan WangJi lowered his voice, "The path would not only damage your body, but your heart as well."

Wei WuXian, "Damage or not, how much damage, I know it the most. As for my heart, it's my heart after all. I know what I'm doing."

Lan WangJi, "Some things you cannot be able to control at all."

Displeasure flashed across Wei WuXian's face, "Of course I can control it."

Lan WangJi walked a step closer. He seemed to be about to speak again when Wei WuXian closed his eyes, "After all, on the topic of how my heart is, what could other people know about it? Why should other people care about it?"

Lan WangJi paused. He had suddenly been angered, "... Wei WuXian!"

Wei WuXian had been angered as well, "Lan WangJi! Do you really have to make this difficult at such a point in time? You want me to go to the Cloud Recesses for the GusuLan Sect's confinement punishment? Who do you think you are, what do you think the GusuLan Sect is?! You really think that I won't resist?!"

Hostile energy formed between the two of them. Over Bichen's hilt, Lan WangJi's knuckles turned white. Jiang Cheng's voice was cold, "Second Young Master Lan, right now, the chaos with the Wen Sect hasn't been stopped yet. This is the time where we desperately need forces. People don't even have the time to care for themselves, why would the GusuLan Sect be concerned about something so far away from it? Wei WuXian is on our side. Do you want to punish our own people?"

Wei WuXian regained his composure, "That's right. It's all good as long as the Wen-dogs are the ones killed. Why care about how I kill them?"

The two knew how to continue each other's words ever since they were young. Now, one sentence after another, the argument flowed seamlessly, "Apologies for saying something so blunt, but even if we get to the bottom of this, Wei WuXian isn't from your sect either. It's not in the GusuLan Sect's place to punish him. No matter whom he goes back with, it wouldn't be you." Hearing this, Lan WangJi's expression froze. He looked up at Wei WuXian, the lump at his throat trembling, "I..."

Before he could continue, a thin scream came from Wen Chao at the corner. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng immediately turned around. At the same time, the two of them walked around Lan WangJi and toward Wen ZhuLiu and Wen Chao. Wen ZhuLiu hung from Zidian. He was still struggling in agony. Wen Chao was half-dead. As he slowly opened his eyelids, he saw at once the two faces looking down at him.

The faces had the same youth, the same familiarity. They had both showed him expressions of either despair, anguish, or deep-set hatred. However, right now, their faces above him had the same cold smile, the same cold eyes.

Wen Chao didn't scream anymore. He didn't try to run away either. Vapidly, he raised up his finger-less hands and began to drool. Wei WuXian kicked him into the position of kneeling in

the direction of Yunmeng. The revealed bones and flesh rubbed against each other. Wen Chao cried sharply in pain. It sounded especially jarring in the empty courier station.

Jiang Cheng asked, "Why is his voice so sharp?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course it'd be with a certain thing gone." Jiang Cheng was disgusted, "You're the one who did it?"

Wei WuXian, "It's nasty if you think about it that way. Of course, I wasn't the one who cut it off. It was bitten off when his woman went mad."

Lan WangJi was still standing behind them, watching them. Wei WuXian suddenly remembered his presence again. He turned around and smiled, "Second Young Master Lan, the following scene might not be suitable for your eyes. Perhaps it'd do you best to avoid it."

Although „perhaps" was used, his tone sounded not in the least refutable. Jiang Cheng also spoke with both respect and distance, "That's right. Second Young Master Lan, Wen Chao and Wen ZhuLiu are already in our hands. The task has been completed, and it's time for us to part. What goes after this would be a personal matter of our sect. It's best if you return first."

Lan WangJi's gaze was still locked on Wei WuXian, while Wei WuXian's attention had already been taken away by his dying enemy. The eyes he looked at Wen Chao and Wen ZhuLiu with glistened, and his grin was both excited and cruel. Jiang Cheng had on him the same expression. Both of them had been buried within the overwhelming pleasure of revenge. Neither had the concern to deal with an outsider.

A few moments later, Lan WangJi turned around and walked down the stairs.

After he went out of the courier station, he stood before the door for a long time, but he never left.

He didn't know how long had passed when the silent night was ripped apart by a shrill wail.

Lan WangJi looked up behind him, his white robes and forehead ribbon fluttering in the cold wind.

The night had passed. The sun in the sky was about to rise. And the sun on the ground was falling.

## Chapter 63: Tenderness—Part One

Wei WuXian suddenly murmured, "... Lan Zhan."

He reached out and grabbed one of Lan WangJi's sleeves. Lan WangJi had always been beside him. He immediately bent down and whispered, "I am here."

Wei WuXian hadn't woken up yet. His eyes were still tightly shut, yet his hand didn't let go either. He seemed to be dreaming,

muttering, "... Don't... Don't be angry..."

Lan WangJi seemed somewhat surprised. His voice was gentle, "I am not angry."

Wei WuXian, "... Oh."

Hearing this, as though he finally felt assured, his fingers loosened.

Lan WangJi sat beside Wei WuXian for a while. Seeing that he was motionless again, he was about to stand up when Wei WuXian grabbed him with his other hand, hugging his arm and refusing to let go. He shouted, "I'll go with you, quick, take me back to your sect!"

Lan WangJi widened his eyes.

After he shouted, Wei WuXian seemed to have shouted himself awake. His long lashes trembled before he slowly opened his eyes. After his sight finally went from blurred to clear, he suddenly realized that both of his hands were wrapped around Lan WangJi as though he was grasping a straw, clutching a floating piece of wood within water.

He immediately let go, almost wanting to roll away. His movement was so large that it hurt the wound at his stomach. He exclaimed an „ah“ as he scrunched his brows, finally remembering that he was still injured. Amid the stars before his eyes, Jing Ling, Jiang Cheng, Jiang YanLi, Jiang FengMian, Madam Yu... Many faces spun around in a large circle.

Lan WangJi held him down, "The wound at your stomach?" Wei WuXian, "The wound? It's fine, it doesn't hurt..."

After Lan WangJi settled him down, he lifted his clothes. Wei WuXian's stomach had been bandaged properly already. After the bandages had been peeled away, he could see that the wound had healed. On his legs, the curse mark had disappeared as well.

Wei WuXian, "How long have I been resting for?"

Only having ensured that his injuries were indeed fine did Lan WangJi finally let him go, "Four days."

Jin Ling's sword stabbed right through. The wound hadn't been shallow at all. How it healed within four days without even leaving a scar behind meant that high level medicine of the GusuLan Sect had to have been necessary. Wei WuXian thanked him, mocking himself along the way, "I've reincarnated but somehow I've become even weaker. I couldn't keep going after just a single stab."

Lan WangJi's voice was tepid, "Nobody would be able to keep going after a stab through the body."

Wei WuXian, "That's not true. If I was in the body from my past life, even if half of my intestines were dangling out, I'd be able to stick them back in and continue fighting."

Seeing that right after he woke up, he began to speak nonsense again, Lan WangJi shook his head and turned away. Wei WuXian thought that he was going to leave. He hurried, "Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan! Don't go. I was talking nonsense, my fault, but don't ignore me."

Lan WangJi, "Even you are scared of others ignoring you?" Wei WuXian, "I am, I am."

He hadn't experienced the feeling of having somebody at his side when he had gotten hurt and woke up for a long time.

Two swords were worn at Lan WangJi's waist. He took off Suibian and passed it to him, "Your sword."

Seeing the sword, Wei WuXian first hesitated. He quickly replied, "Thank you."

Holding the hilt, he slowly pulled it out. A pair of eyes were reflected against the snow-white

blade. Wei WuXian stared at the pair of eyes for a while before he put Suibian back into its sheath again, "It really did seal itself?"

Lan WangJi grabbed the hilt of Suibian as well. He pulled out, but it didn't move at all. Wei WuXian sighed. He patted the body of the sword; I knew that Jin GuangYao didn't dare make things up without any basis... So, it really did seal itself. I just happened to have run into something amazing that only happens once in ten thousand years. It's all over now. The evidence is ironclad. Whoever pulled it out had to be Wei WuXian, no exceptions. I can't deny it even if I want to.

He looked around. It was a clean room. The light was dim, with only a paper lantern at one corner. Wei WuXian asked, "Where is this?"

Lan WangJi, "The Cloud Recesses."

Wei WuXian, "You took me back to the Cloud Recesses? What if your brother finds out?"

Someone spoke, "I have found out already."

The person walked out from behind the screen. With white clothes and a forehead ribbon, his face was like jade though his expression was solemn.

Having rested in the Cloud Recesses without having been taken away by the LanlingJin Sect's people, it was clear that Lan XiChen wasn't any threat to them. And, along with the fact that Lan WangJi was right by his side, Wei WuXian wasn't on his guard at all. He suddenly recalled something and asked, "Where's ChiFeng-Zun's body?"

Lan XiChen, "The many sects have already seen with their own eyes Brother's body. It is being kept by HuaiSang as of the moment. I have sent those I trust to watch over it as well."

Wei WuXian felt, to an extent, relieved. He asked again, "Jin GuangYao's reaction?"

Lan WangJi, "Flawless."

Wei WuXian had known that Jin GuangYao would definitely perfect his act. It'd be fine as long as it was confirmed that he couldn't have got rid of the corpse. However, Lan XiChen spoke slowly, "He said that he would definitely get to the bottom of the matter and give everyone an explanation. Now that Young Master Wei is awake, then, WangJi, is it not time for you to give me an explanation as well?"

Lan WangJi stood up, "Brother."

Lan XiChen let out a long sigh, "WangJi, what do you want me to say to you?"

Lan WangJi, "Brother, ChiFen-Zun's head is indeed in Jin GuangYao's hands."

Lan XiChen, "You saw with your own eyes?" Lan WangJi, "He saw with his own eyes." Lan XiChen, "You believe in him?"

Lan WangJi, "I do."

He answered without any hesitation. Wei WuXian felt his chest warm up. Lan XiChen continued, "What about Jin GuangYao?"

Lan WangJi, "Not to be believed."

Lan XiChen chuckled, "WangJi, then how do you judge whether someone should be believed or not?"

He looked at Wei WuXian, "You trust Young Master Wei, while I trust Jin GuangYao. The fact that Brother's head is in his hands, neither of us have seen it with our own eyes. We only believe in what another person says based on how much we know about them."

"You think that you know about Wei WuXian, so you trust him; I think that I know about Jin GuangYao, so I trust him as well. You believe in your judgement, then am I not allowed to believe in my judgement?"

Wei WuXian feared that the brothers would begin an argument over this, "Sect Leader Lan!"

It wasn't that he couldn't understand Lan XiChen. Watching Jin GuangYao from the perspective of Nie MingJue, he had seen all of his craft and his ambition. However, if Jin GuangYao had always shown Lan XiChen his disguise, there was no reason for Lan XiChen not to believe in his sworn brother and instead one of the most infamous people.

Lan XiChen nodded, "Young Master Wei, no need to worry. Before the truth is entirely revealed, I will not be partial to either side or reveal your whereabouts. Or else, I would not have allowed WangJi to take you to my Hanshi or helped with your injuries."

Wei WuXian, "Sect Leader Lan, I'm grateful that you gave me this opportunity. The fact that ChiFeng-Zun's head is inside of Jin GuangYao's secret chamber is nothing but true. Not only have I seen it, I've seen some other things due to having been affected by its energy of resentment. Maybe this could offer some proof?"

Lan XiChen replied calmly, "Young Master Wei, perhaps you have seen some things indeed. However, you cannot prove that you saw those things within the secret chamber of Koi Tower."

Wei WuXian, "Hm. That's true. Then how about something else? The direct cause of ChiFeng-Zun's death was a qi deviation, but, Sect Leader Lan, don't you think that the timing is a bit too much of a coincidence? The doings of the sword spirit might be one of the reasons, but have you ever thought that there might be another cause to it?"

Lan XiChen, "What do you think the cause is?" Wei WuXian, "The Song of Clarity."

Lan XiChen, "Young Master Wei, did you know that his Song of Clarity had been taught by me personally?"

Wei WuXian, "Then, Sect Leader Lan, could you please listen if there's anything strange with the song?"

His flute was right by the bed. Wei WuXian held it up and began to play after a few moments of thought. After the song was finished, he spoke, "Sect Leader Lan, this song really is the one you taught Jin GuangYao?"

Lan XiChen, "It is."

Wei WuXian was somewhat surprised, but he kept his composure, "What is the name of the song?"

Lan XiChen, "The song is named Cleansing. It is capable of clearing the heart and steadying the mind."

Wei WuXian, "Cleansing. I've heard of many of the cultivation world's famous compositions. Why don't I have any memory of either its name or its melody?"

Lan WangJi, "The song is obscure. It is difficult as well." Lan XiChen, "Precisely."

Wei WuXian, "Did Jin GuangYao choose this piece himself?" Lan XiChen, "That is correct."

Wei WuXian, "Is it really that difficult? Then why did Jin GuangYao choose this piece instead of something easier?"

Lan XiChen, "Because I have told him that although Cleansing is difficult to master, its effects are excellent. The song is indeed difficult. Young Master Wei, you played one of its sections wrong as well, did you not?"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian felt something click inside of him, "I played it wrong?"

Lan WangJi, "One of its sections is wrong."

Wei WuXian grinned, "No, no. It's not that I was wrong. Jin GuangYao is the one who was wrong! When the resentful energy attacked me, this really was how he played it. I can promise that I repeated this song without any mistake at all."

Lan XiChen seemed to be surprised, "Then he learned it wrong? That... would be impossible."

Wei WuXian, "That would indeed be impossible. LianFang-Zun is that clever. His memory is uncommonly good, how could he remember the melody wrong? It's likely that it was on purpose. I'll play it again. Sect Leader Lan, HanGuang-Jun, this time, please listen carefully to the section that I „played wrong”."

He did play it again. Near the end of the second section, Lan WangJi spoke, "Stop."

Lan WangJi, "It is the section that has just passed."

Wei WuXian withdrew the flute from his lips, "It really is this section? But I don't find this section different at all."

Lan XiChen, "It does not sound different indeed. However, it definitely is not part of Cleansing."

If it was a normal mistake, it wouldn't blend so seamlessly into the other sections of the original song. This melody had to have been purposely polished before it was put in here. And this unfamiliar melody, not part of Cleansing but mixed into it, was likely the key to Nie MingJue's death.

After a while of thought, Lan XiChen spoke, "You two can follow me."

As they went out of the house, Wei WuXian was somewhat surprised.

It was a secluded little cottage within some hidden corner of the Cloud Recesses. The Lan Sect's residence was inside of the mountains. In its bounds, pines grew endlessly. Most of the plants were trees and grasses. It wasn't that there were no flowers, but that the flowers were mostly pure, elegant varieties like magnolia, gardenia, and white chrysanthemum, and even then, only as rare, decorative glimpses. Yet, the area before this house was filled with purple gentians. The buds were small while the color was brilliant, gaining the love of whoever passed. Under the light, it seemed to glow softly, as beautiful as a dream, an illusion.

Wei WuXian knew that this place was definitely different from the rest. However, he only had time to have an overall glance at it. It was already past nine. Most of the people within the Cloud Recesses had rested long ago. It was extremely quiet. Not a single person passed their way as Lan XiChen led them to the Library Pavilion.

The Cloud Recesses had once been burnt down by a fire. The Library Pavilion wasn't the Library Pavilion from back then.

However, after it had been rebuilt, the interior setup was no different from the previous one. They had even planted another magnolia tree outside of the pavilion. After the three walked inside, Wei WuXian suspected, "Sect Leader Lan, would we be able to find the source of the melody here?"

Lan XiChen, "Not here."

He walked before a row of books, lowered himself, and flipped over one of the mats on the ground before he took off a piece of wooden board, "We would be able to here."

Below the wooden board was a secret door. Lan WangJi, "The room of forbidden books."

Under the door was a flight of stairs over fifty steps low. The three walked down one by one. What came into Wei WuXian's eyes was a wide, dry underground room made of stone. The sound of footsteps echoed emptily. Rows and rows of bookshelves stood within the room. Books sparsely rested along the shelves. They were covered in dust, as though nobody had flipped through them in a long time.

Lan XiChen led them to one of the bookshelves, "This section is all books of strange songs."

There was a desk in the room and only one paper lamp on the desk. Lan WangJi took from the shelves a writing brush and paper that hadn't been used in years. He wrote down by memory three copies of the melody's score. The three of them sat around the desk and got to work. Each was responsible for a few dozens of books. They compared the melody to scores copied down onto the books, book by book, page by page, searching for parts that matched.

However, four hours had passed, and none of the three found a score that was the same as the melody. This meant that they didn't find its source.

Wei WuXian scanned the scores as quick as he could, thinking to himself, Maybe even the song section of the Lan Sect's room of

forbidden books don't have the melody? But that's impossible. If even the Lan Sect didn't collect it, other places wouldn't have either. Would it be that Jin GuangYao created such a remarkable song himself? If so, then it'd be a pain. The only way to verify that something is wrong with the song would be to get someone to

listen to this song for months to experiment. But even though he's clever, he never had a solid foundation. He couldn't be so clever as to be able to create...

Wei WuXian stared for quite a while at the tightly-packed characters. His eyes felt somewhat tired. He still had a few books left, so he decided to look at them sometime afterward. Lan WangJi had already finished the stack that he was responsible for. In silence, he took over the

books that Wei WuXian left and continued to flip through. Lan XiChen lifted his eyes. Watching the scene, he seemed to stop himself from saying something.

Suddenly, Lan WangJi spoke, "This one."

He passed over the book in his hands. Wei WuXian was immediately more energized. Earnestly, he looked at the pages that Lan WangJi had opened to, comparing them to the score in his hand, "It's not the same at all?"

Lan WangJi stood up and sat beside him, pointing for him to see, "Look at these two pages." Their heads pressed close together, and Lan WangJi's voice was right by his ear, low and magnetic. Wei WuXian's hand trembled lightly. The book had almost fallen off. He finally steadied himself and forcibly tore his eyes away from Lan WangJi's long, white fingers. He concentrated on comparing the two, "Ah, these two pages."

At first glance, there didn't seem to be anything strange with the score book. However, those familiar with music would be able to tell with just some attention that, on the page that it flipped open to, the melody on the former side wasn't connected to that of the latter side.

## Chapter 64: Tenderness—Part Two

Wei WuXian picked up his flute and played a section according to the score. As expected, the two parts of the melody were disconnected. The half of the score on the first page wasn't the same song as that on the second page at all.

There should be another page between these two pages. It had been torn off, cautiously, stealthily.

The person tore the page with a lot of care. There wasn't a single trace left of the page, which made it difficult to be discovered. Wei WuXian turned over the book. On the dark blue cover, there was a title of three characters.

Wei WuXian, "The Collection of Turmoil? What book is this? The songs in it sound a bit strange."

Lan WangJi, "A song collection from Dongying."

Wei WuXian, "From Dongying? So that's why the tune sounds a bit different from the ones over here."

Lan XiChen's expression was complex, "... Legendarily, The Collection of Turmoil, is a collection of dark songs gathered by one of the GusuLan Sect's cultivators during his years of wandering when he was travelling by water and arrived in Dongying. The songs in this book, if played along with spiritual energy, are able to harm others, from weakening the body to irritating the mind to agitating the spirit to shutting the senses..."

Those with great spiritual power could take others' lives in just seven notes."

Wei WuXian slammed the desk, "This is the one!"

He was so happy that when he slammed the desk, he almost knocked over the paper lantern on it. Lan WangJi moved it upright just in time. Wei WuXian spoke, "Sect Leader Lan, within The Collection of Turmoil, is there any that can disturb a person's composure, making them irritated, agitated, violent, easily- angered?"

Lan XiChen, "... There should be."

Wei WuXian, "Jin GuangYao's spiritual energy isn't high. He wouldn't have been able to take someone's life with just seven notes. And killing him this way would've been too obvious. He definitely wouldn't have chosen a song so powerful. But, if he could use the reason of playing the Song of Clarity for ChiFeng- Zun to calm his temper and continued to play it for three months, would the song be able to act as a slow poison and catalyze ChiFeng-Zun's outburst?"

Lan XiChen, "... Yes."

Wei WuXian, "Then, the speculation would be very much reasonable. The torn score not part of Cleansing belonged to a missing page of The Collection of Turmoil. All of the Dongying songs recorded in The Collection of Turmoil are complex and difficult to master. He didn't have time to copy them down in the forbidden room and could only tear it out—no, that wouldn't be right. Jin GuangYao is able to look at something once and never forget it again. He tore the page out not because he couldn't memorize it, but that there'd be no proof once it was gone. To ensure, even if one day it came to light or if he was caught red- handed, nobody would be able to find the source of the melody."

"All that he's done has been with extreme caution. In front of you, he was clearly playing the correct version of Cleansing. ChiFeng- Zun wasn't someone passionate about the arts. He had heard you, Sect Leader Lan, play Cleansing before and knew the overall melody of it. Thus, Jin GuangYao didn't dare straight up play to him the dark song and instead took trouble to combine two songs of different styles with opposite uses. And he combined them so well. They sound as though there were the same. His musical talent is indeed excellent. I'm guessing that he used little spiritual power in the Cleansing sections and only exerted power in the section of The Collection of Turmoil. After all, ChiFeng-

Zunwasn't familiar with this method of cultivation, so of course he wouldn't realize the fact that Jin GuangYao had already changed one of the sections into a dark, life-taking tune!"

After a while of silence, Lan XiChen whispered, "... Although he had often visited the Cloud Recesses, I have never told him about the forbidden chamber within the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion."

Wei WuXian, "Sect Leader Lan, apologies for the bluntness, but during the Sunshot Campaign, Jin GuangYao was a spy in Nightless City of the QishanWen Sect, and a very good spy at that. He could even find Wen Ruohan's secret chamber, sneak inside without anyone noticing, memorize all of the maps and scrolls, and write from memory all of the information before sending it to Koi Tower. Before him, the forbidden room of the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion... really isn't anything."

Lan XiChen took into his hands the piece of paper with the score on it. He stared at it for a while, "I will find some way to try this score."

Lan WangJi, "Brother?"

Lan XiChen, "When Brother passed away, the siege at Burial Mound had already passed and Young Master Wei was no longer in this world. If after trials, this part of the score really is able to disturb the mind and not merely made up, I will..."

Wei WuXian, "ZeWu-Jun, trying the song on living people might oppose the GusuLan Sect's sect rules."

Lan XiChen, "I will try it on myself."

How, as the sect leader of the GusuLan Sect, he could say such an almost ridiculous thing meant that his heart was already in a tangle. Lan WangJi raised his voice slightly, "Brother!"

Lan XiChen supported his head on his hand. His voice was low, as though he was trying to hold something back, "WangJi, the version of Jin GuangYao that I know is entirely different compared to the version that you know and the version that the world knows! Throughout all these years, in my eyes, he has always been... enduring his suffer, caring for all people, treating everyone with respect. I have always believed, without a doubt, that the criticism he received from others all came from misunderstandings, that what I knew how he truly is. Now, you want me to believe, at once, that everything about this person is fake, that he planned to kill one of his sworn brothers, that I was also a part of his plan and even helped him... Could you please allow me some more discretion before I make my own judgement?"

Lan XiChen had taught Jin GuangYao the Song of Clarity, keeping in mind the grudge between Jin GuangYao and Nie MingJue, hoping that they could be how they used to be. He requested Jin GuangYao to help calm Nie MingJue in place of

him. Who would've known that his kindness made possible Jin GuangYao's cruelty? How should he face himself now?

None of the three said anything. After they had walked out of the Library Pavilion, Lan WangJi finally spoke, "I will go see Uncle."

Having been silent for a long time, Lan XiChen spoke as well, "I will bring Young Master Wei back. You can come afterwards."

Leading Wei WuXian, he walked along the white-pebble paths of the Cloud Recesses for a while before they returned to the secluded, gentian-filled cottage in the depths of the mountains.

Wei WuXian stood in front of the door, "Does Mr. Lan know that HanGuang-Jun..."

Lan XiChen, "Uncle has just woken up. I told everyone not to tell him anything unnecessary."

If Lan QiRen knew of the things that Lan WangJi did with him under Koi Tower, he'd definitely be so angry that he passed out right after he had woken up. Wei WuXian, "Much thanks to Senior Lan for all of the work that he's done."

Lan XiChen, "Uncle has done a lot of work indeed."

Suddenly, he spoke, "Young Master Wei, do you know what this house is for?"

Wei WuXian, "ZeWu-Jun, why would you think that I'd know?"

Lan XiChen glanced at him, "This was where my mother lived back then in the Cloud Recesses." Lan XiChen's mother was Lan WangJi's mother. Wei WuXian found this a bit strange. The residences of all of the GusuLan

Sect's sect leaders had been the „Hanshi", which was definitely not this little house hidden in a corner of the Cloud Recesses. Perhaps Lan WangJi's parents were in an unsuitable but pre-arranged marriage like Jiang FengMian and Madam Yu, and thus lived in separation?

No matter how one thought about it, there couldn't be a positive reason behind how a sect leader didn't live together with his wife. And, it was said that the wife of the previous sect leader QingHeng-Jun was quite physically weak. She was resting most of the time and it was unsuitable for her to meet others. People didn't know much about her to begin with. Behind their backs, all of the sects guessed whether or not the „sickness" was something shameful, such as a scar on the face or a handicap. And thus, Wei WuXian didn't ask too much into it and maintained silence, waiting for Lan XiChen to explain.

Lan XiChen, "Young Master Wei, you should know that my father usually meditated in seclusion and never interacted with the rest of the world too often. Throughout all these years, the GusuLan Sect has been taken care of by Uncle almost single-handedly."

Wei WuXian, "That I do know."

Lan XiChen dropped his hand. The hand that he held Liebing with was hidden within his sleeve. He spoke slowly, "The reason that my father often practiced secluded meditation was my mother.

This place, compared to a place of living... was more like a place of detention."

Wei WuXian was surprised.

The father of ZeWu-Jun and HanGuang-Jun, QingHeng-Jun, used to be a famous cultivator. He made his name at a young age and had many things waiting for him in the future. However, at the

age of twenty, he suddenly backed away and announced his marriage. He had also ceased to care for much of the world. Although it was called secluded meditation, it was much more like retirement. People had come up with many possible reasons, but none of them had been verified.

Lan XiChen bent down amid the clusters of gentians. He gently stroked those thin, tender petals, "When my father was young, when he returned from a night-hunt once, he saw my mother outside of Gusu city." He smiled, "I heard that it was love at first sight."

Wei WuXian grinned as well, "The young are often sentimental."

Lan XiChen continued, "However, the woman did not care for him as much. In addition, she killed one of my father's teachers."

This was beyond imagination. Although Wei WuXian knew that asking too many questions would be very rude, whenever he remembered that those were Lan WangJi's parents, he felt that he just had to ask. "Why?!"

Lan XiChen, "I do not know. But I assume that it was something along the lines of „grievances". Wei WuXian didn't ask any more into this and forced down his curiosity, "And... what happened later?"

"And then," Lan XiChen explained, "When my father heard of this, of course he was in much pain. But, no matter how he struggled, he still took the woman to his sect in secrecy. Ignoring the objections from his clan, he knelt with her for the Heavens and the Earth without making a sound and told everyone in the clan that she would be his wife for the rest of his life, that whoever wanted to harm her would have to pass through him first."

Wei WuXian widened his eyes.

Lan XiChen continued, "After the ceremony was completed, my father found a house and locked my mother inside. He found another house and locked himself inside. It was called secluded meditation, but it was in truth to repent."

He paused before speaking again, "Young Master Wei, can you understand why he did such a

thing?"

Wei WuXian answered after a moment of silence, "He could neither forgive the one who killed his teacher nor watch the death of the woman who he loved. He could only marry her to protect her life and force himself not to see her."

Lan XiChen, "Do you think that this was right?" Wei WuXian, "I don't know."

Lan XiChen looked somewhat lost, "Then, what do you think would be right?"

Wei WuXian, "I don't know."

A while later, Lan XiChen whispered, "It could be said that my father did this without a care for anything else. All of the seniors of the clan were enraged, but they had all watched him grow up. They could not do anything except guard the secret, hint to the outside world that the wife of the GusuLan Sect's sect leader had an unspeakable disease and could not see others. After WangJi and I were born, we were immediately taken out to be cared for by other people. When we grew older, we were brought to Uncle to be taught.

"My uncle... has always had a frank personality to begin with. Because of how my mother caused my father to destroy his own life, he began to hate those who behaved improperly even more. Thus, he poured his heart into teaching WangJi and me. He was especially harsh as well. Every month, we could only see Mother once, inside of this cottage."

They were two young children, who faced everyday only their harsh uncle, strict teachings, and mountains of books. No matter how tired, they had to straighten their soft backs to be the most outstanding disciples of the clan, the model students in others' eyes. They could rarely see their closest relatives. They couldn't fool around in their father's arms; they couldn't act spoiled in front of their mother.

But they had clearly done nothing wrong.

Lan XiChen, "Every time WangJi and I went to see her, she had never complained about how tedious it was locked inside of here, unable to go out one step. She had never asked about our studies, either. She especially liked to tease WangJi, but WangJi, the more you tease him the less willing he is to talk, the worse of an expression he puts on. He has been like this ever since he was young. However," he chuckled, "even though WangJi never said it, I knew that every month he was looking forward to the day he could see Mother. He was like this, and I was the same."

Wei WuXian imagined a young Lan WangJi hugged inside of his mother's arms; his snowy little cheeks flushed pink. He laughed as well. But before his smile had even melted, Lan XiChen continued, "But one day, Uncle suddenly told us that we would not need to go any longer.

"Mother was gone."

Wei WuXian's voice was soft, "How old was Lan Zhan back then?"

Lan XiChen, "Six."

He continued, "He was still too young to understand what „gone" means. No matter how much others comforted him, how much Uncle scolded him, he would continue to come back here every single month, sit down in the hallway, and wait for someone to open the door for him. When he grew older, he understood that Mother would not come back anymore, that nobody would open the door for him, but he kept on coming here."

Lan XiChen stood up. His dark eyes looked into Wei WuXian's, "WangJi has been this stubborn ever since he was young."

The leaves rustled and the gentian flowers swished alongside the wind, their scent lingering. Wei WuXian's eyes landed on the wooden hallway of the cottage. He could almost see a small child wearing a forehead ribbon sitting in proper posture in front of the house, waiting quietly for the door to open.

He spoke, "Madam Lan must've been a very gentle woman."

Lan XiChen, "In my memories, Mother had indeed been so. I do not know why she did such a thing back then. And, in truth, I..."

He took in a deep breath before confessing, "Do not want to know either."

After a few moments of silence, Lan XiChen closed his eyes. He took out Liebing. A gust of night

wind suddenly sent forth a sobbing note of the Xiao. The sound was deep, like a sigh.

Wei WuXian had heard Lan XiChen play Liebing before. Its timbre was just like Lan XiChen himself, as warm and graceful as the breeze and the rain of spring. Yet, now, although his technique was as excellent as ever, the tone evoked a strange mixture of feelings.

The night wind swept by. Lan XiChen's hair and forehead ribbon were already somewhat disheveled. However, the GusuLan Sect's sect leader, who had always regarded appearance highly, didn't pay any attention to them. He only put down Liebing after the song had finished, "Music is forbidden at night in the Cloud Recesses. Today I have gone many times too far. Excuse me, Young Master Wei."

Wei WuXian, "How so? ZeWu-Jun, have you forgotten that the person standing in front of you is the person who has broken the most rules...?"

Lan XiChen smiled, "The GusuLan Sect had never revealed to the outside WangJi and my pasts. I should not have told you. Tonight, was my sudden urge to unburden myself, a spur of the moment."

Wei WuXian, "I'm not the kind of person who talks too much. Don't worry, ZeWu-Jun."

Lan XiChen, "Regardless, I would assume that WangJi would not hide anything from you anyways."

Wei WuXian, "If he doesn't wish to talk about something then I won't ask."

Lan XiChen, "But, with WangJi's personality, how could he say anything if you do not ask? There are some things that even if you ask him, he would not say."

Wei WuXian was going to speak again when he heard footsteps come from behind him. He turned around to see Lan WangJi approach, bathed in moonlight. His right hand held two round liquor jars with red covers. Wei WuXian's eyes lit up, "HanGuang- Jun, you really are considerate!"

## Chapter 65: Tenderness—Part Three

Lan WangJi walked closer and gave him the jars of Emperor's Smile. Jars in his arm, Wei WuXian walked inside. To his back, Lan WangJi shook his head, though his gaze was softer than ever. Lan XiChen glanced at him, "You took them from your room?"

Lan WangJi nodded.

Lan XiChen, "It is best... if you do not touch liquor again. Be careful not to have what happened back then happen again."

His eyes landed on the clothes beside Lan WangJi's collarbones. Lan WangJi looked down as well, at where the center of his chest was, "It will not happen again."

Lan XiChen forced a smile. He sighed right after.

After Lan XiChen went away, Lan WangJi walked inside and gently closed the door behind him. Wei WuXian took off the covers of the jars as he continued to think about the stories of Lan An, the founder of the GusuLan Sect, and QingHeng-Jun, The GusuLan Sect really is a strange sect. Although the founder was a monk and its style is so orthodox, it really... raises many romantics. Thinking of this, he couldn't help but look at the other descendant of the GusuLan Sect in the room.

Lan WangJi was reading a book, his head down. A paper lantern was on the corner of the desk. Against the soft light of the fire, his face was even more like a piece of fine jade. Even his indifferent expression and his light eyes seemed to have been glazed a shade warmer. He was so beautiful that it seemed unreal. Caught by the moment, Wei WuXian was somehow entranced. Involuntarily, he inched closer.

Lan WangJi looked up, asking, "What?"

Wei WuXian immediately returned to himself, "Nothing. Your bookmark looks quite pretty."

Lan WangJi's bookmark was a dried flower in a light shade. It had been kept with much care; its color as vibrant ever. The petals

and the veins were so delicate that it seemed to be alive. Between pages, it let off a soft aroma.

Wei WuXian picked out the bookmark and asked, "Herb peony?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian played with the bookmark in his hands before giving it back to him, "Your brother received quite a big shock."

With care, Lan WangJi put the dried herb peony back into the book. He shut the pages, "Now that he has found the evidence, he will not tolerate this."

Wei WuXian, "Of course. He's your brother after all."

No matter how close of a relationship Lan XiChen and Jin GuangYao had, he was still from the GusuLan Sect and had his own principles.

Wei WuXian opened one jar of liquor, The time before the last

time Lan Zhan was drunk, he answered honestly that he's never had the Emperor's Smile in his room before. Then why did he hide them? He couldn't have been saving them just for me, could he? It's a bit shameless if I think about it this way. Speaking of it, should I apologize for the whole thing with the forehead ribbon?

After all I've played with it so many times already. What if he's so embarrassed that he gets mad and kicks me out of here? No matter what, I've fooled around so much and he hasn't gotten angry at all, clearly his self-restraint is getting better and better.

I'm sure that even if I fool around some more, he won't get angry. No, I shouldn't ask him. How about I just pretend that I don't know what the forehead ribbon means. Then, next time, I'll be able to pull it again on purpose. If he gets mad, I'll pretend to be innocent and say that I didn't know. Ignorance isn't a sin...

Wei WuXian was feeling quite pleased with himself. Lan WangJi asked, "What happened?"

He turned around with a serious expression, "Nothing. I'm in a good mood." Not paying

attention, he opened a jar, picked it up, and swallowed a gulp of it before suddenly spitting it out with a pfft.

Lan WangJi put down his book at once, "What happened this time?"

Wei WuXian waved his hands, "Nothing! Nothing, nothing!"

As he said nothing, he put the jar back where it had been and picked up another one with a dejected look on his face.

The last time he snuck a jar of liquor, he purposely put water inside to surprise Lan WangJi if he ever drank it. However, he didn't know that his luck was so bad. The two jars that Lan WangJi had brought just happened to include this jar of pure water, and he drank it himself.

Ever after he came back, whenever he wanted to tease Lan WangJi, he ended up shooting himself in the foot. He just couldn't understand it!

Wei WuXian slept sometime later. He was asleep until early morning when he suddenly woke up. With a shiver, he crawled forward and looked up. Lan WangJi's was still dressed, sword was on his back. As he took back the hand that he had put on Wei WuXian's shoulder, he stared at a white object within his palm, "We have an uninvited guest."

Wei WuXian squinted to see. The object was the GusuLanSect's jade token of passage. He could recall that Lan WangJi's token

was a very high level, able to alert him if others intruded over the barrier of the GusuLan Sect.

But nobody had dared intrude the Cloud Recesses in dozens of years. Wei WuXian hopped off the bed. He discovered that his outer robe had been taken off sometime during his sleep. He put it on as he spoke, "Who is it?"

Lan WangJi shook his head, gesturing for Wei WuXian to follow him. The two had walked stealthily until they arrived at a residence amid lush bamboos. Light seeped from the paper windows. Wei WuXian glanced at the wooden plaques in front of the courtyard, "The Hanshi?" As expected, Lan XiChen sat back-straight within the room. Seeing the two enter, he didn't seem surprised at all. He exchanged a look with Lan WangJi, and both of them understood. Lan WangJi led Wei WuXian to sit behind the screen.

A while later, the bamboo curtains of the Hanshi were lifted. A series of soft footsteps entered the room. The person seemed to have sat down before Lan XiChen.

A few moments later came the sound of jade knocking against each other. It sounded as if somebody had put something onto the table and pushed it over.

The first to speak was Lan XiChen, "What does this mean?" Somebody spoke, "To return to you, Brother."

It was Jin GuangYao.

Lan XiChen, "I have already given this to you."

Jin GuangYao, "The token of passage has never failed before. Now that it has failed, it's time for it to be returned to its rightful owner."

Wei WuXian understood now. Since ZeWu-Jun and LianFang-Zun had quite a good relationship, Lan XiChen had given Jin GuangYao a token of passage as well so that he could visit freely. However, it was likely that within the past few days he had either edited the prohibitions of the Cloud Recesses' barrier or retracted the permission of Jin GuangYao's token of passage. When Jin GuangYao came to visit, he was refused permission to enter, and thus he voluntarily returned the token.

Like Lan WangJi, Lan XiChen didn't know how to feign compliance either. Jin GuangYao backed off his advance, while Lan XiChen said nothing. A moment later, he spoke, "What did you come for?"

Jin GuangYao, "We still don't have any news on HanGuang-Jun and the YiLing Patriarch. I didn't let anyone search the Cloud Recesses, and many sects are already in doubt with many objections. Brother, whenever it works for you, it'd still be best for you to open the doors for two hours. Then I'll be able to take people over and deal with the situation."

Wei WuXian had thought that he was here to demand a search. He didn't expect at all that Jin GuangYao would say such a thing, as though not at all interested in searching where the YiLing Patriarch had gone. He couldn't help but feel somewhat surprised. On the other side of the screen, Jin GuangYao continued,

"Brother, what's wrong?" Lan XiChen, "Nothing."

Jin GuangYao, "If you're worried about WangJi, then please relax. HanGuang-Jun's character is upright and honest. All of the sects have seen this throughout the years. He must be only doing this because he's been lied to in some way. Besides, he hasn't done anything unforgivable yet. It'll be fine as long as he explains when the time comes. I won't let anyone take the chance to spread rumors."

Lan XiChen, "When the time comes? When would that be?" Jin GuangYao, "After we clean out Burial Mound."

Wei WuXian paused in surprise. Lan XiChen, "Burial Mound?"

Jin GuangYao, "Ever since the day of the fight at Koi Tower, strange things have been happening around the areas Moling, Lanling, and Yunmeng. Graves have been destroyed and the corpses have disappeared. Certain signs are showing that large groups of corpses are travelling toward the direction of Yiling.

They've probably gone to Burial Mound." Lan XiChen, "Just what could this be for?"

Jin GuangYao, "I don't know. The speculation is that Wei WuXian initiated some dark array or used the Tiger Seal."

Lan XiChen, "Back in Koi Tower, he had been wounded by Jin Ling. Can he still initiate such things?"

Jin GuangYao, "Brother, during the fight with Sect Leader Jiang, when Wei WuXian betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect, how badly wounded was he? Didn't he still return to command the corpses? Would anything in this world prove to be difficult to the YiLing Patriarch?"

Wei WuXian stroked his chin, you think too highly of me...

Jin GuangYao, "So, sooner or later, there might be the second siege of Burial Mound. I've already notified a few other sects to discuss the matter at Koi Tower. Brother, are you coming?"

A few moments later, Lan XiChen finally replied, "I am. Wait for me in the Yashi. I will go with you soon afterwards."

After Jin GuangYao left, Lan XiChen walked behind the screen and looked at Lan WangJi, "I will go to Koi Tower, and you two go to Burial Mound. Let us move separately."

Lan WangJi nodded slowly, "Yes."

Lan XiChen, "If he really holds other intentions, I will definitely not tolerate it."

Lan WangJi, "I know."

The two went down the Cloud Recesses on a small path. On their way, the grass beside the white pebbles rustled before parting suddenly, revealing a small, snowball-like head and a pair of long ears.

The rabbit's pink nose sniffled. As it saw Lan WangJi, its dangling ears suddenly perked up. With a kick of its leg, it sprang toward

them. They came to the patch of green grass. Lil" Apple was lying under a tree while dozens of round white rabbits circled around it, most of their eyes shut, sleeping tightly. A few of them were still snuggling.

Wei WuXian walked to the tree and scratched Lil" Apple's head. With a shiver, Lil" Apple woke up at once, air coming out of its nostrils. As it saw Wei WuXian, just as it was about to bellow, the

pile of rabbits were startled awake as well. Long ears trembling, all of them hopped toward Lan WangJi. Fluffs of white at his snowy boots, they ran around him again and again, whatever they were excited about.

Holding Lil" Apple's rein, Wei WuXian pulled and threatened for it to move. The rabbits stood on the ground on their hind legs and clung to Lan WangJi's leg one by one. All of them wanted

to climb up. Lan WangJi was as still as a mountain. As the two began to walk, the rabbits stumbled as they followed the pair of white boots. They refused to leave no matter how many times Wei WuXian tried to shoo them away.

Bending down, Lan WangJi picked one up and held it within his arms. Although his face was still cold, the stroke of his hands were gentle. His slender fingers scratched the chin of one of the rabbits. The rabbit shook its long ears. It turned around and shut its ruby eyes into just two slits, as though enjoying the scratching very much.

Wei WuXian wanted scratch it, but it turned its head away. Wei WuXian, “It detests me. It loves you and you only. It really knows who its master is, doesn’t it?”

Lan WangJi glanced at him before passing the rabbit into his arms. Wei WuXian took it over with a grin on his face. The rabbit twisted and turned in his arms, struggling as hard as it could. Wei WuXian tugged its ears, “You don’t like me? You hate me? Then run away. You can’t run away no matter how much you want to.

Why don’t you just be obedient and like me instead?”

Pinching the rabbit, Wei WuXian played with it for a while. When they were almost outside of the gates of the Cloud Recesses, he finally let go of the rabbit whose white fur had already been tangled by him. Now that the rabbits couldn’t follow them any longer, their ears drooped low and sat where they were, watching as their master left.

Wei WuXian looked back, “They don’t want to let you go at all. HanGuang-Jun, I can’t believe that you’re liked do much by these little things. You must’ve been very gentle with them when you brought them up. I’d never be able to do that.”

Lan WangJi, “No?”

Wei WuXian gloated, “Yeah! Those that fly, those that walk, those that swim—every single one of them turns around and flees as soon as it sees me.”

Lan WangJi shook his head. What he meant was more than obvious: it must’ve been Wei WuXian teasing them first that he had never been liked by them.

## Chapter 66: Tenderness—Part Four

Down the mountain path, they left the Cloud Recesses through a discreet shortcut. They walked farther and farther, until they had finally left the GusuLan Sect's "disciples" usual area of activity. Wei WuXian suddenly exclaimed, "Ow, my stomach hurts."

Lan WangJi stopped immediately, "Rest. Apply new ointment." Wei WuXian, "It's fine. I'll just go sit over there."

Lan WangJi, "Sit."

Wei WuXian's expression seemed miserable, "But the movement of getting on the donkey is too big. I'm scared that it'll affect the wound."

His wound had healed long ago. This was clearly being shameless. Lan WangJi stopped, turned around, and looked at him. He suddenly reached out. Making sure not to touch where he had been injured, he picked him up by his waist, lifted him gently, and placed him onto the back of Lil" Apple.

Of the two, one sat on the donkey while the other pulled the rein. On the back of Lil" Apple, Wei WuXian grinned with curving eyes.

Lan WangJi asked, "What?" Wei WuXian, "Nothing."

Like he had played a trick on someone, he felt somewhat pleased with himself.

Although he didn't remember much of the things that had happened when he was young, there was one scene that had always been blurrily imprinted within his mind.

A narrow path, a little donkey, and three people. A man in black gently lifted a woman in white. He picked her up and placed her onto the donkey's back. Then, he raised a small, small child way up high and put him on his shoulders.

He was the child, not yet the height of a person's legs. Sitting on the shoulders of the man, he was suddenly very tall, very majestic. Sometimes he pulled the man's hair, sometimes he rubbed his cheeks. He shouted things, swinging his legs about.

The woman in white sat on the donkey's back, her back swaying. Watching them, she seemed to smile. The man had always been quiet. He didn't talk much. He only pushed him a bit higher, for him to be taller, steadier. One of his hands picked up the donkey's rein. The three of them were squeezed onto the same narrow path, walking slowly forward.

It was one of the rare pieces of memory that he had. Those were his dad and his mom.

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan, pick up the rein, won't you?" Lan WangJi, "Why?"

Lil" Apple was quite clever. It wasn't that it didn't know to follow a person. Wei WuXian said again, "Give me some face and pick it up, won't you?"

Although he still didn't understand why Wei WuXian's grin was so bright, Lan WangJi listened and picked up Lil" Apple's rein anyway, holding it in his hand.

WeiWuXian spoke to himself, "Hm. Now all that's left is a little one."

Lan WangJi, "What?"

Wei WuXian chuckled, "Nothing. Lan Zhan, you really are a good person."

With this journey to Yiling, it was clear that their future was still unclear, even somewhat dangerous. Wei WuXian couldn't get himself to feel nervous at all. Sitting on a donkey with Lan WangJi holding the rein, leading them down the path, his entire heart was

fluttering, feeling as though he was walking on air. Even if a bunch of sects suddenly attacked from beside the road, aside from destroying the scene and spoiling his mood, he thought that he wouldn't find it too bad. He even had the spirit to enjoy the fields under the moonlight, pulling out the bamboo flute at his waist. As natural as ever, he played a tune.

The flute had a limpid timbre. Lan WangJi's footsteps hesitated slightly as Wei WuXian felt something inside of him suddenly light up.

He spoke, "Lan Zhan! Let me ask you, back then, under the Xuanwu cave in Dusk-Creek Mountain, the song that you sang me, what was its name?"

Lan WangJi looked at him, "Why do you suddenly remember to ask about this?" Wei WuXian, "Just say it. What was its name? I think I might've guessed how you recognized me."

On the night at Dafan Mountain, the tune that he somehow played was precisely the one, when he had been fevered under the Xuanwu cave in Dusk-Creek Mountain, Lan WangJi had hummed beside him!

Lan WangJi refused to say anything. Wei WuXian hurried him, "Say it, what song is it? Who composed it?"

Lan WangJi, "I did."

Wei WuXian, "You composed it?!" Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian had thought that it was a secret song of the GusuLan Sect. Now that he knew, he was both surprised and overjoyed.

What he was surprised about was quite obvious. What he was overjoyed about, though, he couldn't really tell. He guessed, "If you really did recognize from just this, it must've meant that—this song, you've never let anyone else hear it?"

Lan WangJi, "Never."

Wei WuXian was so happy that he kicked Lil" Apple. Lil" Apple shouted in anger, kicking its hind legs as though to shake him off its back. Just in time, Lan WangJi pulled the rein tight. Wei WuXian hugged Lil" Apple's neck, "It's fine, it's fine. That's just how it is. It only kicks a few times. Let's continue. Then, really, what is it called?"

Lan WangJi, "What do you think?"

Wei WuXian, "What do you mean what do I think? Just does it have a name or not?" In his heart he muttered. Would Lan WangJi's style of naming things be the same as Jiang Cheng"s? That'd be impossible! He asked, "Are you asking me for my opinion? I think that why don't you call it..."

After the more than eighty names he had come up with were all refused by Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian's spirit finally began to dwindle.

In case they ran into any cultivators searching the area if they walked on main paths, the two of them only chose remote, countryside paths on their journey. A day later, Wei WuXian felt somewhat tired and thirsty. As they happened to see a farmhouse by the side of the road, Lan WangJi halted Lil" Apple.

After they had knocked, nobody answered. When they pushed, the door opened on its own. A handmade wooden table was in the center of the yard, and a bowl of beans that hadn't been entirely peeled was on the table. A tall mountain of straws stood by the dirt wall, a rake sticking out of it. All over the ground, chicks chirped as they picked at the rice, running around.

Wei WuXian saw a few melons piled up in a corner of the yard. He walked over and picked one of them up, proposing in all seriousness, "The owner isn't here. HanGuang-Jun, let's suit ourselves."

Just as Lan WangJi was about to put coins onto the table, the sound of footsteps came from outside of the wall. One in front and one behind, they were probably the owners who had just come home. Wei WuXian didn't know why, but as he heard the footsteps, he quickly pushed Lan WangJi down, behind the stack of straws.

Fortunately, Lan WangJi had always been calm and collected that he didn't make a single noise even after having been pushed down. Despite this, he clearly didn't understand why they had to hide. Wei WuXian also realized, Right, why are we hiding? These villagers from the countryside can't possibly recognize us. Can't we just be honest and say that we're here to buy food? Maybe I've done too many bad things and got used to it.

However, with the push, he pushed Lan WangJi's entire body down onto the soft stack of straws. The somewhat forceful position evoked a strange feeling of excitement within him. He decided to not get up. Purposely putting up an act, he raised his index finger, gesturing for Lan WangJi not to make a sound.

Then, he pretended that this couldn't be helped. Comfortably, he lay on top of Lan WangJi, full

of a secretive delight that couldn't be brought to words.

The sound of pushing wooden stools came from the yard. The two owners of the farm seemed to have sat down before the table. The sound of a woman spoke up, "Er-Gege, I can hug him."

Hearing the „Er-Gege", Lan WangJi paused slightly.

A man's voice spoke, "You can just peel the beans." Then came the sound of a child murmuring in his sleep.

It seemed that it was a young couple. The wife was preparing dinner while the husband was hugging the asleep child.

With a grin, Wei WuXian winked his left eye at Lan WangJi, whispering, "What a coincidence. The owner of the farm is an „Er- Gege" as well."

The tone at the end of his words lifted up, its teasing intent more than obvious. With heavy eyes, Lan WangJi swept a look at him before turning away. Wei WuXian felt his heart melt. He lay beside his ears and called in a low voice, "Lan Er-Gege."

Lan WangJi's breaths seemed to have stuttered. The eyes he looked at him with seemed to hold a hint of a warning.

In the yard, the wife chuckled, "You don't know how to hug him properly. Later, if you make him wake up, I'll need to be the one who cheers him up again, won't I?"

The husband, "He's played too hard today. He must be very tired. He won't be able to wake up."

The wife peeled the beans as she spoke, "Er-Gege, you really need to discipline A-Bao. He's only four and he's already like this. What would he be like when he grows up? How many times has their child cried? He said that he doesn't want to play with A-Bao anymore."

The husband, "But he still comes back to him every single time. He says he doesn't want to, but in his heart, he clearly wants to play with A-Bao very much."

Wei WuXian laughed with a pfft, "Lan Er-Gege, what are your thoughts on this? Do you agree?"

Lan WangJi, "Stop speaking."

At that volume, average people wouldn't be able to hear them at all. The couple chatted about the usual things while on the other side, right next to Lan WangJi's ear, Wei WuXian had already relentlessly repeated „Lan Er-Gege" over half a dozen times, softly and lightly. Lan WangJi seemed to have finally run out of patience. He suddenly flipped around.

His movement was both quick and steady. The straws didn't move at all, but Wei WuXian was already underneath him.

Lan WangJi's voice was low, "Anymore, and you will be silenced."

Wei WuXian reached out toward his face, but Lan WangJi caught his hand at once. Wei WuXian's tone was serious, "HanGuang- Jun, there's a straw on your forehead ribbon."

Hearing this, Lan WangJi's hands finally relaxed. Wei WuXian helped him pick off the thin straw, presenting it in front of his eyes as he gloated, "See? I wasn't lying, was I?"

Before he could gloat for too long, he heard the young wife speak again, "But even if this is true, we shouldn't let A-Bao just bully others."

Her husband spoke calmly, "Let him be. Boys, don't they bully other people only because they like them? They just want others to look at them."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian's smile froze.

At this point in time, it seemed that the young child had woken up. He mumbled something in a creamy voice. The couple hurried to cheer him up together. A while later, the child fell asleep again.

The young wife spoke, "Er-Gege, I told you to discipline A-Bao not only because of this. It's also because these days it isn't too safe. Tell him not to play around outside too much and get home earlier."

The husband, "I know. Is it the thing with the old graves around the village having been dug out?"

The wife, "I heard that it's not just around our village. Even among the people in the city there

are many who had something happen to their ancestors' graves. It's just too strange. A-Bao should play at home more. He shouldn't go outside so often."

The husband, "That's right. It'd be awful if he runs into that YiLing Patriarch."

Wei WuXian, "..."

The young wife spoke softly, "I've been listening to the YiLing Patriarch's story ever since I was young. I've always thought that

"if you don't be obedient the YiLing Patriarch will return to find you and take you back to feed his ghouls" was only the adults teasing the children. Who would've known that such a person really exists? And he really came back?"

The husband, "Yeah. As soon as I heard about digging graves open, I thought of him. It's true indeed. The rumors have been spreading all over the city."

To the fact that he was tied together with the act of „digging graves open", Wei WuXian couldn't do anything aside from feeling helpless. To be honest, he really had done many of these things in the past. The most famous time was during the Sunshot Campaign, when he dug deep into the earth to flip over all of the cemeteries of the QishanWen Sect's ancestors and turned all of the corpses into puppets. And for every one of the Wen Sect's cultivators whom he killed, he made them into puppets as well before controlling them to kill the friends and family they had before they died.

During the Sunshot Campaign, all of these things were praised, used to inspire the people. However, the further the Sunshot Campaign became, the more fearful the people were when they mentioned it again. Not only others, even when he, himself, thought about it afterward, he felt that he had done a bit too much. Along with how his identity had just been revealed a few days ago, it wasn't the fault of other people that they thought it was the YiLing Patriarch when they heard of somebody digging graves open everywhere.

## Chapter 67: Tenderness—Part Five

The wife spoke again, “Let’s just hope that he knows who did him wrong. If he wants to seek revenge, then seek revenge on those cultivators. Please don’t come harm us normal people.”

Her husband, “Who could possibly guarantee that? When he killed over three thousand people in Qishan, I was very young, but I can still remember that back then, not only the immortals who cultivated, even normal people were scared of him. He’s a blood lusting demon who has no heart.”

Wei WuXian’s grin gradually faded.

He had been quite interested when listening to the couple talk about their daily lives. However, all of a sudden, he felt that his head was as heavy as a thousand pounds. He couldn’t raise it to see the expression on Lan WangJi’s face. What the couple chatted about next, he couldn’t hear any of it.

Suddenly, a chilling roar came from outside of the farm. The family in the yard had been having dinner, talking and laughing. When they heard the unhuman roar, they were so startled that even one of the bowls smashed onto the ground. The child began to cry. The young man snatched a hoe from the side, “Don’t worry! Don’t worry!”

Not only were they surprised, even Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi flinched. Lan WangJi was about to get up when Wei WuXian thought of something and grabbed the clothing in front of his chest, “Don’t move!”

Lan WangJi’s eyes widened slightly. The roar had definitely come from some dark, cruel creature. If the owner of the farm went to deal with it alone, he’d most likely not come back alive. In spite of this, Wei WuXian repeated, “Don’t move.”

A scream came from the yard, along with more of those unhuman roars coming closer and closer. It had already entered the door.

Lan WangJi couldn’t stay still any longer. Bichen unsheathed at the speed of lightning. Yet, the family of three had already fled, running as they screamed. The stack of straw had been messed up by Bichen. Amid the straws raining down on them, something entirely black stood in the middle of the yard.

Its hair was tangled and it was still flashing its fangs. The disordered points that seemed to grow out of its body made it look

both terrifying and somewhat funny. Lan WangJi had never seen such a monster before. He paused in surprise, while Wei WuXian had spoken already, “Wen Ning, you haven’t opened up your throat in too many years. Your shouts are really getting worse and worse.”

Human speech came out of the mouth of the dark monster, “Young Master... I’m a fierce corpse after all. All fierce corpses sound like this... when they shout.”

Wei WuXian patted his shoulder, “Such strong energy.”

Wen Ning glanced at Lan WangJi. Probably having recalled that

the GusuLan Sect’s people disliked those who didn’t dress neatly, he smoothed his hair a couple of times, sheepish-looking. As Wei WuXian saw how many branches stuck out of his hair, he almost couldn’t bear it as he plucked one out, “Why did you suddenly jump out? And you’re like this. Were you robbed? What’s that on your face?”

Wen Ning, “The dust and dirt on the ground... After I watched you two go inside and didn’t come out for a long time...”

Wei WuXian, “You’ve always been following behind us?”

Wen Ning nodded. Wei WuXian understood. Wen Ning didn’t dare meet with anyone except for him. And so, after they went down the Cloud Recesses, he secretly followed behind them. When he saw that nothing happened for a long time after they went inside the farm, he went to listen in and heard that the couple was talking about him. He felt awkward and wanted to scare them away so that Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi could come out.

Probably feeling that how he had looked wasn't daunting enough, he stuck a bunch of strange things to his face and his body.

Wei WuXian was laughing so hard that he was close to death. With a look of embarrassment on his face, Wen Ning rubbed the mud away as Wei WuXian suddenly found that his hands were covered in blood, "What happened?"

Wen Ning, "Oh, nothing..."

Lan WangJi, "The scent of blood."

Wei WuXian just realized that there really was the scent of blood coming from Wen Ning. His heart skipped a beat. As Wen Ning saw, he immediately waved his hands, "Not blood! No, no, it is blood, but it's not the blood of live humans."

Wei WuXian, "Not the blood of live humans? Have you fought with anything?"

Wen Ning had led them for a while until they arrived at a patch of woods. In the woods, there were twenty or thirty new graves, along with a half-finished pit on the side and a pile of corpses beside the pit. He'd call it a pile and not a single corpse because the corpses were already quite broken. Wei WuXian went up to examine it. The fingers of some of the severed arms were still twitching. The jaws of some of the heads were still opening and closing, creating the hair-rising sound of teeth rubbing against one another. The corpses had transformed already.

Wei WuXian, "You've broken them into quite a lot of pieces."

Wen Ning, "If I didn't, they'd keep on biting people. They couldn't be stopped at all. All along the way there are corpses like these."

Wei WuXian, "All along the way? Have you always been in front of us to get rid of these things?"

Wen Ning nodded in embarrassment. His ability to recognize those of his own was greater than that of humans, and he could recognize them from farther away as well. If this was the case, then that'd explain why nothing had happened during their journey. Wei WuXian had found this strange as well. Didn't people say that a bunch of fierce corpses were travelling toward Yiling?

Why didn't they see a single one of them? So, Wen Ning had cleared the obstacles before them.

Wei WuXian, "When did you begin to follow us?" Lan WangJi, "Koi Tower."

Wei WuXian looked at Wen Ning as Lan WangJi continued, "The day of the fight with the cultivators, he helped."

Wei WuXian sighed, "Didn't I tell you to hide somewhere and not worry about anything right now?"

Wen Ning forced a smile, "But, Young Master... where could I hide?"

Before, he had somewhere to return to, people he could follow, but now, in this world, apart from Wei WuXian, everyone was unfamiliar to him.

After a while of silence, Wei WuXian stood up and patted at the dust at the lower hem of his clothes, "Bury them."

Wen Ning quickly nodded. He continued to dig the pit that had only been half finished. Lan WangJi pulled Bichen out. Its sword energy swept out. Dirt splashed everywhere, and a crevice was opened in the ground.

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, you're digging the grave too?"

Lan WangJi turned around. Just as he was about to speak, he saw Wen Ning standing behind him. Forcing up his frozen lips, he squeezed a smile, "... Young Master Lan, do you want any help? I'm finished with my side."

Lan WangJi looked behind him. There were rows of black pits, the piles of dirt beside them tall and neat. Wen Ning maintained his

"smile" as he added, "I do this kind of thing a lot. I'm experienced. And fast."

On the topic of who it was that often made him „do this kind of thing", no explanation was needed.

After some silence, Lan WangJi finally spoke, "There is no need. You can help..."

Before he could finish, he suddenly realized that Wei WuXian didn't move at all. He had been squatting on the side, watching them. When he left the farm, he casually took with him a melon,

and now he seemed to be trying to figure out how to open it.

Meeting Lan WangJi's gaze, he protested, "HanGuang-Jun, don't look at me like that. I have nothing in my hands and my spiritual powers are low, am I right? For every field there are professionals, it's true. Digging graves, he's the fastest. Why don't we talk about how to eat the melon? Bichen had gone into the dirt and we won't be able to use it as of now. Does anyone have any more knives or swords or those kinds of things on them?"

Wen Ning shook his head, "Sorry, I didn't bring any." Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, uh, is Subian with you?" Lan WangJi, "..."

Eventually, he took Subian out of his qiankun sleeve. Melon in one hand and sword in the other, he showed off a sword routine and cut the little watermelon into eight pieces. After he finished, he squatted on the ground, watching them dig graves diligently as he ate melon.

On the other hand, within half an hour, Wen Ning had dug an entire row of pits exactly the same in size. He lay the corpses that he had broken up inside as he rambled on, "Everyone, I'm really sorry. I can't tell anymore which of your corpses belonged to whom. If I buried anyone's wrong, please excuse me..."

Having finished the melon and buried the rest of the corpses, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi set off again.

A few days later, the two arrived at Yiling.

Burial Mound was less than three miles away from the town before them. Although they didn't know what was waiting for them there, Wei WuXian had a hunch that it wasn't anything good. However, Lan WangJi was right beside him. His strides were steady and his eyes were calm. Wei WuXian didn't have any sense of emergency to begin with. Looking at such a person, he couldn't feel nervous no matter what. Walking through the town of Yiling, it was the accent of his home all around him. Refreshed by the familiarity, in spite of how he wasn't going to buy anything, he couldn't help but chat with the vendors by the streets in the local accent.

After he felt satisfied with how much he had spoken, he finally turned around, "HanGuang-Jun, you remember this town, don't you?"

Lan WangJi nodded lightly, "I do."

Wei WuXian grinned, "I knew that your memory is better than mine. In this town, we've met once before. You happened to be night-hunting in Yiling and I said that I needed to treat you a meal. You remember this too?"

Lan WangJi, "I do."

Wei WuXian, "But it's quite a shame. You ended up paying in the end anyway, haha!"

He sat on the donkey with his legs crisscrossed. He swayed as he pretended to be unconcerned, "Speaking of it, HanGuang-Jun, do you plan on ever retiring?"

Lan WangJi paused shortly, as though he was thinking for a moment. Wei WuXian struck the iron while it was still hot, "Have you thought of what to do after you retire?"

Lan WangJi gazed at him, "Not yet."

Wei WuXian thought to himself, it's perfect if you haven't thought of anything yet! I'll think for you.

He was going to find a place beautiful though sparsely populated and build a large house there. He could build one for Lan WangJi next to him as well. Everyday there'd be two dishes and a soup. Of course, it'd be best if Lan WangJi was the one who cooked, or else they had to eat the things he cooked. It'd be best if Lan WangJi was responsible for the account of their money as well.

Before his eyes even appeared the scene of Lan WangJi wearing coarse cloth, patches at his chest and his knees, sitting expressionlessly at a handmade wooden table, counting coins one by one. After he finished counting, he grabbed a hoe and went out to work. And, on the other hand, he'd... he'd... he'd do what?

Wei WuXian thought seriously about what he'd be doing. People often said that to exchange for food one either plowed the fields or spun cloth. Now that somebody was plowing the fields,

somebody had to spin the cloth as well. Just thinking of him crossing his knees and shaking his legs in front of a loom was enough for him to cringe. He'd rather grab the hoe. It'd be more suitable for Lan WangJi to spin cloth. In the day they'd fish and plow the fields, while at night they'd get their swords and go night-hunting for beasts and demons. If they got tired of it, they could pretend that they'd never retired and it'd be fine for them just to enter the world again. But, as he had thought, they were missing a small one...

Lan WangJi suddenly spoke up, "A small what?" Wei WuXian, "Huh?"

He suddenly realized that he had spoken the last sentence out. He immediately regained himself, "I meant, Lil" Apple is missing a small friend."

Lil" Apple turned around and spat hard. Wei WuXian slapped its donkey head. Pulling its long ears, he laughed, but all of a sudden, he couldn't laugh anymore.

It wasn't because of anything special, but only that he remembered. Back then, he really had a little child beside him. If he had lived until now, he'd be close to fifteen years old already.

Burial Mound sat in the depths of the mountains of Yiling.

The world called Burial Mound a mountain of corpses. Over the hills, if one stuck their shovel anywhere into the ground, they'd be able to dig out a dead person. This wasn't wrong. Burial Mound used to be an ancient battleground. In the years afterward, people

had gotten used to tossing inside nameless corpses, causing there to always be dark, resentful energy throughout the year. In the end, it became the nightmare of everyone in the Yiling area.

As though tainted by the energy of resentment, within the woods on the mound, all of the leaves and branches were as black as death. From the most bottom part of the mountain, there was a tall wall dozens of feet in height. Carved onto the wall were tightly-packed incantations, preventing both the living and the dead from passing through. The wall of incantations that surrounded the entire burial mound was at first built by the third sect leader of the QishanWen Sect. However, since they couldn't purify the overwhelmingly powerful spirits that dwelled here, they could only choose the second-best option, to isolate them with a wall. Wei WuXian had once pushed this wall down. The one here now was a new wall rebuilt and strengthened by the LanlingJin Sect's people.

However, when they arrived, they discovered that a long section of the wall had been pushed down again.

## Chapter 68: Tenderness—Part Six

Wei WuXian left the donkey down at the bottom of the mountain. He stepped over the remains of the wall and walked up the mountain path. Soon later, he saw the stone statue of a headless beast. The statue was thousands of pounds in weight. It had guarded the mountain path for many years. Vines climbed over it and moss gathered at the dents. The head of the beast had been chopped off by an axe and tossed somewhere nearby. As if to assert power, it had been smashed into small pieces. The cut was still new, revealing the whiteness inside. Farther along, similarly, the next statue that they saw had been cut into two halves, from head to toe.

Wei WuXian knew at once that these were the stone beasts that the sects had set onto the acupoints of the terrain to guard the mountain after he had died. The stone beasts were capable of exorcism. They required much craft and were quite expensive to produce. Now, it was likely that all of them had been destroyed. It was truly a waste.

Side by side, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked a few more steps. Inadvertently looking back, he saw that Wen Ning had already appeared.

He stood beside the stone beast, head lowered and unmoving. Wei WuXian asked, “Wen Ning? What are you looking at?”

Wen Ning pointed at the base of the stone beast.

The stone beast was on top of a short, thick tree trunk. By the trunk, there were three smaller, shorter trunks. They seemed to have been burnt over by fire. They were entirely black.

Wen Ning kneeled on the ground with both of his knees. His fingers dug deeply into the dirt, grabbing a handful of black dirt, and clenched it within his palm, “... Sister.”

Wei WuXian didn’t know what to say. He walked over and patted his shoulder hard.

Throughout Wei WuXian’s life, two periods of time had been extremely hard to endure. Both happened here. He never intended to visit such a place again.

And, to Wen Ning, Burial Mound was even more of an unforgettable place.

A gust of cold breeze swept over. The sea of trees rustled as though tens of thousands of thin voices whispered. Wei WuXian listened carefully. Kneeling on the ground with one knee, he bent down and murmured something toward the earth below him.

Suddenly, a bump formed below the surface.

As though a pale flower had grown out of the black soil, a skeleton arm slowly broke through the dirt.

The portion of the skeleton arm was weakly suspended in the air. Wei WuXian reached out and grabbed it. He bent down even lower. His long hair fell from his shoulder, masking half of his face.

He pressed his lips toward the skeleton hand and whispered something. Then he was quiet, as though he was listening for something. A while later, he nodded slightly. The hand formed a flower bud again and withdrew into the soil.

Wei WuXian stood up and swept away the dirt on him, “These days they’ve taken over a hundred people up here. They’re all at the top, still alive. The people who took them have already gone down the mountain though. I don’t know what they want to do.

Anyways, we should be careful.”

The three continued upward. They came along a few run-down shacks standing alongside the mountain path.

The houses varied in size. The structure was simple, even crude. Just one glance, it was obvious that they had been built rashly.

Some were so burned that only bare frames were left, while some slumped entirely to one side. Even the most complete ones were half-destroyed. After being under over ten years of rain and wind, with nobody to care for them, each looked like dying ghosts in tattered clothing, looking down in silence at those who came up the mountain.

Ever since they had gone up the mountain, Wen Ning's footsteps had been especially heavy. Right now, standing before one of the houses, again, he couldn't walk any longer.

This was one of the houses that he had built himself. Before he left, the house had still been fine. Although it was crude, it was a place to seek shelter from the weather, nonetheless holding the people he was familiar with; the people he treasured.

In the saying „the things remain but the people don't“, at least „the things“ still remained. With such a scene in front of him, there wasn't even anything to remind him of the people whom he missed.

Wei WuXian, “Don't look anymore.”

Wen Ning, “... I knew that it'd be like this a long time ago. I just wanted to see if there was anything left...”

Before his voice faded off, a shadow suddenly wobbled up within one of the broken-down houses.

The shadow stumbled toward outside of the house. The half-rotted face was submerged with the thin daylight. Wei WuXian clapped his hands. The walking corpse didn't seem to notice anything at all, continuing to walk toward them. Wei WuXian calmly walked two steps backward, “It's controlled by the Tiger Seal.”

Corpse puppets who had already submitted to him wouldn't be controlled by the Tiger Seal. Likewise, corpse puppets who had

submitted to the Tiger Seal wouldn't listen to his commands. The rules were simple: first come, first served.

Wen Ning shot forward. With a roar, he tore its head off. Right after, low bellows came from all around them. From amid the black forest slowly walked out almost fifty corpses. No matter gender or age, most of them were still fresh, wearing burial clothes. They were probably the corpses missing from many regions.

Lan WangJi flipped out his guqin. With a strum, notes flowed out like ripples. The group of corpses that had just surrounded them immediately kneeled into a circle. With both of his hands, Wen Ning picked up a male corpse with an especially large physique and threw it far away. Its chest had been pierced through by a sharp branch, and it struggled, stuck to the branch.

Wei WuXian shouted, “Don't bother with them, just go up the mountain!”

He didn't know how many groups of walking corpses Jin GuangYao had madly summoned within these past few days using the Tiger Seal. One attack wave followed another. The three subdued the corpses as they backed up the mountain. The closer they were to the top of Burial Mound, the denser the groups of corpses were. The notes of the zither echoed through the sky above the black forest as crows flew off. Almost two hours later, they finally had some time to rest.

Sitting atop one of the destroyed stone beasts, Wei WuXian sighed as he mocked himself, “I've always been the one using this to deal with others. Today it's finally my turn to have others use it against me. Now I know just how obnoxious the Tiger Seal is. If I were them, I would've wanted to kill the person who created this damn thing as well.”

Lan WangJi put his guqin away. He pulled out a sword from within his sleeves and passed it to him, “To protect yourself.”

Wei WuXian took it over. It was Suibian. After the day when it had been used to cut the melon, Wei WuXian tossed it to the side. Lan WangJi put it away again. He unsheathed the sword and stared for a while at the snowy blade before sheathing it back inside right away, smiling, “Thank you.”

He wore it by his waist and didn't seem like he was going to use it. Seeing how Lan WangJi looked at him, he fiddled with his hair and explained, “I haven't used a sword in so many years. I'm not used to it.” As he spoke, he sighed again, “Alright. The real reason is that my current body is low in spiritual energy. Even if

there's a high-level sword, it won't be able to make the best use of it. And so, it'll be up to HanGuang-Jun to protect the delicate man that I am."

Lan WangJi, "..."

After the delicate man sat for a while, he finally stood up, bracing a hand against his knees. The three walked farther up and finally, at the end of the path, they saw a cave with a dark opening. The mouth of the cave was around fifty feet in both height and width. Before they were even near, they could feel a cold breeze in front of them. They could almost hear the blurry sounds of human moans.

This was the legendary den where the YiLing Patriarch made humans into his corpses and did the deeds that even the Heavens couldn't tolerate—the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

The ceiling of the cave was broad. The three held their breaths and snuck inside. Nobody made a noise, but the human voices coming from the depths of the cave grew louder.

Wei WuXian knew the terrain of the cave like the back of his palm. He walked in the front. At some point, he gestured for them to stop.

The main area of the cave was just a wall away from them. Through the holes on the wall, they could see a large enough area that could contain a thousand people. In the center sat around a hundred. Both their hands and their feet were tightly bound by deity-binding ropes. The one hundred people were quite young as well. Judging from the color of their robes and their swords, they were either high level disciples or direct disciples from clans.

Wei WuXian exchanged a look with Lan WangJi. Before they began to discuss, a boy sitting on the ground suddenly spoke up, "In my opinion, I don't think you should've stabbed him only once. Why didn't you just slash his throat out?"

His voice wasn't big, but the cave was rather empty. Echoes vibrated as soon he spoke. And so, even if they didn't listen in, they could hear his words with clarity. As soon as the boy spoke, Wei WuXian thought that he both looked and sounded familiar.

He only remembered after a while. Wasn't this the one who fought with Jin Ling the other day, Jin Chan?

And he looked again—who was the cold-faced boy sitting beside this disciple, if not Jin Ling? Jin Ling didn't even look at him, remaining quiet. Loud rumbles came from the stomach of a boy beside him, "They have left for so many days already. Just what do they want? If they want to kill

us, then let us off easy. I would rather be eaten by a monster on a night-hunt than starve to death here!"

The boy rambled on and on. It was Lan JingYi. Jin Chan spoke, "What could he do? He'd definitely do what he did with those Wen-dogs during the Sunshot Campaign, make us into his corpse puppets and then use us against our family, so that they can't attack and his enemies can fight amongst themselves." He clenched his teeth, "That dirty, inhuman Wei-dog!"

Suddenly, Jin Ling spoke, his voice icy, "Shut up."

Jin Chan was shocked, "You want me to shut up? What do you mean?"

Jin Ling, "What do I mean? Are you deaf or are you dumb? You can't understand human speech? Shut up, means for you to stop making so much noise!"

Having been tied-up for so long, Jin Chan had been grumpy for a long time. He fumed, "Why should you tell me to shut up?!"

Jin Ling, "What's the use of talking so much garbage? If you go on would the ropes break because of you? It's annoying."

"You!!!"

Another young voice interjected, "Now, we are stuck here and none of us know when the walking corpses on the mountain will rush inside. Even in such circumstances, you two have to argue?"

The calmest voice was Lan SiZhui's. Jin Chan protested, "He flipped out first! What, you can call him names but other people can't?! Jin Ling, hah, who do you think you are? You think that

because LianFang-Zun is the chief cultivator that you'll also be? I'm not gonna shut up. I think you..."

With a thump, Jin Chan's head was suddenly smacked. Jin Chan exclaimed in pain. He cursed, "You wanna fight? I'll take you on! I'm in the mood for it anyways. You son of a nobody!"

Hearing this, Jin Ling was even more unstoppable. He was tied up and couldn't move his arms, so he used his elbows and his knees, slamming them so hard that the other yelped in pain. Yet, he was alone, and Jin Chan had always had groups of people around him.

As the boys saw that he was at a disadvantage, they all shouted, "Let me help you!" All of them crowded over.

Lan SiZhui was sitting nearby. He couldn't help but let himself be dragged into their fight. At first, he could manage to persuade

"everyone calm down, calm down", but after he had received a few elbows, he scrunched his eyebrows in pain, his face darkening. In the end, after a cry, he entered the brawl as well.

The three outside couldn't watch this any longer. WeiWuXian leapt onto the stairs leading to the cave first, "Hey! Everybody look here!"

His shout echoed within the empty cave, almost thunderous. The tangled boys looked up. Lan SiZhui saw a familiar figure beside him and beamed, "HanGuang-Jun!"

Lan JingYi's yelled even louder, "HanGuang-Jun ahhhhh!"

Jin Chan was terrified, "What are you happy about? They're... They're on the same side!"

Wei WuXian stepped into the cave. He unsheathed Subian and casually tossed it back. A shadow flashed out and caught the sword. It was Wen Ning. The disciples began to shriek again, "The G-G-G-Ghost General!"

Wen Ning raised Subian and swung down in the direction of Jin Ling. Jin Ling clenched his teeth and shut his eyes. However, he felt himself loosened. The deity-binding ropes had been cut apart by Subian's sword glare. Following this, Wen Ning walked around the cave, cutting away at deity-binding ropes. The disciples that he had let free could neither run nor stay. On the inside there were the YiLing Patriarch, the Ghost General, and the traitor of the righteous side HanGuang-Jun, while on the outside there were countless walking corpses waiting to be fed. Yet, everything was bright on Lan SiZhui's side, "Senior Mo... Senior Wei. Are you here to save us? You were not the one who got people to take us here, were you?"

Although it was a question, his face was full of complete trust and delight. Wei WuXian felt his heart warm up. He squatted down and rubbed Lan SiZhui's head, messing up the hair that had somehow stayed neat throughout the past few days, "Me? It's not like you don't know how broke I am. How could I have gotten enough money to hire people?"

Lan SiZhui nodded in hurry, "Yes. I knew it! I knew that, Senior, you really are very broke!"

"..."

Wei WuXian, "Good boy. How many people do they have? Is there an ambush around here?"

Lan JingYi shook off the ropes on him and fought to answer, "They have quite a bunch of people! All of them had black mist on

their faces so we could not see who they were. They did not do anything after they threw us here, like they did not care if we were dead or alive. Oh, oh, oh, and there are many walking corpses outside of here! They kept on howling!"

Bichen unsheathed and cut off the deity-binding ropes over them.

Lan WangJi immediately returned his sword to its sheath and turned to Lan SiZhui, "Well done."

It meant that Lan SiZhui did well, maintaining composure and believing in them. Lan SiZhui hurried up, standing with his back- straight at Lan WangJi. Before he had the chance to smile, Wei WuXian grinned, "Yeah, well done, SiZhui, you even know how to fight now."

Lan SiZhui's cheeks flushed red at once, "T-That was... I acted out of impulse..."

Suddenly, Wei WuXian felt someone approach. Turning around, he saw Jin Ling stand behind

them, limbs frozen.

Lan WangJi immediately stood in front of Wei WuXian, while Lan SiZhui stood in front of Lan WangJi, speaking carefully, "Young Master Jin."

Wei WuXian walked out from behind the two, "What are you doing? It's like you're making a human pyramid."

Jin Ling's face looked rather strange. His palms loosened and squeezed, squeezed and loosened. It was as though he wanted to say something, but couldn't open his mouth. He could only use his eyes to look at the place on Wei WuXian's stomach where he had stabbed him. Lan JingYi seemed deeply frightened, "Y-Y- You! You do not want to stab him again, do you?"

Jin Ling's face froze. Lan SiZhui hurried, "JingYi!"

JingYi on the left and SiZhui on the right, Wei WuXian wrapped his arms around both of the children, "Alright, let's hurry out of here."

Lan SiZhui, "Yes!"

The other boys were still balled-up in a corner, not daring to move. Lan JingYi, "Are you not going? Do you want to stay here for longer?"

One of the boys stuck his neck out, "There are so many walking corpses outside. You want us to go out... to meet our deaths?!"

Wen Ning, "Young Master, I'll go outside and chase them away."

Wei WuXian nodded. Like a gust of wind, Wen Ning immediately swept outside. Lan SiZhui spoke, "The deity-binding ropes have been loosened already. If worst comes to worst, we can fight our way out together. If you do not go, what if after we leave the corpses flood inside? With the shape of the cave, would it not be a sure catch?"

After he finished, he grabbed Lan JingYi. Along with a few of the Lan Sect's juniors, the two of them left first, following behind Wen Ning. The rest of the boys stared among themselves.

Quickly afterward, one of the boys spoke up, "SiZhui-xiong, wait for me!" He followed, and left as well.

This boy was the little „seed of sentiment“ who burnt paper money and cried emotionally over A-Qing, back in Yi City. The others called him ZiZhen. He seemed to be the single child of the BalingOuYang Sect's clan. Soon, a few of the boys followed as

well, all of them familiar faces from the Yi City incident. The rest of the boys had been hesitant. But, as they looked around, they saw Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi staring at them. They felt nervous no matter which of the two stared at them, and they could only pass around them and leave as well, the back of their heads tingling. The last one was Jin Ling.

As the group of boys, pulling and dragging, almost arrived at the mouth of the cave, a shadow was suddenly thrown inside, creating a deep, human-shaped dent in the wall.

Dust and rocks showered down. The cries of a couple of juniors came from the front, "The Ghost General!"

Wei WuXian, "Wen Ning? What happened?!" Wen Ning managed, "... Nothing."

He fell from the dent, stood up, and quietly yet roughly attached the broken arm back onto his body. As Wei WuXian looked, he saw a young man in purple stand before the cave, arm dangling. Zidian sizzled and sparked below his hand. This was the whip that had thrown Wen Ning into the cave.

Jiang Cheng.

So that was why Wen Ning had no intention of attacking. Jin Ling, "Uncle!"

Jiang Cheng's ordered coldly, "Jin Ling, come here."

From the dark forest behind him slowly walked out a group of cultivators from different sects, wearing uniforms of different colors. The group grew larger and larger. In estimation, there were almost two thousand, a large black blanket that surrounded the cave. These cultivators, including Jiang Cheng, all bathed in blood, their faces tired. All of the boys rushed outside the cave, shouting, "Dad!" "Mom!" "Brother!" They were embraced into the crowd.

Jin Ling looked left and right, as though he still hadn't decided yet. Jiang Cheng's voice was harsh, "Jin Ling, why are you so slow?"

What are you taking your time for? Do you want to die?!"

Lan QiRen stood before the crowd. He seemed much older. Strands of white even began to grow at his temples. He called, "WangJi."

Lan WangJi's answered in a low voice, "Uncle." But he still didn't stand to his side.

Lan QiRen understood more than anyone. This was LanWangJi's answer, firm, resolute. With a disappointed expression, he shook his head. He didn't try to persuade him any further.

A woman in white robes stood forward, her eyes filled with tears, "HanGuang-Jun, just what is wrong with you? You... You are not you anymore. In the past, you clearly could not even stand the YiLing Patriarch. Just what technique did Wei WuXian use to bewitch you for you to stand on the side opposite to us?"

Lan WangJi didn't pay attention to her. Having not received a reply, the woman could only add in pity, "If so, then how undeserving of your name!"

Wei WuXian, "You people are here again."

Jiang Cheng's voice was cold, "Of course we are."

Su She had on his back his seven-stringed zither. He was standing amid the crowd as well, his tone unconcerned, "If not for how the YiLing Patriarch so blatantly dug out corpses and captured people as soon as he returned, as if he was almost scared that the world didn't welcome him, I don't think that we would've had to grace your den so soon either."

Wei WuXian, "I clearly saved these disciples. Why don't you thank me and instead of accusing me?"

Quite a few people tittered. Some even shouted directly „the thief calls another thief". Wei WuXian knew that all of his arguments would be useless. He wasn't hurried, either. With a slight grin, he spoke, "But your size this time looks a bit miserly. Two important persons seem to be missing. Allow me to ask, everyone, why haven't LianFang-Zun and ZeWu-Jun come to such a grand event?"

Su She sneered, "Hah, yesterday LianFang-Zun was attacked by an unidentified individual in Koi Tower. He was heavily injured.

ZeW-Jun was still using all his effort to heal him. Why did you ask if you knew?"

Hearing that Jin GuangYao was „heavily injured", all of a sudden, Wei WuXian recalled his grandeur of when he had pretended to have committed suicide when sneaking up on Nie MingJue. He couldn't hold it back and bursted with a pfft. Su She's brows sunk, "What are you laughing about?"

Wei WuXian, "Nothing. I just think that LianFang-Zun gets injured quite a lot."

At this point, a small voice suddenly spoke up, "Dad, I feel that maybe he really didn't do it. Last time, in Yi City, he was the one who saved us. This time, he seem to be here to save us as well..."

He followed the voice. The person who spoke was OuYang ZiZhen. However, the father immediately scolded the son, "Children shouldn't talk so carelessly! Do you know what situation we're in? Do you know who that is?!"

Withdrawing his gaze, Wei WuXian spoke calmly, "Now I understand."

He had known from the start that no matter what he said, nobody would listen to him. What he denied could be forced; what he admitted could be twisted.

Lan WangJi originally had quite a lot of weight in his words. But, now that he was with him, he was most likely a target of the people as well. He had thought that with at least Lan XiChen among the sects, they could discuss for a while, but Lan XiChen and Jin GuangYao weren't even present.

Back then, during the first siege of Burial Mound, Jin GuangShan led the LanlingJin Sect, while Jiang Cheng led the YunmengJiang Sect; Lan QiRen led the GusuLan Sect, while Nie MingJue led the QingheNie Sect. The former two were the main forces, the latter two could've gone without. Now, the LanlingJin Sect's leader hadn't arrived at, having only sent

people for the GusuLan Sect to command; the GusuLan Sect was still led by Lan QiRen; Nie HuaiSang replaced his brother's position, shrunken within the crowd, his face still full of „I don't know about anything”, „I don't want to do anything”, and „I'm just here for the numbers”. Only Jiang Cheng was still the one surrounded by hostile energy, face insidious, staring straight at him.

But...Wei WuXian looked slightly to the side. He saw Lan WangJi, who stood beside him, without any hint of hesitation, any thought of withdrawing.

But, this time, he wasn't alone anymore.

Under the hungry eyes of thousands of cultivators, a middle-aged man finally couldn't hold it anymore. He jumped out and shouted, "Wei WuXian! Do you still remember me?"

Wei WuXian answered honestly, "No."

The middle-aged cultivator laughed coldly, "You don't, but my leg does!"

He lifted the bottom of his robe, revealing a prosthetic leg made of wood, "This leg of mine was destroyed by you, that night in the Nightless City. I'm showing this to you for you to understand that, among the people in the siege right now, there's also the force of me, Yi WeiChun. With the works of karma, it's never too late for revenge!"

As though having been inspired by him, a younger cultivator stood out as well. His voice was clear, "Wei WuXian, I won't ask you if you remember or not. Both of my parents died by your hands.

You owe too many people. You definitely won't remember them either. But, I, Fang MengChen, will never forget! And never forgive you!"

Immediately after, the third person stepped forward. It was a middle-aged cultivator of the arts, figure slim, eyes gleaming. This time, Wei WuXian moved first in asking, "Did I make you lose a limb?"

The man shook his head. Wei WuXian asked again, "Did I kill your parents or destroy your whole sect?"

The man shook his head again. Wei WuXian mused, "Then why did you come here?"

The man spoke, "I don't have any revenge to seek upon you. I'm here to fight just for you to understand—as someone who defied the world, who deserves to be punished by everyone, no matter what low-end methods you used, no matter how many times you crawl out of your grave, we will send you back inside again. For nothing but the word „justice"!"

Hearing this, everyone cheered him on, their voices thundering, "Sect leader Yao, well said!"

Sect Leader Yao backed off with a smile on his face. Having been encouraged, the others stood up one by one, declaring their determination loudly.

"In the fight at Qiongqi Path, my son was strangled to death by your dog Wen Ning!"

"My shixiong died by poison, his entire body festering due to your cruel curse!"

"Not for anything but to prove that there is still justice in this world, that evil will not be tolerated!"

"There is still justice in this world, evil will not be tolerated!"

Every face boiled with heated blood, every word spoken guiltlessly, every person heroic, passionate, filled with indignation and pride.

Everyone believed with no doubt that what they were doing was a feat of chivalry, a deed of honor.

It would go down history and receive millions of praises. It was a crusade of the „righteous" against the „wrong"!

## Chapter 69: Departure—Part One

It was autumn in the hunting grounds of Phoenix Mountain. Hundreds of thousands of cultivators chose a place where demons and beasts often lurked. They were to fight for the prey within an allocated period of time. This was what the hunting referred to. Throughout many miles, there were quite a lot of prey. It was one of the three most well-known hunting grounds and had hosted many large hunting competitions. Such a significant event was not only for sects both large and small to display their skills and recruit talents, but also for rogue cultivators and new disciples to make themselves known.

Phoenix Mountain was a vast square before and around the square ten tall watching towers. On top of them, heads could be seen moving around. Their excited whispers crowded the air. The most quiet tower was naturally the tallest, most embellished one. Those who sat there were mostly elder cultivators, sect leaders, and their families. In the back, rows and rows of maids carried either canopies or large fans. The women in the first rows all covered their faces with smaller fans, reservedly looking down at the hunting ground.

However, when the riding formation of the GusuLan Sect arrived, their reservation couldn't be seen anymore.

In night-hunts, horses weren't actually needed when actually hunting down the prey. However, horsemanship was one of the arts that clan disciples were required to study. In events of such formality, entering the grounds on horseback was not only a symbol of respect, but riding formations could also create an atmosphere of grandeur quite beautiful in appearance. Boiled down, it was for nothing but „rules” and „aesthetics”.

Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi sat in an upright posture on two snowy steeds as they led the GusuLan Sect's riding formation slowly forward. The two both wore swords at their waists and arrows on their backs. White robes and forehead ribbons flying in the air, they seemed to be deities themselves. Their snow-white boots were so immaculate that it could even be cleaner than the other people's clothes. The Two Jades of Lan truly were a flawless pair of jade, almost as though they were carved out of ice. As soon as they entered, even the air seemed to have become refreshing.

Many female cultivators had fallen for this. The more reserved ones only let down their fans, their eyes a bit more urgent. The more daring ones, however, had already run to the edge of the watching towers, tossing over the buds and blossoms that they had prepared beforehand. A rain of flowers immediately scattered down from the sky. To toss flowers at beautiful-looking men and women in expression of admiration was a tradition. Since the GusuLan Sect's disciples came from a distinguished clan, their appearances were all excellent. They had long since become used to this. Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi especially had been accustomed to this ever since they were thirteen. The two looked completely calm. Nodding at the watching towers in display of respect, they didn't stop and continued to move forth.

However, Lan WangJi suddenly raised his hand, stopping a flower tossed over from behind him. He looked back. Over at the side of the YunmengJiang Sect's riding formation, which hadn't departed yet, Jiang Cheng clicked his tongue impatiently, seated at the front. However, the person beside him sat on a horse with black, gleaming hair. His elbow was at the head of the horse as he looked to the side as though nothing happened, talking and laughing with two slender-bodied maidens.

Lan XiChen saw that Lan WangJi had drawn the reins and ceased to move forward, "WangJi, what happened?"

Lan WangJi, "Wei Ying."

Wei WuXian finally turned around, face full of surprise, "What? HanGuang-Jun, did you call me? What's up?"

Holding the flower, Lan WangJi seemed to be quite cold. His tone seemed cold as well, "Was it

you?"

Wei WuXian immediately denied it, "No, it wasn't."

The maidens beside him spoke at once, "Don't believe him. It was him!"

Wei WuXian, "How could you treat a good person like this? I'm getting angry!"

Giggling, the maidens pulled their reins and went to the formations of their own sects. Lan WangJi lowered the hand that he held the flower with and shook his head. Jiang Cheng spoke, "ZeWu-Jun, HanGuang-Jun, apologies. Don't pay attention to him."

Lan XiChen smiled, "That is fine. I will thank Young Master Wei's kindness behind the flower in place of WangJi."

When they slowly rode into the distance, carrying with them the clouds of petals and fragrance, Jiang Cheng glanced at the colorful sea of handkerchiefs waving on the watching towers before turning to Wei WuXian, "Why are you throwing out flowers along with the girls?"

Wei WuXian, "I think he looks nice. Can't I throw a few as well?"

Jiang Cheng pointed his nose into the air, "How old are you? Who do you think you are, still playing tricks like that?"

Wei WuXian looked at him, "You want one too? There's still a lot left on the ground. Should I get one for you?" As he spoke, he pretended to bend down.

Jiang Cheng, "Get lost!"

At this point, Jin GuangYao's voice rang above the square, "The QingheNie Sect's riding formation enters!"

Nie MingJue was very tall. When he stood, he gave people an extreme sense of pressure. On horseback, he had to him even more pressuring dignity, as though he could look down the entire square. When men who were high up on the list of cultivators entered, almost all of them couldn't be spared from being showered with a faceful of flowery rain.

As the one ranked seventh, Nie MingJue, however, was an exception. If Lan WangJi was ice amid coldness, surpassing both snow and frost, Nie MingJue was fire amid coldness, as though he could start burning with rage at any moment, making him even more difficult to approach. Due to this, even if the maidens could already feel their hearts bursting from their chests, clutching in their palms sweat-soiled flowers, they didn't dare toss them out no matter what, afraid that they'd anger him and his saber hacked into the watching tower. However, many of the male cultivators

who admired ChiFeng-Zun cheered for him. The cheers almost brought pain to the ears. On the other hand, Nie HuaiSang, beside Nie MingJue, was dressed with as much care as always. He wore both his saber at his waist and rings of jewelry, waving a paper fan. At first glance, he was quite the dandy amid the chaos. However, everyone knew that his saber never really got the chance to be unsheathed. Afterward, he'd probably only stroll around Phoenix Mountain, enjoying the view.

After the QingheNie Sect, it was the YunmengJiang Sect.

Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng entered on horseback. Instantly, another rain of flowers had fallen. Jiang Cheng's face darkened, but Wei WuXian bathed within it, feeling quite comfortable. He waved his hand at the tallest watching tower. The best seat on the tower was for the LanlingJin Sect's Madam Jin. The one who sat beside her was Jiang YanLi. Before this, Madam Jin had been holding her hand, talking to her with a loving expression. Jiang YanLi usually had on an almost bland face, her features mild.

However, as she saw her two younger brothers wave at her, her face immediately lit up. She lowered her fan. Shyly saying a few words to Madam Jin, she walked to the edge of the watching platform and tossed out two flowers at them.

This used up as much strength as she could muster. For one second, Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng were even worried that she'd fall off. Seeing that Jiang YanLi steadied herself, they finally relaxed. Both of them reached out and caught the flowers, giving her the same soft smile. Head lowered, she returned to Madam Jin again. Suddenly, a row of cultivators wearing white, gold-

lined robes rushed out, dressed in light armor and riding on broad stallions. The frontmost person had handsome features, protected by the same armor. It was the sect leader, Jin GuangShan.

Madam Jin immediately patted Jiang YanLi's shoulder. Holding her hand, she dragged her to the edge of the watching tower again, pointing to her the riding formation of the LanlingJin Sect.

Among the neighs, suddenly, one horse went forward and ran in a circle around the square before the reins were drawn. The person atop the horse had a striking figure. Wearing snowy white robes, his features were more vibrant than even the mark of vermilion between his brows. Drawing his bow, he gave off even more of a handsome air.

Immediately, fervor rushed through the crowd on the watching towers. The person glanced in the direction of the watching towers, intentional or not. Although he tried hard to keep his face stiff, unconcealable pride still leaked from the corners of his eyes.

On his horse, Wei WuXian sneered, almost laughing to death, "I really can't believe him. He's like a peacock."

Jiang Cheng, "Watch it. Sister is still watching from the tower."

Wei WuXian, "Don't worry. As long as he doesn't make shijie cry again, I don't even want to pay him any attention. You shouldn't have brought her in the first place."

Jiang Cheng, "The LanlingJin Sect insisted on it. I didn't havethe face to refuse."

Wei WuXian, "More like Madam Jin insisted on it. After this, she'd definitely find some way to urge shijie and that male princess to one place."

As they spoke, Jin ZiXuan had already ridden to the target arena. The row of targets was an obstacle before the official entry into the mountain. Those who intend on hunting in the mountain could

only become eligible to enter if they were able to shoot a target from a certain distance away. There were seven rings on the targets, in accordance with the seven paths of entry. The closer that the arrow was to the center, the more advantageous its respective entry path was. Without dropping his speed at all, Jin ZiXuan took out an arrow and shot. It landed right in the center. Cheers came from all around the watching towers.

Seeing how much Jin ZiXuan flaunted his excellence, neither Wei WuXian nor Jiang Cheng showed any emotions on their faces.

Suddenly, a loud sneer came from somewhere nearby. Somebody shouted, "If anyone here remains unconvinced, then feel free to try if you can shoot better than ZiXuan!"

The person was tall and broad, his skin somewhat dark and his voice booming. This was Jin GuangShan's nephew and Jin

ZiXuan's cousin, Jin ZiXun. Before this, during the LanlingJin Sect's flower banquet, an argument broke out between Wei WuXian and Jin ZiXuan.

Wei WuXian smiled and he noted the enmity. Jin ZiXun was there to provoke him. As Jin ZiXun saw that he didn't answer, he seemed to be pleased. When the YunmengJiang Sect's riding formation reached the target arena as well, Wei WuXian turned to the Two Jades of Lan, who were drawing their bows on their horses, "Lan Zhan, want to help me?"

Lan WangJi glanced at him. He didn't reply. JiangCheng asked, "What are you up to this time?"

Lan WangJi, "What?"

Wei WuXian, "Can I borrow your forehead ribbon?"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi immediately tore his gaze away and didn't look at him anymore. Lan XiChen, on the other hand, laughed, "Young Master Wei, you may not know this, but..."

Lan WangJi, "Brother, there is no need." Lan XiChen, "All right."

Jiang Cheng almost wanted to slap Wei WuXian off his horse. He knew that Lan WangJi wouldn't lend it to him but just had to ask. He could do anything when he was bored. If not for that the situation didn't allow it, he swore that he'd do exactly just that. He spoke, "Why do you want his forehead ribbon? To hang yourself and commit suicide? I can lend you my belt, you're

welcome.”

Wei WuXian took off the black ribbon on his wrist guard as he replied, “You can keep your belt. I don’t want it even if I don’t have his forehead ribbon.”

Jiang Cheng, “You...”

Before he could finish speaking, Wei WuXian had quickly tied the ribbon over his eyes to cover his sight. He positioned his arrow, drew his bow, and released—it hit!

The series of actions was both smooth and fast. The others didn’t even realize what he wanted to do. They couldn’t even see his movements clearly before the center of the target had been pierced through. After a moment of silence, overwhelming cheers rang throughout the watching towers, with even greater intensity than those for Jin ZiXuan.

The corners of Wei WuXian’s lips curved slightly. Spinning the bow within his hands, he tossed it back. On the other hand, as Jin ZiXun saw how his popularity now surpassed Jin ZiXuan’s, he snorted loudly. It seemed that he was displeased on both the outside and the inside. He spoke again, “This is only the opening archery event, and you’re onto such ostentatious things. You have your eyes covered right now, but can you keep them covered throughout the entire hunt? Later, on Phoenix Mountain, we can show our real abilities and see who’s really the better one!”

Wei WuXian, “Sure.”

Jin ZiXun waved his hand, “Let’s go!”

All of his cultivators rushed forward, as though they wanted to be the first ones inside to have the first chance and quickly take all of the high-level prey. As Jin GuangShan saw that his riding formation was rather well-trained, he was quite proud. Seeing that Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng were still on their horses, he smiled, “Sect Leader Jiang, Young Master Wei, what, you aren’t entering the mountain yet? Watch out that ZiXun might steal all of the prey.”

Wei WuXian, “No need for the hurry. He won’t be able to.”

Everyone around them paused in surprise. As Jin GuangShan pondered over what „he won’t be able to” meant, he saw Wei WuXian dismount his horse and tell Jiang Cheng, “You can go first.” Jiang Cheng, “Take it easy. Back down when it’s good enough.”

Wei WuXian waved his hand. Drawing his reins, Jiang Cheng led the YunmengJiang Sect’s people away.

Wei WuXian, with his eyes covered, walked with leisure in the direction of Phoenix Mountain’s path of entry. It was as if he wasn’t here to hunt, but rather strolling around his own sect’s garden.

The crowd grew confused. Could it be that he really wasn’t going to take off the ribbon over his eyes until the hunt ended? How could he participate in the hunt like this?

They looked at one another. In the end, they felt that it was none of their business and would simply be a good show to watch.

Each of them set off.

As Wei WuXian walked for some time, he finally found a spot deep into Phoenix Mountain that was comfortable for resting.

It was a branch that was extremely thick, growing out of a tree trunk that was even thicker, blocking his path. Wei WuXian slapped the dry, wrinkled bark a couple of times. He felt that it was quite sturdy and easily hopped up.

The noise of the watching towers had long since been blocked from the mountain’s forests. Wei WuXian leaned against the tree. Under the black fabric, he closed his eyes. The sunlight poured onto his face through in between the leaves.

He held up Chenqing and blew into it, fingers shifting. The clear sound of the flute rushed into the sky as though it was a bird, lingering as it echoed through the mountain.

As he played his flute, Wei WuXian dangled one of his legs down and swayed it softly. The tip of his boots brushed against the grass under the tree. He didn’t mind that it was dampened by the dew on the blades of the grass.

After the song finished, Wei WuXian crossed his arms and leaned against the tree in a more comfortable position. The flute was between his arms, while the flower was still at his chest, emitting a crisp, quiet fragrance. He didn't know how long he had been sitting for. He had almost fallen asleep when he woke up with a start.

Somebody was approaching.

But the person had no killing intent. Thus, he remained slanted over the tree, too lazy to get up. He didn't even have the energy to take off the ribbon over his eyes. He only tilted his head.

A few moments later, having received no answer, Wei WuXian couldn't help from speaking up voluntarily, "You're here for the hunt?"

The person didn't answer.

Wei WuXian, "You won't be able to get anything good from around me."

The person was still silent, but walked a few steps closer.

Now, Wei WuXian's spirits were lifting. Most cultivators were somewhat afraid when they saw him. They didn't really dare approach him even when many people were around, much less being in the same place as him alone and even approaching. If not for how there was no killing intent on the person, Wei WuXian would definitely think that they had hidden intent. He straightened up his body a little and tilted his head, looking in their direction.

Curling his lips, he smiled. Just as he was about to say something, he was suddenly pushed forcefully.

Wei WuXian's back smashed against the tree. Just as his right hand was about to pull off the ribbon, his wrist was twisted back.

The force was quite strong; he couldn't even struggle out of it, but there was still no killing intent. Wei WuXian's left sleeve shifted.

As he was about to shake out the talismans, the person noticed his intent and caught him like before. They pressed both of his hands onto the tree, movements stiff. Wei WuXian raised his leg and was about to kick when he felt a warmth on his lips. He immediately froze.

The touch felt both strange and unfamiliar, moist and warm. In the beginning, Wei WuXian couldn't even understand what was going on. His mind went entirely blank. When he finally realized, he was shocked.

This person, holding his wrists back, was pressing him onto the tree and kissing him.

He suddenly struggled, wanting to fight out of it and pull away the ribbon, but he failed. He wanted to move again, but he somehow stopped himself.

The person kissing him seemed to be shaking softly. Wei WuXian couldn't struggle anymore. He thought to himself, it seems that even if the maiden is quite strong, her personality is both fearful and easily embarrassed? She's already so nervous. Or else, she wouldn't have chosen to sneak up to him at such a time. She probably mustered up all of the courage she could find inside of her. Besides, it seemed that her cultivation wasn't low, meaning that her self-esteem was even higher. If he pulled off the ribbon and accidentally saw her, how ashamed would the maiden feel?

The two sets of thin lips turned from side to side, careful yet inseparable. Wei WuXian hadn't even decided what to do when

the soft lips suddenly became aggressive. Wei WuXian's teeth weren't clenched, allowing the other to intrude inside. He was suddenly powerless. He felt that it was a bit difficult to breathe, wanting to turn his head away, but the other person squeezed his face and turned it back. Between the swirls of the lips and the tongues, he felt dizzy as well, until the other finally bit down on his lower lip. After a moment of lingering, the lips finally left reluctantly, and he finally managed to recover.

From the kiss, Wei WuXian's entire body felt limp. Energy came into his arms only after he leaned against the tree for some more time.

Raising his hand, he ripped the ribbon away only to be stung by the glare of the sudden sunlight.

He finally managed to open his eyes, but nothing was around him. Bushes, trees, grasses, vines—no second person.

Wei WuXian was still somewhat confused. He sat on the branch for a while longer. When he jumped off, he felt weakness under his legs, almost light-headed.

He supported himself on the tree trunk at once, cursing at how useless he was in silence. He had been kissed so hard that his legs were giving out. Looking up, he glanced around the area, but there was no trace of another person. The previous scene seemed to be an absurd yet erotic daydream. Wei WuXian couldn't help but think of the legends of those mountain creatures.

But he was certain that it wasn't some mountain creature. It had to be a person.

Recalling what it had felt like, formless tickles crawled up all the way to the tip of his heart. Wei WuXian touched his chest with his

right hand, but found that the flower that had been there was gone.

He searched the ground for a while. It wasn't there either. It couldn't have disappeared out of thin air, could it?

Wei WuXian remained paused for a long while. He touched his lips unconsciously, finally managing to say a while later, "How could this be... This was my..."

He didn't see anyone even after he looked around the area. Wei WuXian didn't know whether to laugh or worry. He knew that the person was most likely hiding from him and wouldn't appear again, so he could only give up on searching. He began to walk randomly around the forest. After a while, he heard a loud noise from in front of him. As Wei WuXian looked up, he saw a slender figure clothed in white. Whom could it be but Lan WangJi?

Yet, although he clearly was Lan WangJi, what he did didn't seem like what Lan WangJi would do at all. When Wei WuXian saw him, he thrust his fist into a tree, with such force that the tree snapped in half.

Wei WuXian found it strange, "Lan Zhan! What are you doing?"

The person spun around. It was Lan WangJi after all. However, right now, his eyes were bloodshot, his expression almost frightening. Wei WuXian was startled, "Wow, so scary."

Lan WangJi's voice was harsh, "Go!"

Wei WuXian, "I just came here and you want me to go. Do you really hate me that much?"

Lan WangJi, "Stay away from me!"

Except for the couple of days spent in the cave of the Xuanwu, this was the first time that Wei WuXian had seen Lan WangJi lose his composure so badly. But back then, the situation was special, and it was still understandable. Right now, everything's well, so why would he be like this?

Wei WuXian walked a step backward, "staying away" from him. He continued to ask, "Hey, Lan Zhan, what's wrong? Are you okay? If you're not okay then say you're not okay, yeah?"

Lan WangJi didn't look him in the eye. He unsheathed Bichen. A few rays of blue light slashed across the trees around the area. They collapsed a moment later.

He stood still for a while, clenching his sword. His grip was tight, exerting so much strength that his knuckles grew white. As though he had somewhat calmed down, he suddenly looked over again, his gaze pinning Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian felt a strange, unexplainable sensation. His eyes had been covered by the ribbon for over two hours. The sunlight was still a bit too dazzling for him. After he took off the ribbon, his eyes keep on tearing up. His lips were somewhat swollen as well. Wei WuXian felt that what he looked like right now must be terrible.

Being stared at so hard, he couldn't help but touch his chin, "Lan Zhan?"

"..."

Lan WangJi, "Nothing."

With a clang, the sword was unsheathed. Lan WangJi turned around to walk away. Wei WuXian still found that something was wrong with him. After he thought about it, just in case, he followed

him, lunging in attempt to feel his pulse. Lan WangJi dodged to the side and looked at him coldly.

Wei WuXian, "Don't look at me like this. I just want to see what's wrong with you. You really were too strange. You really haven't been poisoned? Or has something happened to you during night-hunts?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

Seeing that his expression was finally returning to normal and that he was most likely fine, Wei WuXian finally stopped worrying.

Although he was curious about what had happened, it wouldn't be good if he intervened in it too much, and thus he began to chat.

Lan WangJi refused to talk in the beginning. Afterward, he finally replied a few short words.

A hint of heat and a swelling sensation on Wei WuXian's lips kept on reminding him he had just lost the first kiss that he had been guarding for twenty years. He was kissed until his head was dizzy, but he didn't even know whom the other person was and what she looked like. Just how could it be?

Wei WuXian sighed slowly. He suddenly spoke up, "Lan Zhan, have you ever kissed someone?" If Jiang Cheng were here, hearing him ask such a frivolous, ridiculous question, he'd throw his fist over for sure.

Lan WangJi stopped in his tracks as well. His voice was so cold that it sounded stiff, "Why are you asking this?"

Wei WuXian grinned, face full of understanding. He closed his eyes, "You haven't, have you? I knew it. I was just asking. You don't need to be so angry."

Lan WangJi, "How do you know?"

Wei WuXian, "What do you think? With such a stiff face wherever you go, who'd dare kiss you? Of course, I wouldn't expect you to initiate a kiss either. I think that you'll have to keep your first kiss until the end of your life, hahahaha..."

He gloated alone. Lan WangJi's face was still expressionless, but he seemed to have relaxed somewhat.

After he had laughed enough, Lan WangJi spoke up, "What about you?"

Wei WuXian raised a brow, "Me? Of course, I've had lots of experience."

Lan WangJi's face, having relaxed a moment earlier, was immediately covered in a layer of snow and frost.

Out of the blue, Wei WuXian became quiet, "Shush!"

Vigilant, he listened attentively for something before pulling Lan WangJi behind one of the bushes.

Lan WangJi didn't know what he was doing. Just as he was about to ask, he saw that Wei WuXian stared in a certain direction.

Following his gaze, he saw two figures, one white and the other purple, walk out from below the clouds.

The person in front had a slender physique. Although he had fine looks, an air of arrogance surrounded him. With a mark of vermillion between his brows and gold outlining his white robes, the jewelry he wore glimmered with even greater vibrance, especially along with his lofty chin and pompous expression. It was Jin ZiXuan. On the other hand, the one behind him had a more petite physique. With small steps, she held her head low and said nothing, creating stark contrast with Jin ZiXuan who was in front of her. It was Jiang YanLi.

Wei WuXian thought to himself, I knew that Madam Jin would tell shijie and that peacock Jin to come out alone.

On the side, as Lan WangJi saw his contempt, he lowered his voice, "What has happened between you and Jin ZiXuan?"

Wei WuXian snorted.

To ask why Wei WuXian hated Jin ZiXuan so much would require a lengthy explanation.

Madam Yu and Jin ZiXuan's mother, Madam Jin, used to be the dearest of friends. The two promised each other a long time ago that if both of their children were sons, they'd become sworn brothers; if both were daughters, they'd become sworn sisters; if one was a son and one was a daughter, then of course they'd become husband and wife.

The mistresses of the two sects had a close relationship. They knew what each other was like, and their backgrounds were suitable as well. Such a marriage was as good a match as possible; almost everyone called them a match made in heaven. However, the two involved felt otherwise. Ever since he was born, Jin ZiXuan had been a moon worshipped by the stars. He was born fair-skinned and delicate. With a mark of vermillion on his forehead, along with his elite background and exceptional intelligence, he was loved by almost everyone he met. Madam Jin had brought him to Lotus Pier a couple of times. Neither Wei WuXian nor Jiang Cheng liked to play with him; only Jiang YanLi wanted to feed him the food that she made. Jin

ZiXuan, however, didn't really like to pay her any attention. This made Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng yell with anger in a few instances.

Back then, Wei WuXian stirred up trouble in the Cloud Recesses and wrecked the marital engagement between the Jin and the Jiang Sect. After returning to Lotus Pier, he apologized to Jiang YanLi, but Jiang YanLi didn't say anything, only stroking his head. Thus, Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng both thought that the matter passed. To end the engagement would grant everyone satisfaction. However, the only understood afterward that Jiang YanLi must've been feeling quite dejected on the inside.

In the middle of the Sunshot Campaign, the YunmengJiang Sect had been to the Langya area to assist the LanlingJin Sect.

Because they were short of hands, Jiang YanLi went to the battlefield along with them.

She knew that her cultivation wasn't high, so she did what she could, busying herself with the meals of the cultivators. In the beginning, neither Wei WuXian nor Jiang Cheng agreed, but Jiang YanLi had always been adept at cooking. She felt happy, had good relationships with others, didn't force herself either, and was actually quite safe, which was why the two didn't find it such a bad idea.

Due to the difficult conditions, the meals were very bland. Jiang YanLi worried that her two brothers wouldn't get used to the meals because of their usual luxuries, so she'd secretly make two extra bowls of soup for Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng. However, apart from her, nobody knew that she had been making an extra third bowl for Jin ZiXuan, who was also at Langya at the moment.

Jin ZiXuan didn't know either. Although he really enjoyed the soup and felt grateful for the cook's intentions, Jiang YanLi had never

left her name. Nobody knew that another low-level female cultivator had seen all of this. The cultivator was a servant of the LanlingJin Sect. Since her cultivation wasn't high, she did the same job as Jiang YanLi did. She had fair looks and knew to take opportunities. Out of curiosity, she followed Jiang YanLi for a few times before she was able to guess what was going on. Keeping her composure, she loitered outside of Jin ZiXuan's house after Jiang YanLi brought the soup, purposely letting Jiang ZiXuan see her shadow.

Jin ZiXuan had finally managed to catch the person, so of course he was going to ask questions. Cleverly, the woman never acknowledged anything, but instead denied it ambiguously, her cheeks flushed, making it sound as though she was the one who did it, but didn't want Jin ZiXuan to know how much trouble she went through. And thus, Jin ZiXuan didn't force her to admit it any longer. However, in action, he had begun to respect the cultivator. He began to pay attention to her, even raising her from a servant to a guest cultivator. For a long time, Jiang YanLi didn't realize that something was wrong. This went on until one day, after Jiang YanLi brought the soup, she ran into Jin ZiXuan, temporarily there to pick up a letter.

Naturally, Jin ZiXuan was going to ask what Jiang YanLi was doing in his room. Jiang YanLi didn't dare say it in the beginning. However, hearing that his tone sounded more and more

doubtful, no matter how anxious, she had to tell him the truth.

Yet, somebody had used this reason already.

One could easily guess what Jin ZiXuan's reaction was after he heard this.

And so, right then and right there, he „exposed“ Jiang YanLi's „lie“. Jiang YanLi hadn't expected something like this to happen at all.

She had never been the type of person to show off; not even many people knew that she was a daughter of the YunmengJiang Sect. In the short amount of time, she couldn't find any strong evidence. She tried to protest, but the more she did, the more she felt cold at heart. In the end, stiffly, Jin ZiXuan told her, “Don't think that just because you come from a powerful sect that you can steal and trample other people's feelings. Some people, even if they come from poor backgrounds, their character are much

better than the former's. Please watch your conduct.”

Jiang YanLi could finally tell a few things from Jin ZiXuan's words.

From the beginning, Jin ZiXuan had never believed that a maiden like her, born from a noble sect but had low cultivation, could do anything on the battlefield or help with anything at all. To put it simply, he thought that she just wanted to find a reason to approach him, that she was just here to add to the trouble.

Jin ZiXuan had never understood her, and hadn't ever wanted to understand her either. Due to this, of course he wouldn't believe her.

After he said a few harsh words to her, standing where she was, Jiang YanLi had burst into tears. When Wei WuXian returned, this happened to be the scene that he saw.

Although his shijie had an easy temper, except for how they cuddled and cried together the day the three of them reunited

after Lotus Pier was destroyed, she hadn't really shed many tears in front of others, much less cry so loudly, so pitifully in front of so many people. Wei WuXian was filled with panic. As he tried to ask her, Jiang YanLi was crying so badly that she couldn't even speak properly. Then, when he saw Jin ZiXuan standing on the side, astonished, he fumed with anger, wondering to himself why it was the dog of a person again. With a kick, he pounced on Jin ZiXuan.

The fight between the two would have alerted the Heavens. All of the cultivators around the base came to break up their fight. Amid the ruckus, he finally understood what was the cause of all this, and became even more angered. He spread his tough talk, saying that one day he'd definitely make Jin ZiXuan die in his hands, he told people to drag out the cultivator woman.

A round of questions later, the truth emerged, and Jin ZiXuan's entire body was frozen. No matter how much Wei WuXian continued to curse at him, he returned neither words nor fists, his face dark. If not that Jiang YanLi held up her hand a while later, while Jiang Cheng and Jin GuangShan came to pull Wei WuXian away, it was likely that even now Jin ZiXuan wouldn't be able to attend the hunt of Phoenix Mountain.

Afterward, although Jiang YanLi continued to work at Langya, she only did her own things. Not only did she stop bringing Jin ZiXuan soup, she wouldn't even give him a proper look. Soon after, the crisis of Langya was solved, and Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng brought her back to Yunmeng. However, Jin ZiXuan, on the other hand, began to ask more and more about Jiang YanLi after the Sunshot Campaign ended, either out of guilt or having gone through Madam Jin's scoldings.

Those who knew about this all said that it was only a misunderstanding. What was wrong now that it had been clarified? Yet, Wei WuXian didn't feel the same way. He hated Jin ZiXuan to the extreme, who was to him a conceited male princess, an ostentatious peacock, a blind man who only looked at appearances. He didn't at all believe that a narcissist like Jin ZiXuan could realize his mistake and suddenly take interest in Jiang YanLi. He'd probably been hurried and scolded too much by Madam Jin, and thus the reluctant completion of his tasks.

But no matter the hatred, to not let Jiang YanLi feel difficult, Wei WuXian could only stop himself from coming out. Lan WangJi turned to look at him as if he was confused, but Wei

WuXian didn't have the time to explain to him. He put his pointer finger on his lips, gesturing for silence, and continued to look over there.

The gaze from a pair of light eyes landed on the full, moist lips for a brief moment before turning away.

On the other hand, Jin ZiXuan brushed the bushes away to reveal the thick corpse of a snake monster. He bent down for a while before speaking, "It's dead."

Jiang YanLi nodded.

Jin ZiXuan, "The Measuring Snake." Jiang YanLi, "What?"

Jin ZiXuan, "A beast from the Nanman area. It's only that when it sees someone, it'll suddenly straighten itself and compare who's the taller one. If it's taller, it'll devour the person. It's not a big deal. It only looks scary."

It seemed that Jiang YanLi didn't understand why he'd begin to explain such things to her out of the blue. Logically, at such a time, it was probably best to say a few superficial words like „Young Master Jin is so well-learned" or „Young Master Jin is so calm". However, what he just said was the most common of common sense. It was nothing but finding words when there were none. Such obviously fake flattery, it was likely that Jin GuangYao was the only one who could say them with a straight face. Jiang YanLi could only nod again. Wei WuXian guessed that she had been nodding on their whole way.

What followed was another while of silence. The awkwardness went through the grass and blew directly onto the two behind the bushes. A few moments later, Jin ZiXuan finally took Jiang YanLi in the direction that they came from. Even as he walked, he continued, "Scales can be seen on this Measuring Snake, and its fangs are longer than its jaw. It's probably a mutant. Most people would find it difficult to deal with. They wouldn't be able to shoot

through the armor of scales either."

After a pause, he added with a nonchalant tone, "But it's not much anyways. None of the prey on this hunt are difficult. They can't hurt the people from the LanlingJin Sect at all."

Hearing how in the last two sentences, the air of pride rose up again, Wei WuXian found the situation quite irritating. However, he saw Lan WangJi stare at Jin ZiXuan expressionlessly. Wei WuXian thought that this was strange. Following his gaze, he was immediately speechless, since when did Jin ZiXuan walk with the same hand and same foot?!

Jiang YanLi, "It's best if hunts don't hurt anyone."

Jin ZiXuan, "What value are prey who don't hurt anyone? If you go to the LanlingJin Sect's private hunting grounds, you'd be able to see many rare monsters."

Wei WuXian sneered in silence, who'd want to visit your sect's hunting grounds?

Yet, Jin ZiXuan had begun to decide the matter all on his own, "I just happen to have time next month. I can take you there."

Jiang YanLi's voice was soft, "Young Master Jin, thank you for your kindness, but there's no need for the trouble."

Jin ZiXuan paused in surprise, blurting, "Why not?"

How could she answer such a question? As though she felt uneasy, she lowered her head.

Jin ZiXuan, "You don't like watching hunts?"

Jiang YanLi nodded. Jin ZiXuan, "Then why did you come this time?"

If not for the effort that Madam Jin spent in inviting her, Jiang YanLi certainly wouldn't have come. But how could she say such a thing?

Seeing that Jiang YanLi was silent, Jin ZiXuan's complexion switched between red and white. His expression was quite unsightly. A while later, he finally managed, "Do you not like watching hunts or do you just not want to be with me?"

Jiang YanLi whispered, "No..."

Wei WuXian knew she feared that Jin ZiXuan was only inviting her due to Madam Jin's intentions and didn't really want to have her with him, so she didn't wish to trouble him.

However, what could Jin ZiXuan know about this? All he knew that he'd never felt so ashamed in his life. It was not only the first time he'd been refused by a maiden, but also the first time he'd invited a maiden and was refused. Anger rose from within him. A moment later, he laughed coldly, "Fine, then."

Jiang YanLi, "I'm sorry."

Jin ZiXuan's voice was ice, "What should you be sorry for? You can think whatever you want to. I wasn't the one who wanted to invite you anyways. It's fine if you don't want to."

The blood in Wei WuXian rushed to his forehead. He wanted to dash outside and start a fight with Jin ZiXuan again. However, after a second thought, he felt that it'd also be good to let his shijie see the man's real character, so that she'd cast him away and never want him again. Thus, he suppressed his anger and wanted to bear it for a little while longer.

Jiang YanLi's lips trembled, but she said nothing. She bowed to Jin ZiXuan, her voice low, "Please excuse me."

She turned around to leave, alone and quiet. Jin ZiXuan stood still for a few moments, looking in another direction. Sometime later, he suddenly shouted, "Stop!"

However, Jiang YanLi didn't turn around. Jin ZiXuan was even more enraged. He caught up to her in just three strides and was about to grab her hand when a shadow suddenly flashed before his eyes. Before he could see who it was, he received a blow on his chest. Jin ZiXuan swung his sword across and backed away.

When he finally could see, he raged, "Wei WuXian, why is it you again?!"

Wei WuXian blocked Jiang YanLi behind him, raging as well, "I haven't fucking said it yet—why is it you again?!"

Jin ZiXuan, "Attacking because of nothing have you gone mad?!"

Wei WuXian struck with his palm, "That's exactly what I'm doing!

What do you mean because of nothing? What are you doing

trying to grab my shijie just because of how ashamed you are?!"

Jin ZiXuan dodged to the side and returned to him a sword attack, "If I don't grab her should I let her walk randomly around the mountain alone?!"

However, the sword glare was hit to the side by another glare, shooting into the sky. Seeing who it was, Jin ZiXuan was shocked, "HanGuang-Jun?"

Lan WangJi unsheathed Bichen. Standing between the three, he maintained his silence. Just as Wei WuXian was about to walk forward, Jiang YanLi grabbed Wei WuXian, "A-Xian!"

At the same time, a series of scattered footsteps came over. A massive, swarming crowd gushed into the forest. The person at the head shouted, "What happened?!"

It turned out that, back then, both Lan WangJi's and Jin ZiXuan's sword glares shot into the sky, startling the cultivators near them. They could tell at once that two people began a fight, which was why they hurried over and happened to see the strange deadlock of the four people in the forest. People often said that one could never avoid their enemy. The person at the head was nobody but Jin ZiXun. He spoke, "ZiXuan, is Wei making trouble for you again?!"

Jin ZiXuan, "None of your business, don't worry about it for now!" Seeing that Wei WuXian grabbed Jiang YanLi and was about to take her away, he said again, "Stop!"

Wei WuXian, "You really want to fight? That's fine with me!"

Jin ZiXun, "Wei, just what do you mean by going against ZiXuan so many times?"

Wei WuXian looked at him, "Who are you?"

Jin ZiXun paused in surprise before fuming, "You don't know who I am?!"

Wei WuXian mused, "Why should I know who you are?"

When the Sunshot Campaign first broke out, Jin ZiXun insisted on defending the back due to an injury. He didn't have the chance to see what Wei WuXian was like on the front lines, with most of his knowledge of him coming from rumors. He didn't care much for him, thinking that all of the rumors were simply exaggerations.

However, a while ago, Wei WuXian had summoned all of the dark creatures in the forest with a

whistle, calling away the fierce corpses that their group was about to capture, causing their efforts to be wasted. He was already displeased.

Now, in front of his face, Wei WuXian was asking who he was, stirring up a strange sense of indignation within him—he knew Wei WuXian, yet Wei WuXian didn't know him and even dared ask who he was in front of everyone. It was as if this had caused him to lose much face. The more he thought about it, the more irritated he felt. Just as he was about to speak, gold light glimmered in the sky above them. A second group of people had arrived.

The group of people descended on their swords and landed firmly. The one leading them was a middle-aged woman, her features orthodox, edges carrying a hint of rigidity. She seemed valiant on her sword, while elegant when she walked. Jin ZiXun called, "Aunt!"

Jin ZiXuan hesitated, "Mother! Why are you here?" Immediately after, he remembered that his and Lan WangJi's sword glares had already broke into the skies. When Madam Jin saw from the

watching towers, of course she wouldn't have not come. He glanced at the LanlingJin Sect's cultivators who had come along with his mother, "Why did you bring so many people over? You don't need to interfere with the things of the hunt."

Madam Jin, however, spat, "Stop thinking so full of yourself. Who told you that I'm here for you?!"

She saw Jiang YanLi from the corner of her eye, who had shrunken herself behind Wei WuXian, and her face relaxed at once. She walked over and took her hand, speaking in a gentle voice, "A-Li, why are you like this?"

Jiang YanLi, "Thank you, Madam. I'm fine."

Madam Jin was rather sharp, "Did that damn little brat bully you again?"

Jiang YanLi hurried, "No."

Jin ZiXuan shifted slightly. He looked as if he was holding back something. Of course, Madam Jin knew what her son was like. She knew what was going on with just one guess. Immediately, she broke into rage, scolding her son, "Jin ZiXuan! Do you want to die?!! What did you tell me before you came out here?!" Jin ZiXuan, "I!"

Wei WuXian, "No matter what your son told you before he came out, Madam Jin, it'll be fine as long as he and my shijie walk separate paths from now on."

He was in the middle of his temper, and so his words weren't too polite. The good thing was that Madam Jin busied herself comforting Jiang YanLi and didn't care for it much. However, even though she didn't care, somebody else used this as an opportunity. Jin ZiXun shouted, "Wei WuXian, my aunt is your senior. Speaking like this is a bit too presumptuous, isn't it?" The others felt that this made sense. Everyone nodded in agreement. Wei WuXian replied, "It wasn't directed at Madam Jin. Your cousin has regarded my shijie with harsh words over and over again. If the YunmengJiang Sect could tolerate it, then we wouldn't deserve being called an elite sect! How is it presumptuous?" Jin ZiXun sneered, "How is it presumptuous? How is any part of you not presumptuous? Today, in such an important hunt involving all of the sects, you really showed off your abilities, didn't you? One third of the prey have been taken by you. You sure feel pleased, don't you?" Lan WangJi's head tilted slightly to the side, "One third of the prey?" Although over a hundred people who followed Jin ZiXun emitted strong resentment, as they saw that Lan WangJi, rumored to have a terrible relationship with Wei WuXian, speak up as if he was asking, somebody immediately replied impatiently, "HanGuang- Jun, you don't know yet, do you? A while ago, when we were hunting on Phoenix Mountain, we searched for a long time and realized that not a single fierce corpse or resentful spirit is left in

the grounds!" "We only knew after we sent people to ask LianFang-Zun at the watching towers that less than an hour after the hunt began, a flute melody came from within Phoenix Mountain, and then all of the corpses and spirits walked into the YunmengJiang Sect's side one by one and surrendered themselves!" "Of the three main categories of prey on Phoenix Mountain, only the fay and the monsters are left..." "As for the ghouls, Wei WuXian alone summoned away all of

them..."

Jin ZiXun, "You care nothing for other people and only care about yourself—is this not presumptuous enough?" Wei WuXian understood all of a sudden. At the end of it, this was the ulterior intent behind all of that. He laughed, "Weren't you the one who said so? It was only the opening archery event; we could show our real abilities on Phoenix Mountain."

Jin ZiXuan laughed with a ha, as though he found it ridiculous, "What you're depending on is just a crooked path. They're not what you're really capable of. You're just playing a few tunes on the flute. How could it count as showing our real abilities?"

Wei WuXian sounded confused, "It's not as if I tricked or schemed, so why not? You can play a few tunes on the flute as well and see if any corpses or spirits would like to follow you?"

Jin ZiXun, "With how much you disregard the rules, it's not much better than tricks and schemes!"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi frowned. Madam Jin seemed as though she had just heard the quarrel that was going on over here. Her voice was indifferent, "ZiXun, that's enough."

Wei WuXian was too lazy to argue with him. He laughed, "Fine,

then I don't know what could count as real abilities. Please take it out and win against me so that I can see what it is."

If he could actually win, Jin ZiXun wouldn't be as frustrated as he was now. Speechless for a moment, the more he thought about it, the more indignant he felt. He mocked, "But it's only natural that you don't think you're in the wrong. It's not the first time that

Young Master Wei has disregarded the rules. You didn't wear your sword in both last time's flower banquet and this time's hunt. It's such a grand event, and you care nothing for courtesy. In what regard to you hold us, the people who are present with you?" Wei WuXian, however, didn't pay him any attention. He turned to Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, I forgot to say. Earlier, when you blocked the sword for me, thanks." Seeing how Wei WuXian seemed to not care about him at all, Jin ZiXun clenched his teeth, "So the YunmengJiang Sect's discipline is nothing more than this!"

## Chapter 70: Departure—Part Two

Madam Jin's brows stiffened, scolding, "ZiXun!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian's smile disappeared at once. He asked, "Discipline?"

He turned his head slowly, "A crooked path?" Lan WangJi's voice was low, "Wei Ying."

Jin ZiXun and the others noticed the unusual atmosphere as well. Holding their breaths, they looked at him. Wei WuXian smiled

again, "Do you know why I'm not carrying my sword? It wouldn't make a difference if I told you anyways."

He turned around, stating one word at a time, "Because I want you to know that even if I don't use my sword, with nothing but what you call a „crooked path", I will still rise unparalleled and leave all of you staring at me from behind."

With his words, all of the people present were shocked speechless.

No disciple had ever dared say such lofty words in front of so many people. A moment later, as Jin ZiXun finally regained his composure, he yelled, "Wei WuXian! You're only the son of a servant—how dare you be so bold!!!"

Hearing those words, Lan WangJi's gaze froze. The pupils of Wei WuXian's eyes shrunk. It seemed that his right hand was almost going to touch Chenqing. As the air thickened with conflict, ready to burst any second, somebody suddenly spoke, "A-Xian!"

Hearing the voice, Wei WuXian's heart softened. He turned around, "Shijie?"

Jiang YanLi waved at him, "A-Xian, come stand behind me."

Wei WuXian hesitated. Before he could move, Madam Jin quickly picked up her hand, "A-Li, don't intervene in their business." However, with an apologetic smile toward Madam Jin, Jiang YanLi went forth and stood in front of Wei WuXian. She saluted Jin ZiXun and the others.

Jin ZiXun and his people didn't know how to respond either. A few of them returned the salute, and a few didn't. Jiang YanLi spoke

to Jin ZiXun in a thin voice, "Young Master Jin, from what you

meant, it was A-Xian who made a third of the prey on Phoenix Mountain his all to himself; it defied the rules and he was too bold. I... I haven't heard of anything like this either. It truly must've troubled everyone here. I apologize to you in place of him."

As she finished, she bowed down again. It seemed to be quite a serious apology. Wei WuXian, "Shijie!"

Jiang YanLi didn't rise yet. She looked at him and shook her head almost unnoticeably. Wei WuXian could only clench his fists and stay silent.

Jin ZiXun gazed over from afar. His expression was quite complicated. Jin ZiXun and the rest, however, didn't even try to conceal the triumph on their faces. They were more than satisfied with themselves.

Jin ZiXun chuckled, "Maiden Jiang, you really are kind and understanding. What your shidi did was extremely unbefitting, and indeed caused us much trouble. But since you do recognize that it was unbefitting, then for Maidan Jiang and Sect Leader Jiang's sake, an apology won't be needed. The YunmengJiang Sect and the LanlingJin Sect are as close as brothers, anyways."

He was on the verge of breaking into pompous laughter. Wei WuXian was fuming with rage as his tightened knuckles cracked. Just as he was about to speak, Jiang YanLi had finished her bow and got up, continuing in an earnest voice, "But, even if I haven't participated in a hunt before, there's one thing that I know—for all of the hunts that have happened, I've never heard of a singlerule that prohibits someone from hunting too much prey."

The smiles on the people's faces froze before they could even set into place.

Jiang YanLi, "And so, you said that A-Xian defied rules—which exact rule did he defy?"

This time, it was Wei WuXian's turn to laugh.

Jin ZiXun's face was dark, but he didn't respond. There were two reasons. First, he had never

seen Jiang YanLi step up and talk before, so he didn't know how strong his reply should be. Both Madam Jin and Jiang Cheng held Jiang YanLi in high regard, and he didn't dare rashly go against them. Second, if they really looked into it, they'd indeed fail to find such a rule!

At this point, some people among the crowd couldn't hold it down any longer. At such times, Sect Leader Yao was always the first one to jump out, "Madam Jiang, that wouldn't be the best way to put it. Although some rules aren't written out, everyone understands and follows them." Someone shouted, "How much prey is in Phoenix Mountain in total? Is it even five hundred? How many people are there in the hunt? More than five thousand! We're fighting for the prey to begin with. If he keeps so much prey to himself using such wicked means, what could the other people do?"

Wei WuXian sneered. As he was about to speak, Jiang YanLi stopped him, whispering, "It's best if you don't say anything."

Someone else felt unsatisfied as well, "Yeah, or else I would've at least been able to get one." Jiang YanLi, "But... It isn't his fault that others can't capture the prey."

The person couldn't say anything back. She continued, "Isn't the hunt all about true strength? Even if the ghouls are gone, aren't there also the fays and the monsters? Even if he didn't keep one-third to himself, or even if he didn't attend the hunt, those who can't capture the prey will never be able to. Although the methods that A-Xian used is different from what other people use, it's still an ability that he cultivated. You can't call it a crooked path just because others don't have access to that third of the prey, can you?"

The people who gathered around Jin ZiXun had on the same dark faces as he did. Yet, taking into consideration Jiang YanLi's background, they didn't dare talk back to her directly.

Jiang YanLi added, "Besides, hunting is hunting, so why bring the matter of discipline to the table? A-Xian is a disciple of the YunmengJiang Sect. He grew up with my brother and I, and so he's as close as a brother is to me. Calling him the „son of a servant“—I'm sorry, but I won't accept this. And thus..."

She straightened her back and raised her voice, "I hope that Young Master Jin ZiXun would apologize to Wei WuXian of the YunmengJiang Sect!"

If the one currently saying these words wasn't Jiang YanLi and instead some random person, Jin ZiXun would probably have come at them with a slap already. His face was almost black, but he kept his mouth shut. Jiang YanLi stared at him quietly, refusing to turn her eyes away.

Madam Jin spoke, "A-Li, why are you being so serious? It's just a small matter. Don't get so worked up."

Jiang YanLi's voice was soft, "Madam, A-Xian is my younger brother. Him being humiliated by others, to me, isn't just a small matter."

Madam Jin glanced at Jin ZiXun, sneering, "ZiXun, you heard that?"

Jin ZiXun, "Auntie!"

For him to apologize to Wei WuXian was at the least impossible. How could Madam Jin not know what his personality was like?

The situation at hand, however, was already quite uncomfortable. Imagining how Jin ZiXun would definitely throw a few tantrums after he apologized and returned to Koi Tower, she grew more and more annoyed, almost wanting to hold his neck down and force him to apologize. Suddenly, two sword glares arrived. It was Jin GuangYao and Lan XiChen.

Lan WangJi, "Brother."

Lan XiChen mused, "WangJi, why are you here as well?" Jin GuangYao, "Everyone, what happened here?"

As he arrived, the repressed anger of both people immediately found a target to settle on. Just as Jin GuangYao landed, Madam Jin scolded, "Still smiling? Such a big thing happened, and you're still smiling! Just look at the hunt you organized, you good-for-nothing!"

Jin GuangYao always had the same smile plastered over his face.

Not at all expecting to be scolded as soon as he arrived, he

retracted his smile at once and replied earnestly, "Mother, what in the world is going on?" Madam Jin narrowed her eyes, "What in the world is going on— can't you see for yourself? Aren't you supposed to be good at reading the atmosphere?"

Jin GuangYao stayed quiet as Jin ZiXun spoke, "One-third of all of the prey in the entire Phoenix Mountain is gone. What are the five thousand people here going to hunt for?!" He used the chance to muddle through the matter of apologizing to Wei WuXian.

As he was about to continue, Lan XiChen spoke up, "LianFang- Zun has already set about expanding the range of the hunting grounds. Please calm down, everyone."

Now that ZeWu-Jun had spoken, Jin ZiXun knew that it wasn't suitable for him to say anything more. He couldn't keep on venting off to Jin GuangYao either. Throwing his arrow onto the ground, he laughed bitterly, "The hunt this time is like a farce! Never mind. It's fine if I don't participate. I quit."

Jin GuangYao paused in surprise, "ZiXun, it'll soon be arranged. At most you'd have to wait an hour longer..."

Sect Leader Yao called out as well, "Young Master Jin, that's really not necessary!"

Jin ZiXun replied, "The hunt has already lost all fairness. Why should I wait? Please excuse my absence!" With this, he was about to lead his cultivators onto their swords. Jin GuangYao hurried toward him to try and persuade him. Some wanted to follow Jin ZiXun and leave as well, others were hesitating and didn't want to give up just yet. The situation was immediately a mess. Jiang YanLi shook her head and turned to Madam Jin, "Madam Jin, I really did make trouble for you."

Madam Jin waved her hand, "You'll never make trouble for your mother-in-law here. Scold that dumb brat however you want to."

It's not like I care about him. If you're still mad, I can help you beat him up."

Jiang YanLi, "There's no need, there's no need... Then, I'll go back first?"

Madam Jin hurried, "To the Watching Towers? I'll get ZiXuan to walk us back."

As she spoke, she tried her hardest in eyeing Jin ZiXuan, who was standing some distance away.

Jiang YanLi whispered, "That's not necessary. I'd like to have a few words with A-Xian. He can walk me back."

Madam Jin raised her brows, looking Wei WuXian up and down. Her gaze was somewhat cautious, as if she was feeling displeased, "A young man and a young woman—you two can't stick together all the time if nobody else is present."

Jiang YanLi, "A-Xian is my younger brother."

Madam Jin, "A-Li, please don't be angry. Tell me what stupid thing that stubborn brat of mine did to you this time. I'll tell him to make it up to you properly."

Jiang YanLi shook her head, "That's really not necessary. Madam Jin, don't force him."

Madam Jin urged, "How could I force him? It's not forced at all." Wei WuXian lowered his head, "Excuse my absence, Madam Jin."

He and Jiang YanLi bowed at the same time. As they turned around to leave, Madam Jin grabbed Jiang YanLi's hand

refused to let her leave. Between the pushes and the pulls, Jin ZiXuan ran over and shouted loudly, "Maiden Jiang!!!"

Wei WuXian pretended as though he heard nothing. He tugged at Jiang YanLi, "Shijie, quickly, let's go."

Jin ZiXuan shouted again, "That's not it, Maiden Jiang!!!"

This time, he couldn't pretend that he heard nothing no matter what. Wei WuXian could only turn around, along with Jiang YanLi. Even Jin ZiXun's group, who was making a fuss on the other side, had their attention brought over. Everyone was wondering what Jin ZiXuan meant by „that's not it". Jin ZiXuan ran a few steps forward, as if he wanted to catch up, but then he stopped.

Standing afar, he took in a few long breaths, the veins on his forehead protruding.

A moment later, he suddenly yelled, "That's not it, MaidenJiang! It wasn't my mother! It wasn't her intentions! I'm not forced, I'm not being forced at all!!" Holding it back for a few seconds, he finally roared, "It was me! It was myself! I was the one who wanted you to come!!!” Jiang YanLi, “...”

Wei WuXian, “...” Madam Jin, “...” Jin ZiXun, “...”

After his roars, Jin ZiXuan's fair cheeks suddenly turned into the color of blood.

He staggered back a few steps, only managing to steady himself with the support of a tree. As he looked up, he froze. As if he finally recalled that many people were still present and remembered what he said in front of all those people, he stood blankly for a long time before suddenly realizing what had happened. With a shout, he sprinted away.

With a few moments of dead silence, Madam Jin broke out, "You idiot! Why are you running away?!"

She pulled Jiang YanLi toward her, "A-Li, let's continue our talk later on the Watching Tower! First I have to go catch him!" She left before she finished, rising up on her sword with a handful of other cultivators. She shouted as she chased in the direction in which Jin ZiXuan had fled. Wei WuXian didn't at all expect things to turn out this way either.

After the frenzy of events, he didn't even know what to make of things, "The hell is he doing? Shijie, let's go."

Jiang YanLi paused shortly before nodding. Wei WuXian waved at Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, I'm going."

Lan WangJi nodded, saying nothing. In silence, he watched his and Jiang YanLi's silhouettes slowly disappear into the woods. On the other hand, Jin GuangYao couldn't stop Jin ZiXun and the others any longer. The group mounted their swords and left, all talking at once. The large cloud of people who had gathered was at once half of its original size. Seeing that there was no more show to watch, the rest of the people began to scatter as well.

Jin GuangYao wiped the sweat on his forehead, forcing a smile, "This really is..."

Lan XiChen patted his shoulder, "Today's matter was not your fault."

Jin GuangYao sighed and massaged the center of his brows, "I'm afraid I won't be able to do it even in two hours."

Lan XiChen, "Why is that?"

Jin GuangYao, "In reality, not only did Young Master Wei keep a third of the prey to himself, our eldest brother has eliminated over half of the fays and the monsters as well."

Hearing this, Lan XiChen laughed, "That is how Brother is like, after all."

Lan WangJi, on the other hand, seemed to be thinking. Jin GuangYao spoke as though he had a terrible headache, "And so, the range of the hunting grounds might have to be expanded even more."

Lan XiChen, "Then, let us set about it as soon as we can."

Jin GuangYao apologized, "Sorry, Brother. You're here to participate in the hunt, and I had to have you come over to help me last minute."

Lan XiChen smiled, "It is fine. WangJi, should we leave, or would you like to help as well?"

Lan WangJi summoned Bichen in silence, "I will help."

After they left on their swords, only a few people were left amid the trees, still chatting about what had happened. Soon later, someone strode out of the woods. Seeing the situation, he hesitated slightly.

The person was none but Jiang Cheng. On Phoenix Mountain, he heard others talk about how Lan WangJi's and Jin ZiXuan's sword glares appeared in the sky, like the two were fighting. In fear that Jiang YanLi was by Jin ZiXuan's side, he came to check, but he was too late and everyone had gone off already. From the few people here, Jiang Cheng saw that Sect Leader Yao was the only one appearing somewhat familiar to him, "Sect Leader Yao, what happened here?" Sect Leader Yao glanced at him, his tone meaningful, "Sect Leader Jiang, your sect's Wei WuXian really is quite a character."

Jiang Cheng frowned, "What do you mean?"

Sect Leader Yao laughed, "As if I dare mean anything. Sect Leader Jiang, you mustn't take to heart what I said."

Jiang Cheng's face darkened. He knew that those weren't good words and told himself that he had to find Wei WuXian later to sort it all out with him. Not in a mood to maintain false politeness with someone pretending to be clever, with a turn, he walked out of the woods. On his way, he could manage to catch the whispers of chatter coming from behind him. As if scared that he'd hear them, their voices were extremely low, but with his heightened senses, he could still hear the words clearly.

One of the sect leaders spoke in a sour tone, "This time, Lotus Pier is really the center of the show. Almost all of the spirits and corpses were summoned to the YunmengJiang Sect's grounds. There'd definitely be a number of cultivators interested in them."

Sect Leader Yao, "What could we do about it? Whose fault is it that our sects don't have Wei WuXian's?"

"It's not necessarily a good thing to have Wei WuXian. I don't want there to be someone in my sect always stirring up trouble for me."

"Wei WuXian, he really is too bold... Anyways, from now on, I won't attend any night-hunts that he's going to."

Someone sneered, "Huh? Interested in them? I don't think so. To put it simply, they're interested in Wei WuXian, aren't they? Didn't the YunmengJiang Sect grow in fame during the Sunshot Campaign only because of Wei WuXian?"

Jiang Cheng felt his entire body weigh down on him. It was as though something cast a haunting shadow on both his face and in his heart.

## Chapter 71: Departure—Part Three

Two months later, in Yunmeng.

After the QishanWen Sect collapsed, the city that used to be the most flourishing of all cities evaporated into thin air in just one night, falling into ruins. A large number of cultivators searched for new locations of activity, diverging into multiple new cities. Among them, Lanling, Yunmeng, Gusu, and Qinghe received the greatest influx of cultivators. On the streets, people hurried to and from. All of the disciples carried swords by their waists, talking loftily about the fate of the current world. All of them were in high spirits.

Suddenly, the people on the streets lowered their voices slightly. In unison, they looked to the end of the street.

From there, a white-robed man wearing a forehead ribbon slowly approached, carrying with him a sword and a zither.

The man's features were of unparalleled grace, but frost and snow seemed to surround his figure. Before he had even drawn nearer, the cultivators quieted on their own, meeting his eyes in respect. The more well-known ones bravened up and went forth to salute him, "HanGuang-Jun."

Lan WangJi nodded slightly, returning the salutations without fault, and didn't cease in his steps. The other cultivators didn't dare bother him too much, knowing to back off.

Suddenly, however, from ahead of him came a young, grinning girl dressed in vibrant colors. In a hurry, she brushed shoulders with him, but suddenly tossed something toward his body.

Nimbly, Lan WangJi caught the object. He looked down to find the bud of a flower as white as snow.

The bud was delicate and fresh, having gathered some dew. As Lan WangJi maintained his silence, another slender figure approached from in front of him. With a wave of her hand, a small, blue flower was tossed at him. It was aiming for his chest, but ended up on his shoulder. Lan WangJi caught it as well. When he turned to look, the woman giggled before running away without even a hint of embarrassment.

The third time was a younger girl, who wore her hair in double- buns. Hopping over, in her arms she held a bunch of sprigs dotted with red buds. She fled as soon as she threw them toward his chest.

One after another, Lan WangJi had already gathered a bundle of colorful flowers, though he still stood expressionlessly in the middle of the streets. All of the cultivators who recognized HanGuang-Jun didn't dare laugh even if they wanted to. They pretended to be serious, but their eyes kept on lingering. The

ordinary people who didn't recognize him, however, had already started to point at him. As Lan WangJi pondered with downcast eyes, he suddenly felt something weigh onto his head. He raised his hand. A pink medicinal peony, at the peak of its bloom, had landed flawlessly on the side of his head.

From on top of a building came a grinning voice, "Lan Zhan—ah, no, HanGuang-Jun—what a coincidence!"

Lan WangJi looked up to see an airy pavilion lined with layers and layers of gauze curtains. A black-robed man lay on his side over a red lacquer divan. One hand of his slender body dangled down, holding a fine liquor jar made of black clay. Half of the jar's crimson tassel wrapped around his arm, while the other half swayed back and forth in the air.

Seeing Wei WuXian's face, the disciples who were watching the scene all grew somewhat uncomfortable. Everyone knew that the YiLing Patriarch and HanGuang-Jun didn't have a good relationship. When they fought together during the Sunshot Campaign, they'd often begin to argue. Nobody knew what could happen this time. As of the moment, they didn't even bother to put on a polite pretense anymore, staring at the two as hard as they could.

Lan WangJi didn't leave with a cold face, contrary to their conjectures. He only said, "It is you." Wei WuXian, "It's me! Someone who does such a ridiculous thing has to be me. Where did you find the time to come to Yunmeng? If you're not busy, come up here and have a drink?"

A few girls encircled him, all cramped onto the divan, laughing at those down below, "Yeah, Young Master, come up here and have a drink!"

The girls were the ones who tossed flowers at him earlier on. There was no need to say who was the person that told them to do such a thing.

Lowering his head, Lan WangJi turned around and proceeded to leave. Seeing that there was no reaction, Wei WuXian wasn't surprised at all. With a click of his tongue, he rolled down the divan and drank a mouthful of the liquor in his jar. Yet, a few moments later, a series of footsteps came, lighter than heavy, calmer than rushed.

With steady steps, Lan WangJi walked up the stairs and parted the curtains as he entered. The bejeweled strings clinked crisply, almost melodically.

He placed the bundle of flowers that had hit him onto the small table, "Your flowers."

Wei WuXian slanted his body until he could reach the table, "You're welcome. I'll give them to you. These are your flowers now."

Lan WangJi, "Why?"

Wei WuXian, "Why not? I just wanted to see how you'd react to such a thing."

Lan WangJi, "Ridiculous."

Wei WuXian, "Ridiculous is exactly what I am. Or else I wouldn't have been so bored as to get you up here... Hey, hey, hey, don't go. You're already here. You won't have a few sips?"

Lan WangJi, "Liquor is prohibited."

Wei WuXian, "I know that liquor is prohibited in your sect, but it's not like it's the Cloud Recesses here. It's fine if you have some."

The girls immediately took out a new cup. After they poured it full, they pushed it toward the bundle of flowers. Lan WangJi still didn't seem like he was going to sit down, but he didn't seem like he was going to leave either.

Wei WuXian, "You finally came to Yunmeng for once, and you won't even try the delicious liquor here? But, though the liquor is delicious, it'll never even compare to the Emperor's Smile at Gusu where you live. It really is the best of all liquor. In the future, if I have the chance to go to Gusu again, I'll definitely save half or a dozen and drink them all at once. Just look at you—what's wrong with you? The seats are right there, and you're still standing. Go sit, won't you?"

The girls urged him on, "Go sit, won't you?" "Go sit!"

Lan WangJi's light eyes examined the sensual girls coldly. Immediately after, his gaze landed on the coal-black, red-tasseled flute by Wei WuXian's waist. His eyes looked down, as if he was thinking of the best wording. Seeing this, Wei WuXian raised a brow, mostly able to guess what he was going to say next.

As he expected, Lan WangJi said, slowly, "You should not accompany yourself with inhuman beings for so long."

The smiles of the girls who were tittering around Wei WuXian immediately disappeared.

The gauze curtains swayed, at times blocking out the sunlight. The pavilion shifted between light and dark. Now, their snow-white cheeks seemed a bit too pale, so drained of blood that they almost seemed ashen. Their eyes were glued to Lan WangJi as well. Out of the blue came a chilling eeriness.

Wei WuXian lifted his hand, gesturing for them to move to the side. He shook his head as he spoke, "Lan Zhan, you really do become more boring the older you grow. You're still so young. It's not like you're in your seventies, so don't copy your uncle all the time, thinking of nothing but scolding others."

Lan WangJi turned around and walked a step closer to him, "Wei Ying, it is still best if you come back to Gusu with me."

"..." Wei WuXian, "I really haven't heard this in a long time. The Sunshot Campaign is already

over. I thought you've given up long ago."

Lan WangJi, "Last time, during the hunt on Phoenix Mountain, have you noticed certain signs?"

Wei WuXian, "What signs?"

Lan WangJi, "The loss of control."

Wei WuXian, "You mean me almost getting into a fight with Jin ZiXuan? I think you got something wrong. I want to fight with Jin ZiXuan whenever I see him."

Lan WangJi, "And the things you said afterwards."

Wei WuXian, "What things? I say so many things every day. I've long since forgotten about the things I said two months ago."

Lan WangJi looked at him, as though he could tell at once that he didn't take it seriously. He took in deep breath, "Wei Ying."

He continued stubbornly, "The ghost path harms the body and the heart."

Wei WuXian seemed as if his head began to hurt, "Lan Zhan, you... I've heard more than enough of these words that you say, and you still feel that you haven't said them enough? You say that it harms the body, but I'm fine right now. You say that it harms the heart, but I haven't become that frenzied, have I?"

Lan WangJi, "It is not too late yet. In the future, even if you regret..."

Without waiting for him to finish talking, Wei WuXian's expression changed. He suddenly stood up, "Lan Zhan!"

Behind him, red light had begun to glow within the eyes of the girls. Wei WuXian, "Stop it."

Thus, the girls lowered their heads and retreated, but still they stared unwaveringly at Lan WangJi. Wei WuXian turned to him, "What can I say? Even though I don't think that I'll regret it, I don't like it when people take guesses at how I'm going to be in the future, either."

After a while of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "I am the one who was out of line."

Wei WuXian, "Not really. But, indeed, looks like I shouldn't have invited you up here. Today was because of my presumption."

Lan WangJi, "It was not."

Wei WuXian smiled, his words polite, "Really? That's good, then."

He finished in one gulp the half cup of liquor that was left, "But, no matter what, I should still thank you. I'll take it as you're concerned for me."

Wei WuXian waved his hand, "Then, I won't bother HanGuang-Jun any longer. Let's meet again if the chance comes up."

When Wei WuXian returned to Lotus Pier, Jiang Cheng was wiping his sword. He lifted his eyes, "You're back?"

Wei WuXian, "I'm back."

Jiang Cheng, "Your face looks terrible. Don't tell me you ran into Jin ZiXuan?"

Wei WuXian, "Worse than Jin ZiXuan. Guess who." Jiang Cheng, "Give me a hint."

Wei WuXian, "Wants to lock me up."

Jiang Cheng frowned, "Lan Zhan? Why is he at Yunmeng?"

Wei WuXian, "No idea. He's in the streets, probably searching for someone. After the Sunshot Campaign, he hasn't brought this up in such a long time. Now he's at it again."

Jiang Cheng, "It's your fault for calling him over first."

Wei WuXian, "How did you know that it was me who called him over first?"

Jiang Cheng, "Do you even have to ask? Which time has it not been you? You're a strange one as well. Clearly every time you

part with him on bad terms, so why do you keep on trying to get him annoyed?"

Wei WuXian thought about it, "I'm ridiculous?"

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes, thinking to himself, <em>So you do know</em>. His eyes went to his sword again. Wei WuXian, "Just how many times do you have to wipe your sword in one day?"

Jiang Cheng, "Three times. And your sword? How long has it been since you last wiped it?" Wei WuXian took a pear and bit into it, "Tossed it into my room. Once a month is good enough." Jiang Cheng, "From now on, carry your sword in important events like hunts or Discussion Conferences. That's a ripe example of lack of discipline for others to laugh at."

Wei WuXian, "It's not like you don't know. I hate it the most when others force me to do things. The more they force me to do something, the less I want to do it. I'm not carrying my sword—what are they going to do about it?"

Jiang Cheng glared at him. Wei WuXian added, "And I don't want to be pulled into a sword duel by people I don't even know.

Whenever my sword unsheathes, there has to be blood. Unless they give me a few people to kill, nobody can bother me. So, I'll just not take it. Solves everything. It's better that way."

Jiang Cheng, "Didn't you use to love showing off your swordskills in front of others?"

Wei WuXian, "I used to be a kid. Can't be a kid forever, can't I?"

Jiang Cheng smirked, "Don't carry your sword, then. It doesn't matter. But don't provoke Jin ZiXuan from now on. He's Jin GuangShan's only son, after all. The future leader of the LanlingJin Sect will be him. If you beat him up, what should I, the sect leader, do? Beat him up with you? Or punish you?"

Wei WuXian, "Isn't Jin GuangYao here now? JinGuangYao seems so much better than him."

Jiang Cheng finished wiping his sword. After he scrutinized it for a while, he finally put Sandu back into its sheath, "So what, if he's better? No matter how much better he is, no matter how clever, he could only be a servant who greets the guests. That's all there is to his life. He can't compare with Jin ZiXuan."

Wei WuXian found his tone to be even somewhat praising of Jin ZiXuan, "Jiang Cheng, be honest with me—what do you mean? Last time you went all the way to take shijie over. You can't actually want shijie to...?"

Jiang Cheng, "It's not impossible."

WeiWuXian, "It's not impossible? Have you forgotten what he did in Langya? You're telling me that it's not impossible?"

Jiang Cheng, "He's probably regretting it."

Wei WuXian, "Who cares if he regrets it. Do we have to forgive him just because he apologized? Look at what his dad's like.

Maybe he'll be the goddamn same in the future, killing time searching everywhere for women. Have shijie be with him? You could take it?"

Jiang Cheng's voice was frozen, "See if he dares!"

After a pause, Jiang Cheng glanced at him before he continued,

"But, it's not like you have a say in whether he's forgiven or not. Sister likes him, so what can we do?"

Immediately, Wei WuXian was speechless. A while later, he squeezed out a few words, "Why does she have to like such a..."

He tossed the pear away, "Where's shijie?"

Jiang Cheng, "I don't know. Probably still at one of those places— either the kitchen, or the bedroom, or the ancestral hall. Where else could she go?"

Wei WuXian left the dueling hall. First, he went to the kitchen. Half a jar of steaming soup was cooking on the fire. She wasn't there. He then went to Jiang YanLi's bedroom. She wasn't there either. Last, he went to the ancestral hall. There she was.

Jiang YanLi was kneeling in the ancestral hall. She cleaned her parents' memorial tablets as she whispered. Wei WuXian poked his head inside, "Shijie? Talking to Uncle Jiang and Madam Yu again?"

Jiang YanLi's voice was soft, "Neither of you come, so of course I have to."

Wei WuXian walked inside. He sat down beside her and cleaned the tablets with her.

Jiang YanLi glanced at him, "A-Xian, why are you looking at me like this? Is there something

you'd like to tell me?"

Wei WuXian grinned, "Nothing. I'm just here to roll around."

As he spoke, he really did take a roll on the ground. Jiang YanLi asked, "Xian Xian, how old are you?"

Wei WuXian, "I'm three already."

Seeing that he made Jiang YanLi laugh, he finally sat up. After he thought for a while, he still decided to bring the topic up, "Shijie, I want to ask you about something."

Jiang YanLi, "Go ahead."

Wei WuXian, "Why would someone like another person? I mean that kind of like."

Jiang YanLi paused for a moment, musing, "Why are you asking me about this? Do you like someone? What kind of a maiden is she?"

Wei WuXian, "No. I won't like anyone. At least not too much. Wouldn't it be the same as putting a rein on my neck?"

Jiang YanLi, "Three seems a bit too old. How about one?"

Wei WuXian, "No, I'm three! The three-year-old XianXian is hungry! What should he do?"

Jiang YanLi chuckled, "There's soup in the kitchen. You can have some. Would XianXian be able to reach the stove, though?"

"If I can't, Shijie can just pick me up, and then I'll be able to reach it..." As Wei WuXian spouted nonsense, Jiang Cheng just happened to step inside the ancestral hall.

Hearing this, he spat, "Fooling around again! Your sect leader, I, has already poured you a bowl and put it outside. Kneel for me to express your gratitude and go drink your soup outside."

Wei WuXian skipped outside before he turned around and came back, "What do you mean by this, Jiang Cheng? Where's the meat?"

Jiang Cheng, "Finished it. There's only lotus roots left. Don't eat them if you don't want to."

Wei WuXian attacked with his elbow, "Spit out the meat!"

Jiang Cheng, "No objections. I'll spit them out and let's see if you'll eat them!"

Seeing that they started to argue again, Jiang YanLi quickly

interrupted, "Okay, okay. How old are you two, fighting over some meat? I'll just make another jar..."

The lotus pork rib soup that Jiang YanLi made was Wei WuXian's favorite.

Aside from how it really was delicious, it was also because he'd always recall what happened the first time he had it.

At that time, it was not long after Wei WuXian had been brought back by Jiang FengMian from Yiling. As soon as he went in, he saw a proud young master running around the training grounds, leading a few leashed puppies. Immediately, his hands went up to his face and he wailed, soon bawling his eyes out. He was in Jiang FengMian's arms the entire day, not coming down no matter what. On the second day, Jiang Cheng's puppies were given to someone else.

This angered Jiang Cheng so much that he threw a big tantrum. No matter how much Jiang FengMian comforted him gently,

telling him that they should „be good friends", he refused to talk to Wei WuXian. Quite a few days later, Jiang Cheng's attitude

softened. Jiang FengMian wanted to strike while the iron was still hot, so he told Wei WuXian to sleep in the same room as him, hoping that they'd grow fonder of each other.

In the beginning, though still sulking, Jiang Cheng was on the verge of agreeing. But the bad thing was that when Jiang FengMian began to rejoice, he took Wei WuXian up and let him sit on his arm. Watching the scene unfold, Jiang Cheng was shocked speechless. Immediately, Madam Yu let out a bitter laugh and went out the room. It was only because the couple had important matters to attend to and left in a hurry that they didn't start another argument.

That night, Jiang Cheng locked Wei WuXian outside his room, refusing to let him in.

Wei WuXian knocked on the door, "Shidi, Shidi, let me in. I want to sleep."

Inside of the room, Jiang Cheng shouted with his back on the door, "Who's your shidi?! Give me

back Princess, give me back Jasmine, give me back Love!"

Princess, Jasmine, and Love were all puppies that he used to own. Wei WuXian knew that Jiang FengMian sent them away because of him. He whispered, "I'm sorry. But... But I reallyam scared of them..."

In Jiang Cheng's memory, the total number of times Jiang

FengMian picked him up wouldn't even add up to five. Every single instance was enough for him to be happy for months. A fire brewed inside of him, unable to be released. All that he asked himself was „why, why, why". Suddenly, he saw that a set of bedding that wasn't his own was now inside his room. The anger and indignation immediately rushed to his forehead, making him

pickup Wei WuXian's sheets and blankets. Wei WuXian waited outside for a long time. When the door opened, before the joy could spread onto his face, he was bombarded with a pile of things being thrown out. The door banged shut again.

Jiang Cheng told him from inside, "Go sleep somewhere else! This is my room! You're even gonna steal my room?!"

At that time, WeiWuXian didn't know what Jiang Cheng was mad about at all. After a pause, he replied, "I didn't steal anything. It's Uncle Jiang who told me to sleep with you."

Hearing that he was still bringing up his father, almost as if he was purposely showing off, Jiang Cheng's eyes reddened as he yelled, "Go away! If I see you again, I'll call a bunch of dogs to bite you!"

Standing outside, as Wei WuXian heard that dogs would come bite him, fear immediately bubbled within him. Twisting his fingers, he hurried, "I'll go, I'll go. Don't call the dogs!"

Dragging behind him the sheets and blanket that were thrown outside, he ran out the hall. Having only arrived at Lotus Pier for a short period of time, he didn't dare jump around yet. Every day, he obediently holed up in the places that Jiang FengMian told him to stay at. He didn't even know where his room was, much less have the courage to knock on other people's doors, scared that it'd disturb someone's dreams.

Having thought for a while, he walked to a corner of the hallway where there was no wind, laid down his sheets, and lay down right there. But the longer he spent there, the louder Jiang Cheng's „I'll call a bunch of dogs to bite you" echoed in his head. Wei WuXian grew more afraid the more he thought about it. He tossed and turned under the blanket, feeling that a bunch of dogs

surrounded him whenever he heard a single sound. After a while of torment, he felt that he couldn't stay there anylonger. Leaping up, he rolled up the sheets, folded the blanket, and fled Lotus Pier.

Huffing and puffing, he ran for quite some time alongside the night wind. When he saw a tree, he climbed up without second thought. He climbed with all four limbs clinging to the trunk, and only calmed down a bit after he felt that he was high enough up there. He didn't know how long he'd been hugging the tree when, suddenly, a soft voice called his name from afar. The voice got closer and closer. Not long later, a white-clothed girl appeared under the tree with a lantern.

Wei WuXian recognized that this was Jiang Cheng's sister. He stayed quiet, hoping that she wouldn't find him. Yet,Jiang YanLi still called, "Is it A-Ying? What are you doing up there?"

Wei WuXian continued to stay quiet. Jiang YanLi raised the lantern, "I saw you. You left your shoe under the tree."

Wei WuXian glanced down at his left foot before finally exclaiming, "My shoe!"

Jiang YanLi, "You can come down. Let's go back."

Wei WuXian, "I... I'm not going down. There are dogs."

Jiang YanLi, "A-Cheng was making things up. There are no dogs. You don't have anything to sit on. Your arms will grow sore really soon, and you'll fall down."

No matter what she said, Wei WuXian continued clinging to the tree, refusing to come down. Afraid that he'd hurt himself, Jiang YanLi put the lantern under the tree and extended her arms

to catch him, too worried to leave. Thirty minutes later, Wei WuXian's hands finally grew sore. He let go of the tree trunk and fell down. Jiang YanLi hurried to catch him, but Wei WuXian still landed with a slam. Rolling on the ground a few times, he hugged his leg and wailed, "My leg is broken!"

Jiang YanLi comforted him, "It's not broken. It shouldn't be fractured either. Does it hurt a lot? It's fine. Don't move. I'll carry you back."

Wei WuXian was still thinking about the dogs, sobbing, "Are... Are the dogs there..."

Jiang YanLi promised again and again, "No. If dogs come, I'll chase them away for you." She picked up the shoe Wei WuXian left under the tree, "Why did your shoe fall off? Does it not fit?" Wei WuXian forced back the tears of pain, "No. They fit."

In truth, they didn't fit. They were quite a few sizes too large. But this was the first pair of shoes that Jiang FengMian bought him. Wei WuXian was too embarrassed to make him go out of his way to buy another pair, and so he said that they weren't too big. Jiang YanLi helped him into his shoe and pressed the hollow tip, "It is a bit big. I'll fix it for you when we get back."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian felt somewhat uneasy, as if he did something wrong again.

Living in other people's homes, the worst that could happen was to make trouble for the hosts.

Jiang YanLi put him onto her back and began to walk back, wobbling in her steps as she spoke, "A-Ying, no matter what A-Cheng said to you, don't bother about him. He doesn't have a good temper, so he's always home playing with himself. Those puppies were his favorites. Dad sent them away, and so he's feeling upset. He's actually really happy that somebody's here to be with him. You ran out here and didn't go back for a long time. I only came to find you only because he's worried that something happened to you and went to wake me up."

In reality, Jiang YanLi was only two or three years older than him. She was only twelve or thirteen back then. Although she herself was only a child as well, she naturally spoke as if she were an adult, trying to make him feel better. Her frame was quite small, quite slender, and she didn't have much strength either. She staggered now and then, having to stop to push up Wei WuXian's thighs so that he didn't slide down. Yet, when Wei WuXian was on her back, he felt incomparably secure, almost more secure than when he was sitting on Jiang FengMian's arm. Suddenly, the night wind carried forth a series of sobs. Jiang YanLi quivered in fear, "What was that sound? Did you hear it?"

Wei WuXian pointed, "I heard it. It came from inside that pit!"

The two went to the pit and careful looked inside. A small silhouette lay face-down at the bottom. As he lifted his head, they could see two streaks on his muddied face, washed off by his tears. He choked, "... Sister!"

Jiang YanLi sighed in relief, "A-Cheng, didn't I tell you to get others and search for him together?"

Jiang Cheng only shook his head. After Jiang YanLi left, he waited for a while. He felt as if he was sitting on pins and needles, and so he decided to go chase after them. Yet, as he ran too fast and forgot to bring a lantern, he tripped on something halfway down the road and fell into a pit. He scratched his head as well.

Jiang YanLi stretched her arm out and pulled her younger brother out of the pit. She took out a handkerchief and put it against his bleeding forehead. Jiang Cheng seemed to be in low spirits. His black pupils snuck a glance at Wei WuXian. Jiang YanLi, "Is there something you didn't tell A-Ying?"

Jiang Cheng pressed the handkerchief onto his forehead, his voice low, "... I'm sorry."

Jiang YanLi, "Help A-Ying bring back the sheets and blanket later, okay?"

Jiang Cheng sniffed, "I brought them back already..."

Both of the two had injured their legs and couldn't walk. It was still some distance away from Lotus Pier, so Jiang YanLi could only carry one on her back and the other in her arms. Both Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng wrapped their arms around her neck.

She had to stop and take a breath after just a few steps, "Just what am I supposed to do with you two?"

Their eyes were still brimming with tears. Pitifully, they hugged her neck even tighter.

At last, one step at a time, she finally managed to carry her two brothers back to Lotus Pier. In a hushed voice, she woke up the doctor and asked him to bandage Wei WuXian's and Jiang Cheng's wounds. Afterward, she repeated „sorry” and „thank you” countless times before walking the doctor back. Looking at Wei WuXian's legs, Jiang Cheng's face was full of nervousness. If any other disciple or servant learned about this and told Jiang FengMian, after Jiang FengMian knew how he threw Wei WuXian's sheets out and made him hurt his leg, Jiang FengMian would definitely dislike him even more. This was also why he only dared chase after them alone and didn't get anyone else.

Seeing how worried he seemed, Wei WuXian took the initiative, "Relax. I won't tell Uncle Jiang. I only hurt myself because I suddenly wanted to climb a tree last night."

Hearing this, Jiang Cheng sighed in relief. He swore, "You can relax as well. Anytime I see a dog, I'll chase it away for you!"

Seeing how the two finally made up with each other, Jiang YanLi cheered, "That's the spirit."

Having stayed up for almost half of the night, the two had grown hungry as well. And so, Jiang YanLi went to the kitchen and busied herself for a while, standing on tiptoe. She warmed up a bowl of lotus pork rib soup for each of them.

The aroma wrapped itself around his heart, lingering.

Squatting in the yard, Wei WuXian put the empty bowl onto the ground. He gazed at the stars sprinkled across the sky, and then smiled.

When he ran into Lan WangJi in the streets, he recalled many things from when he was studying at the Cloud Recesses.

On a whim, he stopped Lan WangJi, wanting to direct their conversation toward those days as well. But, Lan WangJi reminded him that everything was different from how they were back then.

Yet, when he returned to Lotus Pier, to the Jiang siblings, he'd be under the illusion that nothing had changed at all.

Wei WuXian suddenly wanted to find the tree that he once hugged.

He stood up and walked out of the training grounds. The disciples along the way nodded at him in respect. All of them looked unfamiliar. The shidi who liked monkeys and refused to walk properly, the servants who made faces and didn't salute properly—they had long since gone.

Across the training grounds and outside Lotus Pier's gates, there was a wide pier. No matter day or at night, at the pier, there'd always be vendors selling food. From a pot of sizzling oil came a wonderful aroma.

Wei WuXian couldn't help but went over, grinning, "Big servings today, huh?"

The vendor grinned as well, "Young Master Wei, you want one? I'll give it to you for free. Not charging anything."

Wei WuXian, "I'll have one. Charge it still."

Beside the vendor sat someone whose entire body seemed grimy. Before Wei WuXian walked closer, the person hugged their knees as they shivered, as though they were both cold and tired. After they heard Wei WuXian speak, their head shot up.

Wei WuXian widened his eyes, "You?!"

## Chapter 72: Recklessness—Part One

Koi Tower.

Side by side, Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi strolled along the endless waves of Sparks Amidst Snow.

With a twist of his wrist, Lan XiChen swept over one of the snow- colored flowers, its petals in full bloom. The motion was so gentle that not even a dewdrop fell. He spoke, "WangJi, is there something on your mind? Why have you been so tense?"

Of course, in most people's eyes, the „tension" probably looked no different than Lan WangJi's other expressions.

Lan WangJi's brows sunk low as he shook his head. A few moments later, he replied in a low voice, "Brother, I want to take someone back to the Cloud Recesses."

Lan XiChen was surprised, "Take someone back to the Cloud Recesses?"

Lan WangJi nodded, his expression pensive. After a pause, he continued, "Take him back... and hide him somewhere."

Lan XiChen's eyes immediately widened.

Ever since their mother passed away, this brother of his had gradually become more and more withdrawn. Apart from going on night-hunts, he'd shut himself in his room all day long, reading, meditating, practicing calligraphy, playing his guqin, and improving his cultivation. He never talked much to anyone except

for him, his elder brother. Yet, this was the first time that such words found their way outside of his lips.

Lan XiChen, "Hide him somewhere?"

Lan WangJi frowned softly. He began again, "But he is not willing."

Suddenly, the noise of chatter came from before them. Someone spat, "Is this a road that someone like you can walk on? Who let you roam around!"

A young voice replied, "I'm sorry. I..."

Hearing this, Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi looked up at the same time. Beside the wall reliefs stood two men. The one who had just scolded someone was Jin ZiXun, with a few servants and cultivators following behind him. The one who had been scolded was a white-clothed young man. When the man saw Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi, his face immediately went pale. He couldn't even continue with the things he wanted to say. As Jin ZiXun kept up his haughty guise, Jin GuangYao came to the rescue just in time.

He went to the white-clothed man, "The paths of Koi Tower are rather intricate. Young Master Su, it's not your fault that you got lost. You can come with me."

Seeing that he appeared, Jin ZiXun sneered and walked around them. The white-clothed man, however, hesitated, "You know me?"

Jin GuangYao smiled, "Of course I do. Why wouldn't I? Haven't we met each other once? Young Master Su, Su MinShan, your swordsmanship is quite good. I've been thinking ever since the hunt at Phoenix Mountain about what a pity it'd be if such a young talent didn't come to our sect. In the end, though, he did come to our sect. I was over the moon with joy. This way, please?"

There were countless cultivators who sought assistance by going to the LanlingJin Sect like Su She did. He thought that not many people would recognize him, having never expected Jin GuangYao to be able to remember him so clearly, going as far as to praise him, after just one hasty encounter with him. Instantly, Su She seemed to be more relieved. He ceased to look at the Lan brothers and followed Jin GuangYao away, scared that they'd mock or point at him.

Within Glamor Hall, Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi were seated one after the other. In the hall, it wasn't appropriate to continue the discussion that they were holding. Lan WangJi returned to his norm of ice and frost. The GusuLan Sect was famous for its abstinence from liquor. By Jin GuangYao's arrangements, no liquor cups were placed on either of the two's table. There was

only a teacup and a few fresh, dainty dishes. Nobody had come forth and proposed them any toasts, either, so all was calm.

Unfortunately, just as the calmness settled down, a man wearing a robe of Sparks Amidst Snow suddenly approached them, one liquor cup in each hand, "Sect Leader Lan, HanGuang-Jun, a toast to each of you!"

This was Jin ZiXun, who had been toasting everyone for the past while. Jin GuangYao knew that neither Lan XiChen nor Lan WangJi liked liquor, so he hurried over, "ZiXun, both ZeWu-Jun and HanGuang-Jun grew up in Cloud Recesses. There are over three thousand rules on their stone wall. Instead of asking them to drink, why not..."

Jin ZiXun regarded Jin GuangYao with much aversion. He thought that his background was lowly and was ashamed to be of one clan as him. He interrupted, "The Jin Sect and the Lan Sect have always been like one family. We're all the same. My two Lan brothers, if you don't drink this, you'd be looking down on me!"

On the side, a few of his followers all praised, "What a bold move!"

"That's just how an esteemed cultivator should act!"

Jin GuangYao continued to smile, though he sighed under his breath, rubbing his temples. Lan XiChen stood up, wanting to decline the offer politely. Jin ZiXun continued to pester, turning to Lan XiChen, "Don't say anything. Sect Leader Lan, our twosects aren't strangers to each other. Don't deal with me like how you deal with strangers! Just tell me one thing—are you drinking it or not?"

The corners of Jin GuangYao's smile were starting to twitch. He glanced at Lan XiChen, eyes full of apology. He tried to speak gently, "After this, they'll return on their swords. Drinking would probably affect their..."

Jin ZiXun thought nothing of this, "It's not like they'd get drunk with just a few cups. Even if I drank eight large bowls, I'd still be able to fly away!"

A wave of cheers came from all around them. Lan WangJi was still sitting, staring coldly at the cup of liquor that Jin ZiXun forced into his sight. He looked as if he was about to speak when a hand suddenly took over the cup of liquor.

Lan WangJi paused in surprise, his knitted eyebrows unravelling at once. He looked up.

What first reflected against his pupils were black robes. A flute hung at the waist, tassels in the color of blood dangling off one end. The person who came stood with hands against his back. With a lift of his head, he drank all of the liquor and showed the empty bottom to Jin ZiXun, "I drank it for him. You satisfied yet?"

Laughter clung to both his eyes and his words. Handsome features accentuated his slender physique.

Lan XiChen, "Young Master Wei."

Someone exclaimed in a hushed tone, "When did he come?!"

Wei WuXian put down the cup. With one hand, he fixed his lapel, "Just a moment ago."

Just a moment ago? But, just a moment ago, clearly nobody notified the room, much less greeted him. Although surprising, it was true that not a single person noticed when he managed to slip into Glamor Hall. The crowd couldn't help but shiver in disgust at the mere power of his abilities.

Jin GuangYao was quick to react, his enthusiasm still warm, "I wasn't aware of Young Master Wei's arrival at Koi Tower. The lack of a welcome was my fault. Would you like to be seated? Oh, right—do you have an invitation?"

Wei WuXian didn't make small talk either, getting straight to the point, "No thanks. I don't." He nodded slightly at Jin ZiXun, "Young Master Jin, could I please have a word with you?"

Jin ZiXun, "If you have anything to say, come after our banquet is over."

In reality, he didn't want to talk to Wei WuXian at all. Wei WuXian could see this as well, "How long do I have to wait?"

Jin ZiXun, "Probably around six to eight hours. Or maybe ten to twelve. Or until tomorrow."

Wei WuXian, "I'm afraid I can't wait for that long."

Jin ZiXun's voice was arrogant, "You'll have to wait even if you can't."

Jin GuangYao, "Young Master Wei, what do you need ZiXun for? Is it a pressing matter?"

Wei WuXian, "Pressing indeed. It allows for no delay."

Jin ZiXun turned to Lan XiChen, holding up the other cup, "Sect Leader Lan, here, here. You haven't drunk this cup yet!"

Seeing him stall purposely, a dark cloud flashed before his face. He narrowed his eyes, the corners of his lips curling up, "Fine.

Then I'll talk about it right here. Young Master Jin, have you heard of someone by the name of Wen Ning?"

Jin ZiXun, "Wen Ning? I haven't."

Wei WuXian, "You definitely remember him. Last month, when you were night-hunting in the area of Ganquan, you chased an eight-winged bat king to the gathering place, or the detention camp, of the Wen Sect's remnants and brought a group of the Wen Sect's disciples. The one in the lead was him."

After the Sunshot Campaign, the QishanWen Sect was destroyed. The territory that it was expanding was shared among the other sects. The Ganquan area was appointed to the LanlingJin Sect. As for the remnants of the Wen Sect, they were herded into a small corner of Qishan, not even a thousandth the territory it once owned. They were crammed into the place and struggled to live.

Jin ZiXun, "I don't remember, which means I don't remember. I'm not so idle as to go out of my way to remember a Wen-dog's name."

Wei WuXian, "Fine. I don't mind explaining it in greater detail. You couldn't catch the bat king and happened to run into a few of the Wen Sect's disciples who were there to investigate the same thing. And so, you threatened them to carry spirit-attraction flags to be your bait. They didn't dare do it. One person stepped out and tried to reason with you. That's the Wen Ning I'm talking about. After some delay, the bat king got away. You beat up the Wen cultivators, took them away by force, and the group disappeared. Do I need to say any more details? They still haven't returned yet. Apart from you, I don't know who in the world I could possibly ask."

Jin ZiXun, "Wei WuXian, what do you mean? You came for him? You aren't standing up for a Wen-dog, are you?"

Wei WuXian wore a broad grin, "Since when is it your business whether I'd like to stand up for him or cut his head off? Just give him to me!"

At the last sentence, the grin on his face vanished. His tone turned cold as well. It was clear that he had lost his patience. Many of the people within Glamor Hal shivered in fear. Jin ZiXun felt his scalp tingle as well. Yet, his anger soon soared. He shouted, "Wei WuXian, you are too bold! Did the LanlingJin Sect invite you today? And you dare run wild here. Do you really think that you're invincible, that nobody has the courage to confront you? Do you want to overturn the Heavens?"

Wei WuXian smiled, "You're comparing yourself to the Heavens? Excuse my language, but your face is a little too thick, isn't it?"

Although in his heart, Jin ZiXun had already begun to think of the LanlingJin Sect as the new Heavens, he too knew that his words were too rash. His cheeks flushed slightly. Just as he was about to rebut, sitting on the foremost seat, Jin GuangShan spoke up.

His voice seemed kind, "It's not anything too important anyways. You youngsters, why lose your tempers over such a thing?"

However, Young Master Wei, let me be fair here. Barging in when the LanlingJin Sect is holding a private banquet is indeed inappropriate."

To say that Jin GuangShan didn't mind what happened at Phoenix Mountain would be impossible. This was also why he only smiled when Jin ZiXun bickered with Wei WuXian but

didn't stop them, and only spoke up when Jin ZiXun was at the disadvantage.

Wei WuXian nodded, "Sect Leader Jin, it was never my intention to disturb your private banquet. My apologies. However, the whereabouts of the people whom Young Master Jin took are still unclear. Just a moment of delay, and it might be too late. One of the groups had once saved me before. I will definitely not sit back and watch. Please do not feel pressured. I will make amends for this at a later date."

Jin GuangShan, "Whatever it is, it must be able to wait a little longer. Come, come, you can sit down first. Let's talk about this with no rush."

Soundlessly, Jin GuangYao had already prepared a new seat. Wei WuXian, "Thank you, Sect Leader Jin, but I won't stay for long. The matter can't be delayed. Please let this be sorted outas soon as possible."

Jin GuangShan, "There's no need for hurry. If we break things down, there are indeed a few things between us that haven't been accounted for yet, things that can't be delayed. Now that you're here, how about we use the opportunity to sort those things out as well?"

Wei WuXian raised a brow, "Account for what?"

Jin GuangShan, "Young Master Wei, we've brought this up a couple of times with you already. You haven't forgotten, have you? ... During the Sunshot Campaign, you had once used a certain object."

Wei WuXian, "Oh. You did mention it before. The Tiger Seal?"

Jin GuangShan, "It is said that the Stygian Tiger Seal was casted from the iron of a sword that you acquired in the cave of the Xuanwu of Slaughter. Back then, you used it on the battlefield once. Its powers were horrifying, causing even a few of our own cultivators to be affected by its residual force..."

Wei WuXian interrupted, "Please get to the point."

Jin GuangShan, "This is the point. In the battle, apart from the Wen Sect, our sides undertook great losses as well. In my opinion, such a weapon is quite difficult to be controlled. For it to be in the hands of just a single person might be..."

Before he even finished his words, Wei WuXian began to laugh.

After a few laughs, he continued, "Sect Leader Jin, let me ask you something else. Do you think that, because the QishanWen Sect is gone, the LanlingJin Sect has all right to replace it?"

All was silent within Glamor Hall.

Wei WuXian added, "Everything has to be given to you? Everyone has to listen to you? Looking at how the LanlingJin Sect does things, I almost thought that it was the QishanWen Sect's empire all over again."

Hearing this, over Jin GuangShan's square-shaped face flashed a hue of embarrassed anger. After the Sunshot Campaign, the criticism of Wei WuXian cultivating the ghoul path that the sects had once veiled began to rise. He mentioned the Stygian Tiger Seal here intending to threaten Wei WuXian, reminding him that there was still something they held against him, that others were still watching him, and thus he shouldn't be so bold as to want to climb above the LanlingJin Sect. Nobody expected Wei WuXian's words to be so harshly straightforward. Although he'd held the quiet thought of succeeding the Wen Sect's position since a long time ago, nobody had ever dared to bring it to the surface so fearlessly, going as far as to mock him.

A guest cultivator on his right shouted, "Wei WuXian! Watch your words!"

Wei WuXian, "Did I say something wrong? Forcing living people to be bait and beating them up whenever they refused to obey—is this any different from what the QishanWen Sect does?"

Another guest cultivator stood up, "Of course it's different. The Wen-dogs did all kinds of evil. To arrive at such an end is only karma for them. We only avenged a tooth for a tooth, letting them

taste the fruit that they themselves had sown. What's wrong with this?"

Wei WuXian, "Take revenge on the ones who bite you. Wen Ning's branch doesn't have much blood on their hands. Don't tell me that you find them guilty by association?"

Another person spoke, "Young Master Wei, is it that they don't have much blood on their hands just because you say so? These are only your one-sided words. Where's the evidence?"

Wei WuXian, "You think that they killed the innocent—aren't those your one-sided words as well? Shouldn't you be the first one to show evidence? Why would you instead ask me for evidence?"

The person shook his head, the words „this man refuses to reason with me" written all over his face. Someone else sneered, "Back then, when the Wen Sect slaughtered our people, it was thousands of times crueler than this! They didn't treat us with justice and morality, so why should we treat them with such?"

Wei WuXian grinned, "Oh. The Wen-dogs did all kinds of evil, so anyone whose surname is Wen can be killed? That's not it, is it? Many of the clans who defected from the Wen Sect are quite well-off right now, aren't they? In this hall, isn't there a few sect leaders from clans that used to be under the Wen Sect's wing?"

As the sect leaders saw that he recognized them, their expressions changed at once. Wei WuXian continued, "Since anyone whose surname is Wen can be used an outlet of anger as one pleases, no matter if they're innocent or not, does it mean that it's fine even if I kill all of them right now?"

Before he even finished his words, he placed his hand on his waist where Chenqing hung. Instantly, it was as if a piece of

memory was stirred up in the minds of everyone within the hall, as though they returned to the battlefield where darkness became the sky and corpses became mountains. At once, people stood up from among the crowd.

Lan WangJi's lowered his voice, "Wei Ying!"

Jin GuangYao was the closest to Wei WuXian, but he maintained his composure, speaking in a gentle voice, "Young Master Wei, please don't overdo things. Things are still open for discussion."

Jin GuangShan stood up as well, his face a mixture of shock, anger, fear, and hatred, "Wei WuXian! Just because... Sect Leader Jiang isn't here doesn't mean you can be so reckless!"

Wei WuXian's voice was harsh, "Do you think that I wouldn't be reckless if he were here? If I wanted to kill someone, who could stop me, and who would dare stop me?!"

Lan WangJi spoke, one word at a time, "Wei Ying, put down Chenqing."

Wei WuXian looked at him. From against the pair of eyes as mild as glass, he saw his own hideous reflection. He spun around, shouting, "Jin ZiXun!"

Jin GuangShan hurried, "ZiXun!"

Wei WuXian, "Cut the nonsense. I'm sure everyone knows that my patience is limited. Where is he? With so much timewasted on you, I'll give you three. Three!"

Jin ZiXun wanted to resist, but when he saw JinGuangShan's face, he felt his heart shiver. Wei WuXian began again, "Two!"

Jin ZiXun finally yelled, "... Fine! Fine! It's just a few Wen-dogs. Take them if you want to. I'm not fooling around with you any longer! Go find them at Qiongqi Path on your own!"

Wei WuXian laughed coldly, "If only you said it sooner."

He came like wind and went like wind. When his silhouette finally disappeared, the storm over the people's heads finally dissipated. Within Glamor Hall, most of those who stood up sat back down again. Almost all of them had already broken into cold sweats. On the other hand, Jin GuangShan, standing with a blank face where his seat was, finally lost his temper and kicked over the table in front of him. All of the gold dishes and silver platters rolled down the stairs.

Seeing his discomposure, Jin GuangYao wanted to ease the situation, starting, "Fa—"

Before he could finish, Jin GuangShan had already left. Jin ZiXun also felt that by giving in, he lost face in front of everyone. Out of both anger and hatred, he wanted to leave as well.

Jin GuangYao hurried, "ZiXun!"

Jin ZiXun was at the peak of his anger. Without a second thought, he flung away the cup of

liquor that was turned down, directly towards Jin GuangYao's chest. A splash of liquor immediately sprouted on top of the Sparks Amidst Snow blooming passionately over the white robes. It was more than embarrassing, but because of how chaotic the state of the hall was, nobody really minded the act of great misconduct.

Lan XiChen was the only one who exclaimed, "Brother!"

Jin GuangYao, "I'm fine, I'm fine. Brother, please be seated."

It was unsuitable for Lan XiChen to comment on Jin ZiXun, so he took out a snow-colored handkerchief and passed it to him, "Go retire and change your clothes."

Jin GuangYao took the handkerchief, wiping away as he forced a smile, "I can't leave, can I?"

He was the only one left to clean up the mess. How could he leave the scene? He reassured the crowd as he ranted, completely exhausted, "Young Master Wei really is too impulsive. How could he speak in such a way in front of so many sects?"

Lan WangJi spoke coldly, "Was he wrong?"

Jin GuangYao paused almost unnoticeably. He immediately laughed, "Haha. Yes, he's right. But it's because he's right that he can't say it in front of them, correct?"

Lan XiChen seemed as if he was deep in thought, "Young Master Wei's heart really has changed."

Hearing this, pain flashed across the light pair of eyes under Lan WangJi's knitted brows.

Having left Koi Tower, Wei WuXian turned one corner after

another until he arrived at an alley, "I know where he is. Let's go."

Wen Qing had been sitting on pins and needles within the alley. Hearing him, she rushed out at once. Her body was still fairly weak. Head spinning, she felt her ankle twist before Wei WuXian propped her up with one hand. He suggested, "Do you want me to take you somewhere to rest? It's fine if I go alone. I'll definitely bring back Wen Ning."

Wen Qing immediately clung to him, "No! No! I'll go, I have to go!"

After Wen Ning went missing, she ran from Qishan to Yunmeng with almost no rest on her way. She hadn't closed her eyes in days. When she saw Wei WuXian, she urged him and begged him as if she was mad. Right now, with pale lips and blank eyes, she was worn to a shadow. Seeing how she seemed like she couldn't hold out any longer, with there being no time for her to eat slowly, he bought a few steamed buns from a vendor for her to eat on the go. Wen Qing knew too that she was almost at her limit and that she had to eat. With tangled hair and red eyes, she bit into the bun. What she looked like reminded Wei WuXian of how he and Jiang Cheng were like when they were on the run.

He promised again, "It's fine. I'll definitely bring back Wen Ning."

Wen Qing sobbed as she ate, "I knew I shouldn't have left... But I had no choice. They forced me to go to another city. When I came back, Wen Ning and the entire group was gone! I knew I shouldn't have left him alone!"

Wei WuXian, "He'll be alright."

Wen Qing was breaking down, "He won't! A-Ning's been a skittish one ever since he was young. He's both cautious and timid. He doesn't even dare hire the more quick-tempered people to be his subordinates—they're all a bunch of mice like him! He has no idea of what to do when in an emergency when I'm not there with him!"

When Wei WuXian, with Jiang Cheng on his back, said goodbye to WenQing, this was what she said, „No matter what the result of this campaign turns out to be, from now on, we owe each other no more. It's all settled."

Wei WuXian could still see in his mind's eye her proud expression. Yet, last night, she refused to let go of his hand,

almost kneeling in front of him as she begged, „Wei WuXian, Wei WuXian, Young Master Wei, please help me. I really can't find anyone else to help me. You really have to help me find A-Ning! I have no other choice other than you!"

None of the pride from before remained.

Qiongqi Path was an ancient path that ran through a valley. According to legend, the path was where the founder of the QishanWen Sect, Wen Mao, rose to fame in just one battle. Hundreds of years ago, he fought a divine beast for an entirety of eighty-one days, taking its life in the end. The divine beast was the Qiongqi, a divine beast of chaos known to punish the good and encourage the evil, to devour the loyal, the righteous and to award the malicious. Of course, whether the legend was actually true or if it was exaggerated by the succeeding sect leaders of the QishanWen Sect would be impossible to determine.

Hundreds of years later, this valley had turned from a rift of danger to a scenery of praise and of tourism. After the Sunshot Campaign, the sects divided up the area that the QishanWen Sect used to hold, and Qiongqi Path was taken by the LanlingJin Sect. Originally, all of the tall walls of the valley were carved with life stories of the founder Wen Mao. Now that the LanlingJin Sect had taken over, of course it couldn't let the QishanWen Sect's glorious past continue to exist. It was in the middle of reconstruction, meaning that all of the reliefs on both sides would be chiseled down and new ones would be carved. Naturally, in

the end, it'd be given a new name that'd emphasize the LanlingJin Sect's gallantry.

Such a large-scale undertaking would need many laborers for sure. And, as for these laborers, of course there were no better candidates than the Wen Sect's prisoners of war, who had become homeless dogs after the Sunshot Campaign.

When the two reached Qiongqi Path, it was already nighttime. Against the dark veil, cold strands of rain quivered in the air. One step after another, Wen Qing followed Wei WuXian closely, trembling as though she was cold not from the outside but from the inside. Wei WuXian had to help her a little every once in a while. Before the valley was a row of shacks built temporarily for the prisoners of war to spend their nights. Leading Wen Qing, Wei WuXian saw an old, bent-over figure from afar. Cloaked in rain, the figure walked slowly, carrying a large flag. When it walked nearer, it became clear that the person carrying the flag was a wobbly old woman. She carried on her back a young toddler who paid attention to nothing but nibbling his fingers, fixed into position by a few cloth rags. The old and the young walked to and from across the road. The old woman found the flag to be quite difficult to carry. She had to rest after walking for just a few steps, putting down the flag.

Seeing this, Wen Qing yelled with red eyes, "Granny! It's me!"

The old woman probably couldn't see or hear well. She couldn't tell by sight or by hearing who the person was. All she knew was that someone approached and shouted something at her. She hastily took up the flag again, her face full of fear, as though she was scared that she'd be found out and scolded.

Wen Qing ran over and grabbed the flag from her, "What is this? What are you doing?"

A large sun, crest of the QishanWen Sect, was painted over the flag. However, it a blood-red cross was plastered on top of it. The flag itself was torn to bits as well. From when the Sunshot Campaign ended until now, countless people were labeled

„leftover Wen-dogs". Countless methods were used to torture them too, even called the euphemism „self-reflection". Wei WuXian knew it was likely because she was too old and couldn't

be a laborer like the others that the leader here came up with such a way to torment her. She had to carry the Wen Sect's tattered flag and walk around in self humiliation.

Surprised, the old woman first flinched. When she could finally tell who it was, her jaw dropped. Wen Qing asked, "Granny, where's A-Ning? Where's Fourth Uncle and the rest? Where's A-Ning?!"

The old woman looked at Wei WuXian, standing beside her, and didn't dare say anything. She only looked in the direction of the valley. Unable to do anything else, Wen Qing sprinted over.

Torches were set up on both sides of the valley. The flames flickered now and then within the faint strings of rain, but their blaze nonetheless illuminated the hundreds of heavy silhouettes

on the path.

The prisoners were all ghastly pale, their steps dragging. They weren't allowed to use spiritual powers or any other instruments, not only by the LanlingJin Sect's precautions against them, but also because it had to be punishing. Over a dozen inspectors, bearing black umbrellas, rode on horseback through the rain as they scolded. Wen Qing rushed into the rain, her eyes scanning frantically across every tired, grime-covered face.

One of the inspectors noticed her, raising a hand and shouting, "Where did you come from? Who let you run around here?"

Wen Qing urged, "I'm here to find someone, I'm here to find someone!"

The inspector approached, pulling something from the side of his waist and waving it about, "I don't care if you're looking for someone or not—leave! If you don't..."

At this point, he saw that a black-robed man walked over from behind the young woman. As if his tongue had gotten tied, his voice trailed off.

The young man bore handsome features, but his eyes were

rather cold. He couldn't help but shiver under the gaze. Soon, he realized that the young man wasn't staring at him, but instead the iron brand that he brandished.

The iron brand within the inspector's hand was the same kind as what the QishanWen Sect's servants used. It was only that the shape of the brand at the top was changed from the sun crest to the peony crest.

As Wei WuXian took note of this, cold light flashed within his eyes. Many of the inspectors recognized him. They stopped their horses quietly, whispering among each other. Nobody dared stop Wen Qing any longer, and she shouted as she searched, "A-Ning! A-Ning!"

No matter how desolate her voice was, no one answered her. She saw no trace of her brother even after she searched through the entire valley. If Wen Ning were here, he would've rushed toward her long ago. Stealthily, the inspectors dismounted their horses.

The entire group stared at Wei WuXian, as though hesitating about whether or not to greet him. Wen Qing rushed over and asked, "Where are the Wen cultivators sent here just a few days ago?" The people looked at one another. After some dawdling, an inspector who looked quite honest spoke up, his tone friendly, "All of the prisoners here are the Wen Sect's cultivators. New ones are sent here every day."

Wen Qing, "It's my brother, sent here by Jin ZiXun! He... He's about this tall. He doesn't talk much, stammers whenever he talks..."

The inspector, "Hey, Maiden, look. There are so many people here. How could we remember if any of them stammers or not?"

Wen Qing stomped her feet in anxiety, "I know he has to be here!"

The inspector was round and chubby. He gave an obsequiously apologetic grin, "Maiden, don't worry. Actually, it happens a lot that other sects come to us for cultivators. Maybe somebody else took him during the past few days? When we do roll calls, we'd sometimes find that someone ran away as well..."

Wen Qing, "He wouldn't have ran away! Granny and the others are all here. My brother wouldn't have ran away on his own."

The inspector, "Then, would you like to take your time searching for him? All of the people are here. If you don't find him, then we can't do anything about it either."

Suddenly, Wei WuXian spoke up, "All of the people are here?"

As he spoke, all of their faces froze for an instant. The inspector turned toward him, "That's right."

Wei WuXian, "Fine. For the time being, I'll take it that all the living ones are here. Then, what about the rest?"

Wen Qing's figure wobbled.

The „rest“ as compared to the „living“ could only be the „dead“. The inspectors quickly replied,

"That's not the way totalk.

Although it's all Wen cultivator's here, we've never dared do anything fatal."

As though he heard nothing, Wei WuXian took out the flute at his waist. The few prisoners who were beside him, trudging forward, screamed before they threw off the heavy objects on their backs and fled. Within the valley, a large circle of space formed immediately, him in the center.

In truth, the prisoners didn't recognize Wei WuXian's face, for the Wen Sect cultivators who ran into Wei WuXian on the battlefield of the Sunshot Campaign only met one end—utter annihilation.

Thus, most of the Wen cultivators who recognized his face became fierce corpses in his army, for him to command.

However, the flute made of dark wood, decorated with a crimson tassel, and the young man in black who controlled it had already become their nightmares.

From everywhere, people exclaimed, "It's the ghostflute Chenqing!"

Wei WuXian put Chenqing to his lips. The shrill sound of the flute first ripped through the night sky and across the curtains of rain with the force of an arrow. Immediately after, its residue echoed through the entire valley. Only one note, and Wei WuXian placed Chenqing back. He stood with his arms hanging down, a cold grin at his lips, letting the drops of rain dampen his hair and clothes.

Soon, someone suddenly spoke, "What's that sound?"

Yelps of surprise suddenly came from the far side of the crowd. Scrambling, the people soon emptied out an area of the circle with which they surrounded him. In the area stood slantingly around a dozen tattered figures, tall and short, men and women. Some of them gave off the stench of rotting flesh. The one who stood at the front was Wen Ning, whose eyes were still open.

His face was as pale as wax and his pupils were dilated. The blood at the corner of his lips had already dried into a dark brown. Although his chest didn't rise and fall at all, it was obvious to see that half of his ribcage had collapsed. Nobody who saw such a scene would think that he was still alive, but Wen Qing still didn't give up, grabbing for his pulse with trembling hands.

Holding onto him for a few moments, she finally broke into tears.

She'd been both scared and anxious, running as though shewas mad, but she was still too late. She couldn't even see herbrother one last time.

Wen Qing cried as she touched Wen Ning's ribs, as if shewanted to piece them back together. In vain hopes, she clung onto the nonexistent possibility. Her sweet features were wrung distorted, becoming unsightly, ugly, even. But, when someone was in the deepest of their sorrows, they'd never be able to cry with grace.

In front of the stiff corpse of her only younger brother, not a fragment was left of the pride that she tried so hard to upkeep.

The shock that Wen Qing received was too strong. Finally, she couldn't hang on any longer and passed out. Standing behind her, Wei WuXian caught her without saying anything, letting her lean onto his chest. He closed his eyes, opening them a short while later, "Who killed him?"

His tone was between hot and cold. It was as if he wasn't angered, but rather thinking about something. The inspector at the head thought that he still had a chance, answering in denial, "Young Master Wei, you mustn't say such a thing. We wouldn't dare kill a single person here. He's the one who wasn't careful while working, fell off the valley walls and died."

Wei WuXian, "Nobody would dare kill a single person? Is that true?"

The inspectors swore in unison, "Absolutely!" "Not a single one!"

Wei WuXian smiled, "Oh. I understand."

Immediately after, he continued calmly, "It's because they're Wen- dogs, and Wen-dogs aren't people. So even if you killed them, it doesn't count as having killed people. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

This was exactly what the lead inspector was thinking when he said it. With his thoughts read, his complexion paled. Wei WuXian added, “Or did you really think I wouldn’t know how someone died?”

All of the inspectors were speechless. As if they finally realized that the situation wasn’t in their favor, they looked like they were shrinking backward. Wei WuXian maintained his smile, “It’s best if you admit everything honestly. Who’s the one that killed him?

Step forward on your own. Or else, I’d prefer killing the wrong people over letting them go. Killing all of you would make sure that no one is let off.”

The group felt their scalps tingle and their blood run cold. The head inspector stammered, “The YunmengJiang Sect and the LanlingJin Sect have been getting along with each other. You mustn’t...”

Hearing this, Wei WuXian glanced at him, his tone amused, “You’re quite brave. Are you threatening me?”

The head inspector hurried, “Of course not, of course not.”

Wei WuXian, “Congratulations to you for successfully draining all my patience. Since you don’t want to speak up, let’s let him answer on his own.”

As though it’d been waiting for his words for a long time, Wen Ning’s frozen corpse suddenly moved, raising its head. Before the two nearest inspectors could even scream, each of their throats was clenched by a hand as firm as iron.

Expressionless, Wen Ning raised up the two short-legged inspectors high in the air. The empty circle around them grew larger and larger. The head inspector shouted, “Young Master Wei! Young Master Wei! Please go easy on us! Doing this in the heat of the moment would lead to irreversible consequences!” The rain fell heavier and heavier. Drops of water trickled incessantly down Wei WuXian’s cheeks. He suddenly spun around, putting his hand on Wen Ning’s shoulder before shouting, “Wen QiongLin!” As if a reply, Wen Ning let out a long, thundering roar. The ears of everyone within the valley ached. Wei WuXian spoke one word at a time, “Whoever caused all of you to be like this, let them meet the same end. I give you the right to do so. Settle everything!”

Hearing this, Wen Ning immediately crashed the two inspectors that he was holding together. Like exploding watermelons, the two heads immediately let out a loud bang, sending red and white flying everywhere. The scene was hauntingly grotesque. Screams sounded all throughout the valley. Horses neighed and prisoners fled—it was more than chaotic. Wei WuXian took up Wen Qing in his arms. As if nothing happened, he crossed the panicking crowd and held up the reins of a horse. As he was about to turn around, a slight-figured prisoner called him, “... Mr. Wei.”

Wei WuXian turned to look at him, “What?”

The prisoner’s voice quivered slightly as he pointed in a certain direction, “There’s... There’s a house on that side of the valley. They use it to... lock people inside and beat them up. Anyone who dies would be dragged outside and buried. Some of the people you’re looking for might be over there...” Wei WuXian, “Thank you.”

He followed the direction that the person pointed and indeed saw a shed that seemed like it was only temporarily built. Holding Wen Qing in one hand, he kicked the door open. In a corner of the room sat around a dozen people, all of them bruised and bleeding. They flinched from the shock of him kicking the door open so crudely. When a few of them saw Wen Qing, lying in Wei WuXian’s arms, they rushed over, ignoring their heavy injuries, “Maiden Qing!” One of them seethed, “Who... Who are you? What did you do to Office Leader?” Wei WuXian, “Nothing. Who are the cultivators under Wen Ning? Cut the nonsense and step out now!” The group stared among themselves, but Wei WuXian had already left, Wen Qing in his arms. They could do nothing but force themselves to follow, helping one another up. As soon as they left the house, before they could even tell what the chaos within the valley was all about, Wei WuXian ordered,

“Get the horses. Hurry up!”

A middle-aged man protested, “No, our Young Master Wen Ning...”

Suddenly, a severed head flew across his sight. The people turned around just in time to see Wen Ning crash a corpse the limbs of which were still twitching onto the ground. With bare hands, he grabbed for the internal organs.

Wei WuXian shouted, “Enough!”

Low growls came from Wen Ning’s throat, as though he still wasn’t satisfied. Wei WuXian whistled and said again, “Get up!”

Wen Ning could only stand up. Wei WuXian, “What are you waiting for? Mount the horses! Don’t tell me you’re waiting for me to find you swords?”

One of the groups remembered that an elderly was here. He hastened to bring the old woman and the toddler along, helping them onto a horse. Holding the still-unconscious Wen Qing, Wei WuXian himself mounted his horse as well. The dozens of people found a single dozen horses amid the pandemonium. Around two

or three people took one horse despite the discomfort. The old woman couldn’t ride one by herself and she had to somehow carry the child with her.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian stretched out his hand, “Give him to me.”

The old woman shook her head many times. The child hugged his granny’s neck tightly as well, on the verge of sliding off. There was an unconcealable fear within the two’s eyes. With a reach, Wei WuXian lifted the child up and tucked him under his arm.

The old woman was scared to death, “A-Yuan! A-Yuan!”

Although the child called A-Yuan was still quite young, he already knew fear, but still, he didn’t cry. He only continued to nibble at his fingers as he snuck a few glances at Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian shouted, “We’re going!” His legs struck against the horse’s back and led the group. Around a dozen horses followed behind him, dashing into the night rain.

## Chapter 73: Recklessness—Part Two

On that night, an extreme crisis flooded the cultivational world.

At midnight, in the Golden Pavilion on Koi Tower sat over fifty sect leaders from sects of all sizes. Jin GuangShan sat in the foremost seat. Jin ZiXuan was away, while Jin ZiXun didn't have enough experience, so Jin GuangYao was the only one who stood beside him. In the front row sat sect leaders and famed cultivators like Nie MingJue, Jiang Cheng, Lan XiChen, and Lan WangJi. All of their expressions were solemn. The next row sat sect leaders of lesser importance. They seemed as if they were confronted with a formidable enemy, at times whispering things like, "I knew it."

"It would've been like this sooner or later."

"Let's see how they intend on dealing with this."

Jiang Cheng was the center of everyone's gaze. Sitting in the front, his face was clouded. Along with the others, he was listening to Jin GuangYao explaining things, his expression respectful and his tone soft.

"... Four inspectors were harmed. Around fifty of the remaining Wen Sect members escaped. After Wei WuXian led them into Burial Mound, he summoned hundreds of fierce corpses to patrol the base of the mountain. Our people still can't get any further."

When he finished, silence filled Golden Pavilion.

Jiang Cheng only spoke after a few moments, "What he did was indeed a bit too much. Sect Leader Jin, I apologize to you in place of him. If there's any way at all to help the situation, please let me know. I'll definitely compensate for things however I can."

What Jin GuangShan wanted, however, wasn't his apology or his compensation, "Sect Leader Jiang, at first, for your sake, the

LanlingJin Sect didn't intend on saying anything. However, some of these inspectors weren't from the Jin Sect. There were a few from other sects as well. This makes it..."

Jiang Cheng's brows were knitted. He rubbed the vein that throbbed at his temple and soundlessly took in a deep breath, "... I apologize to all of the Sect Leaders. Everyone, I'm afraid you don't know that the Wen cultivator whom Wei WuXian wanted to save was called Wen Ning. We owe him and his sister Wen Qing gratitude for what happened during the Sunshot Campaign."

Nie MingJue, "You owe them gratitude? Isn't the QishanWen Sect the ones who caused the YunmengJiang Sect's annihilation?"

Within these few years, Jiang Cheng insisted on working late into the night every day. That day, just as he decided to rest early, he had to rush to Koi Tower overnight because of the thundering news. He'd been suppressing some anger under his fatigue since the beginning. With his natural competitiveness, he was already quite agitated since he had to apologize to other people. When he heard Nie MingJue mention the incident of his sect again, hatred sprouted within him.

The hatred was directed at not only everyone who was seated in this room, but also Wei WuXian.

Lan XiChen responded a moment later, "I have heard of Wen Qing's name a few of times. I do not remember her having participated in any of the Sunshot Campaign's crimes."

Nie MingJue, "But she's never stopped them either."

Lan XiChen, "Wen Qing was one of Wen RuoHan's most trusted people. How could she have stopped them?"

Nie MingJue spoke coldly, "If she responded with only silence and not opposition when the Wen Sect was causing mayhem, it's the same as indifference. She shouldn't have been so disillusioned as to hope that she could be treated with respect when the Wen Sect was doing evil and be unwilling to suffer the consequences and pay the price when the Wen Sect was wiped out."

Lan XiChen knew that because of what happened to his father, Nie MingJue abhorred Wen-dogs

more than anything, especially with how intolerable he was toward evil. Lan XiChen didn't say anything else.

One of the sect leaders spoke up, "What Sect Leader Nie said is quite right. Besides, Wen Qing is one of Wen RuoHan's most trusted people. You're telling me she never participated? Well, I don't buy it. Is there any Wen-dog without a single drop of blood on their hands? Maybe it's just that we haven't found out about it yet!"

As soon as the Wen Sect's past cruelties were mentioned, the crowd boiled over, surging and chattering. Jin GuangShan wanted to talk, but he grew displeased, seeing this.

Jin GuangYao noticed his change in expression and raised his voice at once, "Everyone, please calm down. This isn't the focus of what we're discussing today." As he spoke, he let the servants carry out chilled slices of fruits to divert the people's attention.

Eventually, Golden Pavilion managed to quiet down.

Taking this opportunity, Jin GuangShan spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, this was supposed to be a matter of your sect. It wouldn't have been appropriate for me to barge in. But now that things are like this, I'll have to caution you on the topic of Wei Ying."

Jiang Cheng, "Sect Leader Jin, go ahead."

Jin GuangShan, "Sect Leader Jiang, Wei Ying is your right-hand man. You value him a lot. All of us know this. However, on the other hand, it's hard to tell whether or not he actually respects you. In any case, I've been a sect leader for so many years and I've never seen the servant of any sect dare be so arrogant, so proud. Have you heard what they say outside? Things like how during the Sunshot Campaign the victories of the YunmengJiang Sect were all because of Wei WuXian alone—what nonsense!"

Hearing this, Jiang Cheng's face was already quite dark. Jin GuangShan shook his head, "In an event as important as the Flower Banquet, he dared throw a fit right in front of you, leaving however he pleased. He even dared say something like „I don't care about the sect leader Jiang WanYin at all!" Everyone who was there heard it with their own ears..."

Suddenly, an indifferent voice spoke up, "No."

Jin GuangShan was in the middle of his fabrication. Hearing this, he paused in surprise, turning along with the crowd to see who it was.

Lan WangJi sat with his back straight, speaking in a tone of absolute tranquility, "I did not hear Wei Ying say this. I did not hear him express the slightest disrespect towards Sect Leader Jiang either."

Lan WangJi rarely spoke when he was outside. Even when they debated cultivation techniques during Discussion Conferences, he only answered when others questioned or challenged him. With utmost concision, he overcame, without fault, the lengthy arguments of others. Apart from this, he almost never spoke up.

And thus, when Jin GuangShan was interrupted by him, he experienced a far greater shock than annoyance. But after all, his fabrication was exposed right in front of so many. He felt a bit awkward.

The good thing was that, not long after he felt awkward, Jin GuangYao came to save the day, exclaiming, "Really? That day, Young Master Wei busted into Koi Tower with such force. He said too many things, one more shocking than the next. Perhaps he said a few things that were along those lines. I can't remember them either."

His memory could only be equal to Lan WangJi's, if not better. As soon as he heard it, Nie MingJue knew that he was fibbing on purpose, frowning slightly.

Jin GuangShan followed the transition, "That's right. Anyhow, his attitude has always been arrogant."

One of the sect leaders added, "To be honest, I've wanted to say this since a long time ago. Although Wei WuXian did a few things during the Sunshot Campaign, there are many guest

cultivators who did more than him. I've never seen anyone as full of themselves as him. Excuse my bluntness, but he's the son of a servant. How could the son of a servant be so arrogant?"

With him having brought up the „son of a servant”, naturally there'd be some who connected it to the „son of a prostitute”

standing in the hall. Jin GuangYao clearly noticed the unkind stares. Yet, his smile remained perfect, not at all faltering. The crowd went with the flow and voiced their complaints.

“In the beginning, Sect Leader Jin asked Wei Ying for the Tiger Seal with nothing but good intentions, worried that he wouldn't be able to control it and lead to a disaster. He, however, used his own yardstick to measure another's intents. Did he think that everyone is after his treasure? What a joke. In terms of treasures, is there any sect that doesn't hold a few treasures?”

“I knew that something would eventually happen if he continued on the ghostly path—look! His killing intents are being revealed already. Killing indiscriminately those from our side just because of a few Wen-dogs...”

Suddenly, a careful voice interjected, “It's not killing indiscriminately, is it?”

Lan WangJi seemed to have entered a realm of zen that blocked all of his senses. Hearing this, however, he moved, looking over. The one who spoke was a young woman with a fair space, standing beside one of the sect leaders. Her out-of-place comment immediately became the target of the other cultivators nearby, “What do you mean?”

The woman seemed as if she was scared. She was even more careful, “No... I don't mean anything more. There's no need to be so agitated, everyone. I just feel that the words „killing indiscriminately” isn't really suitable.”

Someone else spat, “How is it unsuitable? Wei WuXian has been killing indiscriminately ever since the Sunshot Campaign. Can you disprove this?”

The woman tried hard to protest, “The Sunshot Campaign is a battlefield. In the battlefield, would it mean that everyone is killing indiscriminately? Let's consider this as it stands. I really don't

think it's right to say that he killed indiscriminately. After all, there is a reason. If the inspectors really abused the prisoners and killed Wen Ning, it wouldn't be called killing indiscriminately anymore, but rather revenge...”

One of them raged, “You're almost laughable! Don't tell me you think he's right to have killed our people! Don't tell me you're going to praise that it was an act of justice!”

Another one of them mocked, “We still don't know whether or not the inspectors really did those things. It's not like anybody saw it with their own eyes.”

“That's right. All of the inspectors who lived said that they definitely didn't abuse the prisoners. Wen Ning died because he himself accidentally fell from a cliff. They even went so far as to take back his corpse and bury him, yet they received such revenge. How disappointing!”

The woman said, “The other inspectors are scared that they'd be responsible for abusing the prisoners and killing people. Of course, they'd insist that he fell off on his own...”

Suddenly, someone sneered, “You can stop arguing. We don't want to hear the comments of someone who has other motives.”

The woman's face flushed. She raised her voice, “Explain things. What do you mean I have other motives?”

The person replied, “There's no need for me to say anything. You know, deep down, and we know too. You fell for him back in the cave of the Xuanwu just because he flirted with you? You're still arguing for him, calling white black no matter how irrational it is.”

Ha, women will always be women.”

The incident of Wei WuXian saving a damsel in distress in the cave of the Xuanwu was indeed once a topic of conversation. Thus, many people realized immediately that this young woman was „MianMian”.

At once, somebody murmured, "So that's why. Explains how she's so desperate as to speak up for Wei WuXian..."

MianMian fumed, "Irrational? Calling white black? I'm just being considerate it as it stands. What does it have to do with the fact that I'm a woman? You can't be rational with me so you're attacking me with other things?"

Someone jeered, "Tsk, tsk tsk. Look at how innocent you make yourself to be. Even your heart has grown sideways—how could you consider things as they stand?"

"Stop wasting your time on her. How could someone like her be from our sect? And she even found her way into Golden Pavilion. I'm embarrassed just standing beside her."

Many of those who spoke against her were from the same sect as her. MianMian was so enraged that her eyes grew red. Holding in her tears, she shouted a moment later, "Fine! Your voices are louder! Fine! You're the rational ones!"

She clenched her teeth and took off the crested robe she wore with force, slamming it onto the table with a loud bang. Even the sect leaders in the front rows, who weren't paying attention to this side, turned around to see what happened. The ones beside her were indeed surprised. What she did meant that she was „leaving the sect"?

Saying nothing, MianMian turned around and left. A while later, someone laughed, "If you're taking it off, then don't put it on again, if you're so capable!"

"Who does she think she is... leaving as she pleases? Who cares? What's she doing this to prove?"

Soon, some began to agree, "Women will always be women. They quit just after you say a few harsh words. She'll definitely come back on her own, a couple of days later."

"There's no doubt. After all, she finally managed to turn from the daughter of a servant to a disciple, haha..."

Ignoring the rioting voices behind him, Lan WangJi stood up as well and exited. After Lan XiChen understood what happened a few moments ago, hearing how the direction of their discussion worsened, he spoke up, "Everyone, she is gone already. Let us settle down."

Now that ZeWu-Jun had spoken, of course the people had to give him some face. In Golden Pavilion, one after another, they began to denounce Wei WuXian and the Wen-dogs again. They all spoke with passionate hatred, letting their indiscriminate, irrefutable loathing dance in the air. Using the atmosphere, Jin GuangShan turned to Jiang Cheng, "He's been plotting for a while to go to Burial Mound, hasn't he? After all, with his skills, it wouldn't be too hard to set up a sect of his own. And so, he used this as a chance to leave the Jiang Sect, intending to do whatever he pleases in the bright skies outside. You rebuilt the YunmengJiang Sect with so much work. He's got a few

controversial traits in him to begin with, and still, he doesn't restrain himself, stirring up so much trouble for you. He doesn't care about you at all."

Jiang Cheng pretended to stand his ground, "That probably isn't that case. Wei WuXian has been like this ever since he was young. Even my father couldn't do anything about him."

Jin GuangShan, "Even FengMian-xiong couldn't do anything about him, huh?" He chuckled a few times, "FengMian-xiong just favors him."

Hearing the words „favors him", the muscles beside the corners of Jiang Cheng's mouth twitched.

Jin GuangShan continued, "Sect Leader Jiang, you're not like your father. It's just been a couple of years since the reestablishment of the YunmengJiang Sect, precisely when you should be displaying your power. And he doesn't even know to avoid suspicions. What would the Jiang Sect's new disciples think if they saw him? Don't tell me you'd let them see him as their role model and look down on you?"

He spoke one sentence after another, striking the iron while it was still hot. Jiang Cheng spoke slowly, "Sect Leader Jin, that's enough. I'll go to Burial Mound and deal with this."

Jin GuangShan felt satisfied, speaking in a sincere tone, "That's the spirit. Sect Leader Jiang,

there are some things, some people that you shouldn't put up with."

After the gathering ended, all of the sect leaders felt that they received a terrific topic for conversation. They walked quickly as they discussed with all their might, their passionate hatred still burning bright.

Behind the sea of Sparks Amidst Snow, the Venerated Trio gathered. Lan XiChen spoke, "Brother, you have worked hard."

Jin GuangYao grinned, "It wasn't hard work. Who had to work hard was Sect Leader Jiang's table. He clenched a few of its parts to crumbles. Looks like he really was angered."

Nie MingJue walked over, "All clever talk—hard work indeed."

Hearing this, Lan XiChen smiled but said nothing. Jin GuangYao knew that Nie MingJue would teach him a lesson whenever he

found the chance. Quite helpless, he tried to change the subject, "Huh, Brother, where is WangJi? I saw him leave early."

Lan XiChen gestured to the front. Jin GuangYao and Nie MingJue turned to look. Amid the ocean of Sparks Amidst Snow, Lan WangJi and the woman who left her sect in Golden Pavilion stood facing each other. The woman's eyes were still tearing up while Lan WangJi's expression was solemn. The two seemed to be conversing.

A moment later, Lan WangJi bowed slightly, saluting her.

The salute held gravity amid respect. The woman returned him an even graver salute. Wearing the unresteved gauze coat, she drifted down Koi Tower.

Nie MingJue, "The woman has much more backbone than the mob of her sect."

Jin GuangYao smiled cheerily, "That's right."

Two days later, bringing with him around thirty disciples, Jiang Cheng left for Yiling.

Under Burial Mound, before the walls that were torn down, hundreds of fierce corpses really did roam. Jiang Cheng went forward. They did nothing at all. But if the disciples behind Jiang Cheng approached, they'd make low roars of warning. Jiang Cheng told the disciples to wait down the mountain. He went up

alone, walking amid the dark forest. After he walked for a long time, human voices finally came from ahead of him.

A few round stumps were beside the mountain path, a large one, like a table, and a few smaller ones, like chairs. A red-clothed woman sat with Wei WuXian on two of the stumps. A man who seemed to be honest and simple was turning over the soil of the field nearby.

Wei WuXian was shaking his leg, "How about potatoes?"

The woman's tone was resolute, "Radishes. Radishes are easy to grow. They don't die as often. Potatoes are hard to look after."

Wei WuXian, "Radishes are disgusting."

Jiang Cheng snorted. Wei WuXian and Wen Qing finally turned around. They weren't surprised when they saw him. Wei WuXian stood up. When he walked over, he said nothing and continued to walk up the mountain, hands behind his back. Jiang Cheng didn't ask either, he just followed behind him.

Soon later, a group of men appeared beside the path, busying themselves before a rack made of wood. They were probably all cultivators of the Wen Sect. Yet, having taken off their robes of sun and flames and put on clothes made of coarse cloth with hammers and saws in their hands, timber and straws on their shoulders, they climbed up and down, worked inside and out; they were not at all different from ordinary farmers and hunters. When they saw Jiang Cheng, they could tell by his clothes and sword that he was a prominent sect leader. As though they still felt some fear, they all stopped what they were doing, looking over with hesitation, not even daring to let out a breath.

Wei WuXian waved his hand, "Just continue."

As soon as he spoke, the people all went back to their work, feeling relieved. Jiang Cheng asked, "What are they doing?"

Wei WuXian, "Can't you tell? Building houses."

Jiang Cheng, "Building houses? Then what were the ones we saw turning over the dirt when we came up here doing? Don't tell me you're really going to start farming."

Wei WuXian, "Didn't you hear everything? We are farming."

Jiang Cheng, "You're farming on a mountain of corpses? Will the things that grow here be edible?"

Wei WuXian, "Believe me. When people really are hungry, they'll eat whatever they can."

Jiang Cheng, "You really intend on stationing yourself here in the long run? Can people even live in such a damned place?"

Wei WuXian, "I lived three months in here."

After a moment of silence, Jiang Cheng asked, "You're not coming back to Lotus Pier?"

Wei WuXian replied in a relaxed tone, "Yunmeng is so close to Yiling. I'll sneak back whenever I feel like it."

Jiang Cheng snorted, "You wish."

As he was about to speak again, he felt something heavy on his leg. He looked down. He didn't know when, but a child about one or two years old crept over and hugged his leg. Raising his chubby chin, he looked up at him with his dark, round eyes.

He was quite a fine, lovable child. Unfortunately, Jiang Cheng had no love in him at all. He turned to Wei WuXian, "Where did the kid come from? Get him away from me."

Wei WuXian bent down and picked up the child, letting him sit on his arm, "What do you mean get him away? Can't you talk properly? A-Yuan, why do you hug the leg of everyone you meet? Off you go! Don't bite your nails right after you play with mud. Do you know what the mud is made of? Move your hand! Don't touch my face either. Where's Granny?"

An old woman with sparse, white hair staggered over, holding a wooden walking stick in her hand. When she saw Jiang Cheng, she realized that he was an important character as well. She seemed to be a bit scared, her stooping figure stooped even lower.

Wei WuXian placed the child named A-Yuan by her leg, "Go play on the side."

Limping, the old woman held her grandson's hand and left. The little child stumbled as he walked, looking back at them.

Jiang Cheng mocked, "Those sect leaders thought you gathered some leftover forces and crowned yourself king of the hill. So, it's only the old, the weak, the women, and the children."

Wei WuXian grinned, mocking himself as well. Jiang Cheng continued, "Where's Wen Ning?"

Wei WuXian, "Why are you asking about him?"

Jiang Cheng replied coldly, "These days countless people have asked me about him, but who could I ask? Seemed like I could only come ask you."

Wei WuXian pointed to the front. The two walked shoulder to shoulder. A chilling gust of air surged toward them as they saw the large mouth of a cave. After they entered, for a while they had been walking straight before Jiang Cheng knocked something over with his feet. He looked down to find half a compass.

Wei WuXian quickly stopped him, "Don't kick it. I haven't finished this one yet. It's useful."

Just as he picked it up, Jiang Cheng stepped on something else. It was a crumpled-up flag. Wei WuXian stopped him again, "Don't break it! This one is useful as well. It's almost finished."

Jiang Cheng, "You're the one who littered them on the ground. It's not anyone's fault if they break them."

Wei WuXian, "I live here alone, so what if I litter a few things around?"

They walked deeper into the cave. All along the path were talismans, stuck to the walls or tossed onto the ground, scrunched into balls or ripped to pieces. It seemed as though somebody lost their marbles and threw a tantrum here. On top of that, the deeper they went, the messier it got.

Jiang Cheng felt like he was suffocating, "You dare mess with Lotus Pier like this, then you can just watch as I burn all of these things!"

After they entered the main area of the cave, there was a person lying on the ground. From head

to toe, he was covered entirely in talismans. Only a pair of eye whites could be seen from the outside. This was Wen Ning.

Jiang Cheng glanced at him, "You live here? Where do you sleep?"

Wei WuXian tossed the things he just picked up into a corner. He answered by pointing at a crumpled pile of blankets at another corner, "With those, I can sleep anywhere."

Jiang Cheng didn't want to talk about such a thing with him any longer. Looking down with condescension, he examined Wen Ning, who lay motionlessly, "What happened to him?"

Wei WuXian, "He's a bit too fierce. I'm worried he'll do something, so I sealed him up so that he can't move at the moment."

Jiang Cheng, "Wasn't he a shy stutterer when he was alive? How's he so fierce after he died?"

His tone couldn't be called friendly at all. Wei WuXian glanced at him, "Wen Ning was indeed quite a timid person. But precisely because of this, he hid all of his feelings within him. Hatred, anger, fear, anxiety, pain—these were pent-up for too long, which is why they exploded after he died. You can't even imagine how powerful they are. It's the same as how the more nice-tempered someone is, the scarier they are after they lose their temper. The more he was like this, the fiercer he'd be after death."

Jiang Cheng, "Haven't you always said the fiercer the better? The heavier the resentful energy is, the greater the hatred is, and the stronger the power is."

Wei WuXian, "That's right. But I don't want to make Wen Ning into this kind of corpse."

Jiang Cheng, "Then what do you want to make him into?"

Wei WuXian, "I want to awaken his consciousness."

Jiang Cheng sneered, "Dreaming again, aren't you? Awaken his consciousness? What'd be the difference between a fierce corpse like this and a human being? In my opinion, if you really succeeded, nobody would need to be a human and nobody would need to cultivate. They could just come to you and ask to be made into a fierce corpse."

Wei WuXian laughed, "That's right. I've realized as well that it's too fucking hard. But I've already boasted about it a couple of times in front of his sister. Now all of them believe that I can do it. I'll have to succeed, or else what'll I do with my face..."

Before he even finished, Jiang Cheng unsheathed Sandu and went straight for Wen Ning's neck. He seemed as if he wanted to cut his head off in one go. Wei WuXian's reaction was quicker than most. He struck his arm to move the direction of the sword, shouting, "What are you doing?!"

His words echoed through the Demon-Slaughtering Cave, vibrating incessantly. Jiang Cheng refused to sheathe his sword. His voice was harsh, "What am I doing? I'd like to ask you what you are doing. Wei WuXian, you've been quite full of yourself these couple of days, haven't you?!"

Long before Jiang Cheng came up Burial Mound, Wei WuXian knew that he definitely didn't come to have a nice, calm chat with him. During their way up, there was a string that had been wound up tightly, connecting both of their hearts. Having chatted as though nothing had happened and suppressed things for so long as though both were at ease, the strings finally snapped.

Wei WuXian, "If not because I've got no choice with Wen Qing and the others forcing me, do you think I'd like to be so full of myself?"

Jiang Cheng, "You've got no choice because they were forcing you? Well now, I've got not choice because you're forcing me! A few days ago, at Koi Tower, countless sects surrounded me, forcing me to give an explanation to this, and so I could only come!"

Wei WuXian, "An explanation? We're even already. The inspectors beat Wen Ning to death; Wen Ning became a corpse and killed them. A tooth for a tooth, a life for a life—all that is over."

Jiang Cheng, "All that is over? How could it be possible?! Don't you know how many eyes are watching you right now? How many are watching your Seal? If this opportunity is in their

hands, you wouldn't be in the right even if you are!"

WeiWuXian, "You said it already. I wouldn't be in the right even if I am. What else could I do except for jailing myself here?"

Jiang Cheng, "What else? Of course, there's something."

With Sandu, he pointed at Wen Ning who lay on the ground, "The only way of making up for things is for us to end things before

they get the chance to!" Wei WuXian, "End what?"

Jiang Cheng, "You burn this corpse right now and return to them all these leftovers of the Wen Sect. That's the only way to make the subject die!" As he spoke, he raised his sword again, preparing to attack.

However, Wei WuXian clenched his wrist, "Are you joking?! If we return Wen Qing and the others to them, they'd meet nothing but a dead end!"

Jiang Cheng, "I doubt you'll even return all of them. Why do you care what kind of end they meet? A dead end it is, then—what does it have to do with you?!"

Wei WuXian finally lost his temper, "Jiang Cheng! What- What do you think you're talking about?! Take it back—don't make me give you a thrashing! Don't forget. Who was the one that helped us burn Uncle Jiang's and Madam Yu's corpses? Who returned to us the ashes that are in Lotus Pier right now? And who took us in when we were chased after by Wen Chao?!"

Jiang Cheng, "I'm the one who fucking wants to give you a thrashing! Yes, they helped us before, but why in the world don't you understand that right now any remnant of the Wen Sect is a target of criticism! No matter who they are, with a surname of Wen they have committed a most heinous crime! And those who protect the Wen are at risk of being condemned by everyone! All the people loathe the Wen-dogs so badly that the worse they die the better. Whoever protects them is against the entire world."

Nobody would speak for them, and nobody would speak for you either!"

Wei WuXian, "I don't need anyone to speak for me."

Jiang Cheng exploded, "Just what are you being so stubborn about? If you can't do it then move over—I'll do it!"

Wei WuXian gripped him even tighter, his fingers as tight as iron, "Jiang WanYin!"

Jiang Cheng, "Wei WuXian! Don't you understand? When you're standing on their side, you're the bizarre genius, the miraculous hero, the force of the rebellion, the flower that blooms alone. But the second your voice differs from theirs, you've lost your mind, you've ignored morality, you've walked the crooked path. You think you can be immune to all those condemnations as you stay outside of the world and do whatever you want? No such precedent has happened before!"

Wei WuXian shouted, "If there's been no precedent, then I'll be the precedent!"

Swords unsheathed, the two stared at each other for a while. Neither was willing to take a single step back. A while later, Jiang Cheng spoke, "Wei WuXian, have you still not realized what the situation at hand is like? Do you really need me to say it out loud? If you insist on protecting them, then I won't be able to protect you."

Wei WuXian, "There's no need to protect me. Just letgo." Jiang Cheng's face twisted.

Wei WuXian, "Just let go. Tell the world that I defected. From now on, no matter what Wei WuXian does, it'd have nothing to do with the YunmengJiang Sect."

Jiang Cheng, "... All for the Wen Sect...? Wei WuXian, do you have a savior complex? Is it that you'll die if you don't stand up for someone and stir up some trouble?"

Wei WuXian stayed quiet. A while later, he answered, "So that's why we should cut ties right now, in case anything I do affects the YunmengJiang Sect in the future."

Or else, he really couldn't make any guarantees on what he'd do in the future.

"..." Jiang Cheng murmured, "My mom said that you do nothing but bring our sect trouble. It's true indeed." He laughed coldly,

talking to himself, „To attempt the impossible"? Fine. You understand the YunmengJiang Sect's

motto. Better than I do. Better than all of us do.”

He sheathed Sandu. The sword returned to its sheath with a clang. Jiang Cheng’s tone was indifferent, “Then let’s arrange for a duel.”

Three days later, the leader of the YunmengJiang Sect, Jiang Cheng, arranged for a duel with Wei WuXian.

They fought quite a fight in Yiling. Negotiations failed. Both resorted to violence.

Under Wei WuXian’s command, the fierce corpse Wen Ning struck Jiang Cheng once, breaking one of his arms. Jiang Cheng stabbed Wei WuXian once. Both sides suffered losses. Each spat out a mouthful of blood and left cursing the other. They had finally fallen out with each other.

After the fight, Jiang Cheng told the outside that Wei WuXian defected from the sect and was an enemy to the entire cultivation world. The YunmengJiang Sect had already cast him out. From then on, no ties remained between them—a clear line was drawn. Henceforth, no matter what he did, they’d have nothing to do with the YunmengJiang Sect!

## Chapter 74: Distance—Part One

After the fight, because of Wen Ning's brutally gruesome performance, a somewhat unfortunate nickname was given to him. That, however, would be a story for later. Although he was stabbed in the stomach by Jiang Cheng, Wei WuXian wasn't concerned at all. He stuffed his intestines back into himself and like nothing ever happened, he even got Wen Ning to hunt down a few malign spirits as he bought a few large bags of potatoes.

When he returned to Burial Mound, Wen Qing bandaged his wound and scolded him as fiercely as possible, because it was radish seeds that she told him to buy.

After this, there came a number of ordinary days, when everyone lived in peace with one another. On Burial Mound, heading fifty- or-so of the Wen Sect's cultivators, Wei WuXian planted vegetables, repaired houses, refined corpses, and made new tools. Every day when he was free, he played with the toddler Wen Yuan, son of Wen Qing's cousin. He either let him hang on trees or buried him in the ground, fooling him that he'd grow faster if he was watered and bathed in sunlight. Then, he was scolded by Wen Qing again.

A few months passed like this. Aside from how the world's comments on Wei WuXian worsened even more, there was no progress.

Wei WuXian couldn't go down the mountain often. Since he was the only one who suppressed all of the dark beings of Burial Mound, he couldn't venture too far or too long. Yet he was born an active person who couldn't stay in one place for an extended amount of time. He could only roam around the town time after time, his excuse being to purchase necessities. With how long Wen Yuan had been on the mountain for, Wei WuXian felt that

they couldn't lock a child in such a place to play with mud all the time, and so one day, when he was shopping down the mountain, he took him along as well.

Having been to the town so many times, Wei WuXian was already familiar with it. He found his way to the vegetable vendor.

Suddenly, he grabbed one and bristled, "Your potato is sprouting!"

The vendor seemed to have encountered a great enemy, "What do you want?!"

Wei WuXian, "How about a bit cheaper?"

In the beginning, Wen Yuan was still holding onto his leg. Wei WuXian walked back and forth, picking out potatoes and bargaining. Hanging on his leg, Wen Yuan felt tired just a while later. His short arms were sore, so he let go to rest for a bit. Yet, in just a few moments, the rush of the people on the streets made him reel left and right, losing his sense of direction. His line of sight was quite low. He walked here and there, but couldn't find Wei WuXian's long legs and black boots. Everything in front of his eyes were pants so grimy that they were the color of dirt. He grew more and more petrified. As he spun around dizzily, he bumped into someone's leg.

The person wore a pair of white, immaculate boots and was walking slowly to begin with. Having been bumped into, he immediately stopped.

Wen Yuan looked up, jittering. First he saw a jade pendant hanging from the person's waist, then a sash belt embroidered with patterns of drifting clouds, then neat lapels without a single fold in them, and finally a pair of eyes as light as stained glass, as cold as winter frost.

Face solemn, the stranger looked down at him. Wen Yuan suddenly felt scared.

On the other hand, Wei WuXian picked and chose for a long time before finally deciding not to buy these sprouted potatoes. He might be poisoned if he ate them, but the vendor still refused to lower the price, only giving him a contemptuous humph. Turning around, though, he realized that Wen Yuan was gone. He almost turned pale, searching for the toddler all along the streets. Suddenly, he heard the wails of a child, and he immediately rushed over. Somewhere not far away, a group of nosy passersby gathered into a bustling circle, pointing at something and chattering among themselves. He shoved through the crowds, and his eyes lit up at once.

Lan WangJi, clothed in white and carrying Bichen on his back, stood frozen amid the crowd's encirclement. He even seemed somewhat at a loss. When he took another look, Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he almost tripped over himself. A little kid sat collapsed before Lan WangJi's feet, bawling his eyes out. Lan WangJi could neither stay nor leave, neither reach out nor talk to him. With a serious expression on his face, he seemed to be thinking about what to do.

One of the passersby spoke up, nibbling on melon seeds, "What's happening here? The young'un cried so hard it scared me to death."

Someone commented assuredly, "He was definitely scolded by his dad."

Hiding in the crowd as he heard the words „his dad”, Wei WuXian almost exploded with laughter. Lan WangJi immediately looked up, denying it, "I am not."

Wen Yuan didn't know what the people were talking about. When children were scared, they always called out to those they were close to. And so, sobbing, he called, "Dad! Dad..."

A passerby spoke up at once, "Listen! Told you he's his dad!"

Some felt that they had good eyes, "Definitely his dad. Their noses look as if they're carved out of the same mold. There's no doubt!"

Some were sympathetic, "How poor. Look at how he's crying. Was he scolded by his dad?"

Some were confused, "What's going on over there? Could you move? My carriage can't go through."

Some scolded, "He doesn't even know to pick the child up and make him feel better! So, he's just letting his son cry on the ground? What a dad!"

Some showed their understanding, "Look at how young he is."

First time being a dad, huh? Back then I was like this too. I didn't know anything. He'll get it after his wife bears him a few more. We all had to take our time..."

Some tried to comfort the child, "Good boy, don't cry. Where's your mom?"

"Yeah, where's the mom? The dad doesn't do anything, so where's his mom?"

Amid the flooding noise, Lan WangJi's expression grew stranger and stranger.

How unfortunate that he'd been a chosen one ever since he was born. Everything he did was more righteous than righteous, more exemplar than exemplar. He'd never been put in a situation where everyone was pointing at him. Wei WuXian had already laughed to his death, but as he saw how Wen Yuan was crying so hard that he was almost choking, he could only step out.

Pretending that he only just saw the two, he spoke in a surprised tone, "Huh? Lan Zhan?"

Lan WangJi looked up with force. The two's eyes met with each other's. Wei WuXian himself didn't know why either, but he averted his gaze quickly. Hearing his voice, though, Wen Yuan got up at once. Dragging two long, flowing trails of tears behind him, he hung onto Wei WuXian's leg again.

The crowd went on, "Who is this? Where's the mom? Just where on Earth is the mom? Which one is the dad anyways?"

Wei WuXian waved his hand, "It's over, it's over."

Seeing that their fun had ended, the passerby finally scattered slowly. Wei WuXian turned around and smiled, "What a coincidence. Lan Zhan, why are you at Yiling?"

Lan WangJi, "A night-hunt. I passed by."

Hearing that his voice was no different from before, without any sense of hatred or enmity, Wei WuXian finally felt a part of him relax. He suddenly heard Lan WangJi speak up, "... The child?"

Wei WuXian's mouth moved on its own as soon as his heart was settled, lying, "Mine."

Lan WangJi's brows twitched. Wei WuXian laughed, "Of course I'm joking. He's someone else's. I took him out to play. What did you do? How come you made him cry?"

Lan WangJi's voice was indifferent, "I did not do anything."

Wen Yuan hugged Wei WuXian's leg. He was still sobbing. Wei WuXian understood. Although Lan WangJi's face looked pretty, such a young child was still unable to tell the beautiful from the not. He could only tell that this person wasn't friendly at all. In fact, he was cold and seemed

to be quite strict. Frightened by the bitter expression, it was only natural that he felt scared. Wei WuXian picked Wen Yuan up and played with him for a while, turning him over and over, and said a few comforting words.

Suddenly, he saw that a street vendor was still laughing as he looked at them, so he pointed at the colorful things in the baskets that he carried on two ends of a pole, asking, "A-Yuan, look over here. Aren't they pretty?"

Wen Yuan's focus was shifted. He sniffed, "... Yeah." Wei WuXian, "Don't they smell nice?" Wen Yuan, "Yeah."

The vendor quickly added, "Looks pretty and smells nice—Young Master, buy one, won't you?" Wei WuXian, "Do you want one?"

Wen Yuan thought that he was going to buy one for him. He spoke embarrassedly, "Yeah." Yet, Wei WuXian walked in the opposite direction, "Haha, let's go."

Wen Yuan seemed to be shocked. Tears filled his eyes again. Having been watching the scene unfold, Lan WangJi finally couldn't bear it any longer, "Why did you not buy one for him?"

Wei WuXian mused, "Why should I buy one for him?"

Lan WangJi, "You asked him whether he wanted one or not. Did it not mean that you would buy one for him?"

Wei WuXian answered purposely, "Asking and buying are two different things—why should I have to buy it for him if I asked?"

With such a rhetorical question, Lan WangJi was surprisingly at a loss for words. He glared at him for a long while before he turned to Wen Yuan. Due to his stare, Wen Yuan started shaking again.

A moment later, Lan WangJi asked Wen Yuan, "Which one... do you want?"

Wen Yuan hadn't understood what was going on yet. Lan WangJi pointed at the things in the vendor's baskets, "Of the things here, which one do you want?"

Wen Yuan stared at him in terror. He didn't even dare let out a single breath.

An hour later, Wen Yuan finally stopped crying. He kept on feeling his pockets, stuffed full of the playthings that Lan WangJi bought for him. Seeing that his tears finally stopped, Lan WangJi seemed

to be relieved. Yet, with a blushing face, Wen Yuan snuck over quietly and wrapped his arms around his leg.

Looking down, Lan WangJi saw the extra object on his leg, "..." Wei WuXian laughed madly, "Hahahaha! Lan Zhan,

congratulations! He's taken a liking to you! He hugs the leg of whoever he likes, and he never lets go."

Lan WangJi walked a few steps forward. As Wei WuXian said, Wen Yuan clung onto his leg steadily, not at all intending to let go. The hug was quite tight as well.

Wei WuXian patted his shoulder, "In my opinion, you can save your night-hunting for later. How about we get some food first?"

Lan WangJi looked up at him, his tone unwavering, "Get some food?"

Wei WuXian, "Yeah, get some food. Don't be so cold, will you? You finally came to Yiling for once and I happened to run into you. Let's reminisce the past together. Come, it's my treat."

With Wei WuXian dragging him and Wen Yuan clinging to his leg, Lan WangJi was finally shoved into a restaurant. Wei WuXian sat down in the private room, "Go ahead, order."

Lan WangJi was pushed onto the sitting mat. Glancing at the menu, he replied, "You can order."

Wei WuXian, "I'm treating you, so of course you're the one ordering. Order whatever you like. Don't be so polite." Good thing he didn't buy the poisonous sprouted potatoes so now he had the money to pay. Lan WangJi wasn't someone who liked to decline things too many times, either. After some thought, he ordered.

Wei WuXian heard him say the names of a few dishes monotonously and laughed, "Not bad, Lan Zhan. I thought you folks from Gusu don't eat spicy things. You have quite a strong palate, don't

you? You want a drink?"

Lan WangJi shook his head. Wei WuXian, "Still sticking to the rules even when you're outside—exactly what to be expected of HanGuang-Jun. I'm not ordering for you, then."

Wen Yuan sat beside Lan WangJi's leg. He took out wooden sabers, wooden swords, clay dolls, grass butterflies, and the other toys inside his pockets and put them onto the mat, counting them in delight. Seeing how he stuck to Lan WangJi and rubbed against him so that he couldn't even have a sip of tea properly, Wei WuXian whistled and called out, "A-Yuan, come here."

A-Yuan looked at Wei WuXian, who had just planted him in the soil like a radish two days ago. Then, he looked at Lan WangJi, who just now bought him the big pile of toys. He didn't shift at all, and on his face was written the large word, „No.”

Wei WuXian, "Come here. If you sit there you'll be in his way." Lan WangJi, however, spoke, "It is fine. Let him sit."

Happily, Wen Yuan clung onto his leg again. This time, it was his thigh. Wei WuXian spun his chopsticks in his hand, laughing, "Those with milk is Mother, those with gold is Father—how can this be?"

Soon, the wine and the dishes arrived. It was a sea of fiery red, along with a bowl of sweet soup Lan WangJi ordered for Wen Yuan. Knocking his bowl, Wei WuXian called a couple of times, but Wen Yuan was still looking down, holding two butterflies and mumbling. At times he pretended to be the one on the left, saying shyly „I... I really like you”; at times he pretended to be the one on the right, saying happily „I really like you too!” Being two butterflies at the same time, he seemed to be having lots of fun.

Listening to this, Wei WuXian almost choked from laughter, convulsing, "Good Heavens, A-Yuan, where did a young boy like you learn such things? You like me, I like you and all that—do you even know what liking someone means? Stop playing. Come eat. Your new dad got you this. It's good."

A-Yuan finally put the butterflies back inside his pockets. With bowl and spoon, he drank the soup mouthful after mouthful, still sitting beside Lan WangJi. Before this, Wen Yuan was at the detention camp in Qishan, and then he moved to Burial Mound. The meals at both of those places were so bad that they were difficult to put into words. Thus, to him, the bowl of sweet soup was already a new delight.

Wen Yuan couldn't stop after just a few mouthfuls, yet he still knew to give the bowl to Wei WuXian, speaking as though he was presenting him with a treasure, "... Brother Xian... Xian eat."

Wei WuXian seemed to like it a lot, "Yes, very good. So, you do know what filial piety means."

Lan WangJi, "Speech is forbidden when dining."

For Wen Yuan to understand, he repeated it again using simpler language, "Do not talk when you are eating."

Wen Yuan quickly nodded and buried himself in the soup, not saying anything anymore. Wei WuXian exclaimed, "How can this be? He only listens to me after I repeat myself a couple of times, yet he does whatever you say after just once. Really, how can this be?"

Lan WangJi's voice was indifferent, "Speech is forbidden when dining. You too."

Grinning, Wei WuXian drank a cup and toyed with the liquor cup in his hand, "You really... don't change no matter how many years have passed. Hey, Lan Zhan, why did you come to Yiling? I'm familiar with things here. You want me to show you the way?"

Lan WangJi, "There is no need."

Cultivational sects often had secret tasks that they didn't want others to know about. And so, Wei WuXian didn't push for an

answer either, "I finally met someone I knew from before, one who didn't try to avoid me as well. It's been so stuffy for the past couple of days. Did anything big happen outside?"

Lan WangJi, "What would count as something big?"

Wei WuXian, "Like if a new sect appeared somewhere, if a sect expanded its residence, if any sects formed alliances with one another, and so on. Chatting, you know? Anything is fine."

He hadn't heard of news from the outside after he and Jiang Cheng fell out. The most he heard was from the random conversations in the town.

Lan WangJi, "An arranged marriage." Wei WuXian, "Which sects?"

Lan WangJi, "The LanlingJin Sect and the YunmengJiang Sect."

The hand that Wei WuXian was toying the liquor cup with froze in midair.

He was stunned, "My shi... Maiden Jiang and Jin ZiXuan?"

Lan WangJi nodded softly. Wei WuXian inquired, "When will it be? When's the ceremony?!"

Lan WangJi, "In seven days."

Hand shaking lightly, Wei WuXian put the cup to his lips, but he didn't realize that he finished it already. He felt a bit empty inside, not knowing whether it was anger, shock, displeasure, or helplessness.

Although he had been expecting this to happen long before he left the Jiang Sect, having heard the news so suddenly, endless words were bottled up inside of his chest, ready to be let out all at once but not knowing how to escape. Jiang Cheng didn't even find some way to tell him such an important thing. If not for him having met Lan WangJi today, it was likely that he wouldn't know this until even later!

However, as he thought about it again, he asked himself—what would happen if he knew about it? On the surface, Jiang Cheng announced to the world what all of the sects believed already—that Wei WuXian defected from the sect and that he would no longer be affiliated with the YunmengJiang Sect. Even if he knew, he wouldn't be able to attend their wedding banquet. It was right

that Jiang Cheng didn't tell him. If Jiang Cheng were the one to tell him, he didn't even know what impulsive things he would've done.

Wei WuXian finally murmured, a while later, "Jin ZiXuan was let off the hook way too easily."

He poured another cup of liquor, "Lan Zhan, what do you think of this marriage?"

Lan WangJi didn't say anything. Wei WuXian, "Oh, that's right. Why did I ask you? What thoughts could you have on the matter anyways? It's not like you ever think about these things."

He drank the liquor in one gulp, "I know that behind their backs, lots of people say that my shijie doesn't deserve Jin ZiXuan, ha. In my eyes, though, Jin ZiXuan is the one who doesn't deserve my shijie. But she had to..."

But Jiang YanLi had to fall in love with Jin ZiXuan.

Wei WuXian slammed the cup onto the table, "Lan Zhan! Do you know? My shijie, she deserves the best person in the world."

He slammed the table. On his slightly drunk face was pride, "We'll make this grand banquet one that everyone admires and praises, even after a hundred years. None would be able to compare to it. I'll watch my shijie married with absolute splendor."

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian laughed bitterly, "Why did you answer? I won't be able to watch it anymore."

At this point, having finished the soup, sitting on the mat, Wen Yuan began to play with the grass butterflies again. The long antennas of the two butterflies got tangled together and couldn't be taken apart no matter what. Seeing how anxious he was, Lan WangJi took the butterflies from his hands and untangled the four butterfly antennas in just a few moments. He returned it to Wen Yuan.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian finally averted his attention, managing a smile, "A-Yuan, stop rubbing with your face. There's still soup at your mouth. It'll dirty his clothes."

Lan WangJi took out a white handkerchief and expressionlessly wiped off the soup at the corner of Wen Yuan's mouth. Wei WuXian joked, "Lan Zhan, what a surprise. I never knew that you're good with children. If you treat him just a bit better, I doubt he'd be willing to go back with me..."

Suddenly, Wei WuXian's expression changed. He took out a talisman from his lapels, yet the talisman was burning already. It turned into ashes not long after Wei WuXian took it out. Lan WangJi's gaze hardened.

Wei WuXian stood up at once, "Oh no."

The talisman was the core of a warning array that he set up on Burial Mound. If something happened on Burial Mound after he left, like if the array was broken or if blood was shed, the talisman would ignite on its own to warn him of the incident.

Wei WuXian sandwiched Wen Yuan between his arm and his body, "Excuse me, Lan Zhan, I have to go back!"

Something fell from Wen Yuan's pocket. He called out, "Butter... Butterfly!"

With him in his arm, Wei WuXian had already rushed outside the restaurant. Soon, a white shadow swept by him. Lan WangJi seemed to have followed them out as well, walking beside them. Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan? Why are you following us?"

Lan WangJi put into Wen Yuan's palm the butterfly that he dropped. He didn't answer the question, but instead asked, "Why do you not mount your sword?"

Wei WuXian, "Forgot to bring it!"

Without saying anything, Lan WangJi took him by his waist and brought him onto Bichen as they rose into the air. Wen Yuan was too young to have been on a flying sword before. Although he would've been extremely scared, because Bichen was

exceptionally steady, he didn't feel any bumpiness at all. The people on the streets were shocked by the three who decided to fly into the air without a second of hesitation, looking up at their figures. And so, Wen Yuan felt nothing but curiosity and excitement, cheering loudly.

Wei WuXian let out a breath of relief, "Thank you!" Lan WangJi, "Which way?"

Wei WuXian gestured, "Over there!"

## Chapter 75: Distance—Part Two

The three rushed toward the direction of Burial Mound. When the black peak broke through the clouds, Wei WuXian felt more and more worried

The roars of fierce corpses came from the dark forest afar. It wasn't only one, but an entire group. Lan WangJi made a sword seal with his hand, and Bichen immediately began to fly even faster, although still steady.

As soon as they landed, the two saw a shadow dart from within the woods, screaming as it threw itself toward someone. Bichen cut it in half with one single stroke. The person on the ground was pale-faced. As he saw Wei WuXian, he shouted, "Young Master Wei!"

Wei WuXian tossed out a talisman, "Uncle Four, what's wrong?"

Uncle Four, "All... All of the fierce corpses in the Demon-Slaughtering Cave got out!"

Wei WuXian, "Didn't I set a restriction seal? Who touched it?!" Uncle Four, "Nobody! It was... It was..."

Suddenly, a yell came from in front of them. It was a woman's voice, "A-Ning!"

Within the forest, around a dozen cultivators of the Wen Sect stood before a figure—Wen Ning, bearing a hideous pair of white pupils. Not many of the talismans that once covered his entire body remained. In his hands, he was dragging two other fierce corpses, which had already been torn up by him, blackish blood cascading off what had almost become two sets of skeletons.

Wen Ning was still beating them up, as if he wouldn't rest until they had been turned to dust. The person who stood at the front of the group, holding a sword, was Wen Qing.

Wei WuXian, "Didn't I say not to touch the talismans on him?!"

Wen Qing didn't even have the spare seconds to be surprised that Lan WangJi was here. She answered, "Nobody touched

them! Not a single person went into the Cave! He tore them off on his own when he suddenly went on a rampage. Not only the ones on himself, he destroyed the restriction seals at the blood pool and the Cave as well! All of the fierce corpses in the blood pool got out. Wei WuXian, go save Granny and the others. They won't be able to hold up much longer!!!"

As they spoke, strange hissing noises came from above them. The group looked up to find a few fierce corpses that had climbed up the trees. They curved around the top of the trees as though they were snakes, snarling as sickening mucus dripped from between their teeth. When Wen Ning looked up, he saw them as well. He tossed away the crushed limb in his hand and leaped onto the tree at once!

The tree was at least twenty yards tall. To be able to leap up to such a height directly was an indicator of extreme explosive force. Soon after Wen Ning went up the tree, he tore the corpses apart, limbs flying everywhere and blood raining down on the ground.

He still wasn't satisfied yet, going off the other side.

Wei WuXian pulled out Chenqing, "Lan...!"

He wanted to entrust Lan WangJi with saving the others as he stayed to deal with Wen Ning. When he turned around, he had already disappeared. Just as he was beginning to panic, sounds of the zither vibrated through the sky, sending off a murder of startled crows. Before he could even ask, Lan WangJi had already gone over. Wei WuXian felt his heart settle. Putting Chenqing to his lips, he released a long note. Wen Ning's body, having landed on the ground, paused shortly.

Wei WuXian seized the opportunity, "Wen Ning! Do you still remember me?!"

On the other side, the zither sounded three times before it went silent, meaning that Lan WangJi was able to control the fierce corpses with just three notes. Wen Ning lowered his body slightly, deep growls coming from his throat. He was like a wild beast on alert, prepared to attack at any moment. As Wei WuXian was about to play his flute again, he suddenly realized that Wen Yuan still hugged his leg tightly, too scared to make a sound. He'd forgotten about him the whole

time!

He immediately picked Wen Yuan up and threw him toward Wen Qing, "Take him away!" At this point, Wen Ning pounced on him.

As though he was hit by a large boulder, Wei WuXian flew back from the force, crashing onto a tree. He felt warmth rise up his throat and cursed. Lan WangJi saw this happen just as he returned. His expression changed at once and he rushed in front of him. Wen Qing had just shoved Wen Yuan into another's arms. She wanted to check on Wei WuXian's injuries, but he got there before she could. She paused with surprise. Lan WangJi was almost embracing Wei WuXian as he held his hand and passed spiritual energy to him.

Wen Qing hurried, "Let him go first—it's not necessary! Let medo it! I'm Wen Qing!"

Wen Qing of Qishan was one of the top medics. Lan WangJi finally stopped passing Wei WuXian spiritual energy and let Wen Qing examine his condition, although his hand still refused to let go. Wei WuXian, however, pushed him aside, "Don't let him go!"

After Wen Ning wounded him, he walked down the mountain, arms hanging low. It was where the other cultivators of the Wen Sect were hiding from the fierce corpses. Wen Qing dashed over as she yelled, "Run! Everyone, run! He's going towards you!"

Wei WuXian fought out of Lan WangJi hold and forced himself to chase after Wen Ning. Lan WangJi caught up again, "Where is your sword?"

Wei WuXian whipped out twelve talismans, "Don't know where I put it!"

The twelve yellow talismans formed a line in midair and began to burn. When they landed on Wen Ning, like a chain of fire, they held him down at once. With a flip of his wrist, Lan WangJi strummed the strings of his zither. Wen Ning's footsteps seemed to have been hindered by an invisible thread. He paused, but continued to struggle forward despite the difficulty. Wei WuXian put Chenqing to his lips. Due to the blow he received, some blood sprayed out from his lips. He frowned, but he endured the pain and the blood churning within his chest, playing without a single tremble.

Under the two's collaboration, Wen Ning kneeled on the ground and let out a roar skyward. The leaves within the forest swayed back and forth. Wei WuXian finally couldn't hold it any longer and coughed up a mouthful of blood.

The notes of Wangji suddenly increased in their force. Wen Ning bellowed, arms wrapped around his head, curled up on the ground.

Wen Qing wailed, "A-Ning! A-Ning!"

She was about to rush over when Wei WuXian stopped her, "Be careful!"

Seeing how tormented her younger brother was, under the sounds of the zither, Wen Qing felt her heart ache. Although she knew that if extreme measures weren't taken against his current state of being, he'd definitely bring about danger. Yet, she couldn't help but feel bad for Wen Ning, "HanGuang-Jun, goeasy on him!"

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan! A bit softe-..." "... Young... Master..."

Wei WuXian suddenly froze, "Wait a second?" He shouted, "Lan Zhan, could you stop first?!" The voice came from Wen Ning.

Lan WangJi pressed his fingers onto the strings, stopping the vibrations. Wei WuXian, "Wen Ning?!"

Wen Ning struggled to lift up his head.

Within his eyes wasn't the hideous white anymore, but a... a pair of black pupils!

Wen Ning opened his mouth, continuing, "... Young... Master Wei...?"

It seemed that he squeezed the words out one by one, almost biting down on his own tongue. But those were indeed human words, not meaningless roars.

Wen Qing had frozen. A second later, with a scream, she threw herself toward him, howling, "A-Ning!"

Both of the two fell back from the force. Wen Ning, "Sis... -ter..."

Wen Qing pulled her younger brother into an embrace. With both tears and laughter, she buried

her head in his arms, "It's me! It's your sister, it's your sister! A-Ning!"

She called Wen Ning's name again and again. The other cultivators seemed as if they wanted to go throw themselves over too, but they didn't dare do it. They hugged one another in the chaos, shouting and laughing among themselves.

Uncle Four leaped down the mountain as he cheered, "Everything's fine! It's done! It's done! A-Ning woke up! ..."

Wei WuXian walked over and squatted beside Wen Ning, "How do you feel right now?"

Wen Ning lay on the ground facing up, his neck and limbs still somewhat stiff, "... I..." He stammered for some time before finally saying, "... I want to cry, but I can't. What's wrong..."

After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian patted his shoulder, "You remember, don't you? You're dead already."

When he made sure that Wen Ning really was awake, in his heart, Wei WuXian let out a long breath of relief.

He did it.

Back then, because of his momentary impulse and rage, he made Wen Ning into a low-level fierce corpse. Although he could get Wen Ning to point at whom the inspectors that killed him were and tear them apart, when Wen Qing woke up and had to face her younger brother who didn't recognize her at all and could only bite and bark like a mad dog, being fed with blood and flesh, it was even more painful for her.

After he calmed down, Wei WuXian promised solemnly that he had a way for Wen Ning to return to consciousness. But, nobody knew that he was only talking big so that Wen Qing could relax first. In truth, he had close to no confidence and could only summon up whatever skills he had.

With the arduous days and the sleepless nights, he really did manage to keep his promise.

Wen Qing cupped Wen Ning's pale face, tears streaming down her cheeks. In the end, she still couldn't help herself from crying like she did the day she saw Wen Ning's corpse.

Wen Ning stroked her back with his stiff arms. More and more of the Wen Sect's people came up the mountain, either rushing over and joining the crying pile or gazed with respect and gratitude at Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi's direction.

Wei WuXian knew that the siblings had a lot to say to each other. Wen Qing definitely wouldn't want others to see her sobbing look either. He turned, "Lan Zhan."

Lan WangJi looked at him. Wei WuXian, "You're here anyways, so why not have a seat inside?"

The two walked up to a cave on the mountain, surrounded by chilly winds.

Lan WangJi, "The Demon-Slaughtering Cave?"

Wei WuXian, "That's right. I came up with the name. How is it?" Lan WangJi said nothing.

Wei WuXian, "I know. In your heart, you're definitely saying „not very good.“ After the news got out, I picked up on some of the comments as well, saying that I'm someone who cultivates the demonic path to begin with—I'm the demon myself, so how could I be so shameless as to call my den the Demon-Slaughtering Cave?"

Lan WangJi didn't comment. The two had already walked inside the cave. Wei WuXian's laughter echoed throughout the empty walls, "But in reality, all of them are wrong. What I actually meant with this name is not at all what they interpreted it as."

Lan WangJi, "How come?"

Wei WuXian, "Simple. I often sleep like I'm dead inside of this cave. A cave that kills a demon through slumber—wouldn't it be the Demon-Slaughtering Cave?"

Lan WangJi, "..."

The two entered the main area. Lan WangJi, "What about the blood pool, then?"

Wei WuXian pointed at a pool of water within the cave, "The blood pool is this right here."

It was dim inside the cave, making it difficult to tell whether the water was black or red. It gave an odor of blood, somewhere between light and heavy.

Originally, a line of restriction had surrounded the pool, though it had been destroyed by Wen

Ning already. Wei WuXian put it up again and tied it together.

Lan WangJi, "The dark energy is dense."

Wei WuXian, "That's right. The dark energy is really heavy, fit to nurture dark creatures. This is where I use to „parent“ the fierce corpses that haven't been completed yet. Guess how many are in the bottom?" He smiled, "To be honest, I don't know just how many there are either. But the water in the pool is smelling more and more like blood."

Whether it was because of the lighting or not, Wei WuXian's complexion seemed unusually pale. His smile seemed to have some eeriness to it as well. Lan WangJi gazed at him quietly, "Wei Ying."

Wei WuXian, "What?"

Lan WangJi, "Can you really control it?"

Wei WuXian, "Control what? You mean Wen Ning? Of course, I can. Look, he's already returned to consciousness." Wei WuXian gloated, "An unprecedented fierce corpse."

Lan WangJi, "What would you do if he lost consciousness again?"

Wei WuXian, "I already have experience with dealing with him when he's out of consciousness. I'm the one who controls him. As long as nothing happens to me, nothing will happen to him either."

After a while of silence, Lan WangJi asked, "But what if something does happen to you?"

Wei WuXian, "It won't."

Lan WangJi, "How could you be sure?"

Wei WuXian's voice was firm, "It won't, and it can't."

Lan WangJi, "Do you intend on staying like this from now on?"

Wei WuXian, "What's wrong with staying like this? My place not good enough for you? This mountain here is even bigger than the Cloud Recesses. Our food here is much better too."

"Wei Ying," Lan WangJi spoke, "You know what I mean."

..." Wei WuXian answered with reluctance, "Lan Zhan, you... really are something out of this world. I've already changed the subject of conversation and you pulled it back again."

Suddenly, he felt an itch at his throat. Blood began to rise up his chest. Trying to restrain it, Wei WuXian coughed a couple of times. Seeing that Lan WangJi was going to grab his hand again, Wei WuXian dodged, "What are you doing?"

Lan WangJi, "Your injuries."

Wei WuXian, "No need. Why use spiritual energy for such a small wound? It'll get better after some sitting around."

Lan WangJi didn't waste any words with him, grabbing for his hand again. At this point, two people came from outside of the cave. Wen Qing's voice sounded, "Get better after some sitting around? Did you think I'm dead?"

Following behind her was Wen Ning, holding a tray of tea. Wen Ning's skin was ashen. Incantations that hadn't been fully wiped away yet could still be seen at his neck. Wen Yuan was the one hugging Wen Ning's leg. As soon as he came in, he stumbled toward Wei WuXian and hung himself at his leg instead. Seeing that Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi looked at him in coordination, Wen Ning pulled the corners of his lips up, as if trying to smile.

However, the muscles on his face were dead. They couldn't move.

He could only greet them, "Young Master Wei... Young Master Lan."

Wei WuXian lifted his leg and picked Wen Yuan up, swaying him in the air, "Why are you here? Finished crying so soon?"

Wen Qing threatened, "Just watch how I make you cry later!" Despite what she said, her voice still sounded nasally.

Wei WuXian, "What a joke! How could you make me... Ah!!!"

Wen Qing walked up to him and gave him a loud slap on the back, so hard that it managed to make Wei WuXian cough up a mouthful of blood. His face is full of disbelief, "You... You're so cruel..."

After he finished, he shut his eyes and passed out. Lan WangJi's face paled as he went to catch him, "Wei Ying!"

Wen Qing, however, revealed three silver needles, scolding, "I have crueler things that you haven't seen yet. Get up!"

As if nothing happened, Wei WuXian got up from Lan WangJi's arms, wiping away the blood at his mouth, "Please don't. The cruelest is the woman's heart. I wouldn't want to seethat."

It turned out that Wen Qing's slap only let out the blood that had clogged up within his chest. How could the renowned best medic of Qishan really be so rash? Seeing that it was another prank, Lan WangJi gave a harsh flip of his sleeves and turned around, as though he didn't want to talk to such a ridiculous person ever again. Wen Ning just woke up, his reaction still slower than others. When he saw Wei WuXian cough up blood, he paused in surprise as well, but now he remembered that he injured Wei WuXian when he was still unconscious.

His spoke with guilt, "Young Master, I'm sorry..."

Wei WuXian waved his hand, "Enough, enough. Did you really think something would happen to me with a punch like that?"

Wen Qing watched Lan WangJi's expression with her inky eyes, "HanGuang-Jun, have a seat?" Wei WuXian finally realized. So that was why he felt as though he forgot about something. Lan Zhan had been here for so long and he hadn't sat down yet. However, all that could be sat on inside the cave were a few stone beds, and strange objects were spread over every single one of them, from flags to sabers to boxes to blood-tattered bandages and unfinished fruits. The scene was almost painful to look at.

Wei WuXian, "But there's nowhere to sit here, is there?"

Wen Qing was indifferent, "Of course there is." As she finished, she swept the things on one of the stone beds onto the ground, showing no mercy at all, "Look, now there's a seat, isn't there?"

Wei WuXian was shocked, "Hey!"

Wen Ning said as well, "Yeah, Young Master Lan, sit and have some tea..." As he spoke, he shifted the tray in his hands a bit nearer to Lan WangJi. Two teacups, washed extremely clean, sat on the tray.

Yet, Wei WuXian only glanced at them before complaining, "How dingy. Asking a guest to drink plain water—there aren't even tea leaves in here!"

Wen Ning, "I asked and they said they didn't have any. Uncle Four said that they didn't store tea leaves..."

Wei WuXian took up one of the cups and had a gulp, "This really doesn't seem right. Prepare some the next time a guest comes over." He only felt how funny it was after he said it. How could there be a next time, and how could there be another guest?

Wen Qing, "So you still have the face to talk about it. Look at what useless things you bought, the few times you were asked to shop down the mountain. Where are the radish seeds I asked you to buy today?"

Wei WuXian, "What useless things did I buy? I went to buy toys for A-Yuan, right, A-Yuan?"

Wen Yuan, however, did not cooperate at all, "Brother Xian is lying. This other brother bought them for me."

Wei WuXian fumed, "How could this be?"

Laughter was just starting to fill the Demon-Slaughtering Cave when Lan WangJi turned around without saying anything and proceeded to walk out of the cave.

Both Wen Qing and Wen Ning paused in surprise. Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan?"

Lan WangJi's footsteps hesitated. No emotions could be distinguished from his tone, "It is time for me to return."

He walked out the Demon-Slaughtering Cave without turning back. Wen Ning started to panic again, as if thinking that it was his fault. Wen Yuan hurried, "Brother!"

Using his two short legs, he tried to chase after him. Wei WuXian snatched him up at once and tucked him under his arm, "Wait for me here."

He walked three steps in two and caught up to Lan WangJi, "You're going? I'll see you off." Lan WangJi stayed silent.

Under Wei WuXian's arm, Wen Yuan looked up at him, "Brother, you won't be eating here?" Lan WangJi glanced at him. He reached out and stroked his head softly.

Wen Yuan thought that he was going to stay. His face brightened up, whispering, "A-Yuan heard a secret. They said that there'll be lots of good food today..."

Wei WuXian, "This brother here has food waiting for him in his own home. He won't be staying."

Wen Yuan replied with an „oh". Disappointment was plastered on his face. His head drooped down and he didn't say anything else.

The two of them along with the child tucked in under an arm walked for some time in silence until they reached the foot of Burial Mound. They stopped in unison. Neither of them spoke.

A moment later, Wei WuXian spoke up, "Lan Zhan, you asked me if I intended on staying like this from now on. To be honest, I'd like to ask something as well. What can I do apart from this?"

He continued, "Give up the demonic path? Then what about the people on this mountain?

"Give them up? I won't be able to do it. I believe that if you were I, you wouldn't be able to do it either."

He continued, "Nobody can give me a nice, broad road to walk on. A road where I could protect those I want to protect without having to cultivate the ghostly path."

Lan WangJi gazed at him. He didn't reply, but both of them knew the answer in their hearts.

There was no such road. No solution existed.

Wei WuXian spoke slowly, "Thank you for keeping me company today. Thank you for telling me the news about my shijie's marriage too. But, let the self-judge the right and the wrong, let others decide to praise or to blame, let gains and losses remain uncommented on. I, too, know what I should and shouldn't do. I believe that I'll be able to control it as well."

As if he'd anticipated such an attitude since a long time ago, Lan WangJi nodded slightly and closed his eyes.

And that marked their farewell.

On his way back up the mountain, Wei WuXian finally realized that he was the one who promised to treat Lan WangJi to a meal, yet in the end, the two of them parted ways in an atmosphere less than relaxed. It went without saying that he forgot to pay for the meal as well. Wei WuXian thought, Well, Lan Zhan is so rich anyways. It's no big deal if he paid for me once more. Speaking of it, he still has money on him, doesn't he? It couldn't have been all used up after just buying a few children's toys. If worst comes to worst, I'll just treat him again next time... How could there be a next time?

Now that he thought about it, for reasons this or that, he and Lan WangJi would end up parting on bad terms every time they met each other. Maybe they really didn't suit each other as friends. But, it wasn't like there'd be any more chances for them to try and be friends with each other in the future.

Wen Yuan held him in one hand and a wooden sword in the other, wearing the grass butterfly on his head, "Brother Xian, would Brother Rich ever come here again?"

Wei WuXian bursted, "Who's Brother Rich?"

Wen Yuan answered seriously, "The rich brother is Brother Rich."

Wei WuXian, "Then what about me?"

As expected, Wen Yuan answered, "You are Brother Xian. Brother Poor."

Wei WuXian shot a look at him and snatched the butterfly away, "What, you like him just because he's got money?"

Wen Yuan stood on tippy toes to grab for it, "Give it back... He bought it for me!"

Wei WuXian really had to be ridiculous. He could have fun just by teasing a child, putting the butterfly on his own head, "I'm not gonna. You even called him dad. What do you call me?"

You've only called me brother, an entire generation shorter than him!"

Wen Yuan jumped, "I didn't call him dad!"

Wei WuXian, "I heard it. I don't care, I want to be someone taller than brothers and dads in seniority. What should you call me?"

Wen Yuan pouted, "But... But A-Yuan doesn't wanna call you mom... That's so weird..."

Wei WuXian exploded again, "Who told you to call me mom? The one with higher seniority than brother and dad is granddad—you didn't even know this? Do you really like him so much? You should've said it sooner. If you did I would've asked him to take you away earlier. His sect is rich, but it's very scary. He'd take you back, lock you inside, and have you copy scriptures the whole day. You scared?!"

Wen Yuan immediately shook his head, whispering, "... I won't go... I still want Granny."

Wei WuXian pressed, "You want Granny, but not me?"

Wen Yuan pleaded, "I do. I want Brother Xian too." He messed with his fingers, counting one by one, "And I want Brother Rich, Sister A-Qing, Brother Ning, Uncle Four, Uncle Six..."

Wei WuXian tossed the butterfly back onto his head, "That's enough, that's enough. I'm gonna be drowned amongst all the people."

Wen Yuan hurried to put the grass butterfly back into his pocket, scared that Wei WuXian would snatch it again. He asked once more, "Will Brother Rich come back again or not?"

Wei WuXian kept on smiling.

He only answered a while later, "He probably won't come back again."

Wen Yuan asked in disappointment, "Why?"

Wei WuXian, "There's no why. In this world, everyone has their own things to do, their own paths to walk. He's busy enough in his own sect, so how could he have the spare time to flutter around others?"

They weren't of the same path, after all.

Wen Yuan replied with an „oh," whether he understood or not. He seemed to be quite discouraged.

Wei WuXian fished him up and tucked him under his arm, humming, "... Who cares about the crowded, broad road? I'll walk the single-plank bridge all the night... All! The! ... All the night?"

When he hummed the „night" part, he realized that it didn't seem like nighttime at all.

He'd always walked up the mountain in the dark, but tonight, things were different when he was walking back.

The area around the little shacks were swept clean. Even much of the weeds were removed. A few red lanterns were hung up in the forest at the side. All of the lanterns were made by hand. Hanging on the branches, although its round shapes were simple, it gave off a warm light that lit up the pitch-black forest.

Usually, at this time, the fifty-or-so people would've finished their meals long ago and would be holed-up in each of their shacks, lights turned off. Today, however, they were all gathered inside of the largest shack. The shack was made from eight wooden poles propping up a roof, able to hold all of the people. The building beside it was the „kitchen", and so this became the dining room.

Wei WuXian found this quite odd. With Wen Yuan under his arm, he walked over, "Why is everyone here today? Not sleeping? It's so bright with all these lanterns."

Wen Qing walked out from the kitchen on the side, holding a plate, "Hung them for you. We'll make a few more tomorrow to hang in the mountain path. If you hurry around in the dark all the time, you'll slip and break your bones sooner or later."

Wei WuXian, "I have you here even if I break my bones, don't I?"

Wen Qing, "I wouldn't want to do more work. It's not like I'm paid. If you break them, don't complain if I hamper with your bones when I put them back."

Wei WuXian shivered and crept away. When he walked in the shack, everyone made space for him. There were three tables, and on each of them were seven or eight plates, holding steaming

food. Wei WuXian, "What, nobody ate yet?"

Wen Qing, "No. We were waiting for you."

Wei WuXian, "Why did you wait for me? I ate outside."

He realized what he did right after he said it. As he thought, Wen Qing slammed the plate onto the table. The red peppers in the dish bounced in unison. She fumed, "So that's why you bought nothing. Ate all the money away at a restaurant? I only have a couple of coins, and I gave them all to you. Now look at how you fritter them away!"

Wei WuXian, "No! I didn't..."

At this point, Granny Wen walked out the kitchen as well, shakily holding a walking stick in one hand and a plate in another. Wen Yuan squirmed his way out of his arms and ran over, "Granny!"

Wen Qing turned around to help, grumbling, "I told you to leave them alone. You don't have to help. Just go sit. The smoke is too big in there. Your legs aren't good and your hands shake. If you fall, we're not going to have many plates left. It's not easy bringing all these porcelain up the mountain..."

The other Wen Sect cultivators arranged chopsticks and poured tea, saving the main seat for him. With this, Wei WuXian almost found it difficult to accept.

In the past, it wasn't that he couldn't tell how most of the Wen Sect's people here were all somewhat scared of him.

They had all heard of the ruthless reputation he had during the Sunshot Campaign, the almost cruel ways of venting his anger that so many talked about. They had seen with their own eyes how he used corpses to kill others as well. In the first few days, Granny Wen's legs began to shake whenever she saw him. Wen Yuan always hid behind her too. They only started to approach him after some time had passed.

And, as of the moment, over fifty pairs of eyes were staring at him. Although fear was still present within those gazes, but it was a fear stemmed from veneration, along with some caution, some ingratiating. What was more was the same gratitude and kindness that were in the eyes of the Wen siblings.

Wen Qing's voice was low, "These past few days, you've worked hard."

Wei WuXian, "You... You're suddenly talking so nicely to me. I'm kind of scared?"

Wen Qing's knuckles seemed to have cracked. Wei WuXian shut up at once.

Yet, Wen Qing continued softly. "... In truth, they all wanted to have dinner with you once, so that they could thank you. But you're either jumping up and down, running around, or shut inside of the Cave and staying in there for days upon end, not letting anyone disturb you. They didn't want to hold up your work and annoy you. They thought that you didn't like interacting with

others and didn't want to talk to them, so they were too embarrassed to talk to you. A-Ning woke up today, and Uncle Four said that we had to have dinner together no matter what...

Even if you ate so much when you were outside that you're about to die, come sit down with us. It's fine even if you don't eat. Just have a seat, and we can chat and have a few drinks."

Wei WuXian paused in surprise. Even his eyes brightened up, "Have a few drinks? There's wine up here?"

A few of the older Wen Sect members had been glancing in this direction in a bit of a nervous manner. Hearing this, one of them immediately replied, "Yeah, yeah. There's wine, there's wine." He held up a few sealed bottles by the table, passing them to him, "Fruit wine, made from the wild fruits on this mountain. It's quite rich!"

Wen Ning was squatting by the table, "Uncle Four likes to drink as well. He knows how to make them himself and made them especially for today. He's been trying for a lot of days."

Since he spoke a word at a time, his slow speech allowed him to not stutter anymore. Uncle Four smiled embarrassedly, still staring at Wei WuXian anxiously.

Wei WuXian, "Really? Then I'll have to try some!"

He took a seat at the table. Uncle Four hurried to open the seal on the bottle, giving it to him with both hands. Wei WuXian smelled it, “It really is rich!”

The rest of them sat down along with him. When they heard his praise, they all beamed as though they had received the greatest compliment ever, and began to eat.

It was the first time that Wei WuXian couldn’t tell what the wine tasted like.

He was thinking, to walk it all the night... huh?

It wasn’t really that dark at all.

All of a sudden, his entire body felt refreshed.

The fifty people were crammed at three tables. Chopsticks

stretched here and there. Sitting on his granny’s legs, Wen Yuan showed her his new treasures, showing her a fight with two little wooden swords. The old lady grinned so hard that her toothless mouth was wide open. Wei WuXian and that uncle talked about the wine they had drunk with fierce passion. In the end, the both agreed that the Emperor’s Smile of Gusu was an indisputable winner. Walking in circles, Wen Qing poured wine for the seniors and a few of their subordinates. It emptied in just a few rounds.

Wei WuXian, “Why is it all gone already? I haven’t had much at all.”

Wen Qing, “There are a few more bottles. We can save them for later. You can call it a day for now.”

Wei WuXian, “How could this be? They say that a good name when dead can’t compare to some good wine when living. Stop talking. A full cup, please.”

Seeing that today was a special occasion, Wen Qing filled it up for him, “There’s no next time. I really think you should quitdrinking.

You drink way too heavily.”

Wei WuXian, “It’s not like it’s the Cloud Recesses here; why should I quit drinking?”

At the mention of the Cloud Recesses, Wen Qing glanced at Wei WuXian, asking him as though she didn’t care, “I forgot to ask you. You’ve never brought anyone up Burial Mound. What’s the deal today?”

Wei WuXian, “You mean Lan Zhan? I met him on the way.”

Wen Qing, “You met him? How did you meet him? You ran into him again?”

Wei WuXian, “That’s right.”

Wen Qing, “What a coincidence. I remember that you two ran into each other once in Yunmeng as well.”

Wei WuXian, “There’s nothing special about it. A lot of cultivators from other sects travel in and out of Yunmeng and Yiling.”

Wen Qing, “I heard you call him directly by his birth name back then. Quite bold, aren’t you?”

Wei WuXian, “He calls me directly by my birth name as well, doesn’t he? It’s nothing. Got used to it when we were young. Neither of us care.”

Wen Qing, “Really? Don’t you two have a bad relationship? Heard that it’s like you’re ice and fire, fighting every time you see each other.”

Wei WuXian, “Don’t listen to the rumors. Our relationship really was quite bad in the past. During the Sunshot Campaign, we did get into a few fights because of our bad tempers. But afterwards, it wasn’t as bad as the rumors say. We’re so-so.”

Wen Qing didn’t say anything else.

The food on the plates quickly disappeared. Somebody knocked on a bowl, shouting, “A-Ning, cook us a few more dishes please!”

“Cook a lot. Put them in a basin!”

“Where could we find a basin to put the food in? They’re for washing the face!”

Wen Ning didn’t need to eat, so he’d been waiting by the shack. Hearing this, he replied after some processing, “Oh, sure.”

Seeing that he had a chance to show off his skills, Wei WuXian hurried, “Wait. I’ll do it! I’ll do it,

I'll do it!"

Wen Qing didn't believe him, "You can cook?"

Wei WuXian raised a brow, "Of course. I can be both the hostess and the housewife. Leave it to me. Just wait."

Everyone clapped to show their anticipation. However, when Wei WuXian placed two dishes onto the table, on his face a captivating smirk, Wen Qing only glanced at it once before speaking, "From now on, you stay as far away from the kitchen as possible."

Wei WuXian protested, "Just have some. You can't judge a book by its cover. You'll like after you taste it. That's how it's supposed to taste."

Wen Qing, "Taste my ass! Don't you see how much A-Yuan is crying after he tasted it? A waste of food. Don't pick up your chopsticks. No need to give him the face for it!"

...

In less than three days, almost all of the cultivators learned a terrifying piece of news: Wei WuXian, the one who defected from the Jiang Sect and made his own home in Yiling, had created the highest level of fierce corpse yet. It was incomparably fast, strong, fearless, and vicious. On top of that, its consciousness was preserved, able to win every night-hunt!

Everyone was in shock: there would be no peace anymore! Wei WuXian would definitely make these fierce corpses on a large scale, in desire of founding his own sect to compete with the cultivation world! And the many young blood of today's age would definitely be attracted by his evil, opportunist path as well, and go to him one after another. The righteous path of cultivation would have grim future—dark times ahead!

However, in reality, after he succeeded in creating the corpse, the biggest benefit that Wei WuXian found was that there was a worker that could bear all the hardships when transporting goods up the mountain. In the past, he could only transport one chest at a time at most, but now, Wen Ning could drag up an entire cart of chests all on his own, along with Wei WuXian atop the cart, swinging his legs in boredom.

But nobody believed this. After he found himself in the limelight during a few night-hunts, there really were quite a few people who came for him, hoping that they could be accepted by the „patriarch" and become one of his disciples. The mountains that used to be so deserted suddenly became crowded. None of the fierce corpses Wei WuXian set up on patrol down the mountain would attack on their own. At most, they'd send the person flying and roar their throats out. Nobody got hurt, and so more and more people gathered down Burial Mound.

One time, when Wei WuXian saw a long banner that said „all hail the supreme Lord of Evil Patriarch of Yiling", a mouthful of fruit wine shot from his lips. He really couldn't take it any longer. He

went down the mountain, accepted with pleasure all of the tributes with which they „honored his most wise sage", and began to use another mountain path from then on.

One day, he was shopping in Yiling with his worker when a familiar figure suddenly flashed in the alley before him. Wei WuXian's gaze froze. He followed without making a sound. Behind the figure, the two arrived at a small yard. As soon as they went in, the doors of the yard were closed.

A cold voice came forth, "Get out."

Jiang Cheng was standing behind them. He was the one who shut the door. The words were directed at Wen Ning.

Jiang Cheng was someone who held deep grudges. He was imbued with the hatred he held toward the QishanWen Sect. He had been unconscious the whole time when Wen Qing and Wen Ning helped him, so he couldn't feel the same way that Wei WuXian did at all. Due to this, he had never shown courtesy

toward Wen Ning. The last time they fought, he didn't show any mercy either. Seeing that it was him, Wen Ning immediately looked down and went out.

A woman stood in the yard, wearing a black cloak and a bamboo hat with gauze curtains hanging down its sides. Wei WuXian felt his throat swell, "... Shijie."

Hearing the footsteps, the woman took off her hat. She took off her cloak as well. Under the cloak were wedding robes of scarlet.

Jiang YanLi wore the refined robes on her body and a bright blush on her cheeks, adding some color to her face. Wei WuXian walked a few steps closer to her, "Shijie... you're?"

Jiang Cheng, "What? You think she's marrying you?" Wei WuXian, "You can shut up."

Jiang YanLi spread out her arms to show him. Her cheeks flushed slightly, "A-Xian, I'll... be married soon. I came for you to see..."

Wei WuXian felt warmth at his eyes.

He wouldn't be able to be there the day Jiang YanLi got married, unable to see how his loved one would look in wedding robes.

And so, Jiang Cheng and Jiang YanLi snuck to Yiling and led him into the yard for him to see how his sister would look the day she got married.

A few moments later, Wei WuXian finally smiled, "I know! I heard..."

Jiang Cheng, "Who did you hear it from?" Wei WuXian, "None of your business."

Jiang YanLi spoke shyly, "But... I'm the only one who's here. You won't be able to see the groom."

Wei WuXian pretended that he didn't care, "It's not like I want to look at some groom."

He walked a few times around Jiang YanLi, praising, "It looks good!"

Jiang Cheng, "Sis, I told you so. It really does look good."

Jiang YanLi had always known her own limitations. She answered earnestly, "It doesn't count if you two say so. I can't take it seriously."

Jiang Cheng sighed, "You don't believe me and you don't believe him. Is it that you'll only believe it when a certain somebody says so?"

Hearing this, Jiang YanLi's face grew even redder, all the way until her snowy white earlobes. Even the pink of her blush couldn't hide it. She quickly switched the subject, "A-Xian... Give a courtesy name."

Wei WuXian, "What courtesy name?"

Jiang Cheng, "The courtesy name of my unborn nephew."

The marriage hadn't happened yet and they were already giving a courtesy name to their future nephew. However, Wei WuXian didn't find anything strange about it. He didn't show any modesty at all, saying after a while of thought, "Sure. The next generation of the LanlingJin Sect is named Ru. How about Jin RuLan?"

Jiang YanLi, "That's great!"

Jiang Cheng, "No. It sounds like Jin RuLan, Lan being the Lan from the Lan Sect. Why should a descendant of the LanlingJin Sect and the YunmengJiang Sect be like someone of the Lan Sect?"

Wei WuXian, "It's not like there's anything wrong with the Lan Sect, is there? The Lan flower is the gentleman of flowers; the Lan Sect is the gentlemen of people. A good name."

Jiang Cheng, "That's not what you said in the past."

Wei WuXian, "I'm the one who's giving the name, not you. Why are you being so picky?"

Jiang YanLi hurried, "That's enough. You know how A-Cheng is. He's the one who came up with the idea of having you give the courtesy name. Both of you can stop fooling around. I brought soup for you two. Wait a second."

She went inside the house to take out the jar. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng glanced at each other. A moment later, Jiang YanLi came out and gave them each a bowl. Then, she went inside again and brought out a third bowl, walked to the door, and turned to Wen Ning, "I'm sorry. There are only small bowls left. You can have this."

Wen Ning had originally been guarding the door, looking at the ground. Seeing this, he was so flattered that he started stammering again, "Ah... Th-There's some for me?"

Jiang Cheng wasn't pleased, "Why does he get some too?"

Jiang YanLi, "I brought so much anyways. Anyone who sees it gets some."

Wen Ning replied hesitantly, "Thank you, Maiden Jiang... Thank you."

Cupping the small, filled up bowl in his hands, he was too embarrassed to say thank you, but he couldn't drink it. It was a waste to give him some. Dead people didn't eat. Jiang YanLi, however, noticed his awkwardness. She asked him a couple of things and began to chat with Wen Ning outside. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng stood in the yard.

Jiang Cheng raised up his bowl, "To the YiLing Patriarch."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian remembered the proudly fluttering banner again. All that was in his head was the ten golden words

„„all hail the supreme Lord of Evil Patriarch of YiLing“, „Shut up!“

After he drank a mouthful, Jiang Cheng spoke, "How's your wound from last time?"

Wei WuXian, "It healed a long time ago."

Jiang Cheng, "Mn." With a pause, he continued, "How many days?"

Wei WuXian, "Less than seven. I told you before. With Wen Qing, it was nothing difficult. But you really did fucking stab me."

Jiang Cheng ate a piece of lotus root, "You were the one who smashed my arm first. You took seven days, while I had to hang my arm up for an entire month."

Wei WuXian grinned, "How could it seem realistic if it wasn't hard enough? It was your left hand anyways. It didn't hinder you from writing. It takes a hundred days to heal a wound to the bone. It wouldn't be too much even if you hung it up for three months."

Wen Ning's stuttering answers swept in from outside. After a while of silence, Jiang Cheng asked, "You'll stay like this from now on? Got any plans?"

Wei WuXian, "Not at the moment. None of the group dares go down the mountain. People don't dare do anything to me when I go down the mountain either. It'll be fine as long as I don't stir up trouble on my own."

"On your own?" Jiang Cheng sneered, "Wei WuXian, do you believe that even if you don't stir up trouble on your own, trouble

won't come and find you? It's often impossible to save someone, but there are more than thousands of ways to harm someone."

Wei WuXian replied as he ate, "A man with strength can defeat ten with skill. I don't care if they have thousands of ways. I'll kill whoever comes."

Jiang Cheng spoke in a cool voice, "You never listen to any of my opinions. One day, you'll come to understand that I'm the one who's right."

He drank the leftover soup in one gulp and stood up, "Wow. I'm impressed. Round of applause for the YiLing Patriarch."

Wei WuXian spat out a bone, "Are you done yet?"

Before they parted, Jiang Cheng spoke, "We won't see you off. It wouldn't be good if someone saw us."

Wei WuXian nodded. He understood that it wasn't easy for the Jiang siblings to have come out here. If someone else saw them, all those things they did for the public to believe would be wasted. He spoke, "We'll go first."

After they went out the alley, Wei WuXian was still walking in front and Wen Ning was still following in silence. Suddenly, Wei WuXian turned around, "Why are you still holding the soup?"

"Huh?" Wen Ning answered in reluctance, "To take it back... I can't drink it, but I can give it to someone else..."

"..." Wei WuXian, "Your choice. Be careful not to spill it."

He turned around, knowing that it'd be a long time before he'd get to see the people he was familiar with again.

But... right now, wasn't he on his way to seeing people he was familiar with as well?

## Chapter 76: Nightfall—Part One

Inside of the largest Treasure Pavilion in Lanling City.

Within the well-arranged shelves of treasure rested countless pieces of spiritual jade and weapons of high quality. Many cultivators were choosing among the rows, comparing the pricing and craftsmanship of each. Those with the spare time would come chat for a while.

One of them asked, "Chief Cultivator? Seems like the big sects have been arguing over this for the past while. Have they come to a conclusion yet?"

"What is there to argue about? We can't be a heap of loose sand, a group without a leader forever, can we? To set a cultivator who watches over all of the sects—I don't see anything wrong with that."

"It's not that good, is it? What if another QishanWen Sect..."

"How could that be the same? The Chief Cultivator is elected by all the sects. They're different, they're different."

"Hah, they say it's an election, but everyone knows in their hearts. No matter what, it's the same few people who's competing, isn't it? Is there any space for others?"

"ChiFeng-Zun is quite against it, isn't he? He's tried to stop Jin GuangShan so many times, implied or otherwise. In my opinion, there's still a long time before they finish mulling over it."

"And there can be only one person who sits in the position of Chief Cultivator. If it really passed, whom exactly the person should be would take another few years of arguing over, I suppose."

"It's the worry of those who sit at the top, anyways. None of our business. It's not like little shrimps like us could have anycontrol over it even if we wanted to."

Someone suddenly changed the subject, "Did any of you attend the completion ceremony of the Cloud Recesses" Library Pavilion? Well, I went. I stood there and looked, and it was the exact same as how it was before. A difficult undertaking indeed."

"Yeah, very difficult. It was such a huge cultivational residence, an ethereal realm of hundreds of years old—how could it be rebuilt in a short amount of time?"

"Speaking of it, there's been a lot of joyous occasions thesedays, hasn't there?"

"You mean the seventh-day celebration of Jin ZiXuan's son? There's a whole pile of colorful things, and the kid didn't like any of them. Cried so hard that the roof of Glamor Hall was almost screamed off. How amusing that he giggles like that whenever he sees his dad's Suihua. His parents were so happy. They all said he's going to be a wonderful swordsman when he grows up."

Not far away, a person in white was holding a jade tassel pendant in his hand, examining it carefully. Hearing this, he smiled.

The voice of a female cultivator came over, "Madam Jin is so lucky... She must've given up on rising into immortality in herlast life that she gained such good fortune in this life."

Her companion replied, "Looks like it's true that no matter what you're good at, it's all fine as long as you have a good background. She's clearly just so-so..."

The person in white frowned slightly. Fortunately, the somewhat sour comment was quickly overcome by a louder voice, "The LanlingJin Sect really does deserve its reputation. Even a baby who's just been born a few days gets such a grand display."

"Don't you remember whom the baby's parents are? Could they really be sloppy over it? It was not only that Young Madam Jin's husband refuses to be sloppy. If the display was just a tad bit smaller, her mother-in-law, her younger brother—which of the two would've allowed it? In the full-month celebration a fewdays later, it could only be even more extravagant."

"Speaking of it, have you heard of how it's said that to thisfull- month celebration... a certain somebody was invited?"

"Who is it?" "Wei WuXian!"

A momentary silence suddenly fell upon the Treasure Pavilion.

Someone exclaimed, "Really... I thought that was only rumor. Was he really invited?!"

"Yes! It was confirmed in the past couple of days. Wei WuXian will be going."

Someone else aired their shock, "Just what did the LanlingJin Sect think it was doing? Have they forgotten about the number of innocent people Wei WuXian killed in Qiongqi Path?"

"Who'd dare go to Jin Ling's full-month celebration now that such a person is invited? Anyways, I definitely won't go no matter what."

After this, quite many of the crowd secretly mocked, you aren't even qualified enough to be invited, and now you're worried about going or not?

The person in white raised his brows. After he had chosen, he walked out of the Treasure Pavilion.

A few strides later, he walked into a small alleyway. A black- clothed figure appeared, "Young Master, are you done with the purchase?"

Wei WuXian tossed to him the delicate sandalwood box that he was holding. Wen Ning caught it and opened it to see a tassel pendant that hung a piece of white jade. The jade was translucent. In it, soft light flowed as though it was alive.

He beamed, "It's so pretty!"

Wei WuXian, "The pretty little thing wasn't cheap at all. Your sister's money almost wasn't enough for buying this after a new outfit. I don't have a single coin left anyways. I'll just wait for the scolding when we get back."

Wen Ning hurried, "No, no. Young Master is buying a present for Maiden Jiang's child. Sister won't scold you."

Wei WuXian, "Mark your words. When she scolds me, remember to help out a bit."

Wen Ning nodded before adding, "Young Master Jin Ling would definitely like this gift a lot."

However, Wei WuXian replied, "It's not like this is the present I'm giving him. It's only a small accessory. Those things in the Treasure Pavilion—what do they have except for looks?"

Wen Ning paused in surprise, "Then Young Master, what gift did you prepare?"

Wei WuXian, "The will of the Heavens shall not be grasped by mortals."

Wen Ning, "Oh."

He really did stop asking. However, after holding it in for a while, Wei WuXian couldn't take it any longer himself, "Wen Ning, shouldn't you keep on asking with utmost curiosity and persistence? How could you really stop asking after just an „oh"? Don't you want to know what the present is???"

Wen Ning stared at him blankly. He finally realized, "... I do! Young Master! What gift did you prepare?"

Wei WuXian finally took out small wooden box from inside of his sleeve. He shook it in front of Wen Ning and smiled. Wen Ning

took it over and opened it before exclaiming, "What an impressive bell!"

The „impressive" didn't refer to the intricacy of its craftsmanship, although the purity of its silver and the strikingly vivid nine-petaled lotus carved onto its body could almost be considered the peak of

perfection in their craft. What made Wen Ning exclaim, however, was the amount of power held inside of such a small bell.

Wen Ning, "Young Master, is this what you've been making for the past month or so, when you were shutting yourself in the Cave on days upon end?"

Wei WuXian, "That's right. As long as that nephew of mine carries this bell around, not a single creature whose level is just a bit too low can even think about getting close to him. You can't touch it."

It'll probably leave you affected for some time as well if you do." Wen Ning nodded, "I can feel it."

Wei WuXian took the tassel pendant and hung it to the silver bell. The two, when put together, looked extremely pleasing to the eye. He was quite satisfied with it.

Wen Ning, "But, since you'll be attending Young Master Jin Ling's full month celebration, Young Master, you have to hold it back when you see Maiden Jiang's husband. Don't clash with him..."

Wei WuXian waved his hand, "You can relax about this. I know what to do and not do. For the sake of Jin ZiXuan having invited me, I won't badmouth him for the entire year."

Wen Ning scratched his head, embarrassed, "Last time, when Young Master Jin told people to present you with the invitation at the bottom of Burial Mound, I thought that it had to be a trap. And then it happened to be a misunderstanding. It really was unfair to him. I couldn't tell before, but in reality, Young Master Jin is a nice person as well..."

At noon, the two passed Qiongqi Path on their way.

After its re-establishment, it had been a long time since Qiongqi Path was renamed. Wei WuXian didn't know what it was called right now either. It seemed that others couldn't remember either, and so most of the time it was still called the Qiongqi Path. At first, neither of the two noticed anything different. But when they reached the middle of the valley, Wei WuXian began to feel that something was not quite right.

There shouldn't be so few passersby. Wei WuXian, "Is anything wrong?"

Wen Ning rolled out his eye whites. A moment later, he let down his pupils again, "No. It's so quiet."

Wei WuXian, "It really is a bit too quiet."

He couldn't even catch a single sliver of the inhuman noise that he had always been able to hear.

Wei WuXian was instantly alarmed, whispering, "Let's go!"

Just as he turned around, Wen Ning raised his hand to catch something.

It was a fletched arrow that came right for the middle of Wei WuXian's chest!

Wei WuXian abruptly looked up. Many people emerged from countless hiding corners on both sides of the valley. There were over three hundred of them. Most wore robes of Sparks Amidst Snow, although some wore other uniforms as well. All of them carried bows on their backs and swords at their waists, clad in armor and full of vigilance. With the mountains and other people as defense, the tips of all swords and arrows were pointed at him.

The fletched arrow that was the first to come at Wei WuXian was shot by the one leading the crowd. The man had a large build and darkish skin. His handsome features seemed somewhat familiar.

Wei WuXian, "Who are you?"

The man was originally going to give a few words, having shot the arrow. However, with such a question, he forgot about all that at once, fuming, "You dare to ask who I am? I am Jin ZiXun!"

Wei WuXian immediately remembered. This was Jin ZiXuan's cousin. He'd seen him a couple of times before.

His heart had been sinking for a long time. In the beginning, it was filled with the joy of being on his way to attend the full-month celebration of Jiang YanLi's son. But right now, all of the joy dissipated, clouded over by a shadow. Still, though, he refused to think about it too much, unwilling to take a guess at why these people made an ambush here.

Jin ZiXun raised his voice, "Wei WuXian, I'm warning you—lift the evil curse that you put on me right now, and I can pretend like nothing happened and let you off the hook."

Wei WuXian paused in surprise. Even though he knew it'd be taken as denial, he still had to clear things up, "What curse?"

As he expected, Jin ZiXun thought that he was asking even though he knew, "You're still pretending like you don't know

anything?" He tore his lapels open, roaring, "Fine. I'll let you see just what an evil curse it is!"

Jin ZiXun's chest was covered entirely in holes of all sizes!

The smaller holes were the size of sesame seeds, while the larger ones were as large as soybeans. They were spread out on his body evenly, in a hair-rising sort of way.

Wei WuXian only took one glance at him, "Hundred Holes?" Jin ZiXun, "That's right! Hundred

Holes indeed!"

„Hundred Holes" was a curse of utmost brutality.

Back when Wei WuXian explored the GusuLan Sect's Library Pavilion when he should be copying scriptures, he once discovered an ancient book. At the part where this type of curse was explained, an illustration was added to the text. The person on the page was quite calm, as if he felt no pain, but many coin-sized holes had already grown on his body.

At first, the victim of the curse would feel nothing. At most, they'd think that their pores had become rougher. However, soon later, the holes would become the size of sesame seeds. The longer it went on, the larger and greater in number the holes would be. It'd proceed until their entire body was covered in holes of all sizes, almost like a grotesque human sieve. On top of that, after the surface of the skin was covered in holes, the curse would begin to extend toward the internal organs. It could either be a ceaseless stomachache, or the rotting of all the organs!

With Jin ZiXun having fallen victim to a curse so repulsive yet so hard to remove, Wei WuXian momentarily felt almost sympathetic toward him. However, even if he was sympathetic, he still thought that Jin ZiXun probably didn't have a proper brain, "You were cursed with Hundred Holes, but why would you come block my path? What's it got to do with me?"

Jin ZiXun glanced at his chest as if he himself felt disgusted as well. He folded his lapels back, "Apart from a criminal who's as used to using crooked means as you, who else could put such a savage thing on me?"

Wei WuXian thought to himself that there were indeed many who'd do so. Might it be that Jin ZiXun actually thought he was popular with others?

But he didn't want to say it straight out and provoke Jin ZiXun, worsening the situation, "Jin ZiXun, I don't use such underhanded tricks. If I want to kill someone, I'd let everyone know that this person died in my hands. And, if I really wanted you to die, you'd be a thousand times worse than how you are right now."

Jin ZiXun, "You've always been quite arrogant, haven't you? And now you're not bold enough to admit what you did?"

Wei WuXian, "I'm not the one who did it; why should I admit it?"

Killing intent flashed within Jin ZiXun's eyes, "Courtesy before force—if you don't take this chance to turn around, I won't be letting you off easy either!"

Wei WuXian paused in his steps, "Oh, really?"

What was meant by „letting him off easy" was really quite clear.

There were two ways to lift the curse of Hundred Holes. Apart from having the one who placed the curse cut down their own cultivation and lifted the curse on their own, there was one most absolute method:

To kill the one who placed the curse!

Wei WuXian scorned, "Not let me off easy? You? With just the couple hundreds of people you've got?"

Jin ZiXun waved his arm. All of the disciples placed their arrows on their bows, aiming at Wei WuXian and Wen Ning who were at the bottom of the valley. Wei WuXian lifted Chenqing to his lips as well. The shrill note of the flute ripped apart the silence of the valley.

However, a moment later, no reply had come. Jin ZiXun, "We cleaned the entire area out a long time ago, waiting for you to come. You won't get any helpers no matter how much you play. This is the burial ground that we've prepared just for you!"

Wei WuXian laughed coldly, "You're seeking your own death!"

As he finished, Wen Ning raised his hand and tore off the red string that hung a talisman at his neck.

After the string snapped, his body wavered, and the muscles on his face began to twist. Marks that resembled black cracks crawled up his neck to his cheeks. He suddenly lifted his head, letting out a long, inhuman roar!

Many cultivators adept at night-hunting were present among the three hundred people

participating in the ambush. None of them had ever encountered a fierce corpse who could make such a terrifying noise. They all felt their knees buckle. Jin ZiXun could feel his scalp tingle as well. He raised his arm and ordered, "Release!"

The arrows rained down!

Wen Ning broke apart a boulder with his bare hands and lifted it high up in the air, blocking as many arrows as he could. After the

rain of arrows had ended, around a hundred cultivators leaped down the walls and charged at the two standing in the terrain. Wei WuXian walked back a few steps. With a sidestep, he dodged the sneak attack of a sword blade.

While Wen Ning was dealing with the hundred people, Jin ZiXun used the chance to attack. Seeing that Wei WuXian didn't carry a sword and only carried a flute that was temporarily useless, he laughed, "This is the price you'll pay for your arrogance. Without a sword, let's see how you resist."

With a flick of his hand, Wei WuXian sent out a row of talismans burning in green flames, diminishing Jin ZiXun's sword glare as they collided. With such an attack right after he laughed, Jin ZiXun immediately focused on the fight. The two had been fighting for some time when something suddenly flew out of Wei WuXian's sleeve. His gaze froze as he realized what had happened.

It was the present that he prepared for Jin Ling. Since he cared about it too much, scared that he'd accidentally break it while at the same time wanting to take it out and admire it from time to time, he only placed it shallowly inside of his sleeve. During the fight now, however, it accidentally slipped out, flying toward Jin ZiXun. Jin ZiXun thought that it was something along the lines of a hidden weapon or some obscure poison. He was going to dodge when he saw the change in expression on Wei WuXian's face. Changing his mind, he caught it at once. It was a delicate little wooden box with a row of small characters carved on it—Jin Ling's name and date of his birth. Jin ZiXun paused in surprise before he came to a realization, laughing loudly.

Wei WuXian's face darkened, speaking one word at a time, "Give it back."

Jin ZiXun raised the wooden box, mocking, "A present for A-Ling?"

Wen Ning was standing not far away in the distance. Alone worth more than a hundred soldiers, he battled amid the chaos. Jin

ZiXun, "You didn't really think that you could attend A-Ling's full-month celebration, did you?"

The sentence made Wei WuXian's hands tremble slightly. At this point, a voice shouted, "Stop!"

A white-clothed figure leaped down the valley lightly, blocking between Wei WuXian and Jin ZiXun. Seeing who had come, Jin ZiXun exclaimed, "ZiXuan? Why are you here?!"

Jin ZiXuan placed one hand on the hilt of his sword, enraged, "Why do you think I'm here?!"

Jin ZiXun, "Where's A-Yao?"

Jin ZiXuan was the helper who was supposed to be here to assist him. Just last year, he still held much contempt toward Jin GuangYao. Now that the two's relationship had become better, however, he began to call him in a more intimate manner. Jin

ZiXuan, "I stopped him at Koi Tower. If not for how I exposed him after I saw that he looked strange, you two are just going to

continue with this? Why didn't you tell me at all that you were cursed with Hundred Holes and instead came to do this without saying anything?!"

The fact that Jin ZiXun had been cursed with Hundred Holes was indeed an unspeakable matter. First of all, he had both a good appearance and a good physique. He'd always thought of himself as handsome and couldn't bear for others to know that he was

under such an unsightly, repulsive curse. Second of all, to have been cursed meant that his level of cultivation wasn't high enough, since his spiritual energy was too weak to be able to hold against the curse. This made it even more inconvenient to explain to others. And thus, Jin GuangShan was the only one to whom he told about the curse, pleading with Jin GuangShan to find him the medics and curse specialists. Yet, neither of the two were able to do anything.

Jin Ling's full-month celebration just so happened to be near, to which Jin ZiXuan actually invited Wei WuXian. Jin GuangShan wasn't too fond of this idea to begin with, and so he suggested that Jin ZiXun use this as an opportunity, killing Wei WuXian on his way to the banquet. This way, he wouldn't have to come to Koi Tower either.

Wei WuXian was Jiang Yanli's shidi, and the couple was quite affectionate toward each other. Jin ZiXuan told his wife everything, no matter what a trivial matter it was. A few people were worried that he might give the plan away, causing Wei WuXian not to come, and so they had been keeping Jin ZiXuan in the dark. This was indeed a bit unfair.

Seeing that everything had fallen through, Jin ZiXun couldn't help but feel somewhat guilty. But, no matter what, his life was the most important, "ZiXuan, hide it from Sister-in-Law for now. I'll give you two a formal apology after I get rid of these things on my body!"

The last time Wei WuXian saw Jin ZiXuan, he still had the youthful pride on him. Now that he was married, he seemed a lot more mature. His voice was steady as well, although his face had darkened, "It is still possible to turn things around. All of you, stop for the time being."

Jin ZiXun was both angry and impatient, "What is there to turn around now that things are already like this? Haven't you seen these things on me?!"

He seemed as if he wanted to lift his shirt again to reveal his chest full of holes. Jin ZiXuan quickly stopped him, "There's no need! I've heard about it from Jin GuangYao already!"

Jin ZiXun, "Since you've heard it from him already, you should know that I can't wait. Don't tell me that you'll disregard your brother's life for the sake of Sister-in-Law's shidi?!"

Jin ZiXuan, "You clearly know that I'm not that kind of person! He might not necessarily be the one who cursed you with Hundred Holes either. Why are you so rash? I was the one who invited Wei WuXian to A-Ling's full-month celebration anyways. If this is the way you do things, where does that leave me? Where does it leave my wife?"

Jin ZiXun raised his voice, "It's best if he doesn't attend! What does Wei WuXian think he is—does he deserve to attend our sect's banquet? Whoever touches him gets nothing but a splash of black! ZiXuan, when you invited him, weren't you worried that you, Sister-in-Law and A-Ling would receive an irremovable stain for the rest of your lives?!"

Jin ZiXuan shouted, "Shut up right now!"

Deeply infuriated, Jin ZiXun clenched down. The wooden box that held the bell and the jade tassel was clenched into dust at once!

Wei WuXian watched the object break to pieces with his own eyes. Pupils shrinking fast, he lunged at Jin ZiXun. Jin ZiXuan, however, didn't know what was inside the box yet. He raised his hand and blocked the attack, shouting, "Wei WuXian! Have you had enough yet?!"

Wei WuXian's chest heaved up and down. His eyes were red. Jin ZiXuan and Jin ZiXun were cousins who had known each other well ever since they were young. With almost twenty years between them, at this point, it was indeed difficult for him to defend an outsider. And, in truth, he didn't like Wei WuXian as a person either.

Collecting himself, he spoke, "Tell Wen Ning to stop first. Don't let him continue his rampage and make the situation worse than it already is."

Wei WuXian's voice was coarse, "... Why don't you make them stop first?"

Relentless shouts and roars came from all around them. Jin ZiXuan raged, "Why are you still so stubborn at such a time? When everyone calms down, you can follow me back to Koi Tower to explain things and answer some questions. With

everything clear, if you aren't the one who did it, of course you'll be fine!"

Wei WuXian, "Tell him to stop? As soon as I tell Wen Ning to stop right now, the arrows would fly straight at my heart and I wouldn't even die a whole corpse! And you think I could explain things at Koi Tower?"

Jin ZiXuan, "They would not!"

Wei WuXian laughed, "They would not? How can you ensure it? Jin ZiXuan, I have a question—when you invited me at first, did you really not know about their plan to kill me?!"

Jin ZiXuan paused for a second before he raged, "You! Wei WuXian, are... are you mad?!" Wei WuXian was suppressing a blazing flame of hatred. His voice was cold, "Jin ZiXuan, move away right now. I won't touch you, but you're not going to provoke me either."

Seeing that he still refused to yield, Jin ZiXuan suddenly lunged forward, as if trying to hold him down, "Why can't you just backoff for once?! A-Li is still..."

Just as he reached toward Wei WuXian, he heard a strange, heavy noise.

The noise was almost a bit too near. Jin ZiXuan paused in surprise. He looked down and finally saw the hand that pierced his chest.

Without anyone noticing, Wen Ning had already joined them. On half of his expressionless face was splattered a few searing, glaring drops of blood.

Jin ZiXuan's lips moved. His expression was somewhat blank. Yet, still, he managed to continue the sentence that he couldn't finish:

"... is still waiting for you to go to Koi Tower and attend A-Ling's full-month celebration..."

The same blankness was on Wei WuXian's face. In the short period of time, Wei WuXian hadn't realized what happened yet.

What was happening?

Why did things become like this in just a few seconds?

No.

It shouldn't be.

Something must've went wrong somewhere.

Wen Ning took out the hand that he used to pierce through Jin ZiXuan's chest, leaving behind a gaping hole.

Jin ZiXuan's face twitched in pain, as though he felt that the wound wasn't anything big, that he could still stand up. Yet, his legs finally gave out as he kneeled on the ground.

Screams of fear sounded from all around him. "The... The Ghost General has gone mad!"

"He killed, he killed him. Wei WuXian made the Ghost General kill Jin ZiXuan!"

Jin ZiXuan yelled, "Release! What are you waiting for?! Release the arrows!"

However, as he turned around, a black silhouette approached him with the stealth of the inhuman. He felt his throat tighten as a large, pale hand, lined with blue veins, clenched around his neck.

"Ahhhhh...!!!"

Wei WuXian stood helplessly where he was, unmoving. No.

That wasn't it.

He was clearly controlling Wen Ning properly.

Even though he activated Wen Ning's rampage mode, he should still be able to control him.

He'd clearly always been able to control him perfectly. He didn't want to kill Jin ZiXuan at all.

He never had the intention to kill Jin ZiXuan at all! It was just that moment. He didn't know why, but all of a sudden he wasn't able to control it... He had suddenly lost control!

Jin ZiXuan's body finally couldn't hold up any longer, leaning forward. With a slam, he collapsed on the ground.

He'd been arrogant and self-satisfied throughout his whole life, regarding with importance his appearance and mannerisms. He liked to be clean to the point that he was almost somewhat mysophobic. Right now, however, with the side of his face landing on the ground, he had fallen into the dirt in a most undignified way. The spots of blood on his face and the mark of vermillion between his brows were of the same color.

Staring at the light that slowly faded from his eyes, Wei WuXian's mind was in complete shambles. Everything around him had become an ocean of blood and screams, but he couldn't hear anything any longer.

The only thing he could hear was a voice inside him that questioned him over and over again: Didn't you say you know what you should and shouldn't do? Didn't you say you could control it? Didn't you say that there couldn't possibly be a problem, that nothing could possibly ever

happen?!!

Wei WuXian's head was blank. He didn't know how long had passed when his eyes finally shot open again.

What he saw was the dark ceiling of the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

Both Wen Qing and Wen Ning were inside.

Wen Ning's pupils had fallen into the whites of his eyes again. He was already out of his rampage, appearing to be conversing with Wen Qing in a low voice. Seeing that Wei WuXian opened his eyes, he kneeled to the ground in silence. Wen Qing, on the other hand, said nothing with her red eyes.

Wei WuXian sat up.

After a while of silence, waves of hatred suddenly whirled within his heart.

He stepped onto Wen Ning's chest, kicking him to the ground.

Wen Qing jolted. She clenched her hands, but still looked down, her mouth shut.

Wei WuXian roared, "Who did you kill? Do you know who you killed?!"

At this point, with a grass butterfly on his head, Wen Yuan ran in from outside, beaming, "Brother Xian..."

He was originally going to show Wei WuXian the butterfly that he painted in new colors. Yet, when he came in, he saw a demon

that was Wei WuXian and Wen Ning curled up on the ground. At once, he was shocked speechless. Wei WuXian spun around. He hadn't held back his emotions yet, his eyes almost frightening.

Wen Yuan was so scared that his entire person jerked. The butterfly fell from on top of his head and onto the ground. He began to wail at once. Stooping, Uncle Four hurried in and carried him away.

After having been kicked over, Wen Ning climbed up again and kneeled down properly, saying nothing. Grabbing his collar, Wei WuXian lifted him up and shouted, "You could've killed anyone— why did you have to kill Jin ZiXuan?!"

Wen Qing watched from the side. She seemed as if she wanted to rush up and protect her brother, but forced herself to hold back. Tears of sorrow and fear rolled down her cheeks.

Wei WuXian, "With him dead, what is Shijie supposed to do? What is Shijie's son supposed to do?! What am I supposed to do?! What about me?!"

His shout echoed throughout the cave, spreading outside. Wen Yuan cried even more.

With the child's cries coming to his ears from afar and the scared siblings who were at a complete loss as to what to do in his eyes, Wei WuXian felt his heart sink lower into darkness. He asked himself, just why have I been locking myself up on Burial Mound all these years? Why do I have to go through all this? Why did I choose to walk this path in the beginning? Why did I make myself like this? What do others see me as? Just what have I gained?

Have I gone mad? Have I gone mad? Have I gone mad?!

If only he didn't choose this path in the beginning.

Suddenly, Wen Ning whispered, "... I'm... sorry."

This was a corpse, expressionless, eyes unable to feel warmth, tears unable to fall. However, at this very moment, on the corpse's face was genuine pain.

He repeated, "I'm sorry... I-It was all my fault... I'm sorry..."

Listening to him stutter as he apologized over and over again, all of a sudden, Wei WuXian felt extremely ridiculous.

It wasn't Wen Ning's fault at all. It was his own fault.

When on a rampage, Wen Ning was nothing more than a weapon. The person who created the weapon was him. The things it listens to were his orders as well.

At that time, with all the tension and the killing intent on top of how Wei WuXian had never hesitated to show enmity toward Jin ZiXuan in front of Wen Ning, when he was unconscious, Wen Ning recognized Jin ZiXuan as an „enemy" when he attacked, carrying out the order of

„exterminate“ without a second thought.

He was the one who couldn't control such a weapon. He was the one who grew too confident in his own abilities. He was also the one who ignored all of the ominous indications that had happened up to now, with the belief that he could suppress any loss of control.

Wen Ning was a weapon, but did he come to be a weapon out of his own will?

Could such a timid, stuttering person have been happy, killing all those people under Wei WuXian's orders?

Back then, he received a bowl of lotus root soup that Jiang YanLi gave him. He took it all the way up Burial Mound, not letting a single drop spill. Although he himself couldn't drink it, he watched someone else finish it with content, even asking what it tasted like as he tried to imagine it in his mind. Could he possibly be feeling anywhere near fine, having killed Jiang YanLi's husband with his own hands?

He not only took all of the faults as his own, but was also apologizing to him.

Clenching Wen Ning's collar, Wei WuXian looked at his pale, lifeless face. Before his eyes suddenly appeared Jin ZiXuan's smeared face, covered in dirt and blood. They were the same paleness, the same lifelessness.

He also remembered Jiang YanLi, who finally married the person she loved after overcoming so many difficulties. He remembered the son of Jin ZiXuan and Jiang YanLi, A-Ling, the child who received his courtesy name from him. He was still so young. Just seven days after he was born, he knew to laugh whenever he saw his father's sword. Both of his parents were ecstatic. His full-month celebration was just a few days later.

As he thought and thought about it, Wei WuXian suddenly broke into tears.

His voice was submerged in a deep helplessness, “... Can someone tell me... what I'm supposed to do now?”

## Chapter 77: Nightfall—Part Two

In the past, there were only others who asked him what to do. Now, though, he was the one asking others what he should do, and nobody was able to give him an answer.

Suddenly, Wei WuXian felt a faint pain at the side of his neck, as if he'd been stabbed by a sharp needle. He felt his body grow numb all over. Having been caught off guard due to the momentary absent-mindedness, he only realized what was happening after a few moments had passed. Involuntarily, he had already collapsed onto the rock bed. At first, he could still raise his arm, but soon, even his arm crashed onto the bed. He could no longer move.

With red eyes, Wen Qing slowly removed her right hand, "... I'm sorry."

She shouldn't have been able to land an attack on Wei WuXian with her speed, but Wei WuXian wasn't on the alert at all. With the pain, Wei WuXian felt his mind calm down a bit as well. His Adam's apple bobbed before he opened his mouth, "What are you doing?"

Wen Qing and Wen Ning exchanged a glance. Standing before him, in unison, they granted him a solemn salutation.

Seeing this, a restless sense of foreboding rose within Wei WuXian, "What are you going to do? Just what are you doing?"

Wen Qing, "When you woke up, we were in the middle of discussing it. I think we've come to a conclusion."

Wei WuXian, "Discussing what? Stop talking nonsense. Take out the needle—let me go!"

Wen Ning slowly got up from the ground. His head still hung low, "Sister and I have come to a conclusion. We'll be going to Koi Tower to give ourselves up."

"Give yourselves up?" Wei WuXian was shocked, "How are you going to do that? Apologize? Surrender?"

Wen Qing rubbed her eyes, her expression appearing to be calm, "Yes, more or less. In the days you were down, the LanlingJin Sect sent people to give a few words at Burial Mound."

Wei WuXian, "Give a few words about what? Don't talk one word at a time. Say it all at once! Finish your explanation!"

Wei WuXian, "The LanlingJin Sect wanted you to give them an answer. The answer would be to hand over the two leaders of the remaining Wen Sect members, especially the Ghost General."

"..." Wei WuXian, "I'm warning you two. Get this needle out of me right now."

Wen Qing continued on, "The leaders of the remaining Wen Sect members—that's us. According to them, if you hand us over, this

incident would temporarily be considered over as well. Then, we might have you on the bed for a couple more days. The effects of the needle inside of you would cease in three days' time. I've talked to Uncle Four about it already. He'll watch over you and let you out if an emergency happens within the three days."

Wei WuXian raged, "You can shut the fuck up! It's already pandemonium the way things are right now! You two can stop adding more trouble onto my platter. Give yourselves in my ass. Did I tell you to do this? Take it out!"

Wen Qing and Wen Ning stood still, arms limp. Their silence was the same. Wei WuXian had no strength in his body. His struggles were of no use, and nobody listened to him either. All at once, there seemed to be no strength in his heart either.

He could neither shout nor move, rasping, "Why are you going to Koi Tower? I wasn't the one who cursed him with Hundred Holes at all..."

Wen Qing, "But they have set their minds that it was you."

Wei WuXian tried his best to think of ways to deal with this. Suddenly, he thought of something, "Then find the real person who set the curse! Jin ZiXun's definitely gone to experts of cursing. The most common way to deal with these curses is to hit them back, let the effects rebound back to the one who placed the curse. Even if not all of the power could be rebounded, a large portion

can. We can just look for someone who has the same curse marks on them!"

Wen Qing, "There's no use." Wei WuXian, "Why not?"

Wen Qing, "There are so many people—where could we look for them? Set up a checkpoint on every street of every city and make everyone take off their clothes so that we can check?"

Wei WuXian protested, "Why not?"

Wen Qing, "Who'd be willing to set up these checkpoints for you? And for how long do you intend to search? We could perhaps find them after eight or ten years, but would those people be willing to wait?"

Wei WuXian, "But there are no rebounded curse marks on me!" Wen Qing, "During today's incident, did they ask you?"

Wei WuXian, "No."

Wen Qing, "That's right. They didn't ask. They straight-up prepared to kill you. Do you understand now? They don't need any proof. They don't need you to find the truth either. Whether or not you have curse marks on your body doesn't matter at all.

You're the YiLing Patriarch, the King of the Demonic Path. You specialize in dark curses, so it wouldn't even be strange if you didn't have curse marks on you. On top of that, you didn't have to do it yourself. You could've gotten Wen-dogs, your slaves, to do it for you. It's you no matter what. You won't be able to deny it."

Wei WuXian cursed.

Wen Qing waited quietly for him to finish cursing, "And so, you see? There's no use. With the way things are, the identity of the one who placed the curse of Hundred Holes is no longer important. What's important is the fact that the hundreds of people at Qiongqi path and... Jin ZiXuan were indeed killed by A-Ning."

Wei WuXian, "... But, but..."

But what? He himself didn't even know what to put after „but". He couldn't think of a reason to give, an excuse to use.

He spoke, "... But even then, I should be the one going. I was the one who made the corpses kill the people. Why would the knife go instead of the murderer?"

Wen Qing, "Isn't it better this way?" Wei WuXian, "Better as in what?!"

Wen Qing's voice was calm, "Wei Ying, we both know. Wen Ning is a knife, a knife that scares them, but also a knife that they use as an excuse to attack you. If we go, without the knife, they'd no longer have an excuse. This entire thing might finally be over."

Wei WuXian stared at her in shock. He suddenly let out a meaningless roar.

He finally understood why Jiang Cheng would always express extreme anger toward certain things he did, why he'd always say that he had a hero complex, why he'd always seem as if he'd like to beat him up. Watching others take the responsibility onto their shoulders no matter what, insist on bearing all of the negative consequences, unable to be stopped at all—the feeling was the utmost detestable!

Wei WuXian, "Do you two understand or not? By giving yourselves in at Koi Tower—what would happen to you two, especially Wen Ning? Aren't you the one who loves this brother of yours the most?"

Wen Qing, "Whatever that happens to him would be what he deserves."

No. Wen Ning didn't deserve it at all. He was the one who deserved it.

Wen Qing, "Anyhow, we should've been dead since a long time ago. These days have been a strike of luck for us."

Wen Ning nodded.

He was always like this, nodding at whatever others said, agreeing and never objecting. Wei WuXian had never abhorred his nod and his docility so much.

Wen Qing squatted by the bed. Gazing at his face, she suddenly reached out and flicked her finger against Wei WuXian's forehead.

She put quite some strength into her flick. Wei WuXian frowned from the pain. Seeing this, Wen

Qing seemed to be in a much better mood, "I've said what I had to say, explained things, said farewell. Then, good-bye."

Wei WuXian, "No..."

Wen Qing interrupted him, "I've never really said such things to you before. But now that it's today, there are indeed a few things I should say. I really won't get a chance to say them after this."

Wei WuXian whispered, "... Shut up... Let me go..." Wen Qing, "I'm sorry. And, thank you."

Wei WuXian was lying for the entire three days.

Wen Qing's calculations were indeed correct. Three days. Not a moment earlier, not a moment too late. He was able to move right after the three days had passed.

First his fingers, then his limbs, his neck... When the almost frozen blood began to flow inside of him once more, Wei WuXian leaped up from the stairs and rushed outside the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

The Wen Sect's people seemed like they hadn't had any shut-eye within the three days either. In silence, they sat within the large shack, around the tables. Wei WuXian didn't even spare them a single glance. Sprinting as fast as he could, he dashed down Burial Mound.

After he got down the mountain, he stood amid the bushes, catching his breath. Bent down, he propped his hands against his knees for a long while before he stood up straight again. Yet, looking at the wild grasses that covered many of the mountain paths, he didn't know where to go.

Burial Mound—he'd just gone down from there. Lotus Pier—he hadn't been back in over a year. Koi Tower? Three days had passed already. If he went now, it was likely that Wen Qing's corpse and Wen Ning's ashes were the only things left.

He stood blankly. Suddenly, he felt that the world had no place for him, despite how large it was. He didn't know what to do either.

Out of the blue, a frightening thought emerged from the depths of his heart. Within the three days, he had denied this thought over

and over again, but it kept on appearing, unable to be wiped away.

Wen Qing and Wen Ning left on their own. Perhaps, he was glad, somewhere deep inside of him. Because of this, he wouldn't have to be caught between what choice to make. They had already made the choice for him and dealt with the difficulty.

Wei WuXian raised his hand and slapped himself on the face. In a low voice, he scolded, "What are you thinking?!"

His cheek burned. He was finally able to suppress the frightening thought. Instead, he thought to himself that no matter what, at least he had to bring back the Wen sibling's ashes.

And so, in the end, he still ran toward the direction of Koi Tower.

It wasn't difficult for Wei WuXian to sneak into a place if he wanted to. It was very quiet on Koi Tower. Surprisingly, there weren't any of the heavy lines of defense that he imagined there to be. Searching everywhere, he didn't find anything he deemed suspicious.

Like a ghost, he roamed about the palaces within Koi Tower. He hid when there were people; he walked when there weren't. He didn't know what he was searching for either, or even how to search for it. However, when the sounds of an infant's cries came over, his footsteps suddenly froze. Inside of him was a voice that urged his body to walk toward where the sound came from. The cries were from a large, lightless palace.

Wei WuXian snuck to the main doors without making a noise. He looked through the delicate carvings of the wooden windows.

A black coffin rested within the hall. Before the coffin kneeled two women in white.

The woman on the left had a slightly smaller frame. It was a figure he'd never mistake. Throughout his childhood, he'd been carried by this figure for many, many times.

It was Jiang YanLi.

Kneeling on a futon, Jiang YanLi stared blankly at the coffin so black that it seemed to glow. The

infant was inside of her arms, still crying softly.

The woman on the right whispered, "... A-Li, you can stop sitting here. Go take a break."

Jiang YanLi shook her head. Madam Jin sighed.

It was a woman who had a similar personality to that of her best friend, Madam Yu's. She was extremely assertive, her voice always high. Yet, the few words that she had just spoken sounded so low and so coarse, making her appear to have aged drastically.

Madam Jin insisted, "I'll stay here. You shouldn't sit any longer. You won't be able to hold up."

Jiang YanLi spoke softly, "Mother, I'm fine. I'd like to sit for a while longer."

A moment later, Madam Jin stood up slowly, "You won't be able to hold up if you continue. I'll get you something to eat."

She'd probably been sitting here for a long time as well. Legs numb, her body wavered slightly while she was getting up, but

she quickly steadied herself. She turned around. It was indeed those somewhat hardened features.

In Wei WuXian's memories, Madam Jin had always been vigorous and resolute. She always wore on her face an arrogant expression, surrounded by golden splendor. She maintained her youth quite well and seemed quite young, likely able to pass for twenty. But right now, in front of Wei WuXian was a middle-aged woman clothed in white, her temples frosted. She wore no cosmetics. Over her ashen face was a pair of chapped lips.

When she approached and was about to exit, Wei WuXian immediately darted. With a light dip of his foot, he leaped onto the roof of the hallway just as Madam Jin walked out. She shut the door behind her. With a cold expression, she took in a deep breath and adjusted the positioning of her facial muscles, as if she wanted to put on her usual stately expression again.

Yet, before she even finished drawing the breath, her eyes had reddened. Back then, in front of Jiang YanLi, she never displayed any sign of grief. Just as she stepped out, however, the corners of her lips collapsed at once. Her features crumples, and she began to tremble.

It was the second time that Wei WuXian saw such an unsightly, yet despairing expression on a woman's face.

He really didn't want to see such an expression once more.

Unconsciously, Wei WuXian clenched his fists, but his knuckles gave out a crisp crunch. Hearing this, Madam Jin glared, "Who's there?!"

Just as she looked up, she saw Wei WuXian, hiding behind one of the rooftop decorations. Madam Jin had good sight. She saw the

features submerged in the darkness, and her face twisted at once. She yelled in a shrill voice, "Everyone! Come, everyone! Wei Ying—he's here! He crept into Koi Tower!"

Wei WuXian leaped down the roof. Suddenly, he heard a series of hastened footsteps. Somebody hurried out of the palace. He could only make a run for it.

At this point in time, he didn't dare look at Jiang YanLi, not even a single expression, and not even a single word!

After he fled Koi Tower and left Lanling City, Wei WuXian lost his direction yet again. He roamed around in a blur, his mind clouded. He didn't make a single stop. He didn't know how many cities he'd passed when he suddenly saw a group of people crowd around a city gate. They were holding a heated, passionate discussion.

Wei WuXian intended on ignoring these people, but as he walked past, he happened to have heard the words „Ghost General". He immediately stopped in his track, focused on the conversation.

"The Ghost General really is fierce... Said he was there to give himself in, but then he suddenly flipped out. He slaughtered again, this time in Koi Tower."

"Good thing I didn't go that day!"

"He was a dog trained by Wei WuXian. No wonder he bites everyone in his path."

"Wei Ying, though, he shouldn't have made him if he can't control it. Created a mad dog and he

didn't leash it. Sooner or later, he's gonna be faced with a qi deviation. With the way things have been, I doubt the day is that far away."

Wei WuXian listened quietly. The muscles on his face and fingers twitched slightly.

"How unfortunate for the LanlingJin Sect."

"Things were even worse for the GusuLan Sect! Over half of the thirty-or-so people were from their sect. They were clearly only there to help calm things down."

"Good thing the Ghost General was finally burned. Or else, just thinking about how such a thing was roaming around outside, flipping out now and then, would be enough for me to have nightmares."

Someone spat, "That's the end all Wen-dogs should meet!"

"The Ghost-General was almost burned to crumbs. This time, Wei WuXian should know what's up, huh? I heard many of the sect leaders going to the pledge conference have spoken already. How terrific!"

The longer Wei WuXian listened, the colder his expression grew.

He should've understood long ago. No matter what he did, not a single good word would come out of these people's mouths.

When he won, others feared; when he lost, others rejoiced.

He was cultivating the crooked path either way, so what exactly did the years of persistence mean? What exactly were they for?"

However, the colder his eyes were, the brighter the raging fire within his heart burned.

One of the group gloated, as though he had made a great contribution to this, "Yeah, terrific! It'll be fine if only heobediently

huddles inside of that damn mountain from now on. If he dares show his face outside again? Ha, as soon as he's out, I'll..."

"You'll do what?"

The people, in the middle of their heated conversation, paused in unison. They all turned around.

The saw a pale, black-robed youth standing behind them, two dark circles below his eyes, his voice cold, "If he dares come out, you'll do what?"

Those with sharp eyes saw the flute with the bright red tassel hanging by the youth's waist. They immediately jolted, exclaiming, "Chenqing, it's Chenqing!"

The YiLing Patriarch, Wei WuXian, had really come out!

Within the instant, a large circle had formed with Wei WuXian in the center. The people fled everywhere. As Wei WuXian let out a shrill whistle, the people suddenly felt their bodies sink. They all collapsed onto the ground. As they shakily turned around, they realized that everyone, including themselves, had on their backs various dark, bloody spirits!

Among the scattered, disabled crowd, Wei WuXian walked

patiently, talking as he walked, "Huh, what's wrong? Weren't you all quite the cultivators when you were talking about me behind my back? Whyis it that, now that you're in front of me, you can do nothing but lie on the ground?"

He walked beside the person whose words were the harshest and ground his foot against the person's face, laughing, "Talk. Why aren't you talking anymore? Mr. Hero, just what are you going to do to me?!"

The person's nasal bones had broken from the force, bleeding and screaming uncontrollably. Many cultivators were watching from on top of the city gate. They wanted to help, but they didn't dare approach the scene.

One of them shouted from afar, "Wei... Wei Ying! If you're really that strong, why don't you go find those sect leadersparticipating in the pledge conference? What could you prove by picking on us low-level cultivators with no power to fight back?"

Wei WuXian let out another short whistle. The cultivator who shouted felt as a hand suddenly tugged him down. He fell off the city gate, breaking both of his legs, and began to scream.

Amid the wails, Wei WuXian's expression didn't change at all, "Low-level cultivators? Do I have to tolerate you, just because you're low-level cultivators? If you dared say those things, you had to dare shoulder the consequences. If you knew that you were insignificant pieces of scum as filthy as ants, how come you didn't know to think before you speak?!"

Everyone was as pale as ash, making not a single noise. A moment later, when Wei WuXian didn't hear any more chatter, he continued in satisfaction, "Yes, that's the spirit."

Just as he finished, he kicked again, knocking out half a mouthful of teeth from the person who was spreading the made-up tales the most!

Blood splattered all over the ground. Everyone shuddered as they watched, while the person had already passed out from the pain. Wei WuXian looked down and pressed his foot against the ground, leaving behind a few bloody footsteps.

He thought for a while before speaking up again, his voice

emotionless, "But, you scums were right about one thing. There's not really much meaning in wasting time with you people. You wanted me to find those bigger sects? Fine. I'll be on my way right now, to clear up a few things with them."

He looked up and saw the large announcement stuck over the city gate. The crowd had been chatting around this announcement.

At the top of the announcement was the words „Pledge Conference". The contents told that the four leading sects—the LanlingJin Sect, the QingheNie Sect, the YunmengJiang Sect, and the GusuLan Sect—were going to scatter the ashes of the Wen Sect's remnants atop the ruins of the QishanWen Sect's abandoned residence—the Nightless City. At the same time, they'd take the pledge that they'd be forever opposing the YiLing Patriarch, who had occupied Burial Mound.

A pledge conference at the Nightless City?

## Chapter 78: Nightfall—Part Three

These people had thought that they'd definitely die a terrible death at the hands of the YiLing Patriarch before they became walking corpses under his control. All of them seemed to be scared out of their wits. However, Wei WuXian wasn't interested in bothering with them any longer. After he finished reading the announcement, he left the group on the ground and walked away, hands behind his back.

He didn't retrieve all those dark spirits. On the ground, those who groaned continued to groan, those who writhed continued to writhe. None of them were able to get up.

Sometime later, they suddenly saw a blue sword glare sweep by. They immediately felt their backs lighten up. Someone exclaimed, "I can move!"

A few of them got up and saw the sword glare return into a person's sheath.

It was a handsome man of very young age. Wearing white robes and a forehead ribbon, he bore a solemn expression on his face, in which there seemed to be a suppressed strand of worry. He came at a high speed, but he didn't seem to be hurrying at all. Not even the corners of his robes wavered.

Holding back pain, the cultivator who had broken his legs spoke, "Han... HanGuang-Jun!" Lan WangJi walked beside him and got down, pressing on his legs to check his wounds. His injuries weren't too severe. He got up, but before he could speak, the cultivator continued, "HanGuang-Jun, you've come too late. Wei WuXian just went!"

Quite a few people knew that in the past few days, HanGuang-Jun of the GusuLan Sect had been searching everywhere for the whereabouts of Wei WuXian, probably wanting to settle things with him and have him pay for the dozens of lives that the GusuLan Sect lost. Someone hurriedly shouted, "Yeah, he's been gone for less than an hour!"

Lan WangJi, "What did he do? Where is he going?"

The people immediately started complaining, "He fought with us without a care for anything and almost killed all of us right there on the spot!"

Lan WangJi's fingers, hidden beneath the snow-whitesleeves, twitched slightly, as if he wanted to clench them into fists.

However, he quickly loosened them.

The cultivator quickly added, "But he said already that he was going to the Nightless City to account for things with the Four Great Sects!"

After the QishanWen Sect was destroyed, the main palaces of Nightless City had become a magnificent, yet empty pile of ruins.

Before the tallest place in the entire Nightless City, the Palace of Sun and Flames, was a wide plaza. Three tall flags stood skyward at the front of the plaza, but now, two of them had been broken.

The last one left was a flag of the sun and flames motif, although tattered and painted with blood.

That night, square arrays of sects both large and small filled the entire plaza. The crest-embroidered flag of every sect fluttered in the night wind. In front of the broken flag poles was a temporary altar. Standing before their array, each sect leader was presented with a cup of wine by Jin GuangYao. After they received the wine, the sect leaders raised their cups high up and poured them onto the ground.

After the wine had seeped into the dirt, Jin GuangShan stated, "No matter the sect, no matter the surname—this cup of wine is to the soldiers who have died."

Nie MingJue, "May their souls live on."

Lan XiChen, "Rest in peace."

Jiang Cheng, however, still had on a darkened expression. He didn't say anything even after he poured the wine.

Afterward, Jin GuangYao walked out from the LanlingJin Sect's array and presented with both hands a square box made of black iron. Jin GuangShan took the box with one hand and raised it high in the air, shouting, "Here lies the ashes of the Wen Sect's remnants!"

After he spoke, he sent forth his spiritual energy and shattered the box with his bare hand. The iron box broke into pieces, and white dust drifted alongside the cold wind.

A scatter of the ashes!

A series of cheers exploded through the crowd. Jin GuangShan raised his hands, signaling for the people to be quiet and listen to him talk. When the cheers slowly died down, he continued, raising his voice, "Tonight, the ones whose ashes had been scattered were the two leaders of the Wen Sect's remnants. And tomorrow! It will be the rest of the Wen-dogs and—the YiLing Patriarch, Wei Ying!"

Suddenly, a low laugh interrupted his grand speech. The laugh was too untimely, sounding both stark and jarring. In unison, the crowd turned to look at where the sound came from.

The Palace of Sun and Flames was a rather magnificent palace. A total of twelve ridges made up its roof, and at the end of each ridge were eight heavenly beasts. Yet, right now, the people realized that on one of those ridges, there were nine. The laugh from before came from over there!

The extra beast shifted slightly. The next moment, a boot and a corner of black clothes dangled down from the roof, swaying softly.

Everyone placed their hand onto their sword hilt. JiangCheng's pupils shrunk. Blue veins lined the back of his hand.

Jin GuangShan was overcome with both shock and hatred, "Wei Ying! How dare you show yourself here!"

The person opened their mouth to speak. What came out was indeed Wei WuXian's voice, but he spoke in a strange tone, "Why should I dare not show myself here? Do you people here even add up to three thousand? Don't forget that back in the Sunshot Campaign, let alone three thousand, I've fought against five thousand on my own before. And by appearing here, haven't I granted your wish? No need for you to come all the way to my home tomorrow to scatter my ashes."

A few of the QingheNie Sect's disciples died in the hands of Wen Ning as well. Nie MingJue spoke coldly, "What arrogance."

Wei WuXian, "Haven't I always been arrogant? Sect Leader Jin, how does it feel, having slapped yourself in the face? Who was

the one that said he'd let the matter go if the Wen siblings went to Koi Tower and gave themselves up? And who was the one that just said he'd scatter my ashes and the ashes of the rest of the Wen Sect's remnants tomorrow?"

Jin GuangShan, "Let's consider things as they stand! At Qiongqi Path, you slaughtered over a hundred of the LanlingJin Sect's disciples—this is one thing. You made Wen Ning kill at Koi Tower—this is another..."

Wei WuXian, "Then let me ask you, Sect Leader Jin, at Qiongqi Path, who was the one being ambushed? And who was the one to kill? Who was the main schemer? And who was the one being schemed against? In the end, just who was the one that came to provoke me first?"

Hidden among such a large crowd, the disciples inside of the arrays all felt rather safe. Bravening up, they shouted, "Even if Jin ZiXun was the one who schemed to ambush you first, you shouldn't have been so heartless and kill so many lives!"

"Oh," Wei WuXian helped him analyze, "If he wanted to kill me, he didn't have to think about whether it was a fatal blow or not, and if I died, it'd be my own bad luck. If I wanted to protect myself, however, I had to think about this and that not to harm, unable to take even a single strand of hair away from him? In conclusion, you all could pull a siege on me, but I'm not allowed to fight back, am I right?"

Sect Leader Yao raised his voice, "Fight back? Those over a hundred people and the thirty on Koi

Tower were all innocent. If you were fighting back, why did you have to involve them?"

Wei WuXian, "The fifty cultivators on Burial Mound are also innocent, so why do you have to involve them?"

Someone else spat, "Just what great kindness has the Wen-dogs given you? To have you be on those scum's side like this."

"In my opinion, there isn't any great kindness at all. It's just that he thinks he's a hero fighting against the entire world. He thinks he's doing an act of justice, that he himself is quite an impressive person, risking everyone's condemnation!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian became silent.

The crowd below took his silence as withdrawal, "When it comes down to it, you were the first to place such a dark curse on Jin

ZiXun!"

Wei WuXian, "May I ask you, just what evidence do you have to prove that I was the one who placed the curse?"

The one who asked the question was at a loss for words. He spoke, after a moment, "Then do you have any evidence to prove that you weren't the one who placed the curse?"

Wei WuXian smiled, "Then let me ask you again—why couldn't it have been you? You don't have any evidence to prove that you weren't the one who placed the curse either, do you?"

The person was both shocked and enraged, "Me? How could I be the same as you? Don't you mix the black and the white! You're

the most suspicious. Do you think we don't know? You and Jin

ZiXun have held enmity toward each other ever since a year ago!"

Wei WuXian's voice dripped in ice, "Just who is the one mixing the black and the white? That's right. If I wanted to kill him, I would've done it a year ago. I didn't have to keep him until now. Or else, I'd forget such a person in no more than three days, much less a year."

Sect Leader Yao was shocked, "... Wei WuXian, Wei WuXian, today I've finally come to see. I've really never seen a villain as

unreasonable as you are... Even after you killed the people, you have to shame them with words. Don't you hold any sympathy, any guilt?"

The crowd flung curses at him, but Wei WuXian accepted all of them.

Anger was the only thing that could suppress the other feelings within his heart.

One of the cultivators who stood in the front rows of one of the arrays commented bitterly, "Wei Ying, you disappoint me so much. There used to be a time when I admired you and said that at least you were someone who founded your own sect. Now that I think about it, it's almost repulsive. From this moment on, I'll forever stand on the opposite side of you!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian first paused, but soon exploded with laughter, "Hahahaha..."

He laughed so hard that he almost couldn't breathe, "You admired me? You said you admired me, but why haven't I ever seen you when you admired me? And as soon as I'm loathed by everyone, you jump out and wave your little flag?"

Tears of laughter seeped from the corners of WeiWuXian's eyes, "Your admiration as a bit too cheap, isn't it? You said that you'll forever stand on the opposite side of me. Very well. Does the fact that you're standing on the opposite side of me affect me at all?

Both your admiration and your hatred are so, so insignificant. How could you be so shameless as to flaunt them in front of others?"

Before he could finish, he suddenly felt something at his throat. A dull ache came from his chest. He looked down to see a fletched arrow in the center of his chest. The head of the arrow was buried between two of his ribs.

He gazed toward the direction in which the arrow came from. The one who shot the arrow was a young cultivator with delicate

features. Standing before a small sect's array, he was still maintaining the pose, his bowstring still vibrating.

Wei WuXian could tell the arrow tip was originally aiming for his heart, his vital region. Yet, because the archer wasn't skilled, the force of the arrow tip dwindled by midair to have missed the heart and shot into the ribcage.

Everyone around the person who shot the arrow had eyes wide open, staring with shock and even fear at the disciple who had done such a thing. Wei WuXian looked up. Darkness veiled his face. He pulled out the arrow and tossed it back hard. With a wail, the young cultivator who snuck an attack at him was hit right in the chest with the arrow he tossed back!

A boy next to him threw himself on top of him, "Brother! Brother!"

The sect's array was immediately thrown into chaos. The sect leader pointed at Wei WuXian with one shaking finger, "You... You... You are so cruel!"

With his right hand, Wei WuXian unhurriedly pressed the wound at his chest, temporarily ceasing the blood flow. His voice was indifferent, "What does cruel mean? If he dared shoot the arrow at me when I was off guard, he should've known what would be facing him if he failed. They call me the cultivator of the crooked path, anyways, so you can't possibly count on me to be generous and not bother with him, can you?"

Jin GuangShan ordered, "Set up the battle arrays, set up the battle arrays! We won't let him leave here alive no matter what!"

With the order, the stalemate was finally broken. Carrying swords and arrows, many disciples rushed toward the ceiling of the palace.

They finally attacked first!

With a bitter smile, Wei WuXian took up Chenqing from beside his waist and placed it at his lips. With the flute's sharp howl, pale hands broke through the dirt of the Nightless City plaza, one after another!

Corpse after corpse toppled the white bricks laid on the ground, crawling out from the depths of the soil. Some of those who just mounted their swords and left the ground were immediately dragged back down by them. Wei WuXian stood atop the ridge of the Palace of Sun and Flames, eyes glowing a cold light amid the notes of the flute and the night sky. Looking down, the uniforms of the different sects seemed to be a boiling concoction of multicolored water, tossing and turning, parting at times and joining at others. Apart from the YunmengJiang Sect, all sects were jumbled. Each sect leader hurried to protect their own disciples, having no spare time to attack Wei WuXian.

Suddenly, the limpid notes of a zither interrupted Chenqing.

Wei WuXian put down Chenqing and turned around to see a person sitting on another of the ridges, guqin laid across his lap. His snow-white robes seemed to burn the eye amid the dark of the night.

Wei WuXian spoke in a cold voice, "Lan Zhan." After he greeted him, he again placed his flute to his lips, "You should've known since long ago—Sound of Lucidity is useless to me!"

Lan WangJi flipped the guqin onto his back. Instead, he pulled out Bichen and attacked straight at Chenqing, as if he wanted to sever the flute playing such wrongful notes.

Wei WuXian spun around to dodge the attack and laughed, "Fine, fine. I knew since the start that we'd have to fight a real fightlike

this one sooner or later. You've always found me disagreeable no matter what. Come on!"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi's movements paused, "Wei Ying!"

Although he shouted the words, any sane person would be able

to tell that Lan WangJi's voice was clearly shaking. However, right now, Wei WuXian had already lost his judgement. He was already half-mad, half-unconscious. All evil was being augmented by him. He felt that everyone loathed him and he loathed everyone as well. He wouldn't be scared no matter who came at him. It wouldn't matter no matter who came at him. It was all the same anyway.

Suddenly, amid the battle noises, Wei WuXian heard a faint voice. The voice was shouting, "A-Xian!"

Like a bucket of ice-cold water, the voice doused the vile flames raging within his heart.

Jiang YanLi?

When did she come to the pledge conference?!

Wei WuXian was immediately half dead with fright. He couldn't care about the fight with Lan WangJi any longer and put down Chenqing, "Shijie?!"

Jiang Cheng heard the voice as well. In an instant, his face had turned white, "Sis? Sis! Where are you? Where are you?"

Wei WuXian jumped down the ridge of the palace, shouting with just as much force as Jiang Cheng, "Shijie? Shijie? Where are you? I can't see you!"

He couldn't care less about the swords and arrows that came at him. With his bare hands, he fought his way through the frenzied crowd as he walked as fast as possible. Suddenly, he saw Jiang YanLi's white figure sunken within the people WuXian went forth and tried to push away those who blocked his path, but it was difficult for him to move. There was still a large distance between them, formed by countless people. At the moment, it was impossible for Wei WuXian to rush over, and it was the same for Jiang Cheng. At this point, both of the two realized that behind Jiang YanLi's back, a fierce corpse had stood shakily up.

The corpse's body was already half-rotten. It dragged a rusting sword in his hand as it slowly approached Jiang YanLi.

Watching the scene of terror unfold, Wei WuXian's voice was harsh, "Get lost! Get lost right now! Don't touch her!"

Jiang Cheng roared as well, "Make it go away!"

He tossed out Sandu. Purple light flew toward the corpse, but in midway, the glare was obstructed by other cultivators' swords, deviating from its original direction. The more Wei WuXian panicked, the less control he had. The corpse ignored his command and instead lifted the sword in its hand, slashing it down at Jiang YanLi!

Wei WuXian had lost it, dashing as he shouted, "Stop it, stop it, right now, stop it!"

Everyone was busy with dealing with the corpses around them. Nobody had the spare time to see if another's life was in danger. The sword in the corpse's hand swung down and slashed open Jiang YanLi's back!

Jiang YanLi fell to the ground.

Standing behind her back, the corpse raised its sword again. Suddenly, a sword glare sliced off half of its body!

Lan WangJi landed amid the plaza, catching Bichen which he summoned back. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng could finally hurry over. They couldn't even manage to thank Lan WangJi. Jiang Cheng first picked up Jiang YanLi, while Lan WangJi stopped Wei WuXian.

Seizing his collar, he dragged Wei WuXian in front of him, his voice hard, "Wei Ying! Stop the corpses!"

At the moment, Wei WuXian couldn't care about anything else. Reflected in his eyes wasn't Lan WangJi's face, much less the veins of blood within Lan WangJi's eyes or the redness that surrounded his eyes. He only wanted to see if Jiang YanLi was fine. With red eyes, he pushed him away and rushed to the ground. With the push, Lan WangJi staggered a bit, and gazed at him after he steadied himself. Before he could do anything else, he suddenly heard another scream of help in the distance. He suppressed whatever was in his eyes and went to provide assistance.

Jiang YanLi's back was dyed in blood. Her eyes were closed, but fortunately she was still breathing. Trembling, Jiang Cheng took back the hand that he used to feel for her pulse, letting out a breath of relief. He threw a sudden punch toward Wei WuXian's face, shouting, "What happened?! Didn't you say you could control it?! Didn't you say it'd be fine?!"

Wei WuXian sat collapsed on the ground, his face blank, "... I don't know either." In despair, he continued, "... I can't control it, I just can't control it..."

Suddenly, Jiang YanLi moved. Holding her tightly, Jiang Cheng hurried, however incoherent,

"Sister! It's fine! It's fine, how are you feeling? It's not that bad, just a single gash, not that bad. I'll take you down right now..."

As he spoke, he was about to pick up Jiang YanLi when she spoke up, "... A-Xian."

Wei WuXian felt shivers go down his spine, "Shijie, I... I'm here."

Slowly, Jiang YanLi opened her dark eyes. Wei WuXian felt fear rumble within him.

Jiang YanLi managed, "... A-Xian. Before... why did you run away so fast... I didn't even get the chance to look at you, or say something to you..."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian's heart beat fast.

He still didn't dare look at Jiang YanLi's face. Right then, the face was the same as Jin ZiXuan's back then, covered in dust and blood. He was even more scared to hear the words she was about to say.

Jiang YanLi, "I'm ... I'm here to tell you..." To tell him what?

That it's fine?

That I don't hate you? That everything is fine?

That I don't blame you for have killed Jin ZiXuan?

It was impossible.

But she couldn't say anything that was the opposite either. And so, she didn't know what else she could say to Wei WuXian, under such circumstances. It was just that she felt like she had to see this brother of hers once more.

Jiang YanLi sighed, "A-Xian, you... you should stop first. Don't, don't..."

Wei WuXian hurried, "Yes, I'll stop."

He took up Chenqing, placed it by his lips, and began to play. He only managed to steady his mind with great effort. This time, the corpses finally stopped ignoring his commands. One after another, strange gurgles echoed in their throats as if they were complaining. Slowly, they bent down.

Lan WangJi paused slightly, looking over from afar. Immediately after, he continued to attack, helping those who were still in the fight, whether they be from his own sect or not.

Suddenly, Jiang YanLi's eyes opened wide. Her hands conjured up an explosive current of strength from nowhere and pushed Wei WuXian hard!

Wei WuXian was pushed onto the ground again by the force. The next time he looked up, he saw the gleaming blade of a sword pierce through her throat.

The boy holding the sword was the young cultivator who cried over the disciple who had shot the arrow. He was still crying, eyes covered in tears, "You thief! This is for my brother!"

Sitting on the dirty ground, Wei WuXian stared with disbelief at Jiang YanLi, whose head had already dipped, blood trickling ceaselessly from her neck.

He was still waiting for her to speak, to give him his final judgement.

Jiang Cheng was at a loss as well, arms still wrapped around his sister's body. He hadn't completely realized what happened yet.

A moment later, finally, Wei WuXian let out a bitter scream. Lan WangJi finished his attack before he spun around.

The boy finally realized that he killed the wrong person. He pulled out the sword, along with a series of bloody spurts. With fright, he staggered back, mumbling, "... I-It wasn't me, it wasn't... I was going to kill Wei WuXian, I was going to avenge my brother... She was the one who threw herself over on her own!"

Wei WuXian shot toward him and clenched his neck. Sect Leader Yao waved his sword, "Demon, let him go!"

Lan WangJi couldn't care about appearance or mannerisms any longer.

One after another, he pushed those who blocked his path to the side, sprinting toward Wei WuXian. But before he was even halfway there, under everyone's eyes, Wei WuXian snapped the boy's neck with his bare hands.

A white-haired sect leader raged, “You! Back then... you caused the deaths of Jiang FengMian and his wife, and now you caused the death of your shijie. You suffered from your own actions, and yet you dared vent your anger on another! Instead of turning around, you took yet another life. Wei WuXian, your crimes—shall never be forgiven!”

Yet, no matter the criticism, the blame, Wei WuXian could no longer hear any of them. As if governed by another soul, he reached out and took two objects from within his sleeves. Before everyone’s eyes, he put them together. One half on top and the other below, the two objects snapped into one, letting out a resonating clang.

Wei WuXian placed it on his palm and raised it high into the air. It was the Stygian Tiger Seal!

## Chapter 79: Loyalty—Part One

The bloodbath of Nightless City, legendarily, was a bloody battle in which the YiLing Patriarch, Wei WuXian, slaughtered over three thousand people during the night of the pledge conference on his own.

Some said that it was five thousand as well. No matter three or five, one thing was for sure—in that night, the ruins of Nightless City became a gory hell in Wei WuXian's hands.

And the murderer, even under everyone's attacks, managed to return to Burial Mound unscathed. Nobody knew how exactly he did it.

Due to this battle, the cultivation world was quite badly wounded. And since this was the case, after nearly three months of conserving energy and scheming plans, the Four Great Sects were finally able to successfully pull off a siege on the demon's den, Burial Mound, returning the word „massacre” to the Wen Sect's remnants and the maddened YiLing Patriarch.

Wei WuXian looked at the cultivators before the Demon- Slaughtering Cave. Their expressions were the absolute same as those of the cultivators from the night of the pledge conference, pouring their wine on the ground as they took the pledge to

scatter the ashes of the Wen Sect's remnants and him. Some were the survivors of that night, others were the descendants of those cultivators, but even more were „persons of justice” who held the same beliefs as them.

Yi WeiChun, the middle-aged cultivator who proclaimed to have had his legs cut off by him and had to wear wooden prosthetics from then on, spoke up again, “The debts of blood you owe three thousand people will never be repaid, not even if you die a million times!”

Wei WuXian interrupted him, “Three thousand people? There were indeed three thousand cultivators present that night at Nightless City, but so too were the leaders the sects and many of their elites. With all of them present, could I have really killed all of the three thousand people? Are you thinking too highly of me, or are you looking down on them?”

He was only stating a simple fact calmly, but the cultivator felt as if he was scorned, fuming, “What do you think we're talking about here? How could there be bargaining to debts of blood?”

WeiWuXian, “It's not that I want to bargain about such a thing, but that I don't want my charges to be doubled just becauseof some words from another. I won't shoulder what I didn't do.”

Someone spoke, “What you didn't do? What is there that you didn't do?”

Wei WuXian, “For example, I'm not the one who cut ChiFeng-Zun apart. I'm not the one who forced Madam Jin to take her own life at Koi Tower. I'm not the one who controls all of those corpses you ran into when you rushed up the mountain either.”

Su She smiled, “Patriarch YiLing, I've always heard that you're arrogant, yet now you're being so humble. If not you, I really can't think of anyone in this world who can control so many fierce corpses, putting up such a good fight with us.”

Wei WuXian, “You really can't think of anyone? Anyone can do it if they have the Tiger Seal.”

Su She, “Isn't the Tiger Seal one of your weapons?”

Wei WuXian, “Now it's time to ask just whom it is that treasures it so much. It's like Wen Ning. Back then, some certain sects or so were scared to death of the Ghost General. They said they'd kill him on the surface, but behind their backs they hid him for over ten years. How strange. Who was the one that said his ashes had been scattered back then?”

In unison, everyone looked across at the LanlingJin Sect's disciples who were present. After all, the LanlingJin Sect's leader was the one who held complete responsibility over the matter, proclaiming with solemnity that the two leaders of the Wen Sect's remnants had been burned, and even scattering the ashes in Nightless City.

Su She immediately replied, “You really don't have to makeup stories.”

Suddenly, strange rustlings and rumbles sounded amid the forests again.

Lan QiShen, "Be careful, everyone! The second wave of corpses is here!"

Hearing this, half of the group went forth to deal with it, while the other half still pointed the tips of their swords alarmingly at the „mob" in front of the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

Wei WuXian, "I said, already, that these corpses aren't under my control. If you have the time to look at me, perhaps you should look at them instead."

There were quite a few famed cultivator present, as well as some sect leaders and seniors. To deal with a group of fierce corpses was nothing difficult. With the sounds of the guqin and the sword glares flying everywhere, nobody had the spare time to care about what went on here.

With a wave of his whip, Jiang Cheng slashed three corpses into pieces before he turned around to Jin Ling, "Jin Ling! Do you want your legs or not?!"

What he meant was that he'd break Jin Ling's legs if he still refused to come back. However, such a threat was something

that Jin Ling had heard over and over again. He'd never done it for real. And thus, he glanced at Jiang Cheng, but still didn't move. Jiang Cheng cursed, retrieving Zidian with a twist of his wrist, as though to wrap it around Jin Ling and drag him back by force. Yet, the purple light glowing on Zidian's body suddenly dimmed. A moment later, it went out.

Immediately, the long whip became a silver ring and wrapped itself around his ring finger. Jiang Cheng paused in astonishment. He'd never been in a situation where Zidian morphed back on its own. He was still staring at his palm when two drops of blood splattered on the center of it.

Jiang Cheng lifted his hand and wiped to see a handful of red. Jin Ling exclaimed, "Uncle!"

A few shouts of surprise came from within the crowd battling with the corpses as well. Over there, most of the sword glares had dimmed, and two scarlet streaks of blood hung on over half of the people's faces. Nosebleeds. For some, blood trickled from both their noses and their mouths!

One of the sword cultivators exclaimed, "What's happening?!" "My spiritual powers are gone!"

"Shixiong, come help for a bit! Something happened over here!"

Bichen was unsheathed, killing the corpse that chased after the cultivator shouting for help. However, the distressed calls grew in number, rising and falling. The crowd gathered slowly as well, retreating in the direction of the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

Right now, the cultivators who were prepared to have a grand battle up at Burial Mound had suddenly lost their spiritual powers. Not only had the sword glares disappeared and the talismans failed, even the melodies of the GusuLan Sect's and the MolingSu Sect's disciples had become ordinary sounds, losing the exorcising abilities.

The situation was reversed!

Lan WangJi took off the guqin from his back. The vibration of the strings echoed skyward. However, no matter how adept he was at Sound of Vanquish, he was nonetheless alone. Wen Ning leaped out of the Cave and helped him chase the corpses away, at the same time having to endure in silence the kicks and punches coming from these cultivators. Fortunately, he was unable to feel pain, and thus wasn't affected.

Amid the pandemonium, Lan SiZhui suddenly rushed out and shouted, "Everyone, come here, come inside the Demon-Slaughtering Cave. There is a large array on the ground of the cave. It is missing some parts, but it should work if it is mended. It should be able to manage for a while!"

A few of the cultivators who had gone mad with killing wanted to go in as soon as they heard it. Su She, however, shouted in a louder voice, "Nobody go in! It must be a trap! There must be even greater dangers lying inside for us!"

Hearing his shouts, the people suddenly realized, hesitating as to whether or not to go. With a wave of his hand, Wei WuXian let down a rain of talismans, "Dying outside is dying, dying inside is dying too. You're dying anyways, and you can at least put it off a bit if you come inside. Why are you hurrying all these people to die sooner?"

Although his words made quite a lot of sense, because he was the one saying them, the people

were even more scared to go in. Still hesitating, they continued their hard fight with the fierce corpses. Others were able to manage for a while with their spiritual powers stripped away, but Nie HuaiSang couldn't.

Everyone knew that he was both timid and untalented. He wasn't ambitious either, and didn't work hard as a cultivator. He was caught off-guard by the sudden change of events and didn't receive any wounds only from his personal guards' protection.

Seeing that the corpses grew larger and larger in number with no end in sight, he hurried, "Are you all going to go in or not? If you don't, I'll go in first. Excuse my absence. Quick, quick, quick—everyone, come in!"

Before he even finished speaking, Nie HuaiSang led the QingheNie Sect's disciples into the Demon-Slaughtering Cave with quick decisiveness. He really was as anxious as a dog that had lost its owner, as scared as a fish that had escaped the net. Others were immediately shocked speechless by his straightforwardness.

At this point, OuYang ZiZhen shouted as well, "Dad, stop killing them! Trust me, come in! We just went in the cave some time ago. There aren't any traps inside!"

A few of the other boys shouted as well, "Yeah, there really is a big array on the ground!"

Jin Ling, "Uncle, come in!"

Jiang Cheng lunged with Sandu, which had lost its glare as well, threatening, "You can shut up!"

After his shout, however, blood dripped down from his mouth and nose again. Jin Ling dashed down the stairs and began to drag him toward the Cave.

Right now, having lost his spiritual powers and spent half the day fighting, Jiang Cheng was exhausted, and somehow successfully pulled into the cave by Jin Ling. The Jiang Sect's cultivators hurried to follow their leader too.

At the same time, Nie HuaiSang's beaming voice echoed from within the empty cave, "Everyone, come in! It's quite big inside! Could a senior come in and help mend the array on the ground? I can't! I don't know how to mend it!"

Hearing his last sentence, three large words appeared in everyone's mind, "Good-for-nothing!"

Lan WangJi's fingers didn't leave the strings of his guqin as he looked up, "Uncle!"

In the first place, Lan QiRen didn't want to go inside the Cave. He'd rather battle here outside until his last moment. Yet, right now, he wasn't alone. He was responsible for many Lan Sect cultivators and the Jin Sect cultivators who'd been left to his command. The main force of the battle wasn't him, either. He didn't want to ignore the lives of these disciples, willing to catch any hope that there was.

He didn't look at Lan WangJi, raising his sword and ordering, "Proceed with caution!"

Until now, the LanlingJin Sect, the GusuLan Sect, the QingheNie Sect, and the YunmengJiang Sect had all gone inside already.

With them in the lead, the rest of the people immediately decided not to continue the struggle either. If there really was some beast

or demon within the cave, there were four tall pillars blocking it for them. They hastened inside as well. In the end, the MolingSu Sect's people were the only ones who hadn't moved.

Wei WuXian, "Huh? Sect Leader Su, aren't you going in? Very well, then you can stay outside. But everyone's out of spiritual powers, right? If you stay outside, won't you be seeking your own death? Such commendable courage."

Su She gave Wei WuXian a sideway glance. Although his darkened face twitched uncontrollably, he led his disciples inside as well.

The Demon-Slaughtering Cave successfully held all of the over a thousand people. The breaths and whispers of these people echoed endlessly within the main area of the cave. Lan QiRen approached Nie HuaiSang as soon as he entered and went to examine the smeared parts of the array on the ground under his eager, expectant gaze. The array was indeed quite old. At once, he cut his palm open and mended the array with his blood. Wen Ning guarded the stairs, throwing away the corpses that were the nearest. As soon as the array was mended, the corpses seemed as

though they were blocked out by an invisible barrier, temporarily unable to come in.

Wei WuXian waited until Lan WangJi put his guqin away before walking into the Cave with him. As the cultivators who had just let out sighs of relief saw the two walk down the stairs, one in black and the other in white, they became worried once more.

Nobody expected that this would be the case. They were supposed to be here to join in a siege on the YiLing Patriarch, yet now it seemed like they were the ones facing a siege. They even had to hide in the YiLing Patriarch's cave to live on just a bit longer. Lan QiRen finished mending the array on the ground and

stood before the crowd, blocking the two's path. He held his chin high, almost wanting to block them with his arms, as if he'd fight Wei WuXian until the end of his life if he dared make a move. Lan WangJi, "... Uncle."

The sense of disappointment hadn't left Lan QiRen's heart yet. As of the moment, he still didn't want to look at the disciple whom he was so proud of, having taught him throughout all those years. He only looked at Wei WuXian, speaking coldly, "Just what do you intend on doing?"

Wei WuXian sat down on the stairs, "Nothing. But since you're here already, why not have a chat..."

Yi WeiChun shouted, "There's nothing for us to chat about with you!"

Wei WuXian, "How could there be nothing to chat about? I'm not buying it—don't you want to know how you've suddenly lost your spiritual powers? From the bottom of my heart, I'm not so powerful as to have done something to all of you without anyone noticing."

Just as Yi WeiChun spat, he heard Nie HuaiSang respond, "Yeah, I think he makes a lot of sense."

Everyone glared at him.

Wei WuXian continued, "I'm guessing that before you came here for the siege, you didn't have the time to gather up and have a meal together, so you shouldn't be under any sort of poison."

Lan SiZhui, "It is definitely not poison. I have never heard of a poison that could dissolve one's spiritual powers so suddenly. Or

else, it would definitely be sought after by many cultivators at high prices, and the rumors would be an uproar."

Many medics were among the cultivators who came. They grabbed a few people and felt for their pulses. The people asked, "How is it? How is it? Is the disappearance of our spiritual powers temporary or permanent?!"

The question immediately attracted the attention of many people. They didn't have the spare time to take precautions against Wei WuXian any longer. After all, if their spiritual powers had disappeared forever, eternally, they'd be more-or-less useless.

That'd definitely be a more agonizing end than dying here.

The medics had a short discussion before they spoke, "Everyone, your golden cores are unharmed. There's no need to worry! It should be temporary."

Hearing that it was temporary, Jiang Cheng finally let out a secret sigh of relief. He took over the handkerchief that Jin Ling was passing to him and wiped off the blood on his face. He began, "Temporary? How long is temporary? When should we recover?"

One of the medics, "... I'm afraid... at least four hours." Jiang Cheng's face was terrifyingly dark, "Four hours?!"

Everyone looked up, glancing at the crowd of fierce corpses surrounding the Cave so tightly that not even a drop of water could pass through. The number wasn't any less than the living people who came today. Every one of them stared straight at the inside of the Cave, where human heads bobbed up and down and yang energy churned. They weren't even willing to step half a foot away, squirming back and forth, shoulder to shoulder outside, as

though they'd come in at any moment. The odor of rotting flesh was more than overwhelming.

Their spiritual powers would only be able to recover in at least four hours? They didn't even

know if the fragmented array on the ground, unused for years and temporarily patched up, could last for four hours!

Besides, the YiLing Patriarch was in the same space as they were right now. Although they didn't know why he hadn't made a move yet, maybe he was going to annihilate them like a cat catching mice, after he was done scaring them and toying with them.

Despite this, nobody knew if Wei WuXian would suddenly flip out.

Their gazes landed on Wei WuXian once again. Wei WuXian, "I said already that there's no need for you to look at me. Inside of this cave, there are only two groups of people whose spiritual powers remain. HanGuang-Jun and I form one group; the children who've been brought up the mountain a few days ago form the

other. It's not inaccurate if I described the rest of the people as absolutely powerless, is it? If I wanted to do anything to you, would the children be able to stop me?"

Su She snorted, "Stop with the nonsense. If you want to kill us, so be it. Anyone who makes a single noise doesn't deserve to be called hero. Don't expect that anyone would beg for your pity either."

With his words, many of the people began to hesitate. Among the thousand people, only around twenty were here for vengeance.

The rest only participated thoughtlessly when they heard that there'd be a siege. One could say that they were only bystanders of justice, only here because of their own sense of morality.

These only wanted to go along the flow of the main groups in the lead. To be able to kill a few of Wei WuXian's corpse-dogs would

be quite a prestigious act. But if they were really asked to pay the price, not many people would want to join.

Wei WuXian glanced at him, "I'm sorry, but I have to ask—who are you?"

He called Su She's name back when they were outside the cave, yet now he was asking again. It was clearly on purpose. The veins popped slightly from Su She's forehead. He was about to speak when Lan JingYi chirped in, his voice loud, "And so? It is not poison, and so?"

Wei WuXian immediately forgot about Su She, "And so, people wouldn't lose their spiritual powers with no reason, after all. There had to be a method and a particular moment. Before you went up Burial Mound or on your way here, there must've been either something that all of you made contact with or something that all of you did. The children were brought here a few days back, so the timing is off, while HanGuang-Jun and I didn't use the same mountain path as you did, so the location is off. Would anyone like to think about what you all did?"

Amid the deafening silence, someone responded helplessly, "What we all did? When we went up Burial Mound, we all drank water, didn't we? I can't remember, I don't know."

Who would respond to Wei WuXian at such an untimely manner, do whatever he said and think whatever said? The only one would be that „head-shaker”, Nie HuaiSang. Somebody couldn't help but comment, "Nobody drank anything on our way up the mountain!"

Who'd dare drink the water on a mountain of corpses?!"

Nie HuaiSang took another guess, "Then have we all inhaled the fog in the mountains?"

If there really was anything strange about the fog, it'd be a plausible explanation. Somebody immediately agreed, "That's possible!"

Yet, Jin Ling immediately replied, "It's impossible. Fog is thicker at the top of mountains, but we've already been tied up at the top for two entire days. Our spiritual powers are still here, aren't they?"

Su She seemed as if he really couldn't take it any longer, "Enough, isn't it? So, you've really started to talk with him. Is it fun, getting so carried away by him? He..."

Suddenly, his expression changed drastically. His words stopped mid-sentence. Wei WuXian, "Go on. Why don't you continue?"

All of the MolingSu Sect's disciples stood up, "SectLeader!" "Sect Leader, what's wrong?!"

Su She threw off the disciple who came to help him. He raised his arm. First, he pointed at Wei WuXian, and then straight at Lan WangJi. The disciple closest to him fumed, “Wei WuXian, what hex did you perform this time?!” Lan SiZhui, “It is not a hex! It is... It is...”

Lan WangJi, who sat all prim and proper on the side, lay the fingers of his right hand over the guqin, halting the vibrations of the seven strings. The disciples chattering with excitement all suddenly turned into ducks whose necks had been gripped, their noises coming to an abrupt stop.

All of the Lan Sect’s people who were present commented in silence—this was the silencing spell of the GusuLan Sect...

## Chapter 80: Loyalty—Part Two

When the cave that was vibrating with noise had finally calmed down, Lan WangJi turned to Wei WuXian, “You can continue.”

Flames of rage surged within Su She’s eyes, but his lips were sealed tightly shut. His throat felt dry as well. Compared to the anxiousness of being unable to open his mouth and attack Wei WuXian, what bothered him more was the shame of having been subdued by Lan WangJi. He repeatedly scratched his throat with his finger, trying to lift the spell, but it was to no use. He could only look across at Lan QiRen. However, with a cold expression on his face, Lan QiRen didn’t move at all. Originally, Lan QiRen was entirely able to lift the spell, and if a Lan Sect senior was the one who lifted the spell, out of respect, Lan WangJi definitely wouldn’t put the spell on him again. Unfortunately, many conflicts had passed between the MolingSu Sect and the GusuLan Sect, and

thus, as of the moment Lan QiRen didn’t seem like he was going to lift the spell for him at all.

The people finally realized what was going on. It seemed that whenever someone tried to argue with Wei WuXian, Lan WangJi would seal their lips. The crowd became as quiet as winter cicadas. That being said, at such times, there would always be warriors unscared of death who’d speak up, mocking, “Wei WuXian, you really are the YiLing Patriarch, aren’t you? How assertive of you. So, you’re trying to stop people from saying anything?”

Wei WuXian, “How strange.”

Lan SiZhui, “Senior Wei, what is strange?”

Wei WuXian, “Sect Leader Su, he’s been acting strange ever since quite a while ago. Back when the corpses surrounded us, he encouraged those who lost their spiritual powers to not seek shelter and instead hurry to their deaths, and now he’s stopping me from asking him anything. On top of those, he’s been trying to irritate me, as if he’s scared that you’ll live a moment longer. What does this mean? Is this the way to be a good ally?”

Now that Wei WuXian mentioned it, many of the people began to grow suspicious—Sect Leader Su really did seem to be a bit too talkative today. But since nobody else said anything, they didn’t say anything either, and everyone chose silence out of caution.

The other portion of the people began to think about the things that they did before and when they came up the mountain. Wei WuXian looked at the disciples of the MolingSu Sect, standing quite far from the GusuLan Sect’s disciples. Even more, the latter wasn’t even willing to spare the former a single glance. The more he looked, the odder he found it to be.

He whispered to Lan WangJi, “HanGuang-Jun, let me ask you— both the GusuLan Sect and the MolingSu Sect cultivate through music, and both Gusu and Moling are in the Jiangnan region, not far away from each other. Generally speaking, shouldn’t you be friendly with each other? Why do I feel like the sects don’t have a good relationship?”

Lan SiZhui and Lan JingYi wriggled their way over. As Lan JingYi heard this, he raised his voice, “Of course they do not have a good relationship!”

Lan WangJi, “The MolingSu Sect was a branch of the GusuLan Sect.”

Wei WuXian, “What?”

Lan SiZhui covered Lan JingYi’s mouth, whispering, “Senior Wei, you might not know this. The MolingSu Sect was the sect that a foreign disciple built after he broke away from the GusuLan Sect. But because of where he studied, his sect’s techniques tend to be similar to those of the GusuLan Sect’s. They cultivate through music as well. Even the sect leader Su She’s first-class spiritual weapon is a seven-stringed guqin like HanGuang-Jun’s.”

Quite speechless, Wei WuXian turned around to look at the dark-faced Su She. Lan JingYi struggled his way out of Lan SiZhui and grumbled, “Not only that, it gets even more peculiar! Sect Leader Su... Fine, I know I have to be quiet! Sect Leader Su not only learns everything, but he is also quite annoyed by others saying that he is imitating our HanGuang-Jun—he gets angry

at once.

How could such a person exist in this world?!”

Hearing him become louder and louder, Lan SiZhui could only interrupt, “JingYi!”

Yet, Su She had already heard everything with clarity. With a darkening face and two fires as his eyes, he spat out a mouthful of blood and finally lifted the Silence spell by force. But as soon as he opened his mouth, his voice was so rasp that it sounded as if he was ten years older, “The GusuLan Sect, famed for righteousness, full of talents, top of the entire world of cultivation! So, this is how you teach your disciples!”

Sect Leader OuYang, “Sect Leader Su, in front of such a great enemy, let’s not fall out with those who are our own.”

Su She laughed coldly, “Those who are our own? Look at the GusuLan Sect. Every one of them has hit it off with Wei WuXian. Do they really count as our own?”

With this, the GusuLan Sect was immediately displeased. Lan QiRen glanced at him, but didn’t say anything. One of the older, higher-level guest cultivators seemed to have been angered, “Su MinShan, even if you are not of the GusuLan Sect anymore, you should still watch your words!”

A disciple immediately stepped out from the MolingSu Sect, “Our sect leader has long since broken off from the GusuLan Sect.

What right do you have to talk to him this way?”

Lan JingYi had been filled with complaints about the MolingSu Sect since a long time ago, speaking loudly, “The fact that your sect leader can be in such a position right now was because of

the GusuLan Sect’s teachings back then anyways. So, we cannot say anything, even as he bites the hand that fed him?”

Within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave, the two groups of people began to glare at each other, mocking at each other. Over on the MolingSu Sect’s side, someone else shouted, “There are so many disciples in the GusuLan Sect; don’t tell me that any one of them can establish their own sect? That’s a bit too contemptuous, isn’t it?”

Immediately, someone from the GusuLan Sect’s side returned the attack, “Who is the one being contemptuous here? I wonder which sect played their exorcism melodies all wrong, and still does not realize it!”

As soon as this was spoken, Wei WuXian felt everything clear up! He spoke, “It’s not the food or the environment!”

Everyone paused in surprise. Wei WuXian continued, “You all forgot that after you came up the mountain, there was one other thing that you all did.”

Lan SiZhui, “What is it?”

Wei WuXian, “Killing the corpses.”

OuYang ZiZhen exclaimed, “Oh, maybe it’s the same as back in Yi City, where there was something like a poisonous powder in

the corpses’ mouths?! Dad, when you were killing those corpses, did strangely-colored powder come out of the corpses’ bodies?”

Sect Leader OuYang, “There wasn’t any powder, therewasn’t!”

OuYang ZiZhen refused to give up, “Then... Then what about liquids?”

Jiang Cheng’s voice was cold, “Enough. If strange powder or liquids were sent out the corpses’ bodies after they were killed, we wouldn’t be so weak as to not have noticed anything odd.”

OuYang ZiZhen, who thought that he uncovered the mystery, blushed and scratched his head. Sect Leader OuYang finally pulled his over-excited son down to sit properly. Wei WuXian, “It is indeed related to killing corpses. However, the problem isn’t the corpses, but the people who were killing the corpses.”

He turned to Lan QiRen, “Senior Lan, I’d like to ask you a question.”

Lan QiRen glanced at Lan WangJi, his voice indifferent, “If you had a question, why would you ask me instead of asking him?”

Lan QiRen was pedantic, but he wasn't oblivious. He realized that something was strange as well, which was why he listened for so long despite his temper. His face, though, was still quite dark. But Wei WuXian was familiar with his temper ever since he was young, and after that, he'd seen the tempers of countless more people. He had long since stopped caring. Thinking that this was the uncle who brought Lan WangJi up all on his own, he was even more certain that there was nothing to fret over.

Touching his chin, he grinned, "Well I was worried that you'd get mad if I asked him too many things in front of you, wasn't I? But since you've told me to ask him already, I'll go ahead and ask.

Lan Zhan?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "The MolingSu Sect was a sect that branched off from the GusuLan Sect, right?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "Although it branched off, the MolingSu Sect's techniques still used the GusuLan Sect's techniques „as reference", right?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "One of the GusuLan Sect's techniques, the Sound of Vanquish, has the effect of exorcising evil. Amongst them, the seven-stringed guqin was the most powerful, and so there is the greatest number of people who cultivate through the guqin. The

MolingSu Sect did the same, and the guqin is the most common in their sect as well, is that correct?"

Lan WangJi, "That is correct."

Wei WuXian, "Although the MolingSu Sect's leader left the GusuLan Sect with knowledge of its techniques when he founded his own sect, his own guqin skills weren't anything special, and the disciples he taught often make many mistakes too, right?"

Lan WangJi answered with honesty, "Yes."

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi went on back and forth, speaking as though nobody was around. More and more people realized that they weren't only mocking Su She, but rather taking something apart. Thus, they began to listen more carefully.

Next, Wei WuXian slowed down, "... And that means, even when a section of the battle melodies that the MolingSu Sect played when killing corpses on Burial Mound was wrong, the GusuLan Sect wouldn't find it unusual, and only think that they made a mistake because of their inferior techniques and remembered the sheet music wrong, not taking the time to notice whether it was an accidental mistake or a mistake on purpose. Is this the case?"

Hearing the last question, Su She's pupils shrunk. The hand he placed on the hilt of his sword was suddenly lined with veins. The blade of the sword was already half-an-inch unsheathed. On the other hand, Lan WangJi lifted his eyes at the same time. Both Wei WuXian and he saw the sense of understanding in each other's eyes.

He stated one word at a time, "This is the case."

Su She unsheathed his sword with a clang. Wei WuXian moved the blade of the sword to the side with two fingers and smiled, "What are you doing? Don't forget. You've lost all your spiritual powers. Would threatening me like this do anything?"

Sword raised in his hand, Su She could neither attack nor put it down. He clenched his teeth, "Aiming at me for so long—just what are you trying to imply?"

Wei WuXian, "Was I understating things so much that you thought I was implying? Then I'll be a bit clearer. Everyone here lost their spiritual powers because they did one thing in common. What was it? Killing the corpses. When killing the corpses, Sect Leader Su of the MolingSu Sect came up along with you all. He pretended to be using his guqin to fend off the corpses, but without anyone noticing, he had already changed a section of the battle songs to be another melody, one that'd cause people to lose their spiritual powers temporarily. You fought in the bloodbath, but while he fought with you on the surface, behind his back, he..."

Su She, "This is slander!"

Wei WuXian, "Many of the GusuLan Sect's guqin cultivators are here, right? Back when you were coming up the mountain, there were mistakes in the battle melodies that the MolingSu Sect played, weren't there?"

The GusuLan Sect's guqin cultivators had the greatest right to answer such a question. They answered in unison, "Yes, there were!"

Wei WuXian continued, "Sect Leader Su, you knew that many of the GusuLan Sect's people were filled with scorn toward you and

the MolingSu Sect, and so you used this scorn to your advantage. Dark songs can be used to harm others, but they have

requirements as to the spiritual powers of the person who plays them. If you were alone, of course you wouldn't be able to perform it to the degree that almost a thousand people lost their spiritual powers. And thus, you brought with you all of the guqin cultivators of the MolingSu Sect so that they could play with you!

Amongst the sects present here, only the GusuLan Sect would be able to notice what was wrong, but they held scorn towards you.

Even if they noticed that you played the battle songs wrong,

they'd only think you were so unskilled that you even taught your disciples wrong!"

Nie HuaiSang's mouth hung gaping, "Is there really such a dark song in the world that could make whoever heard it lose their spiritual powers?"

Wei WuXian, "Why not? The sounds of the guqin can fend off evil, so why can't they summon evil instead? There's a song collection from Dongying called Collection of Turmoil. The songs collected inside are all dark songs around the region of Dongying. There were even songs that could be used to kill someone, so why couldn't there be a song that makes someone temporarily lose their spiritual powers? Senior Lan QiRen is right here with us. Ask him—is there such a book inside of the Room of Forbidden Books in the GusuLan Sect's Library Pavilion?"

Collecting himself, Su She sneered, "Even if such a song exists, back when I was studying in Gusu, I wasn't at all able to go into the Room of Forbidden Books, and so I couldn't have seen it. Afterward, I haven't walked a single step inside the Cloud Recesses either, and I've never even heard of such a book! You, on the other hand, are so familiar with Collection of Turmoil, and you've been abnormally close with HanGuang-Jun too. Compared to me, you have a greater chance of gaining contact with this book, don't you?"

Wei WuXian laughed, "Who said that you have to go inside the Room of Forbidden Books? Wouldn't it be fine as long as your master can go in at will? The methods of tampering with the sheet music—he was probably also the one who taught you that, right?"

A person of power free to travel in and out of the Cloud Recesses at will. There was no need to say out loud whom Su She's master was. Everyone knew—it could only be LianFang-Zun!

Wei WuXian, "It was an idea of you two to capture the disciples of all the sects and attract so many people to Burial Mound. The mantis preys on the cicada, while the oriole on the mantis—he used his injuries as an excuse to avoid rousing suspicion and collaborated with you from the outside. One of you played a dark song to diminish the people's spiritual powers, while the other used the Tiger Seal to control the corpses on the mountain. In the end, thousands of people are annihilated at my place. Nobody would believe it if I said I wasn't the one who did it, right? You weren't afraid that you ran into me either. After all, Wei WuXian's infamous name is known by everyone. With hatred both new and old, the excited crowd wouldn't listen to my protests at all. Perhaps it'd even stir up my killing intent and I'd slaughter everyone, sparing you all the work."

Su She, "How laughable. LianFang-Zun is already the chief cultivator who leads the entire world of cultivation. It's not like he needs power or name. What benefit is there to him, making so many people come to their deaths? Not only did you slander me, you dare slander LianFang-Zun as well!"

Wei WuXian, "If you say that I'm slandering you with such conviction, then do you dare play the

battle song that the MolingSu Sect played to fend off the corpses on your way up the mountain, here in front of everyone?”

All of the GusuLan Sect’s guqin cultivators were here. If Su She played different from before, he’d be exposed at once!

Within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave, the crowd had been moving slowly away from the MolingSu Sect’s people, leaving quite a large area empty, isolating them in the middle. Wei WuXian took advantage of the opportunity, “No? Sure, that’s no problem. Why don’t you check out what this is?”

He took out two yellowed sheets of paper from within his lapels and waved it, allowing everyone barely to see that they were two pieces of sheet music, “Did you really think we returned with nothing in our hands during our trip to Koi Tower? Inside of the secret chamber behind the bronze mirror in the Palace of Fragrance, Jin GuangYao hid two torn-off pages from Collection of Turmoil. We found it already. As soon as I take it to Senior Lan QiRen to see if the melody that you just played was inside, the truth will come to light!”

Su She sneered, “You’re lying. How do I know that these aren’t sheet music you randomly made up to slander me?”

Wei WuXian, “I can’t possibly carry two pieces of sheet music with me at all times, ready to take them out on a moment’s notice, can I? Anyways, whether I’m lying or not, Senior Lan QiRen will know once he looks at them.”

Su She originally suspected that it was a bluff. However, seeing Wei WuXian’s sly smile and his assured tone along with Lan QiRen’s furrowed eyebrows after he took them over, he felt his chest tighten up, “Senior Lan, watch out!” As he spoke, he reached out to grab the two pages.

At this point in time, Bichen’s icy blue glare flew toward him. The sword at Su She’s waist unsheathed to block the attack. However, only after he blocked it did he realize—he was tricked!

Su She’s sword was called „Nanping”. Right now, striking against Bichen, its glare swirled brightly—he was clearly full of spiritual energy!

## Chapter 81: Loyalty—Part Three

At once, Wei WuXian folded the two pieces of paper and put them back into his lapels, exclaiming, “Am I seeing right? I can’t believe you still have your spiritual powers! Congrats, congrats. But I’d like to ask you—if you aren’t up to no good, why did you hide the fact that you didn’t lose your spiritual powers?”

Of course, the two pieces of paper weren’t torn pages

from Collection of Turmoil, but instead the strange melody that Jin GuangYao played, noted down by Lan WangJi back in the Room of Forbidden Books. At the time, Lan WangJi left one copy for Lan XiChen to compare and examine, while Wei WuXian put away the two copies of his and Lan WangJi’s, taking them with him. He happened to have been able to use it to trick Su She so that he grew suspicious and irritated. Along with him purposely mocking Su She beforehand, provoking him again and again, he became impatient as expected. In the end, without Wei WuXian having to say anything, Lan WangJi simply tossed out a surprise attack, and Su She exposed himself.

Everyone darted out of the way. In reality, it wasn’t necessary. When Lan WangJi attacked, it was the same as when Wei WuXian spoke, pressing and unsparing. Su She had to use all his abilities so as to not be defeated. He staggered all the way up to the stairs. Looking down, he happened to see the red array under his feet. Lan WangJi’s brows knit together.

Wei WuXian thought to himself, oh no, he’s going to destroy the array that was just mended!

As he thought, Su She bit down on his tongue, held blood in his mouth, and spat it toward the ground. The splatter of the blood covered the red, darkening lines. Lan WangJi could no longer care about the fight with him. Slicing his left hand on Bichen’s glare, he tried to repaint the array. Su She used the chance to take out a talisman and throw it onto the ground. Smoke and blue flames arose.

A transportation talisman!

The mist-faced person from the YueyangChang Sect’s cemetery was familiar with the GusuLan Sect’s sword techniques, while Su MinShan was a foreign disciple of the GusuLan Sect’s, in correspondence with this condition. The mist-faced person who had appeared so many times was none else but Su She!

Wei WuXian got down beside Lan WangJi, “How is it?”

Lan WangJi painted on the ground for a while with his bleeding finger, then shook his head. The new blood had already completely covered and ruined the original array. It was impossible to mend. Wei WuXian took his hand and wiped off the dirt and blood on it with his own sleeve, “Stop trying if it’s useless.”

The array was on the verge of being completely destroyed. The disciples from the MolingSu Sect had blank looks on their faces. It seemed that Su She neither told them that he was playing the wrong melodies nor any way to prevent their spiritual powers from being drained. This meant that in the original plan, the MolingSu Sect’s disciples, like the others, were supposed to die. They were scared that other people would want to seek revenge upon them due to the hatred, and huddled into one small group. Yet, everyone was already panicked within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave. Nobody had the spare energy for any revenge.

A few sect leaders clutched onto their sons, cautioning them, “When the corpses rush inside all at once, protect yourself and try to get out. Stay alive no matter what! You understand?!”

As Jin Ling heard this, he felt himself cringe, but somewhere deep down he hoped that his uncle would say something similar as well. He waited for a while, but nothing came from Jiang Cheng, so he couldn’t help but glare at him. He glared for too long, and Jiang Cheng finally turned to him.

He seemed a bit less gloomy, but he frowned, “What’s wrong with your eyes?”

“...” Jin Ling was quite annoyed, “Nothing!”

Wei WuXian tore off a part of his sleeve that was clean and treated the wound on Lan WangJi's hand. Suddenly, a figure dashed out from behind his back and came at him with his sword. Lan WangJi flicked the fingers of his right hand. With a jarring clash, he somehow managed to flick away the rash blade.

Wei WuXian turned to look, "Why is it you again?"

From the force of the flick, the person staggered a few steps back before he collapsed on the ground. It was Yi WeiChun. He held his sword with blood-red eyes, "Wei WuXian, those things you just said—I don't believe a single word in them!"

Wei WuXian, "Everything was exposed. Su She had already attacked and ran away. How come you still don't believe it?"

Yi WeiChun lunged again, "I don't believe it! I won't believe a single word you say!"

Hatred could blind a person's eyes, make him unable to admit anything in favor of his enemy.

At this point, many terrified shouts came from in front of them, "It's broken!"

"The array has broken!" "They're coming in!"

With bare hands, Wen Ning threw a row of tattered corpses flying away. Yet, no matter what, he was only one. Without the barrier formed by the array of blood, the Demon-Slaughtering Cave was finally unable to hold against the crashing waves of the corpses. Rancid roars immediately filled the empty cave!

Jin Ling had never seen so many fierce corpses before, much less at such a close distance. He could feel his scalp tingle, clutching the sword hilt of Suihua. Yet, suddenly, his fist was peeled open, and a cold object was stuffed inside. He looked down in surprise, "Uncle?"

Jiang Cheng propped himself up with Sandu, which had lost its spiritual energy. His figure wavered slightly, "Try losing Zidian and see what happens!"

Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and a few others charged with their swords, "General Ghost! We can come help you!"

Sect Leader OuYang could neither stop his son nor stand up, bellowing, "ZiZhen, come back!"

OuYang ZiZhen brandished his sword fiercely as he turned around, "Don't worry, Dad! I'll protect you!"

Yet, just as he turned around, a withered hand stretched toward his throat. Sect Leader OuYang was almost scared to death as he wailed, "ZiZhen!!!"

At that precise moment, a blade severed the hand. Lan QiRen grabbed OuYang ZiZhen and threw him back into the pile of people. He himself, leading a group of sword cultivators from the GusuLan Sect, charged into battle. He'd been resting for quite a while, so his stamina had recovered. Many people were astonished by the force of his sword. Lan SiZhui was wielding his blade swiftly when he heard a loud clang from behind him.

Somebody blocked an attack that came for his back.

Lan SiZhui exclaimed, "Young Master Jin, why are you here too?"

When Jin Ling saw that all of the people around his age had rushed over, he couldn't hold himself back either. When Jiang Cheng was unaware, he stuffed Zidian's ring back into his hand and sprinted toward the crowd, all the way up to the most dangerous area before the mouth of the cave. Jiang Cheng was about to chase after him when he managed to slice a few corpses, staggering. He felt that Sandu was no lighter than hundreds of pounds. Two female corpses threw themselves at him from both directions.

Jiang Cheng cursed. As he lifted his sword again, another pair of hands tore the two corpses into pieces, "Sect Leader..."

Jiang Cheng lost his temper as soon as he heard the voice. He kicked Wen Ning away and cursed, "Get the fuck away from me!" He immediately roared, "Jin Ling!!!"

Lan JingYi felt chills go down his spine, "I think you should go back! Your uncle is gonna eat someone."

Jin Ling ignored Jiang Cheng's roar, scarier than even the corpses before him, "You can go back!"

OuYang ZiZhen disappeared for a while after being caught by his father, but he rushed over nonetheless, “Wow, this is the first time I knew that Mr. Lan QiRen knows the sword and his swordsmanship is so good!”

Lan JingYi’s voice was as loud as always, “Of course, whodid you think was HanGuang-Jun and ZeWu-Jun’s teacher of swordsmanship before they reached sixteen?”

Sect Leader brandished his sword with all the courage he could muster, shouting to the rest of the people in the Cave who were still blank-faced, “What are you waiting for?! It’s death awaiting if you don’t kill them. Even these juniors are fighting—how come you’re still sitting around?”

Under the influence of these boys passionately slashing around, more and more people unsheathed their swords, joining in the fight with their almost nonexistent stamina and spiritual powers.

When Lan WangJi sliced the last corpse, that threw itself over, into two halves, mountains of corpses and rivers of blood had already formed within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

Everyone was clad in black, hardened blood, their chests filled with the pungent scent of blood. After the long and hard battle, many people had already collapsed on the ground, unable to get themselves up just like the corpses lying around. Only a few sect leaders and the boys full of stamina were still able to stand, leaning against their swords.

Lan JingYi’s pupils seemed dilated, his complexion pale, “I...I have never killed so many corpses before... I, alone, killed at least thirty, no, forty of them...”

OuYang ZiZhen, “Me... too...”

After this, as if the boys made an agreement beforehand, they fell toward the ground with a plop, never wanting to get up again.

Jiang Cheng forced himself to walk over to Jin Ling, grabbing him at once, “Did you get hurt?!”

Jin Ling’s breaths even smelled like rust, “I didn’t. I...”

Jiang Cheng immediately slapped him onto the ground, scolding, “You didn’t?! Then I’ll make you get hurt and teach you the lesson! You damn brat turning a deaf ear to my words?!”

However, after his slap, he couldn’t stand up any longer either. He sat down, catching his breath as his eyes turned to the two sitting at the side of the Demon-Slaughtering Cave closest to the outside.

Both Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi were a mess. Wei WuXian wore black, so he didn’t look as terrible, but Lan WangJi’s white robes had already been dyed into different shades of black and red, making them almost hideous. On his entire body, only his forehead ribbon could be considered clean, given how meaningful it was. Bichen was gripped in his hand, still steadily maintaining its flow of spiritual energy.

It was the first time that anyone had seen HanGuang-Jun with such an untidy look, but nobody could care less about someone other than themselves. One of the people spoke, “Is it... over...?”

Hearing this voice, the crowd commented in silence. That Nie HuaiSang managed to live through such a battle and speak in such an energetic tone was indeed a mystery. Nobody had the strength to respond to him. Nie HuaiSang seemed so ecstatic that he was about to cry, “Thank Heavens, these corpses are finally all killed! Seems like we managed to escape death this time—our ancestors really are protecting us, aren’t they?”

Influenced by his emotions, a few of the boys cheered as well. One after another, more and more people joined. Among the cheers, someone from the GusuLan Sect’s side exclaimed in a low voice, “Sir!”

Lan QiRen’s voice immediately sounded, “No need to help me.”

Lan WangJi looked over only to see Lan QiRen cough up another few mouthfuls of blood. He waved his hand, crossed his legs, and began to meditate.

Lan WangJi immediately went forth to feel Lan QiRen’s pause. Just as he was about to pass spiritual energy to him, Lan QiRen stopped him, “There is no need! Our spiritual powers have not recovered yet. Doing so is absolutely futile.”

Lan WangJi put his hand back. A few guest cultivators asked out of habit, “HanGuang-Jun, what

should we do now?"

They only realized after they asked that the act was somewhat inappropriate. However, Lan QiRen continued to rest, showing no sign that he was going to care. Lan WangJi, "Rest for a while and examine the casualties. No delay is permitted in assisting the wounded."

He'd always been quite an impressive figure in the GusuLan Sect. The disciples seemed as if their hearts could finally settle down a

bit, answering in unison, "Yes!" Even their tone seemed somewhat steadier.

Yet, before they had the chance to do anything, Wei WuXian interrupted, "Quiet."

His expression was serious, and everyone was quiet at once. The few who had been cheering simmered down as well, one after another. Everyone stared at him anxiously. Within the entire Demon-Slaughtering Cave, all was silent apart from the people's faint breaths.

In comparison to the silence, another sound could be heard with more and more clarity.

It was the sound of feet stepping on dry leaves, coming from

outside of the Cave. And it wasn't one person's feet. Those were dense, endless footsteps.

This time, the people within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave didn't even dare let out a single breath. Countless petrified eyes looked outside the Cave. They could see that within the dark forests, something was moving and writhing slowly. It was a dark, blurry fog, unable to distinguish, but as the sluggish footsteps became clearer, so did the moving objects, until their ashen cheeks, bony hands, and jagged fangs could be seen in full view.

It was a new wave of corpses.

And it was greater than the previous one!

The people in the Demon-Slaughtering Cave had just seen a ray of hope before the next moment, when a suffocating dread washed over the entire Cave, shadowing everyone. Even Jin Ling, Lan SiZhui, and the other boys felt as though they were

drowning in the spine-chilling dread, limbs growing numb. Some of the people seemed as if they couldn't accept the dread following the hope and passed out directly. Others also broke into tears, whimpering weakly. Nonetheless, not a single person was able to pick up their sword and continue fighting any longer.

Even if Wen Ning, yet again, blocked the mouth of the cave, how long could just one person last? Suddenly, Wei WuXian spoke up, "HanGuang-Jun!" Lan WangJi

turned around to look at him. Wei WuXian took in a breath, "I want to do something."

The eyes of the others were led over by the conversation as well. Wei WuXian, "Will you do it with me?"

Lan WangJi gazed at him. He answered, firm and articulate, "I will."

Wei WuXian grinned before he took off his black robe.

Under the black robe was a layer of white, already dyed half red. However, it didn't stop him from picking up his blood-soaked palm and painting a few lines on it.

As the lines grew clearer and clearer, the disbelief in eyes of the people watching him grew heavier as well, as though they were looking at some sort of monster. Fang MengCheng stood up at once, his face full of shock, "What are you doing?"

Wei WuXian didn't pay him any attention. He continued to paint.

When he stopped, what he wore was no longer a white robe. It was a flag.

A flag able to attract all dark creatures onto one single person—a spirit-attraction flag!

Wei WuXian stood alongside Lan WangJi as he waved at Lan SiZhui and the others. The juniors all surrounded them. Jin Ling wanted to go too, but was pressed back down by Jiang Cheng.

Wei WuXian, "Later, when the second wave of corpses breaks in, I'm going to lead them towards the blood pool, and HanGuang- Jun will be responsible for killing them. Here," he patted his chest, "is a target. They won't pay any attention to you all. Don't engage in battle, just run outside as fast as you can."

Lan SiZhui's voice was loud for once, "How could this be?! You cannot do it!"

Sect Leader OuYang had already given up on stopping his son. OuYang ZiZhen, "Senior Wei, we

want to kill corpses too! I can kill a hundred more!”

Lan JingYi even began to take off his own clothes, “I am going to draw a flag on myself too!” Wei WuXian didn’t know whether to laugh or to frown, hurrying to stop him, “That’s enough, stop messing about. One target is enough. HanGuang-Jun is the only one needed to help me kill the corpses. The others can stop giving me more trouble.”

Inside of the Demon-Slaughtering Cave, nobody knew what to make of the situation at hand. Nobody was oblivious to what the spirit-attracting flag did. However, even if a single person here right now was willing to use their own corporal body to attract the crowd of corpses almost breaking through the barrier in exchange for everyone else’s safety, it shouldn’t be Wei WuXian! Lan SiZhui and the others seemed as if they wanted to say something else, but Lan WangJi stopped them, “Listen to him.”

Immediately after, he turned to Lan QiRen and bestowed upon him a heavy salute. Lan QiRen opened his eyes but said nothing.

Lan SiZhui, “Mr. Lan! HanGuang-Jun, he... he...” Lan QiRen’s voice was calm, “It goes without saying.” Lan SiZhui wanted to continue, “But...!!”

Wei WuXian ordered, “Wen Ning! Clear the way!”

The black lines along Wen Ning’s neck immediately extended, almost climbing over his cheeks. He stopped holding the corpses back. Letting out a long roar from his throat, he carved out a bloody path among the layers and layers of corpses.

And the second wave of corpses, having lost their obstacle, had finally stepped into the Demon-Slaughtering Cave as well.

Wei WuXian shoved Lan SiZhui hard, “Go!”

## Chapter 82: Loyalty—Part Four

Wei WuXian turned around and dashed in the directly of the blood pool. Lan WangJi followed closely at his side. The red spirit-summoning flag on the white robe was indeed the best target. Not

a single corpse took notice of anyone else, completely ignoring all of the living humans that brushed by it, rushing red-eyed toward Wei WuXian alone.

The corpses advanced one after another. The path that Wen Ning cleared up was always quickly filled up by other corpses, and so he'd rush back and clear it again. Over half of the people inside the Demon-Slaughtering Cave hadn't had the time to leave yet.

Some of them were still unable to walk. They watched as Bichen's sword glare swept across the cave again and again, rows of corpses severed into chunks as the next row pressed on. Cries and wails echoed, almost flying above the ceiling of the Cave.

Soon, the corpses had surrounded Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, making it difficult for them to approach the blood pool. The mountains of corpses on the sides grew higher and higher, and the circle that surrounded them shrunk as well. The juniors were all burning with worry. They all returned, swords unsheathed.

Lan JingYi saw that someone was waving his sword as he rushed outside, "Could you please help? If you can still pick up your sword, could you please come help?! Just a little bit is enough!"

The person, "Get lost!!!"

Lan SiZhui, "Let it go, JingYi, we are fine on our own!"

Having heard their voices, Wei WuXian shouted, "Wen Ning!!! Throw them out!!!"

Wen Ning, "Yes!"

He grabbed Lan JingYi with one hand and, just as he was about to grab Lan SiZhui with the other, Lan SiZhui spoke to him,

"General Ghost, I cannot go, let me stay here!!! Or else I would regret it for my entire life!!!"

The moment they made eye contact with each other, Wen Ning's body froze. Seeing that he wasn't going to catch him anymore, Lan SiZhui immediately took up his sword and turned around. Lan JingYi and the others took the chance to get past him as well.

Almost being picked up, Jin Ling was dragged outside, brushing shoulder with many corpses. All of these corpses were attracted to the flag on Wei WuXian, staring at that one direction with red eyes and ignoring them.

Jin Ling shouted, "Uncle! I..."

Jiang Cheng's voice was drenched in ice, "If you dare go back there, don't call me your uncle anymore."

Jin Ling stared at him hard. Jiang Cheng threw him onto the ground, shouting, "Stay here!" He himself, on the other hand, took up Sandu and rushed back inside the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

Jin Ling paused in hesitation before calling after him, "Uncle, wait for me!" Despite the warning, he still followed.

On the other hand, within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave, the area that surrounded Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi had already shrunken to no greater than ten feet in width.

Bichen's sword glare was still bright and clear, and the fires of the talisman burned incessantly as well. However, there were just too many corpses!

Just as Wei WuXian tossed out a handful of talismans, he sensed that there was danger. Looking to the side, as he expected, a fierce corpse had crawled up a pile of corpses near the two.

Mouth hanging open, it threw itself at him. Wei WuXian's hands were empty. He cursed and searched inside his sleeve, but nothing was there. His heart immediately skipped a beat.

He had used up all of his talismans!

Lan WangJi noticed the danger over there as well. Just as he was about to attack it with his sword, he suddenly heard a scream.

The fierce corpse broke into two in midair.

No. It was torn into two. And the creature that tore it apart was right in front of everyone's eyes! A bloody corpse stood atop the mountains of corpses as tall as man. In both of its hands, it still clutched the two twitching pieces of the corpse as it gazed down at Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi.

Lan JingYi's mouths hung gaping, unable to shut itself. OuYang ZiZhen murmured, "... My Ancestors... Just what in the world is this?"

Everyone who saw it had the same thought in their minds—just what in the world was this?! The unidentified corpse that had appeared out of nowhere was nothing like the other corpses they had seen. It was colored a bloody crimson all over, as though it had just crawled out of the blood pool. With its extremely emaciated body, it seemed more than grotesque.

The corpses controlled by the Stygian Tiger Seal were also attracted to such a strange colleague of theirs. They all gave up on attacking Wei WuXian and instead looked over there with hesitation.

The blood corpse walked a few steps forward.

It wobbled forward as cracking noises came from its knuckles, almost as if it was stretching its bones. Dark red blood dripped from its limbs and torso, creeping to the ground.

A bitter fusion of yin energy and heavy resentment spilled from its body. As it approached, the other corpses began to writhe backward. Many of the people grew pale, afraid to make a single noise.

Lan WangJi stood in front of Wei WuXian, yet Wei WuXian pressed down on the hand he clutched Bichen with, whispering, "... Wait." He stared dead at the blood corpse. A conjecture had formed within him. Heart racing, he repeated, "Wait."

The blood corpse stopped at about ten feet away from them. Suddenly, it lifted his head, and let out two loud howls. The howls grew louder and sharper by each. The people covered their ears.

Light ripples formed over the surface of the blood pool.

At first, it was as though a small rock had been tossed. Yet, the ripples grew larger and larger, as though something was moving restlessly beneath the thick syrup.

Suddenly, a hand broke out of the blood!

With the force, the hand clenched the shore, its fingers sinking deep into the ground. What emerged afterward was a crimson face, half-rotten, its facial features unclear.

A second blood corpse had crawled out of the pool.

Immediately after, the entire surface of the blood pool began toss and turn, almost as if it had reached a boil. As it churned, more heads bobbed up its surface. A third, a fourth, a fifth...

Every one of them were clothed in blood. Shrill howls accompanied their hideous faces. As soon as they crawled out of the blood pool, they immediately began to fight the other corpses!

The corpses under the control of the Tiger Seal seemed as if they had been stirred by a red blade, becoming flesh, limbs, and black blood that flew in the air!

Jin Ling watched with shock, "... Just what in the world are these things?! Why would there be more fierce corpses in the blood pool? Didn't they say that all of the corpses on Burial Mound had been incinerated?!"

Sect Leader OuYang answered, protecting his son, "Some weren't!"

Lan JingYi, "Which ones were not?!"

Sect Leader OuYang, "Those... Those..."

He couldn't say it out loud. After those Wen Sect's remnants on Burial Mound back then were killed by the people partaking in the siege, the fifty corpses were all thrown into the blood pool!

Suddenly, Jin Ling shouted, "Watch out!"

A bloody lump of a red figure landed before him. Holding his sword, Lan SiZhui walked a few steps back. The blood corpse rose slowly.

The corpse was abnormally small and bent-over. It seemed that somebody had smashed a hole into its skull. Its white hair was sparse, sticking tattered to its forehead after being soaked by the bloody water. Along with its rotting flesh, it was extremely repulsive. Anyone who saw it felt uncomfortable. After it crawled up, limping, it slowly walked toward Lan SiZhui. All of the juniors trembled with fear, immediately gathering over here.

With the increase in people, the blood corpse grew cautious, growling with its throat. The boys seemed as if they faced a significant enemy, yet Lan SiZhui hurried to stop them, "Do not move!" Although he himself was a bit nervous as well, for some unknown reason, he didn't feel scared. If the scrawny corpse had eyeballs, it must be staring at him. Tilting its head, it even stretched out an arm, its hand slowly moving toward Lan SiZhui as though it wanted to touch him.

The hand was covered in blood, almost like a half-nibbled chicken feet. All of the boys could feel goosebumps crawling up their bodies. Jin Ling raised his sword, ready to block it, just as Lan SiZhui exclaimed, "Young Master Jin, stop!"

Jin Ling, "Then what do we do?!"

Lan SiZhui, "Everyone... Everyone, do not move for now."

The blood corpse called out in a faint voice. He steadied himself, and reached out toward the corpse as well.

Just as he was about to touch the corpse, a new wave of corpses had arrived. The blood corpse spun around and, with a long howl, leaped into the air, throwing itself into the pile of corpses before it

bit and tore as if it was mad. Blood and flesh flew everywhere. The terror of its howls and the brutality of its moves was drastically different from how it was in front of Lan SiZhui.

Wen Ning threw off a number of corpses. His body trembling, he shouted at the corpse, "Is it you?!"

It didn't pay attention to him.

All of the blood corpses killed with madness. Wen Ning shouted, "Is it you?!"

Fierce roars of all tones filled the entire Demon-Slaughtering Cave. Not one of them answered him, and not one of them could.

Not even an hour later, all of the sounds slowly quieted down.

After it all had ended, the Demon-Slaughtering Cave seemed just like the sceneries of hell painted in scrolls.

One after another, the blood corpses began to gather at where Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi were.

The tall and the short, the men and the women, the old and the young—all of them were demons drenched in blood. But on these figures, Wei WuXian saw a few familiar shadows.

Wen Ning murmured, "Uncle Four... Granny..."

He said their names one by one, his voice wavering as he went. Wen Ning, "Have you been waiting here ever since??"

If he were alive, his eyes would have grown red already and begun to tear up.

Wei WuXian's lips trembled. He seemed as if he wanted to say something, but still, he couldn't say it. He lowered his head and bestowed upon them a heavy salute. His voice was rasp, "... Thank you."

Lan WangJi saluted as well.

When they were fighting, the blood corpses seemed as fierce as could be, but right now, when facing them, they still appeared hideous, but their movements seemed somewhat clumsy. At varied times, they bent down and lifted their hands, returning the salute.

And then, as if something had sucked out the energy and life within them, they all collapsed at once.

Their blood-colored bodies seemed to be fragile porcelain, cracking apart inch by inch, their pieces growing smaller and smaller. If another gust of wind blew over, there might be nothing left.

Wen Ning threw himself onto the ground, using his hands to gather up the crimson ashes. After he grabbed them, he stuffed him into his clothes, handful by handful. Soon, they were all full. Seeing this, Lan JingYi scratched his hair and took off one of his perfume pouches. He dumped out the herbs inside, squatted down, and handed it to him, "Here!"

Watching, the other boys copied as well. Jin Ling was the only who continued to watch them, his expression complex. He didn't do anything. Frowning, he instead walked farther away. On the other hand, when the seven or eight hands were in front of Wen Ning, holding up perfume pouches and woven bags, Wen Ning didn't know what to do.

Lan SiZhui, "General Ghost, do you need help?" Wen Ning hurried, "No, you..."

Lan JingYi, "There are so many bones and ashes. Can you finish collecting everything all on your own?"

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked over, "Don't touch them as you please. You'll be under corpse poisoning if you don't wear gloves."

Hearing this, the boys finally gave up. Lan SiZhui, "Senior Wei, HanGuang-Jun, and General Ghost, this time, thank you so much for..."

Suddenly, a cold voice came from within the crowd, "For what?"

Lan SiZhui and the boys turned around to find that the one who spoke was Fang MengChen again. He stood up, rage written over his face, "What is all this?"

Lan SiZhui was perplexed, "What is all what?"

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi looked at him as well. Fang MengChen's voice was harsh, "I'm asking you—what is all this? Atonement?! You haven't all begun to feel gratitude towards him in your hearts, have you?!"

It was a dead silent within the Demon-Slaughtering Cave. Not a single whisper could be heard. What everyone was feeling right now really wasn't too great.

With all their fanfare, they came to throw a siege, yet they themselves were instead faced with a siege. They chanted that

they were here to destroy evil, yet in the end they needed the  
"evil" to save their own lives.

They really didn't know whether it was comical, strange, awkward, or absolutely incomprehensible. They only felt that they, the ones who jumped up and down with such indignation during this farce, were indeed somewhat embarrassing.

Thank Wei WuXian? It didn't seem quite appropriate, but they were saved by him after all. It didn't seem appropriate either to say that they held no gratitude. Under such circumstances, the best way out was to remain silent.

Seeing that nobody was going to answer him, Fang MengChen grew even more angered. He lunged with sword in hand, "Do you think that by doing a few pretentious good things and showing

that you've repented your errors would write off all those debts of blood in your hands?!"

Wei WuXian darted to the side. Somebody came forth to mediate, "Fang-xiong! Don't be so agitated. Let it go..."

As soon as the person said it, he realized what he did wrong. Fang MengChen's eyes reddened, "Let it go?! What do you mean, let it go? The murder of my parents—I let it go just because you say so?!"

He questioned loudly, "Wei WuXian killed my parents. That is the truth. But why is it that now it seems like he's become a hero?! Do a few good deeds, and you can forget about all the things he did? Then what about my parents?!"

Among the crowd, Jin Ling clenched his fists. Suddenly, sharp pain shot out from his shoulder. The fingers that Jiang Cheng placed at his shoulder slowly tightened.

Jin Ling couldn't see his expression. He whispered, "Uncle..." A curt, ambivalent laugh came from Jiang Cheng.

Finally, Wei WuXian spoke up. He said, "Then what do you want me to do?"

Fang MengChen paused in surprise. Wei WuXian, "Then what do you want? Nothing but my miserable death to soothe your own hatred?" He pointed at Yi WeiChun, who lay passed out among the crowd, "He's missing a leg, while I was cut into pieces; you lost your parents, while my family had long since been gone. I'm a dog who was chased out of its home. I've never even seen the ashes of my parents."

Wei WuXian, "Or do you hate the Wen Sect's remnants? The Wen Sect remnants that you speak of already died once, thirteen years ago. And right now, just then, for my sake, for your sake, they died once again. This time, they've all become ashes." He continued, "Let me ask you—just what else do you want me to do?"

Fang MengChen glared at him. A moment later, he replied through clenched teeth, "There's no use. Let me tell you, Wei WuXian, no matter what you do, don't ever expect me to forgive you or forget about my parents' deaths." He raised his voice, "It'll never happen!"

Wei WuXian, "Nobody told you to forgive me. The things I did, not only do you remember them, I remember them too. You won't forget them, and they'll stay even longer in my mind!"

He looked at him for quite a while. Fang MengChen felt a whirlpool of emotion within him, a feeling of surrender.

His life was indeed saved by Wei WuXian and the others, but he didn't want to give up on all those grudges right then. But if he wanted to seek revenge on Wei WuXian, it'd be futile, given how powerless he was. In the end, he could only let out a loud shout before he rushed out the Demon-Slaughtering Cave.

After he went out, a voice asked, "No more corpses will come, right? We're really safe this time, right?!"

Hearing this voice, everyone felt their heads grow a few times bigger, It's him again!

Nie HuaiSang looked around. Seeing that nobody answered him, he asked once more, "Then aren't we... allowed to go too?"

This was the right question to ask. Right now, all that anyone wanted to do was to put on some wings and fly their swords back to their sects. One of the female cultivators spoke, "Four hours should be up by now. How much have everyone's spiritualpowers recovered?"

## Chapter 83: Loyalty—Part Five

Many people took out talismans to try if they could ignite them with their spiritual powers. Gradually, the talismans in some of the people hands lit up dimly. Hearing the question, they answered, "Two-tenth is back for me."

"One-tenth for me..."

"They're recovering so slowly!"

When they set off, they all thought that compared to the siege at Burial Mound thirteen years ago, this one would definitely be more successful, so grand and tragic that it'd be recorded in history. Yet, nobody expected that the number of people who went down the mountain was almost the same as the number who went up. The second „siege” could indeed be recorded in history. However, instead of being its scale or number of deaths, it'd be because it was the most pointless, laughable event of the cultivation world.

Some of the people rejoiced that they escaped death, others lamented about the changing of times. The dozens of sect leaders all gathered together. After some discussion, they agreed to first find a safe place to rest until their spiritual powers had recovered up to eight-tenths so that no more incidents happened on their way back.

Wei WuXian knew at once. The closest „safe place” to Yiling was the area of the YunmengJiang Sect. He asked, "So you intend on going to Lotus Pier next?"

Lan QiRen was vigilant, "Why do you ask?"

Wei WuXian, "Nothing. I just wanted to ask if I could go along."

Sect Leader Yao warned, "Wei WuXian! You did a good deed today, but those are two separate things. Please understand that it's impossible for us to associate with you."

Wei WuXian felt speechless, "Don't worry, nobody's making you associate with me. Right now, though, we're on the same side, aren't we? The figure who planned the siege on you today hasthe Stygian Tiger Seal in his hands. Can you deal with it?"

The sect leaders looked at one another. In all honesty, what Wei WuXian said wasn't wrong. If he was willing to join in, it'd be of great assistance. But people had slandered the YiLing Patriarch's name for so many years. It'd be a bit embarrassing to have him cooperate with them all at once.

On the other hand, Lan WangJi turned to Lan QiRen, "Uncle, have you received any news about Brother?"

After a moment of silence, Lan QiRen answered, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Maybe ZeWu-Jun is still under Jin GuangYao's control as of right now. Mr. Lan, the more people there is, the more help there is. Even if you're worried about me, at least let HanGuang-Jun participate in your next plans. It's his brother,after all."

"..." Lan QiRen's face was full of fatigue. He turned to Lan WangJi, "Come if you want to."

The rest of the people immediately looked at Jiang Cheng. Among the three sect leaders of the highest status, Lan QiRen had taken a stand and it didn't matter if Nie HuaiSang took a stand or not, so now it was all up to Jiang Cheng. At the side, Jiang Cheng was trying out his spiritual powers and testing them on Zidian. Although it switched between bright and dark, at least the light didn't go out anymore. Purple light reflected against Jiang Cheng's face, giving it an air of mystery. Everyone knew that Sect Leader Jiang, the one whom Wei WuXian turned against, hated him the most. They all thought that their negotiation would fall through.

Yet, he only let out a bitter laugh, "So you dare go back to Lotus Pier?"

After the short sentence, he stopped talking. Nobody knew what this meant, unsure if he allowed it or not. But when they set off, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi joined the group, and he didn't give them a single glance. They took it that he neither allowed it nor didn't.

When the group arrived at the bottom of the mountain, it was already nighttime. As they returned to the town, the lights had already been blown out, and everything was quiet. Everyone

was tired, both in body and in spirit. Even their square arrays looked uneven and disorganized. Fortunately, when they conjured up the energy to count the heads, they realized that there wasn't a big difference at all. Because most people's spiritual powers hadn't recovered yet and couldn't mount their swords, water paths were the quickest way to get to Lotus Pier. The group, consisting of over a thousand people, then set off toward the pier nearest to Yiling.

However, because of their hurried decision, they couldn't gather so many boats in such a short amount of time. The sect leaders could only rent all of the boats at the pier, no matter the size, no matter the use. Crowded with the disciples from all those sects, the boats traveled along with the water.

Around a dozen disciples were crammed into the same boat. Almost all of these boys grew up in comfortable environments. They'd never had to ride in such old, broken down fishing boats before, the corners of which were piled up with dirty nets and barrels, emitting the rotten odor of fish as its wooden boards creaked. Winds were high at night. The boats rocked back and forth. A few of the boys from the North were quite seasick. After they tried for a while, they truly couldn't hold it back anylonger.

They rushed outside the cabin and retched before they collapsed, dizzy-eyed, on the deck.

One of the boys commented, "Heavens, it's so shaky that it feels like there's a storm in my stomach. Hey, SiZhui-xiong, you're throwing up as well? Aren't you from Gusu? It's not like you're from the North. Why are you even more seasick than I am?!"

Lan SiZhui waved his hand, his face the color of ash, "I... I do not know why either. I have been like this when I ride in boats ever since I was four or five... Maybe I was born this way."

As he spoke, he felt the revolting feeling come upon him again. He stood up, holding onto the rail. Just as he was about to throw up some more, he suddenly saw a dark silhouette hanging onto the part of the boat below the rail, half of its body submerged inside the river's water, staring straight at him.

Lan SiZhui was so scared that he immediately gulped back the things he was about to throw up. Just as he pressed down onto the hilt of his sword, he looked carefully and exclaimed, "The Ghost..."

Inside of the cabin, as Jin Ling heard this, he immediately rushed out with his sword, "A ghost? Where? I'll kill it for you!"

Lan SiZhui, "Not a ghost—the Ghost General!"

All of the boys hurried to the deck and looked in the direction that Lan SiZhui pointed at. As expected, the silhouette clinging to the side of the boat, looking up from below, was none other than the Ghost General, Wen Ning.

Right after they left Burial Mound, Wen Ning had disappeared. Yet, who knew that he was clinging to the fishing boat so quietly. They didn't know how long he'd been there, either.

Although back on Burial Mound, Wen Ning was fighting alongside them. There were many people then, and lots of seniors as well.

In the middle of the night, especially on water, Wen Ning's strange, sudden appearance still gave the boys a good shock. They stared at him for a few moments.

OuYang ZiZhen was the first one to shrink back, taking a seat on the deck, "Why did the Ghost General come to find us alone?"

Someone mumbled, "So that's why I felt this boat was going so slowly. A person is hanging on the bottom. It's so heavy."

"Why... Why is he clinging there?"

"Definitely not to harm us. Or else, he wouldn't have protectedus back in the day."

"But there's no danger right now anymore. Why did he come find us again..."

"Pfft!"

"JingYi, what are you laughing about?"

Lan JingYi, "Look at him. He is clinging onto the boat without moving at all, almost like a big, oblivious sea turtle!"

Now that he said it, some people felt that he indeed did look like one. But before they began to laugh, OuYang ZiZhen exclaimed, "He's coming up!"

Just as he said, Wen Ning's body emerged from the water. Hands grabbing onto a hemp rope hanging off the deck, he began to crawl slowly up. The boys scattered themselves at once. A few of the more timid ones ran in circles on the deck as they panicked, chirping, "He's coming up, he's coming up! The Ghost General is coming up!"

Lan JingYi, "What is there to be scared of? It is not like you have not seen him before!"

"What do we do? Should we call someone over?!"

When Wen Ning flipped over the rail, dripping with water as he landed heavily on the deck, the entire boat seemed to shake with his landing. The boys were as nervous as possible, almost all squishing to the other side of the deck. Their hearts raced, but they were too embarrassed to face him with their swords.

Wen Ning stared at Lan SiZhui's face as he walked toward him. Lan SiZhui noticed that he was here for him. He steadied himself as Wen Ning asked, "Wh-What is your name?"

Lan SiZhui hesitated for a second before he stood up straight and answered, "I am a disciple of the GusuLan Sect. My name is Lan Yuan."

Wen Ning, "Lan Yuan?" Lan SiZhui nodded. Wen Ning, "Do... Do you know who g-gave you this name?"

Dead people had no expressions, but Lan SiZhui was under the illusion that he thought he saw Wen Ning's eyes light up.

He also thought that Wen Ning was feeling very excited, so excited that he stammered as he spoke. He himself began to feel excited as well, as though they were about to reveal a secret hidden for years.

Lan SiZhui answered carefully, "My name was of course given by my parents."

Wen Ning, "Then, are your parents still in good health?"

Lan SiZhui, "My parents passed away when I was at a very young age."

One of the boys on the side tugged at his sleeve, "SiZhui, don't say so much. Be careful."

Wen Ning paused in surprise, "SiZhui? SiZhui is your courtesy name?"

Lan SiZhui, "That is right."

Wen Ning, "Who gave it to you?" Lan SiZhui, "HanGuang-Jun did."

Wen Ning looked down, saying the word „SiZhui" a couple of times in silence. Seeing that he seemed as if he realized something, Lan SiZhui spoke, "Gen-..." He was about to call him General, but he felt that something was weird about it. He changed his wording, "Mr. Wen? Is there anything about my name?"

"Oh," Wen Ning looked up, gazing at his face, not answering the question, "Y-You really l-look like a distant relative of mine..."

These words really sounded like the things low-level cultivators and foreign disciples said when they wanted to become familiar with the inner disciples. The boys grew more and more confused as to what was going on. Lan SiZhui didn't know what to respond with, either, "R-Really?"

Wen Ning, "Really!"

He tried as hard as he could to lift the muscles at the sides of his lips, as if he wanted to smile. For something, watching the „Ghost General", a deeply sour sense of familiarity rose up amid Lan SiZhui, along with a blurry thought—he seemed to have seen this face some place, some time ago. It seemed that there was a name that almost broke through some sort of a barrier. If he said

the name out loud, many other things would resurface as well, and he'd understand everything.

But at this point, Lan SiZhui saw Jin Ling, who stood at the side.

Jin Ling's face was dark, extremely dark. Holding his sword hilt, his grip switched back and forth between tight and loose. The veins on the back of his hand also appeared and disappeared. He finally remembered that the Ghost General Wen Ning, who looked so harmless right now, was the one who killed Jin Ling's father.

Following his gaze, Wen Ning's „smile“ disappeared as well. He slowly turned to Jin Ling, “Young Master Jin RuLan?”

Jin Ling's voice was cold, “Who's that?”

After some silence, Wen Ning changed his wording, “Young Master Jin Ling?”

Jin Ling stared at him dead in the eye, while the other boys stared at Jin Ling, scared that he'd do something out of impulse. Lan SiZhui, “Young Master Jin...”

Jin Ling, “Move to the side. It's none of your business.”

But Lan SiZhui somehow felt that it definitely wouldn't be none of his business. He went over and put himself between the two, “Jin Ling, put your sword away fir-”

Jin Ling was feeling tense anyway. His sight being blocked, he couldn't help but shouted, “Don't stop me!”

He reached out and pushed. Lan SiZhui was feeling seasick to begin with, his legs feeling wobbly. With the push, he bumped into the rail, almost toppling over and into the dark river. Good thing

that Wen Ning got a grip on him and dragged him back. The boys immediately went over to help him, “SiZhui-xiong!”

“Young Master Lan, are you alright? Are you still dizzy?”

Wen Ning saw that Lan SiZhui's complexion was pale. Anxious, he blurted, “Young Master Jin, come at me. Wen Ning will not resist. But A- Young Master Lan Yuan...”

Lan JingYi had a tolerant personality. He criticized, “Jin Ling, why are you like this?! What did SiZhui do to you!”

“SiZhui-xiong did it for your own good. Not only did you not appreciate it—why did you push him?”

Originally, Jin Ling also felt that he used too much force. He was shocked as well. But as he saw that all of the others went to help Lan SiZhui up, blaming him instead, the scene overlapped with the countless scenes from his past. In these years, because he had no parents, everyone said that he'd been spoiled with no-one to discipline him. He had a bad temper and he wasn't easy to get along with. He had no close friends around the same age as him, no matter at Koi Tower or at Lotus Pier. His status was supposed to be respected, but he ended up in such an awkward position.

When he was young, no disciples liked to play with him; when he grew older, no disciples liked to follow him. The more he thought about it, the redder his eyes grew. He suddenly raised his voice, “Yes! It's all my fault! I'm just such a terrible person! So what?!”

The other boys all shuddered, surprised by the roar. After a while of silence, one of the group muttered, “What do you mean? You were the one who started it anyways... Why are you the one scolding us now?”

Jin Ling spoke fiercely, “Are you telling me what to do?! Since when is it your turn to tell me what to do?!”

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi were on a nearby boat. With the shout, Wei WuXian paused in surprise within the cabin. He hurried outside and looked over across the water. Seeing that Jin Ling held his sword toward others, he asked, “What's going on?”

Seeing the two, Lan SiZhui felt that no matter what difficulties he faced, he could overcome them no matter what, beaming, “HanGuang-Jun! Senior Wei! Come over here!”

## Chapter 84: Loyalty—Part Six

Lan WangJi wrapped his right arm around Wei WuXian's waist and took up Bichen. Mounting the sword, the two of them landed on the boat. Wei WuXian's figure wavered slightly. He only spoke

up after Lan WangJi steadied him, "What happened to Wen Ning? Didn't you say you were only going to take a look?"

Wei Ning, "I'm sorry, Young Master. It was my fault. I couldn't hold back from..."

Jin Ling turned the blade of the sword toward him and roared, "There's no need for you to act so pretentious!"

Wei WuXian, "Jin Ling, just put down the sword first!" Jin Ling, "I won't!"

Wei WuXian was just about to speak again when Jin Ling suddenly broke into tears.

As he cried, all of the people had frozen solid. In confusion, Wei WuXian walked a step toward him, "What's... What's wrong?"

Even as tears streaked down his face, Jin Ling still shouted, sobbing, "This is my dad's sword. I won't put it down!"

What he hugged tightly in his arms was Jin ZiXuan's sword, Suihua. This sword was the only thing that his parents had left him.

Right now, Jin Ling, who cried so loudly in front of the crowd, could almost make him see what Jiang YanLi looked like as she bawled her eyes out in such extreme despair. Among the boys at Jin Ling's age, some had married already, and the older ones had already become fathers. To them, crying was quite the humiliating act. To cry before such a large crowd—just how frustrated did he feel?

For a while, Wei WuXian didn't even know what to do. He looked at Lan WangJi as if he was asking for help, but it was even less likely for Lan WangJi to know what to do. At this point, a voice came from across the river, "A-Ling!"

Around half-a-dozen larger boats surrounded the fishing boat that they were on. Every one of those boats was filled with cultivators, with one sect leader standing at the foremost. The YunmengJiang Sect's boat was at the right side of the fishing boat. It was the nearest, with no more than thirty meters between the two. The one who called was Jiang Cheng, who stood near the edge. Still teary-eyed, as soon as Jin Ling saw his uncle, he immediately wiped his face, sniffing. He looked here and there and finally made up his mind to fly over, landing at Jiang Cheng's side.

Jiang Cheng grabbed him, "What happened to you? Who did this to you?!"

Jin Ling rubbed his eyes roughly, refusing to speak up. Jiang Cheng lifted his head, casting a nasty look at the fishing boat. His cold glare passed by Wen Ning, just about to land on Wei WuXian as Lan WangJi stepped out and blocked WeiWuXian's silhouette, whether intentional or not.

One of the sect leaders was alarmed, "Wei WuXian, why are you on that boat?"

His doubtful tone, quite uncomfortable to the ear, made it clear that he thought Wei WuXian had ulterior motives.

Ouyang ZiZhen spoke, "Sect Leader Yao, why are you talking in such a tone? If Senior Wei really wanted to do anything, then I'm afraid none of us could be sitting on our boats as safely as we are now."

As soon as he said this, many of the older cultivators looked a bit awkward. Although it was the truth, nobody wanted to hear it spoken so frankly. Lan SiZhui immediately followed, "ZiZhen is right!" Many of the other boys agreed as well.

Jiang Cheng lowered his chin slightly, "Sect Leader OuYang."

Having been named, Sect Leader OuYang could feel his eyelids throb the way his heart did. He heard Jiang Cheng icily continue, "If I remember correctly, the one who spoke is your son, isn't

he? He sure has a silver tongue.”

Sect Leader OuYang hurried, “ZiZhen! Come back, come over to Dad!”

OuYang ZiZhen was confused, “Dad, weren’t you the one who told me to get on this boat so that I didn’t annoy you guys?”

Sect Leader OuYang wiped at a few beads of sweat, “Enough! Haven’t you shown off enough times today? Come here right now!” His sect was located at Baling, close to Yunmeng but incomparable in power. Naturally, he didn’t want Jiang Cheng to bear a grudge against his son just because he spoke up a couple of times for Wei WuXian.

Jiang Cheng glared at Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi one last time before he returned to the cabin, arm wrapped around Jin Ling’s shoulders. Sect Leader OuYang sighed in relief. He turned to his son and scolded, “H-H-How dare you! You’re really listening to me less and less! Are you coming over or not?! I’ll go get you if you don’t!”

OuYang ZiZhen seemed concerned, “Dad, you should go in and take a rest too. Your spiritual powers haven’t recovered yet, so

you won’t be able to come here. Please don’t mount your sword so rashly.”

Right now, most people’s spiritual powers were recovering slowly. If they forced themselves to mount their swords, they might end up falling flat on the ground. This was why they could only travel by water. On top of this, Sect Leader OuYang’s physically was unusually hulky. He really couldn’t fly over and go grab his son.

Enraged, he turned around with a flip of his sleeves and returned to the cabin. On another boat, Nie HuaiSang laughed loudly. All of the other sect leaders looked at him speechlessly, but most of them had already somewhat dispersed. Seeing this, Wei WuXian let out a long sigh of relief. As soon as he relaxed, heavy exhaustion suddenly passed over his face. He fell to one side.

It seemed that he didn’t waver because he couldn’t balance himself on the boat, but rather because he really was so tired that he couldn’t stand steadily.

The boys didn’t care about the blood and grime on him either. In a flurry, they all went up to him, wanting to help him up like they did with Lan SiZhui. However, without requiring their help at all, Lan WangJi bent down slightly. With one hand at his arm and another behind his knees, Lan WangJi picked Wei WuXian up at once.

Carrying Wei WuXian just like this, he walked into the cabin.

Inside the cabin, there wasn’t anywhere to lie down, only four long benches. Thus, Lan WangJi held Wei WuXian’s waist with one arm, letting his head lean on his shoulder, and with his other hand he pieced together the four benches into a platform wide enough to lie on. He gently laid Wei WuXian on the benches.

Lan SiZhui suddenly realized that even though HanGuang-Jun was drenched in blood, the bandage that Wei WuXian tore from

his sleeve and wrapped around that tiny wound of his was still knotted properly, tied around a finger of his left hand.

Before this, he didn’t have time care about his appearance. Right now, Lan WangJi finally took out his handkerchief, slowly wiping away the blood clots on Wei WuXian’s face. Soon, the snowy handkerchief had been dyed with red and black. Although he’d finished wiping Wei WuXian’s face, he hadn’t wiped his own yet.

Lan SiZhui immediately handed over his unused handkerchief, “HanGuang-Jun.”

Lan WangJi took it over and looked down. With a wipe of the handkerchief, his face was back to white. The boys finally eased up. As expected, HanGuang-Jun only looked normal if his face was so icily clean.

OuYang ZiZhen, “HanGuang-Jun, why did Senior Wei collapse?” Lan WangJi, “Fatigue.”

Lan JingYi was amazed, “I thought that Senior Wei would never get tired!”

The other boys felt somewhat astonished as well. That the legendary YiLing Patriarch could collapse from fatigue from dealing with walking corpses—they all thought that the YiLing Patriarch should be able to settle them with just a snap of his fingers. However, Lan WangJi

shook his head. He only said four words, "We are all human."

They were all human. How could a human be tireless? How could they stand forever?"

All of the benches had been put together by Lan WangJi, so the boys could only squat in a circle, looking anxious. If Wei WuXian were awake, he'd joke around, teasing this one before he teased the next. Right now, the cabin would be so very lively. Yet, he was lying down right now, and HanGuang-Jun was the one sitting beside him, his back as straight as ever. Usually, someone would say a few things to liven up the atmosphere, but if Lan WangJi didn't talk, the others didn't dare speak up either. After they squatted for some time, it was still a dead silence within the cabin.

The boys all commented in silence, "... It's so boring."

They were so bored that they began to communicate with their eyes, "Why isn't HanGuang-Jun saying anything? Why hasn't Senior Wei woken up yet?"

Hands cupped around his cheeks, OuYang ZiZhen stealthily pointed here and there, "Is HanGuang-Jun always this untalkative? How could Senior Wei stand being around him all the time..."

Lan SiZhui nodded gravely, silently assuring him, "HanGuang-Jun has indeed always been this way!"

Suddenly, Wei WuXian wrinkled his brows, his head tilting to the side. Softly, Lan WangJi moved his head back where it was, so

that he wouldn't end up with a stiff neck. Wei WuXian murmured, "Lan Zhan."

Everyone thought that he was waking up. They were ecstatic, but Wei WuXian's eyes were still tightly shut. Lan WangJi, on the other hand, looked just as usual, "Mn. I am here."

Wei WuXian was quiet again. As though he felt safe, he shifted closer toward Lan WangJi and continued to sleep. The boys

stared at the two blankly. For some reason, their cheeks suddenly flushed. Lan SiZhui was the first to stand up, stammering, "H- HanGuang-Jun, we will go out and get some fresh air..."

They almost fled the scene, rushing to the deck. With the night wind, it seemed that their suffocating feelings from before were finally blown away. One of them asked, "What happened? Why did we have to come out?! Why?!"

OuYang ZiZhen covered his face, "I don't know what happened either, but all of a sudden I just felt that we really shouldn't be in there!"

A few of them pointed at one another, "Why did you blush?!" "I only blushed because you blushed!"

Wen Ning never stepped forward to help Wei WuXian up in the first place. He didn't follow them into the cabin either, squatting on the deck. Back then, the group all wondered why he didn't goin.

Now, they realized that the Ghost General really made the right decision.

Not a single third person could fit inside!

Watching them come out, Wen Ning made space for them to squat, almost as if he expected all this. However, Lan SiZhui was the only one who walked over, squatting down beside him. A few of the boys muttered on the side, "Why does SiZhui seem like he's really close with the Ghost General?"

Wen Ning, "Young Master Lan, may I call you A-Yuan?"

All of the boys felt their hearts shiver, <em>... So, the Ghost General is so quick to friendship?!</em>

Lan SiZhui replied gladly, "Sure!"

Wen Ning, "A-Yuan, have you been well these years?" Lan SiZhui, "Very well."

Wen Ning nodded, "HanGuang-Jun must've treated you kindly."

Hearing him speak of Lan WangJi in such a respectful tone, Lan SiZhui felt even closer to him, "HanGuang-Jun treated me as if he were my brother or my father. He even taught me how to play the guqin."

Wen Ning, "When did HanGuang-Jun start looking after you?"

After some thought, Lan SiZhui responded, "I cannot remember either. It was probably when I was around four or five. I do not have many memories of the things that happened when I was younger, but when I was younger, I doubt HanGuang-Jun was able to take care of me. I think HanGuang-Jun had been in secluded meditation for many years back then."

He suddenly remembered that when HanGuang-Jun was doing secluded meditation, the first siege on Burial Mound happened at the same time.

Inside the cabin, Lan WangJi looked up at the door that the juniors closed as they barged out. He then looked down at Wei WuXian, whose head had tilted to the side again. Wrinkling his brows once more, Wei WuXian turned his head left and right, as though he was feeling really uncomfortable. Seeing this, Lan WangJi stood up, walked over to bolt the door, and sat back down beside Wei WuXian again. He held up his shoulders and gently let him lean in his arms. This time, Wei WuXian's head finally stopped moving. Shifting against his chest, he finally found the best position to sleep in. Watching him relax again, Lan WangJi looked down, gazing at the features of the person within his arms. His ink-colored hair fell from his shoulders. Suddenly, eyes still closed, Wei WuXian grabbed onto his lapel. His fingers just so happened to be around his forehead ribbon.

His grip was quite tight. Lan WangJi pinched one end of the ribbon and tugged. Not only did he fail to pull it out, he even made Wei WuXian's eyelashes tremble. Soon later, he woke up.

When Wei WuXian finally opened his eyes, what he saw first was the wooden ceiling of the cabin. He sat up. Lan WangJi was standing before a wooden window, gazing at the glowing moon sitting atop the end of the river.

Wei WuXian, "Huh, HanGuang-Jun, did I pass out?"

Lan WangJi turned slightly to the side, answering calmly, "Yes." Wei WuXian asked again, "Where's your forehead ribbon?"

"..."

After he asked, he looked down, exclaiming, "Huh, what happened? Why is it in my hand?"

He swung his legs down the benches, "I really am sorry. I like to hug things when I sleep, or else I tend to grab around. My apologies, here." After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi took back the forehead ribbon, "It is fine."

However, Wei WuXian was trying so hard to hold back his laughter that he almost suffered an internal injury. Back then, there was indeed a moment when he really wanted to fall asleep, but he wasn't so weak that he'd faint just like that. However, just as he wavered the slightest, Lan WangJi picked him up as fast as possible. Wei WuXian didn't even have the face to open his eyes and say hey, there was no need to do this, he could stand up on his own. On top of that, he didn't want to be put back down either. If he could be carried, why should he stand?

Wei WuXian touched his neck. In silence, he gloated as he regretted, <em>Lan Zhan, he really... If only I knew, I wouldn't have woken up. If I remained unconscious, I'd be able to lie in his arms for the entire journey!</em> At three in the morning, they reached Yunmeng.

Lights burned brightly before Lotus Pier's gates and its docks, reflecting against the water to form pieces of gold. In the past, it was rare that so many boats of so many sizes could gather at the dock at the same time. Not only the guards at the gates, even the old men still at their stands selling midnight snacks were wide-eyed in astonishment. Jiang Cheng was the first to disembark the boats. He said a few words to the guards, and countless armed disciples immediately rushed out the gates. The people disembarked one after another, led inside by the YunmengJiang Sect's guest cultivators. Sect Leader OuYang finally caught his son. Chastising in a low voice, he dragged him away. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked out the cabin and leaped down the fishing boat.

Wen Ning, "Young Master, I'll wait for you outside."

Wei WuXian knew that Wen Ning wouldn't enter the gates of Lotus Pier. Jiang Cheng definitely wouldn't let him in, either. He nodded. Lan SiZhui spoke up, "Mr. Wen, let me keep you

company.” Wen Ning, “You’ll keep me company?” He was quite happy, having never expected this.

Lan SiZhui smiled, “Yeah. The seniors are going inside to discuss important matters anyways. There is not much need for me to be present. Let us keep chatting. Where were we again? Did Senior Wei really plant a two-year-old child in the soil like a radish before?”

Although his voice was small, the two walking in the front had acute hearing. Wei WuXian almost tripped on his own foot. Lan WangJi’s eyebrows curved, but immediately went back to normal.

When their silhouettes finally disappeared into the gates of Lotus Pier, Lan SiZhui finally continued, whispering, “Poor child. But, in reality, I remember that when I was young, HanGuang-Jun had also put me in a pile of rabbits before. They are actually quite similar in some ways...”

## Chapter 85: Loyalty—Part Seven

Before he stepped inside Lotus Pier's gates, Wei WuXian took in a deep breath, trying to calm himself. But after he went in, he didn't feel as excited as he thought he would.

It was perhaps because too many places had been renewed. The training field was two times larger. Each new building seemed to be taller than the previous, adorned with curving roof decor. It seemed grander than before and had more splendor. But, compared to the Lotus Pier of his memories, it had changed too much.

Wei WuXian felt a sense of loss from deep within. He didn't know whether the old buildings from the past were blocked behind these impressive new buildings or if they were torn down already.

After all, they were indeed too old.

On the training field, the disciples gathered in the square arrays again, sitting in the lotus position to rest and restore their spiritual powers. Having been so busy during both the day and the night, all of these people had long since worn themselves out, desperately needing to catch their breaths. On the other hand, Jiang Cheng led the sect leaders and other important personnel into the main hall, Sword Hall, to further discuss today's matter.

Just as they entered, before anyone was seated yet, someone who looked like a guest cultivator walked up, "Sect Leader."

He shifted toward Jiang Cheng's ear and whispered a few words.

Jiang Cheng frowned, "No. If there's something important, tell them to come at a later date. Don't you see the situation right now?"

The guest cultivator, "I told them already. The two ladies said... that they were here for none other than today's matter."

Jiang Cheng, "What's their background? Which sect do they cultivate at?"

The guest cultivator, "None. They aren't cultivators either. I am certain that both are ordinary women without any spiritual powers. They brought with them some expensive medicinal herbs as well, but they didn't say which sect leader sent them. They only said that they had a few things to tell you, Sect Leader. From their words, I judged that what they were speaking of was no small

matter. In case they feel disrespected, I already placed them within one of the guest residences. The medicinal herbs haven't been stored yet, either. They have been examined already. There are no abnormal spells or curses."

It wasn't that anyone could see the YunmengJiang Sect's sect leader whenever they wanted to, even without telling him why they were there. On top of that, they were two women who lacked both spiritual powers and sects to support them. However, since they brought rare herbs, the guest cultivator responsible for receiving them didn't dare show disrespect. Even if not for the lavish gifts, the oddity of the incident itself was enough for him not to ignore them.

Jiang Cheng, "Everyone, please help yourselves. Please excuse my momentary absence."

Everyone responded, "Sect Leader Jiang, please go ahead."

However, Jiang Cheng didn't return after just a few moments. He hadn't returned for a long while. To have unentertained guests at one's home was already disrespectful, much less during such times, when everyone was waiting to discuss important matters. Almost an hour later, Jiang Cheng still hadn't returned. Many people began to feel either anxious or displeased. At this point in time, Jiang Cheng finally came back. He looked perfectly fine when he went, but as he returned, his expression was icy cold, walking fast. He also brought with him two people—two women, probably the two who were visiting. The people originally thought that even if those were two ordinary ladies, to be able to visit with such lavish gifts meant that they had to be extraordinary in some ways. However, neither of the two ladies retained their youth. Age was spelled among the details next to the corners of their eyes and lips. One of the two looked both

meek and uneasy, while the other not only looked weathered, but also had around half a dozen cuts on her face. Although the cuts seemed old, they were nonetheless so gruesome that the crowd was both disappointed and turned off. They began to murmur in silence, wondering why Jiang Cheng brought such women into Sword Hall and even pointed them to a position in the center of the hall.

Jiang Cheng's face was dark. He turned to the women, who had just sat down gingerly, "You can speak here."

Sect Leader Yao, "Sect Leader Jiang, you mean?"

Jiang Cheng, "The matter is too shocking and I did not dare act hastily. The delay was due to careful questioning. Everyone, please quiet down, and lend your ears to these two." He turned around, "Which of you two will speak first?"

The two women looked at each other. The weathered one was a bit braver. She stood up, "I'll go first!"

She presented them with a casual salute, "What I'm about to tell you is an old story that happened around eleven years ago."

From Jiang Cheng's tone, the people knew that what the women was about to say couldn't be just an unimportant matter, trying to recall the things that happened eleven years ago. The woman, "My name is Sisi. In the past I sold my body. You can say that I was famous for a while. Ten-or-so years ago, I found a rich businessman and wanted to marry him, but it turned out that the man's wife was a fierce one. She got a group of hunky men and cut my face through. That's why I'm like this now."

The woman spoke with no shame in her voice, not at all trying to beat around the bush. Many of the female cultivators covered

their lips with their sleeves, while the men frowned. Sisi, "After my face became like this, my days were different from before. Nobody wanted to spare me a single glance, let alone do my business. My original brothel kicked me out. I didn't know how to do anything else, but I couldn't take in any business at all, so I joined up with the older sisters. Their customers didn't have high demands. If a job is up, I'd tag along with them. I could manage with my face covered up."

At this point, some of the people couldn't take it any longer. They let the contempt in their eyes pour out without any intent to cover it. Some didn't understand why Jiang Cheng was making the crowd listen to the woman talk about her dirty past. The sect leaders, however, kept calm and waited for her to continue.

As expected, she finally arrived at the key point. Sisi, "One day, the sisters from our alleyway suddenly got a job, asking for all two dozens of us. With horse-drawn carriages, they brought us to a place. After those old sisters of mine finished with discussing the price, they were all ecstatic on the way there. I, however, felt that something wasn't right. Let's be honest here—they were either old, yellowed pearls or the same as me. We were paid so much, and even beforehand. How could there be such a lucky thing in the world? And the people who came to get us were fishy too."

They led us into the carriages and took as away as soon as they came, not letting a single other person know about it. No matter how you look at it, they couldn't have had good intentions in mind!"

The others thought the same thing. Their original disdain had already been replaced by curiosity. Sisi, "When the carriages arrived, they directly brought us to a courtyard and let us off there. None of us had ever seen such a tall, grand, glorious house before. We've all been dazzled blind, too scared to make a sound. A boy leaned against the doorway, playing with a dagger. He let us in when he saw us. He closed the door, and we entered the

room. In such a large room was only two people. A man lay within the brocade sheets on a large bed. He seemed to be thirty or forty years old, probably sickened to the verge of death. When he saw that people entered, he could only turn his eyeballs."

“Ah!”

Within Sword Hall, someone suddenly let out an exclaim of realization, “Eleven years ago?! This was... This was...!!!”

Sisi, “Beforehand, someone had already told us what to do—one after another, we had to use our best skills to look after the person lying on the bed. We weren’t supposed to stop for a single second. I even thought that it was some brawny hulk. Who knew it’d be a sick man? How could such a man endure ourlooking—

after? I bet he’d give his last breath before we finished a single round. Could the dirty old man really be looking for such a death? And they were so wealthy too. It definitely wasn’t that they didn’t have the money to hire younger, prettier ones. Why did they have to hire us old, ugly ones? I was thinking about this even as I crawled on top of them, when suddenly there seemed to be the sound of a young man’s laugh. I jumped from the scare. Only then did I realize that there was a curtain beside the bed, and a man sitting behind the curtain!”

Everyone’s heart was tugged tight by her words. Sisi continued, “I finally realized that this man had been sitting behind the curtain the whole time. When he laughed, the man in the bed suddenly struggled, pushed me away, and rolled off the bed. The person laughed even harder, talking as he laughed. He said, Father, I brought you your favorite women. There are so many of them. Are you happy?” Although Sisi was the one who said those words, everyone felt their hair rise. A smiling face appeared before their eyes.

Jin GuangYao! And the half-dead man inside the bed had to be Jin GuangShan!

Jin GuangShan’s death had always been a public secret within the world of cultivation. Jin GuangShan had been so amorous his whole life that he was almost obscene. He left his love everywhere; he left his seeds everywhere. The reason of his death was related to this as well. The sect leader of the LanlingJin Sect insisted on pursuing pleasure with women even when he was in such a weakened condition and finally died in bed. Such a story really saved him no dignity when told to others. After Madam Jin lost her only son and her daughter-in-law, she’d been quite depressed for a few years in the first place. Thinking that her husband had to fool around even when he was dying and finally fooled his life away, she was so angered that she fell ill as well, eventually passing away. The LanlingJin Sect tried to hide the news as hard as it could, but the world had a tacit understanding. The people sighed in grief on the surface, but they all thought that he deserved it, that such a death was only suitable for him. Yet, today, they had just heard of an uglier truth that was even more sickening than the previous one. Sharp intakes of breath could be heard throughout Sword Hall.

Sisi, “The middle-aged man wanted to shout and struggle, but his body was weak. The boy who led us inside opened the door again, grinning as he dragged him onto the bed again and tied him up with a rope, stepping on his head. He told us, carry on, don’t stop even when he’s dead. Had any of us been through such a situation before? We were scared half-dead, but we didn’t dare disobey. We had to continue. At the twelfth or eleventh round, that sister suddenly screamed, saying that he really was dead. I went over and checked. He’d indeed kicked the bucket, but the person behind the curtain said, didn’t you hear me? Don’t stop even when he’s dead!”

Sect Leader OuYang couldn’t help but comment, “No matterwhat, Jin GuangShan was his father by birth. If this was real... then it’s just too... too...”

Sisi, “When I saw that the man was dead, I knew that we were done. We wouldn’t be able to escape either. As expected, when we finished, those old sisters of mine were all killed. Not a single one of them was left...” Wei WuXian, “Then why are you the one who lived?”

Sisi, “I don’t know! Back then, I begged again and again. I said that I didn’t want the money, that I definitely wouldn’t say anything. Who knew that they really didn’t kill me. They took me to a place and locked me inside. I was there for eleven years.

Only recently did someone save me by accident, and I could finally escape.”

Wei WuXian, “Who was the one that saved you?”

Sisi, "I don't know. I've never seen the one who saved me. But after my savior heard about what happened to me, he decided not to let that pretentious, immoral man continue to fool the world. No matter how powerful he is right now, my savior said that he was going to expose all of the things he did and deliver justice to all those he hurt, letting those poor sisters of mine rest in peace in the Underworld."

## Chapter 86: Loyalty—Part Eight

Wei WuXian, "Then is there any proof to your words?"

Sisi hesitated for a moment, "No, but if I said even a single lie, I swear my corpse will rot and not even have a coffin to lie in!"

Sect Leader Yao immediately commented, "With such clear details, she definitely isn't lying!"

Lan QiRen's eyebrows were tight-knit. He turned to the other woman, "I think I have seen you before."

The woman's face was full of panic, "I think... I think you have."

Everyone paused in surprise. Sisi was a prostitute—could this woman be one too? Then why would Lan QiRen say he'd seen her before?

The woman, "During the YuelingQin Sect's Discussion Conference, I often accompanied my madam."

"The YuelingQin Sect?" A female cultivator asked, "You're a maid of the YuelingQin Sect?"

A more sharp-eyed one directly called out her name, "You're... Bicao, Madam Qin's personal maid Bicao! Right?"

The Madam Qin whom she referred to was Qin CangYe's wife, and so the birth mother of Jin GuangYao's wife, Qin Su. The woman nodded, "But now I'm no longer at the Qin Sect."

Sect Leader Yao was thrilled, standing up as he slammed his table, "Do you have something to tell us too?"

With red eyes, Bicao began, "What I'm about to say happened a bit earlier, about a dozen years ago.

"I'd served my madam for many years. I watched our Maiden A-Su grow up. Madam had always cared for Maiden Su, but around the time when Maiden Su was about to marry, Madam was in an extremely bad mood. She had nightmares when she slept and sometimes cried too when she was awake. I thought that she was only finding it hard to let go of Maiden Su, since Maiden Su was about to marry. I kept on comforting her by saying that the man she was marrying, LianFang-Zun Jin GuangYao, was not only accomplished but also caring and devoted. Maiden Su would lead a very good life. Yet, after Madam heard this, she was even worse.

"When the marriage day approached, one night, Madam suddenly said to me that she was going to see Maiden Su's future husband, and that she was going right now, wanting me to secretly accompany her. I said, you can ask him to see you. Why would you sneakily go see a young man in the middle of the night? If others heard of this, who knows how the rumors would go. But Madam's mind was set, so I had to go with her. After we arrived, however, Madam told me to wait outside and not go in, which was why I didn't hear anything and I don't know what exactly she said to Jin GuangYao. I only knew that a few days later, when the date of Maiden Su's marriage was set, Madam fainted as soon as she saw the invitation letter. And after Maiden Su was married, Madam was still extremely depressed. She was sick in her heart, and her sickness worsened by day. Before she passed away, she couldn't hold it in any longer, and told me everything."

Bicao said as she cried, "LianFang-Zun Jin GuangYao and our maiden, they never were wife and husband—they were brother and sister..."

"What?!"

There wouldn't be a shock so great even if thunder exploded in Sword Hall. Qin Su's pale face emerged before Wei WuXian's eyes.

Bicao, "My madam really was too unfortunate... Old Sect Leader Jin was a bastard. He lusted after my madam's looks, and once forced her when he was drunk outside... How could Madam resist? She didn't dare say anything afterwards either. My master was of utmost loyalty to Jin GuangShan, so she was more than scared. Jin GuangShan might not remember whose daughter Maiden Qin was, but my madam could never forget. She didn't dare talk to Jin GuangShan,

knowing that Maiden Qin was very much in love with Jin GuangYao. After a long struggle, she finally went to find him secretly before the marriage day and told him a few things, begging him to somehow cancel the marriage before things got out of hand. Who knew... Who knew that Jin GuangYao married Maiden Su even though he knew she was his younger sister!"

What was scarier was that not only did he marry her, the two even bore a child!

This really was the scandal of the century!

The sounds of the crowd's discussion rose louder and louder.

"For how long has Old Sect Leader Qin followed Jin GuangShan?

So, he even dared touch the wife of his old subordinate. Damn that Jin GuangShan!"

"So, it seems that nothing can be kept a secret for long in this world..."

"For Jin GuangYao to gain a strong foothold within the LanlingJin Sect, he had to have the help of his father-in-law Qin CangYe as his backbone. How could he have chosen not to marry her?"

"He really is the most immoral person of all the world!"

Wei WuXian whispered to Lan WangJi, "So that's why in the secret chamber he said to Qin Su, „A-Song had to die.”"

In Sword Hall, a few others thought of A-Song as well. Sect Leader Yao, "Judging from this, I dare to guess that his son wasn't assassinated by another at all, but rather by his own hands."

"And why so?"

Sect Leader Yao analyzed, "Most of the children born from closely related brothers and sisters end up being dull-witted. Jin RuSong was only a few years old when he died, precisely the age at which young children begin to learn. Others wouldn't be able to notice anything wrong when the child was still young, but after he grew up, it'd expose the fact that he was different from the others. Even if they didn't doubt the relationship between his parents, if a dull-witted child really was born, it'd be inevitable that others pointed at Jin GuangYao, saying that such a child was born only because he had the dirty blood of a prostitute in him."

Everyone found this to be quite persuasive, "How sharp, Sect Leader Yao!"

Sect Leader Yao continued, "And the one who killed Jin RuSong just happened to be the sect leader who opposed his construction of the lookout towers—how could there be such a coincidence?" He snorted, "Either way, no matter what, Jin GuangYao didn't need to keep a son who'd likely turn out to be an idiot. He killed Jin RuSong, framed the sect leader who opposed him, and crusaded against sects that refused to accept him fair and square, in the name of revenge for his son—although it was heartless, it killed two birds with one stone. What tactics, LianFang-Zun!"

Suddenly, Wei WuXian turned to Bicao, "The night of Koi Tower's Discussion Conference, you saw Qin Su, didn't you?"

Bicao paused.

Wei WuXian, "That night, in Fragrance Palace, Qin Su and Jin GuangYao were in quite a big argument. She said she went to meet someone, that this person told her a few things and gave her a letter, that this person definitely wouldn't lie to her. Was she talking about you?"

Bicao, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "For how long have you been keeping this secret? Why did you suddenly decide to tell her? And why did you suddenly decide to publicize all this?"

Bicao, "Because... I had to let Maiden Qin just what kind of person her husband is. In the beginning, I didn't want to publicize it either, but because of Madam Qin's inexplicable suicide at Koi Tower, I had to uncover this demon's real face to seek justice for my madam and Maiden Qin."

Wei WuXian smiled, "But have you never thought what a blow it'd be to her after you told her? Or do you really not know? That it's

because you went to tell Qin Su of the matter that she killed herself?"

Bicao, "I..."

Sect Leader Yao criticized, "Now this I can't possibly agree with. Would hiding the truth be right

instead?"

Immediately, someone helped him, "The other people are not to blame... Madam... Qin Su was still too fragile."

A few of the older female cultivators chimed in, "Qin Su was so pitiful."

"Back then I even envied her. I thought that she really had a good life. She had a good birth and a good marriage, the only mistress of Koi Tower with how devoted her husband was. But who knew? Tsk, tsk."

One of the madams commented in an aloof way, "That's why these seemingly beautiful things are often full of holes beneath the surface. There's nothing to envy at all."

Wei WuXian, perhaps it's precisely because of these people who comment in joy masked as pity that Qin Su decided to take her own life.

He looked down to see a bracelet of jade and gold worn on Bicao's wrist. The quality was extremely high. It was definitely not something that a maid would be able to wear. He smiled, "Nice bracelet."

Bicao hurried to pull her sleeve down. She said nothing.

Nie HuaiSang still seemed confused, "But... But who exactly is... the person who sent these two here?"

Sect Leader Yao, "Why worry over these?! No matter who it is, there's one thing we can be certain of—he's a man of justice who's definitely standing on our side."

Immediately came sounds of agreement, "That's right!"

Wei WuXian, however, disagreed, "The one who saved Maiden Sisi is definitely remarkable. Wealthy, and has time in his hands. But a man of justice? That's not necessarily true."

Lan WangJi, "There are many points of suspicion."

If Wei WuXian said this, not many people would pay attention, but since the one who spoke was Lan WangJi, the crowd quieted at once. Lan QiRen, "And where do those points lie?"

Wei WuXian, "Now there's quite a lot of them. For example, with how cruel Jin GuangYao is, why would he spare Sisi after having killed more than twenty people? Now we have the witnesses, but what about the material proof?"

He had always been voicing different opinions than the rest, ringing quite starkly against the passionate speeches among the crowd. Some people already seemed very much offended.

Sect Leader Yao spoke loudly, "This is called, the net of Heaven has large meshes, but it lets nothing unwanted through."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian smiled, and stopped speaking.

He knew that right now, nobody could take in what he said. Nobody would carefully consider his suspicions either. A few

more words, and maybe the others would start to position themselves against him again. If it were ten years ago, he wouldn't care about other people at all. He'd say whatever he wanted, and others would have to hear them whether they wanted to or not. Now, however, Wei WuXian no longer had the interest in taking the limelight this way.

And so, the waves of criticism began:

"Who knew this person could be so ungrateful and immoral!"

In the past few years, the words „ungrateful" and „immoral" were almost tied to Wei WuXian. At first, he even thought that they were criticizing him again. He only realized afterwards that even though it was the same people using the same words, the object of their criticism had already changed. He felt a bit not used to it.

Closely after, someone else spoke, "Back then, Jin GuangYao could climb up a step at a time only by playing up to ChiFeng-Zun and ZeWu-Jun. Or else, how could a prostitute's son like him be where he is now? How dare he lay his hands on ChiFeng-Zun!"

ZeWu-Jun is still with him right now. Let's hope that nothing happens to him!"

In the beginning, none of them believed that ChiFeng-Zun's death, the incident of the dismembered corpse, and the corpse siege at Burial Mound was all related to Jin GuangYao.

Now, everyone suddenly believed it.

“Not only his sworn brothers, his brothers by blood had it even worse. The couple of years before Jin GuangShan’s death, he busied himself everywhere getting rid of his dad’s illegitimate children, scared that someone would suddenly appear and fight for his spot with him. It wasn’t even that bad for Mo XuanYu. Ifnot because he lost his mind and was forced back, maybe he’d end

up the same way the others did and disappear for some reason or another.”

“Jin ZiXuan’s death had to be related as well!”

“Does anyone still remember Xiao XingChen from back then? Xiao XingChen, the bright moon, the gentle breeze. And the case of the YueyangChang Sect. At that time, Xue Yang was protected single-handedly by LianFang-Zun as well!”

“When Daozhang Xiao XingChen first came down the mountain, didn’t a lot of sects want him to be a guest cultivator at their place? The LanlingJin Sect also invited him, but he politely refused. Back then, the Jin Sect was quite pleased with itself.

Having been rejected by a rogue cultivator, of course it felt like it had lost face. This old enmity had to be one of the reasons they protected Xue Yang in the future as well. They just had to see Xiao XingChen lead to a terrible end, huh?”

“Hah! What do they think they are? Just you wait if you don’t join our sect?”

“How unfortunate. Back then, I had the luck of seeing Daozhang Xiao XingChen’s brilliance at a night-hunt with my own eyes. His sword, Shuanghua, could move the whole world.”

“Afterwards, Jin GuangYao still got rid of Xue Yang. What a case of the dog bites the dog.”

“I heard that back when Jin GuangYao worked undercover in the QishanWen Sect, he wasn’t genuine at all. This was what he

thought: if the Sunshot Campaign didn’t go well, he’d stay at the Wen Sect and help the villain; if the Wen Sect was about to fall, he’d turn around and become a hero.”

“Wen RuoHan is probably mad as hell in the Underworld. Back then, he trained Jin GuangYao as one of his most trusted cultivators. Almost all of Jin GuangYao’s current swordsmanship was taught to him by Wen RuoHan!”

“That’s not so big of a deal, is it? I heard that the reason ChiFeng- Zun failed the surprise attack was because he purposely sent out the wrong information!”

“I’ll say a secret too. The money and resources he used to build the lookout towers were all collected from other sects, right?

Every sect helped out a bit. I heard that he secretly takes... this amount.”

“Oh Heavens... So much? He really is shameless. I thought he really wanted do good back then. All of our sincerity was fed to the dogs!”

Wei WuXian felt that things were rather comical, if they’re rumors, why the hurry to believe them? If they’re secrets, why would you come to know them?

These rumors didn’t happen in just the one day. However, in the past, when Jin GuangYao was popular, they were suppressed quite well. Almost nobody took them seriously. Yet, tonight, all of the rumors seemed to have become absolute truths, forming the rocks and bricks of Jin GuangYao’s supposedly-committed crimes, proving his lack of morality.

“Judging from this, this person killed his father, his brother, his wife, his son, his master, his friend... and even committed incest. How terrifying!”

“The LanlingJin Sect is extremely overbearing, and Jin GuangYao is even more so authoritative. He never listens to other people’s opinions. Right now, the indulgent, arrogant climate was brought up by Jin GuangYao alone as well. Does he really think we’d hold our anger back?!”

“He’s probably made up his mind to get rid of us all now that he’s feeling threatened by the expanding forces of the other sects, scared that he’d be overthrown like how the Wen Sect was, right?”

Sect Leader Yao sneered, “Since this is the case, let’s make what he fears the most a reality.” He slammed his table, “Attack on Koi Tower!”

Amid the hall full of cheers, Wei WuXian thought, right before today, he was still the LianFang-Zun whom everyone praises. Just a day, and everyone wants to beat him up.

Suddenly, someone turned around, "Mr. Wei, Jin GuangYao has got the Tiger Seal in his hands. We'll entrust this matter to you."

Wei WuXian, "Huh?"

He didn't think that someone would come talk to him out of their own will, and even in such an enthusiastic way, calling him „Mr. Wei" instead of derogatories like „Wei-dog". He hesitated for a second.

Immediately, another sect leader followed, "That's right! Nobody ranks higher than the YiLing Patriarch in this path of cultivation!"

"Now things are looking bad for Jin GuangYao, hahahaha..."

Wei WuXian immediately felt a bit speechless. The last time others praised him like this was during the Sunshot Campaign

more than ten years ago. Although somebody finally inherited his position as being the enemy of the entire cultivation world, Wei WuXian didn't feel happiness at such an end, much less any warmth from finally being accepted by everyone.

He only doubted in silence, back then, could it have been just like today? A group of people gathered up in a place, began a secret discussion, cursed everything, and finally decided to have a siege on Burial Mound?

After the discussion ended, preparations finished in the YunmengJiang Sect's banquet hall as well. However, after the banquet started, two figures were missing.

One of the sect leaders mused, "Why are Wei... Patriarch YiLing and HanGuang-Jun missing?"

Sitting at the foremost seat, Jiang Cheng asked the guest cultivator beside him, "Where are they?"

The guest cultivator, "The two went to change after they left the inner hall. They said that they wouldn't be taking part in the banquet—that they wanted to walk around a bit and would come back later."

Jiang Cheng sneered, "The same as before, without any manners."

This seemed to include Lan WangJi as well. Displeasure could be seen on Lan QiRen's face. If Lan WangJi had no manners, manners wouldn't exist in this world. With such a thought, he began to grind his teeth at Wei WuXian again.

On the other hand, Jiang Cheng fixed his expression and spoke politely, "Everyone, please dine first. I'll invite the two back at a later time."

Outside of Lotus Pier, before the dock, Lan WangJi followed the lead of Wei WuXian. He didn't ask where they were going, either. The two strolled freely.

There were a few street vendors at the dock. Wei WuXian walked over, looked, and smiled, "Good thing we didn't eat with them."

Lan Zhan, come here, come here. The pie's really good. It's my treat! Can we have two please?" Grinning, the vendor wrapped two pies in greaseproof paper. Just as Wei WuXian was about to take them, he suddenly remembered that he had no money on him. How could he treat him? However, Lan WangJi had already taken them over in place of him, paying with his other hand. Wei WuXian, "Uh-oh, my apologies. Why is it always like this? Seems like every time I want to treat you to something, it doesn't work out."

Lan WangJi, "It is fine."

Wei WuXian took a bite, "Back then, I didn't even have to pay when I ate at the dock. I grabbed whatever I wanted, ate whatever I wanted; ran after I grabbed, walked as I ate. A month later, the vendor would get the reimbursement from Uncle Jiang."

Lan WangJi left a moon-shaped opening on the round pie, "Now, you do not have to pay either."

Wei WuXian, "Hahahahahahahahahaha!"

He finished in a couple of bites and scrunched the paper into a ball, tossing it in his hand as he looked around, "There aren't many vendors left. Back then, no matter how late it was, this place

was crammed with vendors, selling all kinds of food, because many people in Lotus Pier came out for late night snacks. There were also many boats, maybe even more than your Caiyi Town.” He continued, “It’s much fewer now. LanZhan, you came here too late. You weren’t here when it was at its liveliest.”

Lan WangJi, “It is not late.”

Wei WuXian grinned, “When we were studying at the Cloud Recesses, I asked you so many times to come play at Yunmeng, and you always ignored me. I should’ve been more forceful and dragged you over. Why are you so slow? It doesn’t taste good?”

Lan WangJi, “Speech is forbidden when dining.”

He’d always chewed slowly when he was eating. If he had talked, he made sure that there was no food in his mouth. Wei WuXian, “Then I won’t talk with you. You can eat. I thought you didn’t like it and that you could give me whatever you didn’t finish.”

Lan WangJi turned to the vendor, “Another one please.”

In the end, after Wei WuXian finished all three pies, Lan WangJi was still nibbling on his first one. Wei WuXian had already led him further and further away from Lotus Pier. On the way, he pointed at this and that for him to see.

He really wanted to show Lan WangJi all the places where he grew up at, played at, and fooled around at, tell him about the troubles he stirred up, the fights he fought, the pheasants he caught, and then examine the slight changes in Lan WangJi’s expression, eagerly expecting his every reaction.

Wei WuXian, “Lan Zhan! Look at me, look at the tree.”

Lan WangJi finished his pie as well. He folded the paper into a neat little square and held it in his hand as he looked toward Wei WuXian’s direction. It was only the average tree. The trunk stood straight and the branches fanned out. It should be a few decades old. Wei WuXian stood below the tree and walked around it a couple of times, slapping the trunk, “I’ve climbed this tree before.” Lan WangJi, “You have climbed every single tree on our way here.”

Wei WuXian, “But this one’s different! This was the first one I climbed after I came to Lotus Pier. I climbed it in the middle of the night. My shijie came out to search for me, holding a lantern. She was scared I’d fall down the tree, so she prepared to catch me on the ground. But what could she catch with her thin little arms?”

And so, I still broke one of my legs.” Looking at his legs, Lan WangJi asked, “Why did you climb the tree at night?” Wei WuXian bent down in laughter, “There’s no why. You know. I love fooling around outside at night. Haha.”

## Chapter 87: Loyalty—Part Nine

As Wei WuXian spoke, he grabbed two branches and started to climb up the trunk of the tree. With great ease, he leaped up until he reached an area near the top. Wei WuXian finally stopped, "Hm, it should be about here."

He buried his face inside a cluster of thick leaves and only looked down after a long while. His voice was high, tinged with laughter, "Back then, it felt so scarily high, but looking at it now, it really wasn't that high."

The instant he wrapped his arms around the tree, Wei WuXian's eyes had warmed. When he looked down, his sight was already blurred.

Lan WangJi was standing right beneath the tree, looking at him with his chin raised. He was clothed in white as well. He didn't hold a lantern, but moonlight glided down his body, almost enveloping him in a soft halo, making him seem so bright. He looked up at the top of the tree with a dedicated expression. He seemed to have walked a few steps closer, almost as if to stretch his arms out.

All of a sudden, an abnormally strong impulse surged into Wei WuXian's mind.

He wanted to fall down again, just like back then.

A voice inside of him said, if he catches me, I'll...

At this point where he thought „I'll", Wei WuXian let go. Seeing that he fell out of the tree without any warning, Lan WangJi's eyes immediately widened. He shot forward just in time to catch Wei WuXian, or one might say, be caught by Wei WuXian.

Lan WangJi's figure was slender. He seemed to be quite the scholarly young master, but his power wasn't to be disregarded. Not only was his arm strength shocking, his lower body was steady too. But, after all, it was a grown man who jumped from the tree, so although he caught Wei WuXian, he staggered slightly, walking a step backward. Immediately, however, he steadied himself. Just as he was about to let go of Wei WuXian, he realized that Wei WuXian's arms were tightly wrapped around his neck, preventing him from moving in the slightest.

He couldn't see Wei WuXian's face. Wei WuXian couldn't see his face either, but he didn't need to. When he closed his eyes, all he breathed in was the cold sandalwood on Lan WangJi's body. His voice was hoarse, "Thank you."

He wasn't scared of falling. All these years, he'd fallen many times. But falling on the ground still hurt, after all. If someone was there to catch him, it'd be more than wonderful.

Hearing Wei WuXian thank him, Lan WangJi's body seemed to freeze for a second. The hand that was about to be laid on Wei WuXian's back paused before it returned.

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi responded, "You are welcome."

With a long time of hugging, Wei WuXian finally parted with him. Standing with his back straight as ever, he spoke as though nothing happened, "Let's go back!"

Lan WangJi, "No more reminiscing?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes, more reminiscing! But there's nothing to see if we walk farther out. It'd be the wilderness there, and we've seen enough of that in the past few days. Let's go back to Lotus Pier.

I'll take you to see the last place."

The two returned to the dock and entered the gates of Lotus Pier once again. They walked across the training field. As they passed by an ornate little building, Wei WuXian stopped and took a few more looks. His expression seemed different. Lan WangJi asked, "What is wrong?"

Wei WuXian shook his head, "Nothing. The place I lived in used

to be here. Now it's gone. It really was torn down. All of these are new."

They passed by the layers of buildings and arrived at a quiet place in the depths of Lotus Pier, in front of a black eight-cornered palace. As if scared that he'd startle someone, Wei WuXian gently pushed the doors open and walked inside. Before the palace neatly lay rows and rows of tablets.

It was the YunmengJiang Sect's ancestral hall.

He found a hassock and kneeled down. Taking three of the incense sticks in the container, he ignited them with the candlelight and stuck them into the bronze tripod in front of the tablets. He prostrated three times to two of the tablets, and turned to Lan WangJi, "I used to come here a lot."

Lan WangJi had on an expression of understanding, "Kneeling as punishment?"

Wei WuXian mused, "How did you know? That's right. Madam Yu punished me almost every day."

Lan WangJi nodded, "I have heard of a few things."

Wei WuXian, "It's so famous that even people outside Yunmeng, even you Gusu people know—how could it be „a few things"? But, to be honest, in all these years, I've never seen a second woman whose temper was as bad as Madam Yu's. She told me to go to the ancestral hall and kneel no matter how small the matter was. Hahaha..."

But, apart from this, Madam Yu had never really done anything to harm him.

He suddenly remembered that this was the ancestral hall and that Madam Yu's tablet was right in front of him. He immediately apologized, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

To make up for his thoughtless words, he lit up three more sticks of incense. Just as he raised them above his head, still apologizing in his mind, it suddenly got darker beside him. He turned to find that Lan WangJi had also kneeled down beside him.

Now that they were in the ancestral hall, for the sake of courtesy, of course he had to show his respect as well. Lan WangJi also took three sticks of incense and, sweeping his sleeve to the side, and ignited them using one of the red candles. His movements were proper, and his expression was grave. Wei WuXian tilted his head to look at him, his lips curving upward almost uncontrollably. Lan WangJi glanced at him and reminded, "The ashes."

The three sticks of incense that Wei WuXian held had been burning for quite a while. A bit of ashes had already accumulated at the top, close to falling off. However, he still refused to insert them into the tripod, instead saying, "Let's do it together."

Lan WangJi didn't object. And so, each with three sticks of incense, the two of them kneeled among rows of tablets and bowed down to Jiang FengMian and Yu ZiYuan's names together.

Once. Twice. The movements were exactly the same. Wei WuXian, "That's it." He finally placed the incense into the tripod.

In the end. Wei WuXian glanced at Lan WangJi, who's kneeling as properly as ever beside him. He put his hands together and uttered in his heart, „Uncle Jiang, Madam Yu, it's me again. I'm here to disturb you two again. But I really did want to bring him here and show him to you. Let the two prostrates we just did count as prostrating\* to the Heavens and the Earth, and to the Father and the Mother. Please help me reserve the person beside me for now. I'll owe you the last prostrate for now, and find some chance to make up for it in the future..."

\*In traditional Chinese marriages, one has to prostrate three times: once to the Heavens and the Earth, once to the Father and the Mother, and once to the Husband and the Wife (each other).

At this point, a cold laugh suddenly came from behind the two.

Wei WuXian was in the middle of his silent prayers. Hearing the sound, he trembled as his eyes sprang open. He turned around to see Jiang Cheng standing in the middle of a clearing outside of the ancestral hall, his arms folded.

His voice was chilling, "Wei WuXian, you really don't take yourself as an outsider, do you? You come and leave whenever you want.

You take with you whomever you want. Do you perhaps still remember whose sect this is? Who's the owner?"

Doing this, Wei WuXian wanted to keep it away from Jiang Cheng in the first place. Now that he discovered them, he knew they'd definitely be faced with some vicious remarks. He didn't want to argue, "I didn't take HanGuang-Jun to the other, more confidential places of Lotus Pier. We only came to greet Uncle Jiang and Madam Yu with a few sticks of incense. We're finished

already and we'll be leaving now."

Jiang Cheng, "If you're leaving, please go as far as possible. Don't let me see or hear you fooling around in Lotus Pier again."

Wei WuXian felt his brows twitch. He saw Lan WangJi's right hand press onto his sword and stopped him at once.

Lan WangJi turned to Jiang Cheng, "Watch your words."

Jiang Cheng was quite blunt, "I think you're the ones who should watch your actions."

Wei WuXian's brows throbbed even harder, and the ominous feeling within him grew as well. He spoke to Lan WangJi, "HanGuang-Jun, let's go."

He then turned around and prostrated a few more times before the Jiang couple's tablets before standing up with Lan WangJi. Jiang Cheng didn't stop him from prostrating, but he didn't hide his mocking tone either, "You really should kneel for them

properly, having dirtied their eyes and contaminated their peace."

Wei WuXian threw him a sideways glance, speaking in a calm voice, "I'm only here to burn some incense. That's enough, isn't it?"

Jiang Cheng, "Burn some incense? Wei WuXian, are you really that dense? It's been so long since you were kicked out of our sect, and here you are taking unwelcome people with you to burn incense for my parents?"

Wei WuXian was already about to pass around him and leave. When he heard this, he suddenly stopped, his voice low, "Well, say it out loud. Who's an unwelcome person?"

If he were alone here, he'd be able to pretend like he heard nothing of what Jiang Cheng said. However, with Lan WangJi with him, no matter what, he wouldn't want Lan WangJi to suffer through Jiang Cheng's vulgar remarks and obvious malice alongside him.

Jiang Cheng mocked, "Look how forgetful you are. What does unwelcome people mean? Then let me remind you. It was because you played the hero and saved Second Young Master Lan, who's standing beside you right now, that the entire Lotus Pier and my parents went down with you. And that wasn't enough. With the first time, soon comes the second. You even had to save Wen-dogs and drag my sister down with you. What a person you are! What's more, you're even so generous as to take the two to Lotus Pier. The Wen-dog's strolling in front of my sect's gates; Second Young Master Lan came here to burn incense. You're here on purpose to remind me, to remind them." He continued, "Wei WuXian, who do you think you are? Who gave you the face to take whomever you want into our sect's ancestral hall?"

Wei WuXian knew that Jiang Cheng had to settle this with him no matter what.

For Lotus Pier's destruction, Jiang Cheng thought not only that Wei WuXian responsible, but also that Wen Ning and Lan WangJi were responsible too. He wouldn't give a friendly look to either of

the three, let alone when they were walking right in front of his face at the same time inside Lotus Pier. He was probably infuriated.

## Chapter 88: Loyalty—Part Ten

When Jiang Cheng accused him, Wei WuXian couldn't defend himself at all, but he just couldn't bear it when such words were being directed at Lan WangJi.

Wei WuXian, "Jiang Cheng, just listen to yourself. What are you saying? Is it appropriate? Don't forget who you are. After all, you're the leader of a sect. Insulting a renowned cultivator in front of Uncle Jiang and Madam Yu's spirits—where is your discipline?"

His original intention was to remind Jiang Cheng to at least hold some respect for Lan WangJi. However, Jiang Cheng was the most sensitive. From those words, he managed to make out the notion that he wasn't fit to be a sect leader. Immediately, darkness crawled up his face, bearing an eerie similarity to how Madam Yu looked when she was angry. His voice was harsh, "Who's the one insulting my parents in front of their spirits?! Could you two please understand whose sect you're in? I don't care if you act so shamelessly outside, but don't you dare fool around inside our ancestral hall, before my parents' spirits! After all, they were the ones who brought you up—even I feel ashamed for you!"

Wei WuXian never expected such a huge blow to crash down on him. He was both shocked and furious, blurting, "Shut up!"

Jiang Cheng pointed outside, "Mess around outside however you want, whether under a tree or on a boat, hugging or otherwise!

Get out of my sect, get out of anywhere my eyes can see!"

Hearing him mention „under a tree", Wei WuXian felt his heart skip a beat—could Jiang Cheng have seen the scene where he crashed into Lan WangJi's arms?

His guess was not wrong. Jiang Cheng did indeed go out to find Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi. He chased after them in the direction that the street vendors pointed at. A voice in his heart seemed to tell him to which places Wei WuXian would definitely go. He caught up to them in just a while. Yet, he just so happened to see Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi enveloped in a tight embrace under a tree, unwilling to let go of each other even after so long.

Goosebumps immediately ran down Jiang Cheng's body.

Although he'd made guesses at the relationship between Mo XuanYu and Lan WangJi before, they were only attacks trying to offend Wei WuXian, not that he really doubted anything. He'd never thought that Wei WuXian would have ambiguous ties with a man, for after all, when they grew up together, Wei WuXian had never expressed any such interest. He'd always loved good-looking girls with a passion. On the other hand, it was even more impossible for Lan WangJi. He was famous for his asceticism, seemingly interested in neither men nor women.

But hugging like that seemed abnormal no matter what. At least, they didn't seem like normal friends or brothers. He immediately recalled that Wei WuXian had always stuck to Lan WangJi ever since he came back. Lan WangJi's attitude toward him was also different from what it was before he was reborn. At once, he was almost certain that the two really were in that kind of relationship. He couldn't turn around and leave, yet he didn't want to say a single word to the two, so he continued to hide himself as he followed them. Every single look and movement that passed between them seemed different in his eyes. For a while, the shock, absurdity, and slight disgust that he felt combined to overpower his hatred. It was only after Wei WuXian brought Lan WangJi into the ancestral hall that the long-suppressed hatred was awakened again, devouring his courtesy and rationality.

Wei WuXian was holding something back, "Jiang WanYin, you... apologize right now."

Jiang Cheng mocked, "Apologize? For what? For exposing your thing for each other?"

Wei WuXian raged, "HanGuang-Jun is only my friend—what do you think we are?! I warn you. Apologize right now—don't make me beat you up!"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi's expression froze for an instant. Jiang Cheng laughed, "Well, then I've never seen „friends" like that before? You warn me? Warn me against what? If you two had

the slightest trace of integrity left, you shouldn't have come here and..."

Seeing the change in Lan WangJi's expression, Wei WuXian

thought he felt insulted by Jiang Cheng's words. He was so angry that his entire body was shaking. He didn't dare think about what Lan WangJi would think after being shamed like this. The rage from his heart rushed to his head as he threw out a talisman, "Have you had enough yet?"

The talisman was both fast and powerful. It exploded at Jiang Cheng's right shoulder, causing him to stagger. Jiang Cheng didn't expect Wei WuXian to attack so suddenly. His spiritual powers hadn't recovered completely yet, either, and so the talisman hit its target. Blood seeped from his shoulder as disbelief flashed across his face. Zidian immediately unraveled from his fingers, lashing out with sizzling light. Lan WangJi unsheathed Bichen to block the attack. The three began to fight inside the ancestral hall.

Jiang Cheng's voice was as hideous as the look in his eyes, "Very well! A fight it is, then! You think I'm scared?!"

Yet, as he fended off a couple of attacks, Wei WuXian suddenly remembered. This was the YunmengJiang Sect's ancestral hall. Just a short while ago, he was kneeling here, asking for the Jiang couple's blessings, yet now, he was attacking their son with Lan WangJi, right in front of their eyes!

As though doused in an icy waterfall, he felt the light in his eyes flicker between light and dark. Lan WangJi glanced at him before whirling around and grabbing his shoulders. Jiang Cheng's expression changed as well. He stopped his whip as his eyes gleamed with alertness.

Lan WangJi, "Wei Ying?!" His low voice rang within Wei WuXian's ears, echoing endlessly.

Wei WuXian was starting doubt if something happened to his ears, "What's wrong?"

He felt something streak down his face, but reached up only to retrieve a handful of scarlet. Accompanied by throbs of dizziness, blood continued to drip down his nose and his mouth, onto the ground.

This time, he finally wasn't faking it anymore.

Wei WuXian could barely manage to stand, holding onto Lan WangJi's arm. Seeing that the white clothes that Lan WangJi had just changed into were dyed red by his blood again, he couldn't help but reached out to wipe them, worried in an ill-timed way, I made his clothes dirty again.

Lan WangJi, "How do you feel?!"

Wei WuXian didn't answer the question, "Lan Zhan... Let's go." Go. Right now.

Don't ever come back again. Lan WangJi, "Yes."

He'd completely lost all intention to continue the fight with Jiang Cheng. Without saying anything, he picked Wei WuXian up and turned to leave. Jiang Cheng was full of both shock and doubt. He

was shocked that Wei WuXian was suddenly in such a terrible condition, yet doubtful that this might be a pretense Wei WuXian came up with to escape. After all, Wei WuXian had often used this to pull pranks on him in the past.

Seeing that the two were about to leave, he shouted, "Stop!" Lan WangJi seethed, "Leave!"

What came as well was Bichen, the force of which immediately flung out. Zidian also lashed, and the two struck, sending out an ear-piercing clash. Impacted by the noise, Wei WuXian's head almost split into two. Like a dying candlelight that was finally blown out, he closed his eyes, and his head drooped as well.

Feeling the weight on his shoulder, Lan WangJi retreated from the fight to feel his breathing. Without the help of its owner, Bichen was slowly being overpowered by the approaching Zidian. Jiang Cheng didn't really want to hit Lan WangJi, and immediately retracted his whip, but it was already too late. Just now, however, a figure leaped down from the side and blocked between the two.

Jiang Cheng looked to find that the uninvited guest was Wen Ning. Immediately, he raged,

“Who let you inside Lotus Pier?! How dare you!”

He could manage to tolerate others, but definitely not Wen Ning, the Wen-dog who put his hand through Jin ZiXuan’s heart and ended both his sister’s happiness and her life. Just a look, and he felt the urge to kill him right there. How dare he step foot on the earth of Lotus Pier—he really was looking for his death!

Because of the two lives and many other reasons, Wen Ning had always felt guilty, and so he’d always been somewhat scared of Jiang Cheng, consciously avoiding him all the time. Right now, however, he blocked Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi as he faced

him, taking the hard lash. A gruesome scorch climbed across his chest, but still, he didn’t flinch. Having come to the conclusion that Wei WuXian was only in a temporary state of unconsciousness due to extreme fatigue and anger, Lan WangJi finally tore his gaze away. He saw that Wen Ning held something in his hands and passed it to Jiang Cheng. Zidian, in Jiang Cheng’s right hand, glowed so bright that it was almost white, its light surging alongside the killing intent within him. He laughed from the rage, “What do you want?”

The object was Wei WuXian’s sword, Suibian. On the way, Wei WuXian tossed it everywhere due to it being too much of a hassle. In the end, he left it in Wen Ning’s care. Wen Ning held it as he spoke, “Pull it out.”

His tone was firm, and his eyes determined. He had nothing of his previously blank look left.

Jiang Cheng, “I warn you. If you don’t want to be turned to ashes once more, then immediately move your feet off of Lotus Pier’s soil. Leave!”

Wen Ning was almost thrusting the sword hilt into his chest. His voice soared, “Do it. Pull it out!”

Annoyance swelled in Jiang Cheng. His heart pounded without a reason. For whatever reason, he really did do as Wen Ning said. He held Suibian’s hilt with his left hand and pulled on it hard. A white, glaring blade was removed from its plain hilt!

Jiang Cheng stared down at the glimmering sword in his hand. He only realized after a few moments.

The sword was Suibian, Wei WuXian’s sword. After the siege at Burial Mound, it was collected as a battle trophy by the LanlingJin Sect’s people. It’d long since sealed itself. Of those who saw it later, not a single one was able to pull it out.

But why could he do it? Did the sword lift its seal?

Wen Ning, “It’s not that the sword lifted its seal! Even now, it’s still sealed. If you put it back into its sheath and ask someone else to unsheathe it, nobody would be able to pull it out.”

The chaotic confusion within Jiang Cheng could be seen shown on his face, “Then why could I pull it out?”

Wen Ning, “Because the sword took you as Young Master Wei.”

Carrying the unconscious Wei WuXian on his back, Lan WangJi stood up.

Jiang Cheng shouted, “What do you mean the sword took me as Wei WuXian? How?! Why would it be me?!”

Wen Ning’s voice was even harsher, “Because the goldencore that is revolving inside you right now is his!”

## Chapter 89: Loyalty—Part Eleven

Only after pausing blankly for a long while did Jiang Cheng finally shout, “What nonsense are you talking about!?”

Wen Ning seemed to be composed, “It’s not nonsense.” Jiang Cheng, “Shut up! My core was... My core was...” Wen Ning, “Was mended by BaoShan SanRen.”

Jiang Cheng, “How do you know? He even told you about this?”

Wen Ning, “He didn’t. Young Master Wei never mentioned it to anyone. I saw it with my own eyes.”

Jiang Cheng’s eyes were bloodshot as he laughed, “Liar! You were there? How could you have been there?! I was the only one who went up the mountain; you couldn’t have followed me!”

Wen Ning, “I didn’t follow you. I’d been on the mountain ever since the beginning.”

Veins lined Jiang Cheng’s forehead, “... Liar!”

Wen Ning, “Just listen and see if I’m lying! You had a piece of black cloth over your eyes when you went up the mountain. You were holding a long branch in your hand. You passed a stone forest when you were about to reach the top and you only managed to go around it after almost an entire hour.”

The muscles on Jiang Cheng’s face twitched slightly. Wen Ning continued, “And then you heard bell chimes. The chimes sent a flock of birds flying away. You held the branch tight in your hand, like holding a sword. When the bell chimes stopped, a sword was pressed against the center of your chest. You heard a woman’s voice, ordering you to stop going forward.”

Jiang Cheng’s entire body started to tremble as Wen Ning raised his voice, “You immediately stopped in your tracks, looking

extremely nervous, almost a bit excited. The woman’s voice was very low. She asked you whom you were and how you found this place. You answered...”

Jiang Cheng roared, “Shut up!”

Wen Ning roared as well, “... You answered, you were Wei Ying, son of CangSe SanRen\*! You talked about the destruction of your sect, the pandemonium at Lotus Pier, and that your golden core was dissolved by Wen ZhuLiu, the Core-Melting Hand. The woman asked you questions about your parents over and over again, and when you answered the last question, you suddenly caught the scent of something fragrant before you lost consciousness...”

\*pronunciation change due to audio drama pronouncing it cang instead of zang.

Jiang Cheng seemed almost as if he was about to cover his ears with his hands, “Why do you know? How do you know!?”

Wen Ning, “Haven’t I told you already? I was right there, but not only that, Young Master Wei was there as well. Apart from us, there was also my sister, Wen Qing. In other words, on the entire mountain, we three were the only ones waiting for you.”

“Sect Leader Jiang, did you really think that it was the secluded residence of some... some BaoShan SanRen? Young Master Wei himself didn’t know where on Earth to find such a place either. His mother CangSe SanRen never revealed anything about where her teacher was to that young of a child! The mountain was nothing more than one of Yiling’s barren peaks!”

Shouting his voice hoarse, Jiang Cheng repeated the same things again and again, as if to use the malicious expression to conceal his sudden lack of words, “Nonsense! That’s fucking enough! Then why was my core mended?!”

Wen Ning, “Your core was never mended in the first place. It’d long since been completely melted by Wen ZhuLiu! The reason you thought it was mended was that my sister Wen Qing, the best medic of the QishanWen Sect, cut out Young Master Wei’s golden core and replaced yours with it!”

Jiang Cheng’s face was completely blank for amoment, “Replaced mine with it?”

Wen Ning, “That’s right! Why do you think he never used Suibian again and never carried it

with him when he went out? Was it really because of some youthful arrogance? Could he have really enjoyed it when others said that he was impolite and lacked discipline, whether behind his back or not? It was because even if he carried it, there'd be no use! It was only because... if he carried his sword to those banquets and night-hunts, there'd definitely be people asking to duel him for whatever reasons. And

he, without his golden core, was deprived of spiritual energy. If he used his sword, he wouldn't be able to last long at all..."

Jiang Cheng stood blankly. His eyes glowed green. His lips quivered. He even forgot to use Zidian. Suddenly, he threw Suibian down and struck hard against Wen Ning's chest with his hand, shouting, "Liar!"

Wen Ning staggered a few steps back from the force. He picked up Suibian, put it back inside its sheath, and shoved it into Jiang Cheng's arms again, "Take it!"

Jiang Cheng couldn't help but to take the sword. He didn't move. Instead, at a loss as to what to do, he looked across at where Wei WuXian was. It was fine when he didn't look, but now that he looked, Wei WuXian's feeble appearance—pale-faced, blood still at the corners of his lips—hit his heart as though it were a hammer. Lan WangJi's eyes chilled the air around his body, making it feel like a cave of ice.

Wen Ning, "Take this sword and go to the banquet hall, to the training field, to anywhere you want and ask every single person you see to pull the sword out. See if any one of them can pull it out! And then you'll know if I'm lying or not! Sect Leader Jiang—you, so driven of a person, have been comparing yourself to others your whole life, but you have to know that you never should've been able to equal him!"

Jiang Cheng kicked Wen Ning before he stumbled toward the banquet hall, holding Suibian in his hand.

He bellowed as he ran in an almost crazed manner. Wen Ning was kicked onto one of the trees in the courtyard. He stood up slowly and turned to the other two. Lan WangJi's immaculate face was at the moment more than pale. His expression was also

covered in frost. After one last look at the Yunmeng Jiang Sect's ancestral hall, he lifted Wei WuXian's body so that it rested steadily and finally walk away in the opposite direction without turning back.

Wen Ning, "Y-Young Master Lan, where are you going?"

Lan WangJi's figure paused before the stairs, "Just now, he told me to take him away."

Wen Ning followed at once, walking out the gates of Lotus Pier along with him.

At the dock, most of the group of boats that they used to come here had already gone back after they arrived at the destination. Only two old, unattended ferries were left in front of the dock. The ferries were both long and narrow, shaped like willow leaves, able to contain seven or eight people. Both ends of each ferry curved upward, with two oars at one end. Carrying Wei WuXian on his back, Lan WangJi stepped onto the ferry without any hesitation.

With hurry, Wen Ning leaped onto the tail of the boat, taking up the oars voluntarily. With just two rows, the ferry steadily drifted quite a few feet away. Soon, the ferry had followed the water's flow away from the dock, approaching the center of the river.

Lan WangJi let Wei WuXian lean on his body. He first fed him two pills. Only after he confirmed that he swallowed them properly did he take out his handkerchief and slowly wipe away the blood on his face.

Suddenly, Wen Ning's nervous voice came over, "Y-Young Master Lan."

Lan WangJi, "What is it?"

Wen Ning's assertion back when he was in front of Jiang Cheng had already disappeared without a trace. He summoned up all his courage before speaking, "Please... Please don't tell Young Master Wei that I revealed the secret of his core yet. He's warned me very seriously to not tell anyone no matter what. Although I probably wouldn't be able to keep him in the dark for long, I..."

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "Do not worry."

It seemed that Wen Ning let out a sigh of relief, even though dead people had no breath to sigh. He spoke earnestly, "Young Master Lan, thank you."

Lan WangJi shook his head. Wen Ning, "Thank you for speaking up for me and my sister back then, on Koi Tower. I've always remembered it. For how I lost control afterwards, I... really am sorry."

Lan WangJi didn't answer. Wen Ning continued, "Thank you even more for looking after A-Yuan all these years."

Hearing this, Lan WangJi looked up slightly. Wen Ning, "I thought every single person from our sect was dead. I really didn't expect that A-Yuan would still be alive. He looks so much like my cousin when he was around twenty."

Lan WangJi, "He hid inside the tree trunk for too long and caught a severe fever."

Wen Ning nodded, "I know he must've been sick. He remembers nothing of his childhood. I chatted with him for a long time. He kept on talking about you." He said somewhat disappointedly, "In the past, it was about Young Master Wei... It's never been about me, anyways."

Lan WangJi, "You did not tell him."

Wen Ning, "You mean his background? No, I didn't."

He turned around with his back facing the two, speaking as he rowed the ferry diligently, "He's doing very well right now. If he knew too much or remembered things that are too heavy... he wouldn't be doing as well as he is right now."

Lan WangJi, "It is only a matter of time."

Wen Ning hesitated for a moment, "Yes. It's only a matter of time." He looked up at the sky, "Just like Young Master Wei and Sect Leader Jiang. It was only a matter of time before Sect Leader Jiang knew about the core. He couldn't have kept it from Sect Leader Jiang for his whole life, could he?"

The night was silent, and the river's flow heavy. Suddenly, Lan WangJi spoke up, "Is it painful?"

Wen Ning, "What?"

Lan WangJi, "Cutting out one's core. Is it painful?"

Wen Ning, "If I said it wasn't, Young Master Lan, you wouldn't believe it either, would you?"

Lan WangJi, "I thought Wen Qing would find a way."

Wen Ning, "Before we went up the mountain, my sister did make many anesthetics, hoping they'd reduce the pain of cutting out this core. But then she found out that those anesthetics were absolutely useless. Because if the person is under anesthetized conditions when the core is being cut out, separating from the body, the core would be affected as well. It was hard to tell whether it'd dissolve, when it'd dissolve."

Lan WangJi, "... And so?"

Wen Ning's rowing paused for an instant, "And so, the person whose core is being cut out has to be awake."

He had to be awake. He had to watch the golden core connected to his spiritual pathways be peeled from his body. He had to feel the gradual suppression, sedation, settlement of his originally surging spiritual powers, all until they became a pool of dead water, unable to rise ever again.

Only after a long while did Lan WangJi's voice sound again, somewhat hoarse. The first word seemed to tremble, "Constantly awake?"

Wen Ning, "Two nights and one day. Constantly awake." Lan WangJi, "What were the chances?"

Wen Ning, "About half."

"Half." Soundlessly, Lan WangJi took in a deep breath. He then shook his head, repeating, "... Half."

He tightened the arm he wrapped around Wei WuXian's shoulders. His knuckles were already growing white.

Wen Ning, "After all, in the past, nobody had ever actually tried transferring golden cores before. Although my sister had written an essay on core transfer, she'd only made some conjectures. Nobody at all would let her experiment on them, so the conjectures stayed conjectures. All of the seniors said that she

was letting her imagination run wild. On top of that, it was unrealistic. Everyone knew that nobody would willingly give their golden core to someone else, for if this really happened, they themselves would become absolutely useless, never able to reach the pinnacle or go anywhere in life at all. And so, when Young Master Wei first came back for us, my sister refused to do it. She warned him that the article and actually conducting the experiment were two different things. She was not even half confident.

"But Young Master Wei kept on bothering her. He said that half was fine too. There was an equal chance of succeeding and failing. If his core was ruined, he'd manage to live on, but Sect Leader Jiang was a different case. He was too driven. He laid too much emphasis on such a subject. Cultivation was his life. If Sect Leader Jiang could only be an ordinary person, unable to go anywhere in life, his entire life would be over."

Lan WangJi looked down. His glass-like eyes gazed at Wei WuXian's face as he extended his hand. In the end, he only brushed the tip of his finger against Wei WuXian's cheek, almost unnoticeably.

Wen Ning turned around. He couldn't help but ask, "Young Master Lan, you don't seem too surprised about this. Did you... Did you know about this as well?"

"..." Lan WangJi managed, "I only knew that his spiritual powers were somehow impaired."

But to think this was the truth.

Wen Ning, "If not because of this..."

If not because there really wasn't a second path to walk on.

At this point, the head leaning against Lan WangJi's shoulder shifted slightly. Wei WuXian's lashes trembled as he slowly awakened.

## Chapter 90: Longing—Part One

Wen Ning immediately shut his mouth. Amid the gurgles of the boat being rowed forward, Wei WuXian opened his eyes with a terrible headache.

Leaning completely on Lan WangJi's body, he realized that they weren't in Lotus Pier anymore. For a long while, he couldn't figure out what was happening. Only when he saw the splatters of blood on Lan WangJi's left sleeve, like a string of plum blossoms resting on snow, did he finally recall what happened before he passed out from anger. His expression twisted at once as he suddenly sat upright. Lan WangJi went to help him, but the ringing in Wei WuXian's ears hadn't stopped yet. A heavy scent of blood also felt stuffed in his chest. It was more than uncomfortable.

He was worried that he might cough blood onto the clean-loving Lan WangJi again. Waving his hand, he turned around to one side and tried to hold it back for a while, supporting himself on the rail of the boat. Lan WangJi knew that he wasn't feeling well.

Silent, he didn't ask anything. He lay one hand on his back, sending him a warm thread of spiritual energy.

As the iron taste in his throat passed, Wei WuXian finally turned back around, letting Lan WangJi remove his hand. After a while of sitting quietly, he finally tried to ask, "HanGuang-Jun, how did we get out?"

Wen Ning's expression immediately grew nervous. He stopped rowing as well. As expected, Lan WangJi kept his promise and said nothing of the secret. However, he didn't lie and make up an explanation either. His words were simple, "We fought."

Wei WuXian reached out with one hand and massaged his chest, as if trying to break up the pent-up feeling inside his heart. A moment later, he blurted, "I knew Jiang Cheng wouldn't have let us go so easily. That brat... How could this be?!"

Lan WangJi frowned, his voice deep, "Do not mention him."

Hearing how displeased his tone was, Wei WuXian paused in surprise. He immediately replied, "Okay. I won't mention him."

After some thought, he began again, "Um, HanGuang-Jun, don't mind the things he said, alright?"

Lan WangJi, "Which sentence?"

Wei WuXian's eyelids throbbed, "Every one of them. The brat's been like this ever since he was young. He'll say anything when he's angry, no matter how bad it is. He gives up on all grace and discipline whatsoever. As long as it'd annoy whomever he's against, he'd say it no matter what terrible insults he uses. After all these years, he hasn't gotten better at all. Please don't take it to heart."

He spoke as he secretly paid attention to Lan WangJi's expression. Slowly, his heart sunk.

Wei WuXian originally thought—or hoped—that Lan WangJi wouldn't take those words to heart. But unexpectedly, Lan WangJi didn't look too well. He didn't even reply with a „mn.”

It looked like Lan WangJi was even more displeased at Jiang Cheng's insults than he had thought. Perhaps he simply didn't like Jiang Cheng's character, or perhaps... he was especially intolerant of being called „shameless,” „lacking in integrity,” and „an unwelcome person.” After all, the Gusu Lan Sect was known for its motto of „be righteous.” HanGuang-Jun himself had never been associated with such words either.

Although in the past few days, he felt that Lan WangJi probably regarded him highly and differently from other people, he'd never dared to guess just how „highly” it was or if „differently” was the kind that he thought. Wei WuXian never thought of being confident as bad, and in fact prided himself on such a thought.

Legends often gossiped about the YiLing Patriarch's allegedly amorous life, but in reality, he'd never experienced such hectic feelings before. He used to think that Lan WangJi was too easy of

a person to understand, but things were different now. He feared that he was the only one who thought of them that way, that it was all his own wishful thinking, that he was too confident for his own good.

Lan WangJi stayed silent. Wei WuXian wanted to bluff it out with some kind of joke, what he was best at, but was worried that the forced laughter would result in awkwardness. After some hesitation, he asked suddenly, “Where are we going?”

The change of topic was extremely stiff, but Lan WangJi continued obediently, “Where do you want to go?”

Wei WuXian rubbed the back of his head, “We don’t know ZeWu- Jun’s situation yet. We don’t know what those people intend on doing either. How about we go to Lanling first...” All of a sudden, he remembered something, “No. Not Lanling yet. We’re going to Yunping City.”

Lan WangJi, “Yunping City?”

Wei WuXian, “Yes. Yunping City of Yunmeng. I’ve told you, haven’t I? Back on Koi Tower, I saw my manuscripts in the secret chamber of Fragrant Palace. Right beside my manuscripts was a title deed of a place in Yunping City. The LanlingJin Sect has both wealth and power. I’m thinking that if it weren’t for some hidden reason, then Jin GuangYao wouldn’t have kept the title deed in such a manner. Maybe we’ll find some things there.”

Lan WangJi nodded. At this point, Wen Ning spoke up, “Young Master, is Yunping City in this direction then?”

Wei WuXian, “What?!”

Both he and Lan WangJi sat with their backs facing the tail of the boat, which was why he hadn’t seen Wen Ning. With someone speaking up behind him so suddenly, he immediately felt his scalp tingle, rolling around before asking in shock, “Why are you here?!”

Looking up, Wen Ning answered with a blank expression, “Me? I’ve always been here.”

Wei WuXian, “Then why didn’t you say anything?”

Wen Ning, “I saw that you were talking to HanGuang-Jun, Young Master, so I didn’t...”

Wei WuXian, “Then shouldn’t you have at least made a noise??”

Holding up the oar in his hand, Wen Ning protested, “Young Master, I’ve been rowing the boat. I’ve always been making noise. Haven’t you heard?”

“...” Wei WuXian waved his hand, “I didn’t notice. Enough, enough, stop rowing. The waters are fast here at night. The boat will go without you rowing.”

He grew up in Yunmeng, flapping about in the waters here ever since he was young, so of course he was familiar. Wen Ning obeyed and put down the oar. With much reservation, he sat at the end, almost six feet away from the two of them. It was three in the morning when they arrived at Yunmeng. After so many things happened, dawn was already breaking. White glowed behind the deep blue of the sky. The mountains on the two sides of the river finally came into view.

Looking around, Wei WuXian suddenly exclaimed, “I’m hungry.”

Lan WangJi looked up. Of course, Wei WuXian wasn’t hungry at all. He had just eaten three pies at the vendor in front of Lotus Pier’s gates. Lan WangJi only ate one, however, and it was the only thing he’d eaten in the past two days. The matter was on Wei WuXian’s mind. Before them, there seemed to be almost no signs of human habitation. It was likely that they’d have to keep drifting for a long while to reach a town or a city to rest and dine.

Lan WangJi replied a moment later, “Pull over?”

Wei WuXian, “There aren’t many people on the shores here, but I know somewhere to go.”

At once, Wen Ning picked up the oar and rowed toward the direction he pointed. Soon, the ferry turned to a side branch of the river and drifted into a lotus lake.

In the lake were lotus leaves of all different heights, almost forming a blanket. The thin ferry broke through the crowded stems and coasted toward the depths of the lake. Viewed from above, following the ferry was a string of waving lotus leaves. To roam amid the green umbrellas, push a large leave aside, and find plump seed pods hidden underneath, one after another—it was like finding a small treasure. Grinning, Wei WuXian was just about to reach out and grab them when

Lan WangJi suddenly called, “Wei Ying.”

Wei WuXian, “What’s wrong?”

Lan WangJi, “Is there an owner to this lake?”

Wei WuXian’s face was completely honest, “Of course not.”

Of course, there was. Ever since Wei WuXian was eleven, he’d often stolen lotus seed pods and water chestnuts in the many lakes of Yunmeng. He’d originally given up the hobby for a long time, but now that they needed to obtain food so that they could keep going, he had to go back to his old ways again.

Lan WangJi’s voice seemed lukewarm, “I heard the lotus lakes around here all have owners.”

“...” Wei WuXian, “Hahahahahaha really? That’s too bad. You’ve really heard of a lot of things, haven’t you? I haven’t even heard of this. Let’s go then.”

Having been exposed, of course he wasn’t so shameless as to make Lan WangJi join him in doing such foolish things. That the renowned HanGuang-Jun would steal lotus seed pods in someone else’s lake really didn’t seem appropriate. Just as he was about to pick up the oar in embarrassment, Lan WangJi reached out and plucked off one of the seed pods.

He handed the seed pod to Wei WuXian, “There is no next time.”

Please do NOT comment with ANY spoilers!! Thank you!

## Chapter 91: Longing —Part Two

With an almost insatiable force, Wei WuXian picked as many lotus seeds as he could. There was almost no room on the boat left to put their feet, all three of them sitting amid mountains of green lotus seed pods. When the skin was torn off, the creamy green seeds could be seen hidden right inside the brown, puffy coats. Dig them out, peel the coats off, and there were the seeds, soft and snowy. They had a refreshingly sweet taste. Even the centers were made of watery greens, not at all bitter.

Wen Ning continued to peel the seed pods, sitting at the front of the boat. Lan WangJi stopped only after he peeled two. As he saw Wen Ning pass them the peeled seeds, he shook his head and let him give them to Wei WuXian. Alone, Wei WuXian finished the entire boat. They finally arrived at the docks of Yunping City after being afloat for another three or four hours.

The shallow regions of the docks were cramped with small fishing boats. A few groups of women were gathered on the stone stairs before the waters, washing clothes. Shirtless boys with tanned skin dove and swam around the edge of the river.

Suddenly, a ferry slowly drifted over. One person was at the end of the boat, head hanging low, but the two young men inside both had striking looks. The man sitting at the front was dressed in snow white, carrying a most ethereal air while the grinning youth right beside him had quite a pretty face as well. People rarely saw such figures on a daily basis, so everyone widened their eyes and

stared as hard as they could. A few of the boys swimming in the river gathered toward them like fish. Around seven or eight heads bobbed up and down beside the ferry.

Wei WuXian, "If I may ask, is Yunping City here?"

A girl washing clothes by the river blushed, "Yes, it is." Wei WuXian, "We're here. Let's go."

The ferry docked. Lan WangJi was the first to stand up. After he was on land, he turned around and helped Wei WuXian up. Both of the two had gotten off already, yet Wen Ning was still on the boat, unable to move an inch. The swimming boys watched as he looked down and said nothing, strange marks crawling up his neck across his pale cheeks. They found him strange, but felt amused instead of scared. Over ten pairs of hands clung onto the boat and shook without stop, so hard that Wen Ning almost couldn't steady himself.

Wei WuXian turned around, "Hey! What are you doing? Don't bully him."

Wen Ning hurried to reply, "Young Master, I can't get off."

As he called out for help, two of the boys slapped the river's surface to splash him with water. Wen Ning pulled a helpless smile, at a loss as to what to do. If only the boys knew the "person" they were fooling around with could tear their bodies, even their bones, into smithereens, how could they make fun of him the way they were right now?

Wei WuXian tossed over the few lotus seed pods that were left, "Catch!" The boys immediately scattered, fighting for the seed

pods. Wen Ning could finally jump ashore. Embarrassed, he patted the drenched hem of his robe.

Even out of the entire Yunmeng, Yunping City wasn't just some small place, but rather bustling instead. The three entered the city. On their way were countless vendors and passerby. Wen Ning didn't like places that buzzed with people; he disappeared in silence shortly afterward. From the address in his memory, Wei WuXian asked as he walked, but when they finally arrived at their destination and confirmed what they saw, both were somewhat surprised.

Wei WuXian looked at the grand building, prosperous with incense, "This is... a Guanyin Temple?"

\*Deity of Mercy Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Jin GuangYao really didn't seem like the devout type. The two exchanged a look with each other. Together, they passed the flood of visitors, crossed the tall threshold, and entered the temple.

The temple had three courtyards. Everywhere smoke could be seen and woodblocks for prayers could be heard. It didn't take long to complete an entire circle around the temple. The last courtyard was the Guanyin Palace. Before the two even stood for long before the entrance, a monk came to greet them with his palms put together. The two returned the salute.

Wei WuXian chatted with him for a while, asking in a casual manner, "Most temples are built inside mountains. Ones inside cities are truly rare."

The monk smiled, "Those in the city often toil all day. Don't they also need such a Guanyin Temple to pray and search for inner peace?"

Wei WuXian smiled as well, "Wouldn't the noise disturb Guanyin?"

The monk, "Guanyin delivers all from torment. How could they be disturbed by people?"

Wei WuXian, "Is Guanyin the only one this temple worships?" The monk, "That's right."

The two walked around the temple some more, an idea already in mind. After they left the temple, Wei WuXian led Lan WangJi into an alleyway, picked up a branch, and drew a few squares on the ground before he tossed it away again, "Jin GuangYao really went out of his way."

Lan WangJi picked up the branch he tossed away and added a few more strokes onto the squares. The outlines became clearer and clearer—it was an aerial view of the Guanyin Temple.

Wei WuXian took the branch from his hand again, "There's a big array inside the temple. Something is being suppressed." He pointed at a certain spot, "The array's a bit complicated. It's quite safe. But if the eye of the array right here is destroyed, whatever it's suppressing will come out."

Lan WangJi stood up, "We will do it at nighttime, when people are sparse. We should find a place to rest before we strategize."

They didn't know how powerful the creature under the Temple was, so of course they couldn't act rashly in the day, when there

were so many passersby. Wei WuXian, "I wonder how long it'd take to finish off the thing in the Temple. Could we make it to Lanling? Would our schedule be delayed?"

Lan WangJi, "The condition of your body is still unclear. You must not force yourself."

In the fight at Burial Mound, Wei WuXian exerted too much energy and stamina. Both his mind and his body were strained for too long. A few hours earlier, Jiang Cheng angered him so much that he almost bled from his qiqiao. He only recovered after a long time of rest. Although he didn't feel too bad right now, if there was something he missed and he pushed himself all the way to Lanling, it was hard to tell whether or not an accident would happen at a critical moment. On top of that, he wasn't the only one straining his mind and body in the past few days. Lan WangJi didn't rest for a second either.

Thinking even if he didn't need to rest, Lan WangJi definitely needed to, Wei WuXian replied, "Okay. Then let's find somewhere to rest first."

Wei WuXian himself was able to live anywhere, an estate if he had money, and under a tree if he had none. But right now, Lan WangJi was with him. He definitely couldn't imagine Lan WangJi lying on some tree roots, or cramped with him inside a small, dirty room. And so, after some time of walking, the two finally settled on a neat inn at the other side of Yunping City.

The owner rushed outside enthusiastically, almost dragging them inside. Inside of the inn was both clean and organized, and the first floor was almost full with guests, making it obvious that whomever responsible for the place was quite good at their work. Most of the people working inside were women, from young girls just over ten sweeping the floors to chubby ladies working in the

kitchen. When they saw two young men walk in, their eyes lit up in unison. One of the girls pouring water for the guests was staring at Lan WangJi so hard she didn't even notice that the mouth of her teacup pointed off.

The owner shouted a few things, telling them to do their work properly. She herself led Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi upstairs to look at the rooms, asking as she walked, "Young Masters, how many rooms would you like?"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian's heart suddenly skipped a beat. He snuck a glance across at Lan WangJi.

If it were two months ago, the question wouldn't even be necessary. During the time they just returned, in order to escape as soon as possible, he tried everything he had to disgust Lan WangJi. Lan WangJi noticed it as well, so he just decided to get one room ever since then. In any case, no matter how many he got, Wei WuXian would find a way into his bed.

Not only that, because nobody knew whom he was, Wei WuXian dared to do anything, no matter how shameless it was. Just the first night they went down the Cloud Recesses, and he was already the first to slink into Lan WangJi's bed. Lan WangJi saw him rolling on his bed the moment he opened the door.

Expressionless, he stood for a while before he went to the other room next door that he paid for. Wei WuXian, of course, wouldn't let him go as easy as that. He chased after, yelling that he wanted to sleep with him. Even after he crawled into the bed, he tossed the other pillow out the window, insisting on using the same one as Lan WangJi. He even went as far as to ask why Lan WangJi was sleeping with clothes on, trying to forcefully strip him.

Halfway through the night, he had suddenly stretched his cold feet into Lan WangJi's blanket, grabbing his hand and laying it on his chest, "Listen to my heartbeat, HanGuang-Jun!" And then he stared innocently yet romantically into his eyes... In the end, Lan WangJi struck him frozen. Unable to move, he finally quieted.

The past was almost unbearable to remember. This was the first time Wei WuXian felt shocked at his own shamelessness.

At the third glance, Lan WangJi was still looking down. He didn't say anything, and his expression couldn't be seen either. Noticing how he hadn't responded even after so long, Wei WuXian's mind began to wander. In the past, Lan Zhan's always gotten only one room. Why isn't he saying anything this time? If he gets two rooms this time, that means he really does mind. But if he only gets one room, it wouldn't mean he doesn't mind either. Maybe he's only making it seem like he doesn't mind so that I don't mind either...

After the whole mind-this mind-that business, the owner promptly answered herself, stating, "One room, right? One room is enough! My rooms here are comfy even for two people. The bed won't feel cramped."

With no refusal coming from Lan WangJi for quite a while, Wei WuXian's body and heart finally stopped giving out, temporarily coming to a steady state.

The owner opened one of the doors and led them inside. It was indeed large enough. She asked, "Hey, would you two like dinner? Our cooks have great skill. We'll bring the dishes up here once we finish?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes, please, but not right now. How about a bit later? Bring them at around seven."

The owner answered as she walked out the door. Right after she left, just as Wei WuXian was about to close the door, he suddenly chased after her, "Ma'am!"

The owner, "Yes, Young Master?"

Wei WuXian seemed as though he made up his mind, lowering his voice, "When you're bringing up the meals in the evening, please get some liquor as well... the stronger the better."

The owner grinned, "Of course!"

After this, he finally went back inside the room, pretending that nothing happened. He shut the door and sat down at the table. Lan WangJi's hand reached over and pressed onto his veins. Although he knew it was only checking the condition of his body, as the two long fingers swam up his wrist, slowly rubbing, Wei WuXian's other hand tightened up slightly underneath the table.

After almost an hour of examining his body, Lan WangJi spoke, "There is no imminent danger." Wei WuXian stretched and smiled, "Thanks." Seeing that Lan WangJi's brows were tight-knit in a serious expression, he added, "HanGuang-Jun, are you worried about ZeWu-Jun? I think Jin

GuangYao still holds a certain degree of respect towards ZeWu- Jun. ZeWu-Jun's cultivation is higher than his, anyway, and he's already been alerted about him, so he might not necessarily fall into his traps. Let's figure out the Temple's array as soon as possible and aim to be on our way again tomorrow."

Lan WangJi, "Something is strange." Wei WuXian, "What?"

Lan WangJi, "Brother has been familiar with Jin GuangYao for many years. Jin GuangYao is not one who acts on impulse and lusts for blood. He never proceeds rashly."

Wei WuXian, "Yep, that's also my impression of him. It isn't that Jin GuangYao still has a heart, but he tries to offend as few people as possible."

Lan WangJi, "The incident at Burial Mound was rushed and exaggerated. It did not seem like his manner of doing things."

Wei WuXian thought for a bit before speaking, "The battle at Burial Mound, if it succeeded, it'd be a success; if it was exposed, it'd be forcing the entire cultivation world to oppose him. The risk was high indeed."

Lan WangJi, "Further investigations are perhaps necessary."

## Chapter 92: Longing –Part Three

Wei WuXian sighed within his heart, never mind about these further investigations and whatnot... I'm more worried about if being cut-sleeve is contagious through sacrificing one's body!

As he thought, the fatigue of the past few days began to rise. Wei WuXian rubbed his temples. Lan WangJi, "You should rest."

Wei WuXian, "Okay." As he spoke, he sat onto the bed, kicked off his boots, and lay down, "HanGuang-Jun, you should also..." At this point, he discovered quite an awkward problem.

There was only one bed inside the room. If Lan WangJi was going to rest as well, he had to sleep on the same bed as him. Despite

the number of times they'd slept on the same bed in the past couple of days, a lot of things had become delicate after Jiang Cheng's words at the ancestral hall of Lotus Pier. Now, much less tell Lan WangJi to sleep on the same bed as him, he mulled things over for so long even when deciding how many rooms to take.

Lan WangJi, "There is no need."

Wei WuXian somewhat propped up his body, "How could you do that? You've also been..." Just as he finished, he started to regret it. What if after he said so, Lan WangJi thought that with so much hassle, it was best if they had two rooms? Wouldn't it be more awkward?

Lan WangJi, "I am fine. You can rest."

Wei WuXian touched his chin, "... Oh. Then I'll lie down for a bit. Wake me up at three."

Seeing how Lan WangJi had already shut his eyes and begun to meditate, still seated at the table, Wei WuXian finally lay down again.

He lay on his arm and stared at the ceiling for some time, turning around for his back to face Lan WangJi. Even after a while, he was still wide-eyed, unable to fall asleep. He couldn't help but become irritated.

Back when he was playing the madman, he said something like he could only sleep when he was beside Lan WangJi. Of course, all of that was nonsense. But ever since however long ago, the nonsense seemed to have become a reality. Wei WuXian thought, what should I do now? Don't tell me from now on I really won't be able to sleep in a bed that doesn't have Lan Zhan in it?

After a long struggle, Wei WuXian finally managed to clamp his eyes shut.

Having slept hazily for who knew how long, when Wei WuXian woke up, the light had already disappeared from the window. It was probably past five already.

Wei WuXian sat up at once. A noise came from behind him. Turning around, he saw that Lan WangJi had just closed a book. Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan, why didn't you wake me up? Didn't I say I'd get up at three?"

Lan WangJi, "Let both your mind and your body recover fully. Do not rush."

Wei WuXian had been sleeping for almost half the day. Within the day, Lan WangJi had probably only gone downstairs and brought a book up here to read. He felt a bit sorry, so he hopped off the bed, "My apologies. I really slept too heavily. You should also lie down for a while."

Lan WangJi, "There is no need."

At this point, somebody knocked on the door. The owner's voice came from outside, "Young Masters, I've brought dinner."

Wei WuXian finally realized that it was seven already. Lan WangJi opened the door. Atop the tray that the owner brought up were a small pot of liquor and two dainty cups. She said as soon as she came in, "Huh, looks like you slept all the way 'til now?"

Wei WuXian felt even more guilty, laughing drily. The owner put the tray on the table, "Young Masters, where are you from? If you're visiting from elsewhere then it really is tiring. You can

only keep on going after some proper rest, am I right?"

Wei WuXian replied without much thought, "We're from Gusu."

The owner, "Really! No wonder. I was thinking you two good-looking figures must've come from a watery and spiritual place like the Jiangnan\* region, Young Masters."

\* Jiangnan (and places with lots of rivers and lakes in general) is known for good-looking people.

Lan WangJi seemed as if he heard nothing. Wei WuXian laughed, "I can't compare to him. He's much more handsome than I am."

The owner had quite a good mouth. She grinned, "He's handsome, you're cute. It's different, but both are pretty! Oh, right." It was as though she recalled something, "If you're here to visit, you can come check out the Guanyin Temple in our city."

Wei WuXian was just about to ask her about the Temple when she coincidentally brought it up, "We went to the Temple in the day. You really don't see many Guanyin temples in cities."

The owner, "Yeah, I was surprised the first time I saw it too." Wei WuXian, "Ma'am, when did you come to Yunping City?" The owner, "It's been eight years or so."

Wei WuXian, "The Temple's been here since then? Have you ever heard why they built a temple in the city?"

The owner, "That I'm not so sure about. Anyways, the temple's quite popular. In Yunping City, no matter what someone runs into, we'd all go there and pray for the Guanyin's protection. I sometimes go there and light a few sticks of incense too."

Wei WuXian asked, "Then why don't you go find the cultivational sect that's in charge of this region?"

He only remembered after he asked. Wasn't the cultivational sect in charge of this region precisely the YunmengJiang Sect?

Yet, the owner curled her lips, "Go find them? How dare we?" Wei WuXian, "Oh? Why not?"

The owner, "Young Masters, you're not from Yunping City so you don't know. The Jiang Sect is responsible for all of us along the Yunmeng area. The Sect Leader's got quite a bad temper. It's almost frightening. His subordinate's said so a long time ago.

Only one sect is in charge of such a large area. Each day, there are almost a hundred cases of small ghosts or other creatures pulling pranks on the living and all that. If every single small thing had to be dealt with immediately, would there be enough time and energy? Those that don't kill anyone aren't malign spirits, and we're not supposed to disturb them with trivial matters that aren't malign spirits." She complained, "What is this supposed to mean?"

Wouldn't it be too late if we waited until somebody's died to find them?!"

In truth, to refuse to act unless it was a malign spirit was a silently agreed rule that all of the larger sects followed. Although „to be wherever the chaos is" was praised by many, the only person who really followed this was Lan WangJi, the one beside him right now.

The owner continued, "On top of that, Lotus Pier is truly a scary place. How would anyone dare go there again?"

Wei WuXian moved his gaze from Lan WangJi's calm face with a short pause of surprise, "Lotus Pier is scary? How could Lotus Pier be scary? You've been there?"

The owner, "I haven't been there myself, but I know someone who went because his house was being badly haunted. But it was all bad luck. That Sect Leader Jiang was cracking a glowing whip right on the training field. The victim's flesh and blood flew as high as his screams! A servant secretly informed him that the sect leader caught the wrong person again, that he hadn't been in a great mood, and that he definitely shouldn't be irritated in any way. He was so scared that he dropped off the gifts he brought and fled at once. He never dared visit again."

Wei WuXian had long since heard of how Jiang Cheng had been searching for cultivators of the ghost path who seemed like they

seized another's body, taking all of them into Lotus Pier to be tortured and questioned. The

owner's friend probably just happened to have ran into him when he was letting off steam. It wasn't hard to imagine how hideous Jiang Cheng would've looked, so no wonder a normal person would make a run for it.

The owner, "Also, I've heard of another person who was scared away."

Wei WuXian, "Scared away by what?" It couldn't have been when Jiang Cheng was whipping someone again, could it? Just how often did Jiang Cheng capture people and whip them?

The owner, "No, no. It was his misfortune. The person's surname was Wen, and that Sect Leader Jiang's archenemy happened to have the surname of Wen as well. He's hating on everyone in this world whose surname is Wen. Whenever he sees one, he'd grind his teeth in hatred, wanting to skin them alive. How could he give a single friendly look to..."

Wei WuXian looked down and pinched the center of his brows. He didn't say anything. The good thing was that he didn't need to say anything. After rambling for so long, the owner was satisfied as well, "I've delayed your dinner with all this chatter, haven't I? I'll go down and disturb you no longer. Please tell me if there's anything else you need."

Wei WuXian thanked her and sent her off. He turned around, "Looks like what we're looking for has to be over eight years old. Tomorrow, let's ask a few locals who know the place well."

Lan WangJi nodded slightly. Wei WuXian, "But we probably won't be able to get anything either. Eight years, it's too long. It's enough to forget a lot of things."

Just as he was about to pour the wine, he paused for a split second, warning himself immediately, if he doesn't drink it, then let it go. If he drinks it, I'll only ask a few things. I definitely won't do anything else. I only have to know what he thinks. He won't remember anything after he wakes up anyways... It won't interfere with anything.

Only after such a promise did his hands steadily pour the cup full. As if nothing happened, he pushed it in front of Lan WangJi. He'd already been prepared for if Lan WangJi didn't drink it, but perhaps because Lan WangJi's mind was busy as well, he didn't even look at it as he raised it and drank everything.

Wei WuXian placed his own cup near his lips, watching anything that happened over there, whether purposely or not. Yet, after just a tiny sip, he immediately choked, coughing for quite a while. He thought, the owner really is an honest person. I told her the stronger the better, and she really did get me such a strong one.

In reality, he'd been able to drain liquor ten times stronger than this. He only choked this time because he was absent-minded. He wiped the wine off his clothes. When he looked up again, just as expected, Lan WangJi was already in the zone.

This time, he fell asleep right on the sitting mat. He still sat properly. Apart from his closed eyes and chin pointing downward, his sitting pose was no different from the norm. Wei WuXian waved his hand a few times in front of his face. When there was no reaction, he was finally relieved. He reached out, gently lifted Lan WangJi's chin, and whispered, "I've been holding it back all these days. HanGuang-Jun, you're finally in my hands now."

Asleep, Lan WangJi obediently lifted his chin. When the pair of eyes were open, the face looked quite indifferent, stern and distant, because of the light pupils and the cold gaze. But when the eyes were closed, the edges softened to form the jade statue of a young, handsome man. Its calm peace had to it an extreme magnetism. The more Wei WuXian looked, the more he was captivated. Holding his chin, he couldn't help but drew nearer, all the way until their faces were almost a bit too close. Amid the cold sandalwood fragrance, he suddenly remembered where he was.

He cursed in silence as he quickly drew his hand away. Lan WangJi's head hung down again. Wei WuXian's heart throbbed almost madly. To calm himself, he rolled a couple of times on the ground before he leaped up.

Telling himself to keep his head clear, he slowly slid back, sitting in front of Lan WangJi. He sat properly for a while, waiting for him to wake up, but he still couldn't give up, this time poking his cheek. After a few pokes, he somehow realized he'd never seen how Lan WangJi looked when

he was smiling, and so he pinched the corners of Lan WangJi's lips and pulled them upward, wanting to see his smiling face. All of a sudden, he felt a small ache come from his finger. Lan WangJi had already opened his eyes. He was staring at him with cold eyes. And one of Wei WuXian's fingers was already caught within his mouth.

## Chapter 93: Longing —Part Four

“...” Wei WuXian, “Open your mouth.”

Lan WangJi held his head high, maintaining the cold gaze. Leaning forward slightly, he moved his teeth from the first knuckle to the second. He bit down even harder.

Wei WuXian, “Ow!”

Lan WangJi finally relaxed somewhat. Wei WuXian took this opportunity to pull his finger back and roll to the side. The bite made his hair rise. Anything that bit made him think of dogs, and his hair rose whenever he thought of dogs. Yet, before he was even able to roll far away enough, Lan WangJi tore Bichen out of its scabbard and stabbed it hard into the sitting mat, nailing a corner of Wei WuXian’s robe onto the ground.

Both of them changed into the clothes they were wearing currently at Lotus Pier. They were made of a special fabric and didn’t tear easily. Being held back by the corner of his robe, he couldn’t roll any farther, rambling, “Lan Zhan, look at you. You poked a hole in the inn’s floor and sitting mat. You’re gonna have to pay...”

Before he even finished his sentence, he felt someone seize the back of his collar and drag him back. Wei WuXian’s back collided hard with the person’s chest. Lan WangJi’s low voice immediately thundered beside his ear, “Pay!”

As he finished, he yanked Bichen from the ground as if he wanted to stab a few more times. Wei WuXian threw himself back and stopped him, “Stop! What’s wrong with you? Why are you like this after just a cup of wine? Look at what bad things you’re doing.”

His tone was reproachful. Lan WangJi looked at him, then at his hand, and then at the hole in the floor. As though he suddenly realized, he threw his sword away at once. Bichen crashed onto the ground with a dull „clang” before it rolled away. Wei WuXian grabbed the sheath with his left hand and used his foot to kick it into the air. Steady and precise, Bichen plunged right into its

sheath. He scolded, “Don’t throw such a dangerous thing around.”

Hearing this, Lan WangJi sat even more properly. He looked down, almost as if he knew he did wrong and was willing to

improve. It had always been Lan WangJi who scolded him so seriously. Only after they drank was he able to turn the tables. Holding Bichen in his folded arms, Wei WuXian looked at him with a tilted head, trembling as he tried to hold back his laughter.

He genuinely loved the drunken Lan WangJi!

Now that he was drunk, Wei WuXian’s past dilemma had completely disappeared. It was as if all the wildness in him that had nowhere to go finally found an exit out of his body. Walking a few circles around Lan WangJi, who was still sitting all prim and proper, Wei WuXian turned around and sat down beside him, holding up his ragged robe for him to see, “Look at what you’ve done. You tore my clothes. You have to mend it up for me later, you know?”

Lan WangJi nodded. Wei WuXian, “Do you know how to mend clothes?”

Lan WangJi shook his head. Wei WuXian, “I knew it. Learn if you don’t know how. Either way you have to mend my clothes for me. You understand?”

Seeing that Lan WangJi nodded his head again, Wei WuXian took another sitting mat giddily and used it to cover the hole that Bichen made, now that nobody had discovered it yet, “I’ll hide the hole for you. This way, nobody will find out that you made a mess.”

Lan WangJi took out the dainty little money pouch from within his lapels and presented it to Wei WuXian, shaking it as he spoke, “Pay.”

Wei WuXian, “I know you’re loaded. Put it away, put it away...What are you doing?”

Lan WangJi stuffed the pouch into his arms. Wei WuXian felt the heavy pouch in front of his chest, “For me?”

After he stuffed the money pouch inside, Lan WangJi pulled Wei WuXian’s lapels up and even

patted his chest a few times, as if scared he'd lose it, "Keep it." Wei WuXian, "You're really giving it to me? There's so much money." Lan WangJi, "Mn."

The broke WeiWuXian expressed his gratitude, "Thanks, I'm rich now!" However, Lan WangJi's brows immediately furrowed. He reached into Wei WuXian's lapels and took his pouch back out, "No!"

The money Wei WuXian just obtained was taken away again. He was surprised, "No what?" Lan WangJi seemed both disappointed and restrained. He only shook his head quietly and put his money pouch away again in low spirits, appearing almost a bit sad.

Wei WuXian, "Didn't you say you'd give it to me? Why are you not giving it to me anymore? Aren't you a man of your word?"

Lan WangJi turned to the other side. Wei WuXian grabbed his shoulder and turned him back around, coaxing, "Look at me."

Don't run away. Come, come, look at me."

And so, Lan WangJi looked at him. Both of the two stared hard at each other's face. They were too close, so close that he could even count Lan WangJi's long eyelashes. Cold sandalwood and amorous wine—two aromas intertwined amid the unnoticeable breaths.

After a long while of staring, Wei WuXian's heart beat faster and faster. He finally couldn't take it any longer and retreated in defeat, the first to avert his gaze. He spoke, "Fine! You win. Let's play another game. Just like before, I ask and you answer. You're not allowed to lie..."

Yet, at just the word „play", Lan WangJi suddenly responded, "Yes!"

He grabbed Wei WuXian's hand and zipped out of their room like a gust of wind, rushing down the stairs. Befuddled, Wei WuXian was dragged down the main hall. On the first floor, the owner and her workers were eating around a long table. Lan WangJi didn't spare them a single glance, focused on dragging Wei WuXian outside the doors.

The owner stood up, "What's wrong? Young Masters, did the food not suit your taste?"

Wei WuXian managed to reply from amid the chaos, "It did! Especially the wine. It was strong indeed..." Before he finished his words, Lan WangJi had already dragged him out of the inn.

Even when they reached the streets, Lan WangJi still didn't seem like he was going to stop. He continued to run.

Wei WuXian, "Just where do you want to go?"

Lan WangJi said nothing. As he arrived at the yard of somebody's house, he suddenly stopped in his tracks. Wei WuXian was somewhat confused. Just as he was about to ask, Lan WangJi put a finger in front of his own lips, "Sh." He reached out and

wrapped his arm around Wei WuXian's waist. With a kick, they leaped lightly onto the house's roof. Bent over on the tiles, he whispered, "Look."

Seeing how mysterious he was being, Wei WuXian felt a bit curious. He followed his dedicated gaze and saw a chicken coop inside the yard.

"..." Wei WuXian, "This is what you wanted me to look at?" Lan WangJi whispered, "Go."

Wei WuXian, "To do what?"

Lan WangJi had already leaped up and landed at the center of the yard.

If the owners of the house were awake right now, they'd think that an Immortal of the Heavens had landed on Earth, watching such a heavenly man float down, dressed in the moon-lit white robes.

But the things Lan WangJi did didn't seem Heavenly at all as he slowly searched around the yard. Wei WuXian felt more suspicious the more he looked. He hopped off the wall as well and tugged his forehead ribbon, "Just what do you want to do?"

Lan WangJi pressed his forehead ribbon with one hand and reached into the chicken coop with the other. The hens that were sleeping soundlessly inside immediately woke up, flapping their wings madly in attempt to escape. Lan WangJi's gaze hardened. Like lightning, he caught the fattest one inside his hand.

Wei WuXian was shocked speechless.

The hen cooed unstoppably within Lan WangJi's hands. In all seriousness, Lan WangJi put it into Wei WuXian's arms. Wei WuXian, "What?"

Lan WangJi, "Chicken."

Wei WuXian, "I know it's a chicken. Why are you giving me a chicken?"

Lan WangJi's said with a straight face, "For you."

WeiWuXian, "For me... Fine." It seemed like if he didn't accept it, Lan WangJi was going to get mad again. Wei WuXian took the chicken, "Lan Zhan, do you know what you're doing? The chicken has an owner. This is called stealing."

If somebody were to find out that the prominent HanGuang-Jun

tried to steal somebody else's chicken after he was drunk... Itwas beyond imagination.

But at this time, Lan WangJi only listened to the things he liked. Those he didn't like, he'd pretend like he didn't hear anything. He continued to busy himself with the work at hand. From inside of

the chicken coop came „clucks" and „coos", eggs and feathers flying everywhere. It was unbearable to the ear.

Wei WuXian, "I wasn't the one who told you to do this."

Both of the two had a trembling hen in their arms when they flipped back over the wall. After walking for some time, Wei WuXian was still confused as to why Lan WangJi suddenly wanted to steal chicken. Could it be he wanted to eat them? Suddenly, he saw that a feather was stuck to Lan WangJi's dark hair.

With a „pft", Wei WuXian wasn't able to watch this any longer. Just as he was about to take it off for him, Lan WangJi turned around again and leaped onto a tree.

The tree was inside someone else's yard. It grew too well, andthe branches reached outside the yard's wall. Lan WangJi was sitting right on one of the branches. Wei WuXian looked up, "What's wrong, this time???"

Lan WangJi looked down, "Sh."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian suspected that what he was going to do was probably of similar nature as stealing chicken. He watched Lan WangJi reach out, pick something off the branch, and toss it down to him. Wei WuXian held the hen in one hand and caught it with his other. He took it back and looked. It was a big, round jujube, still half-green.

As expected. After he stole chicken, he was now stealing jujubes!

Things like stealing chicken and jujubes weren't unfamiliar to Wei WuXian. In fact, he used to love such activities when he was young. He always did them with a large gang, making up a big ruckus every time. But if his partner in crime was switched with Lan WangJi, it'd be a bit too terrifying. No, they weren't partners in crime. Lan WangJi was obviously the mastermind here.

At this point, something suddenly flashed across his mind.

Back at Lotus Pier, he took Lan WangJi to see where he grew up in Yunmeng and told him a lot of interesting stories that happened when he was young. Out of those, there were many „feats of glory" like this one. Could it be that Lan WangJi bore them in mind after he heard them and wanted to experience them as well deep down?

It was very possible!

The GusuLan Sect was extremely disciplining. Lan WangJi was locked up in his room to read and write ever since he was young. Every word, every act was said and done according to his seniors" standards. He'd never fooled around so disruptively before. He wasn't able to do such things when he was awake, so he didthem when he was drunk?

On the jujube tree, Lan WangJi struck like a tornado. Just a while later, and all of the jujubes on the tree had been completely picked off. Only after he put them all into his qiankun sleeve did he jump off the tree and open up his sleeve, showing Wei WuXian his „spoils of war". Staring at all these round jujubes, Wei WuXian was at a complete loss as to what to say.

A moment later, he praised, "... They're so big, there are so many, you're so cool! Well done!"

## Chapter 94: Longing —Part Five

Lan WangJi gladly accepted his exaggerated praise. He opened Wei WuXian's sleeves and poured all of the stolen jujubes inside, saying, "For you. All for you."

Wei WuXian cooperated, "Thank you."

Yet, Lan WangJi suddenly let go. With a flick of his sleeve, all of the jujubes fell out, rolling onto the ground. Wei WuXian immediately bent down to pick them up, but there were too many. Lan WangJi, "Not anymore."

He also grabbed the hen under Wei WuXian's left arm, carrying one in each of his hands. Wei WuXian tugged the tail of his forehead ribbon and pulled him back, "You were just fine a second ago. Why are you mad again?"

Lan WangJi's eyes swept over him, "Do not pull."

From what it sounded like, his tone wasn't too happy. It almost sounded like a warning. Wei WuXian couldn't help but let go. Lan WangJi looked down and moved both of the two astonished hens to his left hand before he could use his right hand to straighten out his hair and forehead ribbon.

Wei WuXian thought, He never stopped no matter how I played with his forehead ribbon, in the past. Is he really mad today?

He felt he really needed to remediate a bit, pointing at the hens, "Forget about the jujubes. Give this to me. Didn't you say you'd give it to me?"

Lan WangJi looked up and looked him down in an inspecting way. Wei WuXian said sincerely, "Please. I really want it. Give it to me."

Hearing this, Lan WangJi turned his eyes downward. He only handed the hen back to him after a long while. Wei WuXian accepted it. He took out a jujube, wiped it on the cloth at his chest, and bit half of it away, thinking that if Lan Zhan wanted to play, he should just play with him, "What do you want to do next?" He held himself back from saying, „Whose house do you want to destroy next?"

Lan WangJi frowned slightly, correcting him, "We." Wei WuXian, "Fine, fine, fine. We."

Lan WangJi nodded and gave the jujubes back to him. Wei WuXian wiped another on his clothes and crunched down,

thinking to himself that it'd be beyond terrifying if anyone knew that HanGuang-Jun wanted the YiLing Patriarch to do bad deeds with him in the middle of the night.

The two arrived at a wall. Lan WangJi looked left and right. After making sure that nobody was around, he unsheathed Bichen from his waist. With a few swings, glaring blue light flashed by, leaving behind a row of tall characters.

Wei WuXian went forth and looked. There were seven words—

„Lan WangJi of Gusu has been here". Wei WuXian, "..."

Holding a jujube in his mouth, he was shocked speechless. On the other hand, Lan WangJi unsheathed Bichen and admired his masterpiece. A moment later, he turned around to ask, "How is it?"

Wei WuXian, "Huh? What? How is it? ... Good, it's good. I must say you're better than me!"

This was indeed the truth. Despite him being drunk right now, HanGuang-Jun's handwriting was still an extremely proper script. Wei WuXian had to confess his inferiority. Lan WangJi nodded and handed Bichen to him.

Wei WuXian, "?"

Lan WangJi handed Bichen to him again. Wei WuXian took it. As he saw how there was still much empty space after the words

„Lan WangJi", he understood.

Lan WangJi was waiting for him to write his name up there as well!

Lan WangJi continued to stare at him. Wei WuXian really couldn't take the stare any longer,

“Fine, fine, fine. I’ll write it, I’ll write it.” Unwillingly, he wrote the words „Wei WuXian of Yunmeng” after

„Lan WangJi of Gusu”. Now, both of the two’s names were hanging side-by-side on the wall.

„Lan WangJi of Gusu, Wei WuXian of Yunmeng, have been here!” Lan WangJi seemed quite satisfied, finally taking Bichen back.

After a moment of thought, he reached out again. This time, it

wasn’t to write, but rather to draw. A few glares of the sword zipped across, and the small portrait of two kissing figures appeared on the wall. The precision of the lines and the obscenity of the content was enough to make Wei WuXian slap his own forehead.

Stealing from everywhere, making a mess, writing and drawing inappropriate things... This time, he was sure—

Back in Lotus Pier, Wei WuXian told Lan WangJi about many of the fun things he did when he was still a child. The GusuLan Sect was strict in its discipline. Lan WangJi must’ve never had so much fun when he was young. He’d probably taken them to heart after he heard Wei WuXian talk about them, and was repeating those things one after another, now that he was drunk. Wei WuXian had to be right. After all, even the content of the graffiti was the same as what Wei WuXian told him!

Now that he understood what was going on, he didn’t know what to make of it, but these are all things I did when I was twelve or thirteen!

Watching how the content of his drawing became stranger and stranger, Wei WuXian felt sorry for both Bichen and the wall as he thought, I’ll definitely have to cross out our names from this wall. I can’t possibly let others know who did this. No, no, no, taking down the entire wall is much faster...

“Woof woof woof arroof!”

Suddenly, a series of wild barks exploded. Wei WuXian seemed as if firecrackers had just bursted beside his ears. He immediately screamed, unconsciously jumping onto Lan WangJi’s body, “Lan Zhan, help me!!!”

This household had a dog!

To be honest, amid the silence of the night, Wei WuXian’s screech was much scarier than dog barks. He was half dead with fright, but Lan WangJi’s expression remained unchanged. With one hand, he held up Wei WuXian, giving him a comforting pat, while with his other hand he held his sword. Leaping onto the wall, he looked down at the dog guarding the house, his cold expression making it seem as though he was having a faceoff with it. Wei WuXian’s limbs wrapped around him like a braid, his face buried deep into his neck. His entire body was frozen as he roared, “Stop staring each other! Go, let’s go!!! Take me away, Lan Zhan!!! Ahhhhhh!!!” He was almost shouting himself mad, but the dog immediately tucked its tail away after it saw Lan WangJi. Extending its tongue, it looked down and whimpered on the ground, afraid to keep on barking. Lan WangJi gained a complete victory. He finally patted Wei WuXian a few more times and leaped off the wall with him.

The dog’s barks were never heard again, even after they walked for a long while. Wei WuXian was finally able to tear himself off Lan WangJi’s body. His eyes were glazed and his legs shivered. Lan WangJi patted his shoulder, gazing at him with dedication, as though asking if he was fine or not. Wei WuXian still hadn’t recovered from the shock. Now that he could finally catch his breath a bit, he praised, “HanGuang-Jun, you’re so brave!”

Hearing this, Lan WangJi seemed to smile.

The ripple of movement faded at once. Pausing in astonishment, Wei WuXian thought he saw wrong.

A moment later, he sighed, touching his chin as he looked up and smiled, “Lan Zhan, now you regret not coming with me to Lotus Pier back then, don’t you... Wait, where are you going now?! Don’t run around!”

After a hard struggle, Wei WuXian finally dragged Lan WangJi back to the inn. When the owner

saw that they caught two hens in the middle of the night and even gave them to her, her expression almost couldn't be put into words. Wei WuXian hauled Lan WangJi upstairs, shut the door, and turned around. Back when

they were outside, he couldn't see clearly because of the darkness of the night, but now that they were inside, with the lamplight, he could see that feathers, leaves, and the white dust of wall plaster was all over Lan WangJi, from his clothes, to his face, to his hair. He really didn't look his back.

Wei WuXian swept them off of him as he laughed, "You're so dirty!"

Lan WangJi, "Wash my face for me."

Wei WuXian couldn't help but tugged his forehead ribbon, "You've even learned to order me around!"

The first time he was drunk, Wei WuXian washed his face for him, and Lan WangJi seemed as if he liked it a lot. Of course, this time, he asked for it on his own. Wei WuXian wanted to do it for him in the first place, but now that he was already like this, simply washing his face wouldn't be enough at all. And so, he asked, "How about I just help you bathe instead?"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi widened his eyes slightly. Wei WuXian examined his expression carefully, "Do you want it?

Lan WangJi immediately nodded, "Yes."

All of the workers in the inn were women. Of course, Wei WuXian wouldn't make them do work that was too difficult. And so, he reminded Lan WangJi to sit properly in the room. He himself went downstairs, boiled water, and carried them up one bucket at a time, filling the entire tub. He tried the temperature of the water.

Just as he turned around, wanting to tell Lan WangJi to take off his clothes, he saw that Lan WangJi had already stripped on his own.

The two of them had long since seen each other unclothed before in the Cloud Recesses' cold spring, but back then, both of the two were boys without a single sideways thought. When he ran into Lan WangJi taking a bath, he didn't have any other ideas either, and during both those two times, more than half of Lan WangJi's body was buried underwater. And so, suddenly seeing such an uncovered HanGuang-Jun... It was needless to say that Wei WuXian received quite a big shock. At the moment, he didn't even know whether he should follow his heart and look as much as he wanted or find something with which to cover up Lan WangJi and pretend to be a decent person. His scalp tingled. He couldn't help but to walk backwards, but as he walked back, Lan WangJi continued to walk forward. Wei WuXian had already backed away to a corner of the wall. He couldn't hide at all, and could only braven up as he watched Lan WangJi approach him expressionlessly. The distinct Adam's Apple, fair-colored skin, and smooth, aesthetic muscles flashed before his eyes so clearly that he didn't even dare look at them straight, eyes averting slightly. He swallowed unconsciously, somehow feeling a bit parched.

Wei WuXian was almost in a state of despair. He clenched his teeth, pretending like everything was fine, "I'm only pouring the bathwater for you. Okay. You can do the rest now." As he spoke, he was just about to move away when Lan WangJi suddenly reached out and tore his sash belt into half.

His face was still all serious, but his movements were extremely rough. Wei WuXian never expected that he'd do such a thing. He jumped from the shock, quickly pulling his collar up, "Stop, stop! I won't bathe! I won't be bathing! You can go."

Lan WangJi frowned. Wei WuXian, "You can bathe first. I like, uh, bigger tubs. It's a bit hard to fit two people inside this one."

Lan WangJi glanced at the tub with indifference. After he confirmed that it wasn't big enough, he finally settled. Slowly, he found his way into the tub, sinking down and enveloping himself in the hot water. Wei WuXian let out a sigh of relief, "Then take your time bathing. I'll be outside." As he finished, he was about to flee and get some fresh air to calm himself when he suddenly heard a splash. He turned around and looked, "Why did you come out again?!"

Lan WangJi's face was cold, "Not bathing anymore." Wei WuXian, "Why not? It's so dirty if you don't bathe."

Lan WangJi seemed quite grumpy. He didn't say why either, and only walked towards the screen to put on the clothes he'd taken off. Wei WuXian quickly went back. He had an idea of what the reason was, "Do you want me to help you bathe?"

Lan WangJi looked down. He neither confirmed nor denied it.

Looking at him, Wei WuXian felt a place in his heart go soft. He also thought it was funny. This one'd been like this ever since he was young. When he wanted something, he never said anything on the surface, but rather chased after it as much as he could in his actions. And so, he dragged Lan WangJi towards the tub,

"Fine, I'll help you bathe. Come here." He thought, My loss, my loss. Fine, I'll just scrub him a couple of times. I won't do anything else at all.\*

\*yeah well we all know that's not gonna happen

Lan WangJi was finally hauled by him. He sunk into the water again. Wei WuXian also rolled up his sleeves and walked towards the tub.

Lan WangJi's skin was extremely fair. His long hair gleamed darkly, drifting on the surface of the water. For a second, amid the whirling steam, he seemed like an Immortal of ice and snow immersed in one of the Heaven's springs. Wei WuXian felt that it was quite a shame. The scenery would be much better if he found some petals for Lan WangJi and sprinkle them on the water. He took up the wooden spoon inside the tub. Carefully, he let the warm water pour evenly down Lan WangJi's head. Since Lan WangJi had been staring at Wei WuXian without a single blink, Wei WuXian was worried the water might drip into his eyes and make him feel uncomfortable, "Close your eyes."

## Chapter 95: Longing —Part Six

Lan WangJi didn't listen to him. His eyes were still glued to Wei WuXian as though he was scared that if he blinked once, Wei WuXian might run away. Wei WuXian reached out to shut his eyes, and he buried the lower half of his face into the water, letting out a series of bubbles. Wei WuXian laughed as he lightly pinched his cheek, "Er-Gege, how old are you?"

He grabbed the soap and cloth from the side, and wiped from Lan WangJi's face downwards. As he wiped away, his movements suddenly paused.

Back then, Lan WangJi took off his hair tie and forehead ribbon on his own. His hair fell and covered his upper body. But now, after he moved Lan WangJi's wet, black hair behind his shoulder and began to wipe his chest, the thirty-or-so discipline whip marks and the brand at his chest could be seen with clarity.

Wei WuXian took the cloth and moved to his back.

The whip marks climbed from Lan WangJi's back all the way to his chest, shoulders, arms, sprawling across the smooth, white skin. These almost hideous scars, whether dark or light, destroyed what could be called the perfect male body.

"..."

Wei WuXian was suddenly silent. He dipped the cloth in water and traced the whip scars. He was extremely gentle, as if he didn't want to hurt Lan WangJi, but these were old wounds already. They'd never hurt again. And even if they were fresh scars, with Lan WangJi's personality, he definitely wouldn't display a single sign of weakness, even at the most painful times.

Wei WuXian really wanted to use this opportunity to ask him just how in the world he got these scars. In the GusuLan Sect, the only people with the right to punish Lan WangJi like this were Lan XiChen and Lan QiRen. Just what did he do for his brother, the one closest to him, or his uncle, the one who single-handedly brought him up and took pride in him so much, to do such a cruel deed? The QishanWen Sect's brand that he'd never seen, and

the question that he'd always held in the back of his mind, the question he wanted to ask the most—

HanGuang-Jun, just what do you think of me?

But every time it was close, he'd find some reason to blur things over. Like maybe he shouldn't be so eager and ask after he played with him long enough; like not being so casual and asking after they sat down properly; like maybe the words of the drunk weren't to be trusted.

Despite all these excuses, he knew the real reason quite well.

It was probably because he was afraid. He was scared he'd hear an answer different from what he hoped for.

Suddenly, Lan WangJi turned around and glanced at him. Wei WuXian finally noticed that as he scrubbed him, his mind began to roam around, rubbing the snowy skin on Lan WangJi's back so red that it seemed like someone had beat him up. Wei WuXian

thought the look Lan WangJi gave him might mean he wasn't satisfied with the work, and so he stopped at once, "Sorry, sorry. Does it hurt?"

Lan WangJi didn't say anything, only shaking his hand. Seeing how he looked, all quiet and obedient, sitting in the tub, Wei WuXian felt quite sorry. Curving his finger, he scratched his chin to show comfort. Just the chin wasn't even enough. Feeling his fingers itch, he even wanted to poke Lan WangJi's abs, but before it was even halfway there, his wrist was suddenly caught by Lan WangJi, whose voice was low, "Do not touch me."

A few transparent drops of water still remained on his eyelashes and his handsome features. His expression seemed cold, but his eyes were searing.

Tonight, Wei WuXian had already done countless frivolous little things to Lan WangJi. He'd long since gotten used to Lan WangJi letting him do whatever he

wanted. Right now, having been stopped so suddenly, he was still brave, "Why not? Haven't you let me touch you for so long already?"

Lan WangJi's lips were sealed. He said nothing, whether angered or not. Seeing this, Wei WuXian was a bit guilty, "Fine. I won't touch you anymore. Do it yourself."

As he spoke, he tossed the cloth away and was about to leave. Yet, not only did Lan WangJi refuse to let him go, the hand around his wrist gripped even tighter. He ordered, "Do not go."

Wei WuXian struggled for some time and couldn't get out of it. He steeled his nerves, "HanGuang-Jun, now you're at fault here. You told me to wash your face, didn't let me touch you, and didn't let me go. Just what do you want me to do?"

"..." After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi's tone was almost unreasonable, "In any case, you may not go."

Wei WuXian splashed some water onto Lan WangJi's face, "Look at you, all domineering and unreasonable!"

Lan WangJi didn't flinch or dodge even as the water splashed onto his face, "I told you not to touch me."

This seemed like a warning. Perhaps because the wine really had a strong aftereffect, Wei WuXian's head felt abnormally feverish.

The corner of his mouth curved up, "If I'm touching you, no matter what, what can you do to me? Punish me by making me copy scriptures? Have me grounded? Or silence me?"

Lan WangJi's eyes were locked on him. Sparks seemed to flash across his gaze. He appeared to be angered.

The face, the expression, the eyes, the situation, and the person. Wei WuXian drew in a breath. As though having decided to go all out, he shoved his other hand into the water, found a certain part of Lan WangJi's body, and scooped, "HanGuang-Jun, don't tell me you don't like it when I touch you like this?"

Wei WuXian's daring words and act finally enraged his opponent.

Lan WangJi seemed as if he'd been bitten by a poisonous snake, pulling violently. Wei WuXian felt a terrifying force sweep over. He couldn't help from being pulled in.

Water splashed everywhere. Things had gotten out of hand. It was all the same, no matter who started it first. When Wei WuXian felt a bit more clear-headed, he was already sitting on Lan WangJi's legs.

The two embraced and kissed each other in such a position for quite a long while. Wei WuXian's arms were wrapped around Lan WangJi's neck as they kissed wildly and inseparably. Suddenly, he exclaimed with an „ah.“

Opening his eyes, he wiped a tinge of blood from his lips as he scolded, "Lan Zhan! Why are you biting like a dog again?!"

His lips were kissed red in the first place. Stained with blood, they looked even more vivid. To his ill-timed dissatisfaction, Lan WangJi responded with another bite. Sore from all the biting and sucking, Wei WuXian frowned. He reached down again in vengeance and rubbed him hard again.

In all likelihood, nobody had ever done such a shamelessly brave act to Lan WangJi before. Once wasn't even enough—Wei WuXian had to do it twice. His face changed immediately. The arm he embraced Wei WuXian with tightened, fingers leaving behind clear marks.

Wei WuXian grinned as he caught his breath, "How's that? You angry yet? You don't know this, Lan Zhan, but I love it when you're angry..."

His tone was full of a fearless excitement. After he spoke, he pecked the corner of Lan WangJi's lips and removed his drenched top.

Lan WangJi's skin was so hot that he seemed like he'd burst into flames. One hand locked around Wei WuXian's waist, he slammed the edge of the wooden tub with his other hand. It split into pieces at once. The room immediately turned into a mess, the sight unbearable to the eye.

The two couldn't be less concerned with these unimportant things. Lan WangJi almost picked

Wei WuXian up and threw him onto the bed. Just as Wei WuXian propped himself up a bit, he was immediately pressed down again. Lan WangJi's gestures were more than fierce. He was nothing like the normal HanGuang-Jun, who was all righteous and sensible.

Wei WuXian's back hurt from the collision. He yelled a few times, and Lan WangJi paused shortly. Wei WuXian immediately flipped around and pushed him onto the bed, holding him down as hard as he could. He said beside his ear, "I couldn't tell you'd be so fierce in bed..."

The earlobe by his lips was white as jade. Wei WuXian couldn't help himself from taking a soft bite. It was soft and cold. After he bit it, he took it into his mouth and sucked on it lightly. Lan WangJi's fingers tightened around Wei WuXian shoulders.

The strength in his hands was abnormally strong. Wei WuXian immediately gasped from the squeeze. He turned to look at his shoulder, which was already lined with five scarlet marks. Seeing this, Wei WuXian shoved his thigh between Lan WangJi's legs and pressed, pretending to threaten him, "What are you being so mean for? Careful, I..."

Right away, Lan WangJi reached towards Wei WuXian's waist to untie his sash belt. Wei WuXian purposely wanted to tease him as he slapped his hand away and smirked, "HanGuang-Jun, so impatient?"

He didn't know if it was a hallucination or not, but Lan WangJi's eyes seemed to be bloodshot, almost glowing red. When he reached out again, Wei WuXian swiftly dodged to the side, "It's not like I won't take it off. I'll do it myself."

After he said it, he indeed untied his sash belt and took off his lower garments. Stark naked, he lowered himself on Lan WangJi again.

Both of the two were bare. Skin brushed against skin. With intimacy, they kissed, turning their heads. Wei WuXian pressed the back of Lan WangJi's neck with his left hand, not letting him open up a single sliver of space between the two, biting and

rubbing his lips. With his right hand, he chased down the graceful yet powerful lines of Lan WangJi's back. When he felt the somewhat uneven scars, he stroked them tenderly with the tips of his fingers.

There was no less action on Lan WangJi's part. Those fair, slender hands swam around Wei WuXian's body with his distinct knuckles before lingering at his waist and his hips, forcefully rubbing the delicate skin at the end of Wei WuXian's thighs. It was as though Wei WuXian had turned into a zither, plucked and strummed under the pair of hands. But the person who played him had not a single trace of the coldness and elegance of playing the seven-stringed zither. What Wei WuXian let out weren't graceful zither notes either, but rather unbridled moans of pleasure.

However, Lan WangJi's hands were just too strong, and he liked to pinch the sensitive regions as well. At first, Wei WuXian was able to enjoy it, but it soon became an unbearable throbbing. He gasped, moving his stinging, swollen lips away. His chest heaved up and down, "HanGuang-Jun, w-why are you like this after you

take off your clothes? Where are you pinching? You really don't deserve to be called a gentleman."

Feigning disappointment, he removed the completely ungentlemanly hand of Lan WangJi's. Lan WangJi let out a low growl, sounding quite dangerous. Wei WuXian, "Don't be like this. Come on, I'll let you pinch me. Pinch here." As he spoke, he led Lan WangJi's hand towards his lower region, laughing quietly as he mumbled, "Pinch however you want to. Use your muscles."

Amidst the buzz, Wei WuXian felt he really had a self-taught obscenity when doing these things. But imagination was one thing, and action was another. He'd lived for two lives, and nobody had ever touched such a private part of his body aside from himself. When Lan WangJi's burning palm really enveloped him, Wei WuXian couldn't help but tremble, curling himself up slightly.

Yet, it felt too good being held within Lan WangJi's fingers and caressed at such a rhythm.

Soon, Wei WuXian unconsciously stretched his body, his arms climbing around Lan WangJi's back and shoulders to offer his member to those hands. Lan WangJi's movements quickened. Wei WuXian breathed shallowly, closing his eyes in pleasure. His fingers wanted to cling onto something but could only stroke Lan WangJi's firm, bare back in vain. All of a sudden, he realized that he shouldn't be the only one who was feeling this good, and so his right hand searched for LanWangJi's member as well.

Just as he touched it, Wei WuXian felt the hot, thick object swell a size larger, bouncing into his palm as hard as iron. Even touching it made his cheeks burn. He'd never thought he'd touch this particular region of a man. It was absolutely unimaginable. But whenever he remembered Lan WangJi was the one he was touching, Wei WuXian would become so excited, he almost couldn't control his hands. He grabbed it, stroking it recklessly as he rubbed it with his slippery legs again and again.

Lan WangJi's breaths suddenly became heavier, while what was in Wei WuXian's hand also throbbed, growing even hotter. Beside their ears were each other's insuppressible pants and Wei WuXian's moans.

However long had passed, Wei WuXian felt all of the blood and pleasure in his body flood towards a single place. As his scalp tingled, a whimpering, almost broken voice leaked from his throat, "Lan... Lan Zhan, w-wait, I..." Before he could even finish, the dangerous pleasure exploded through him.

Wei WuXian's voice froze. A moment of white flashed in his mind. Quite some time later, still dazed, he saw a few light traces on Lan WangJi's taut abdominal muscles. He finally realized that he'd released already. On the other hand, Lan WangJi released almost the same time he did, sending forth the white fluid between Wei WuXian's legs. As Wei WuXian moved, no matter how slightly, the embarrassing liquid slowly slid down, dripping onto his sensitive region. It felt extremely obvious. He could tell there was a mess even without looking at it. The viscosity felt a bit uncomfortable down his gluteal cleft, but what was more apparent was an incomparable sense of satisfaction.

Lan WangJi's head was buried into Wei WuXian's chest, his warm body atop Wei WuXian. Wei WuXian was all out of energy, limp all the way from his head to his fingertips. He felt so relaxed he didn't even want to move his hand.

Only after a long while did their breathing return to normal.

Even though he was so heavily pressed down, his heart was full of peace and contentment. Wei WuXian pecked at Lan WangJi's hair. What enveloped the two, apart from the soft sandalwood, was the refreshing scent of soap, after they'd bathed. Thesensual aroma was not as evident.

Wei WuXian had buried the things he wanted to ask Lan WangJi inside of him for a long time, too afraid to ask. Only right now, as the two-lay side-by-side, did he feel a bit more confident. He lowered his voice, "Lan Zhan... Are you listening?"

A moment later, Lan WangJi replied with a „mn". Wei WuXian, "I have to tell you something." He breathed lightly before speaking, "Lan Zhan, thank you."

With thousands of words, there was nowhere to start.

If he didn't meet Lan WangJi when he came back, Wei WuXian didn't know what he'd be like right now. In reality, even if he roamed around alone, it wouldn't necessarily be that bad. Butno matter what, he believed that nothing would be better than this.

Unfortunately, he didn't notice that after Lan WangJi heardthis, his body froze slightly.

The surging heat finally began to retreat. Wei WuXian's head was still dizzy as he rambled on, "In these two lives, you've helpedme a lot. I know you're... really nice to me. You're really great!

Apart

from thank you, I don't know what else to sayto you... Anyways, towards you, I feel... I feel..."

But this wasn't the point at all. Wei WuXian had never confessed like this to anyone before. Even someone whose face was as thick as his felt a bit embarrassed. He could only first pick a few random things to say. Just as he was thinking how to explain himself to make it sound

sincere and serious when Lan WangJi suddenly pushed him away.

With how sudden it was, WeiWuXian's back slammed hard against the bed.

He widened his eyes, so surprised that he couldn't move. On the other hand, Lan WangJi sat upright. His chest heaved. His breathing was a bit rushed.

In silence, the two stared at each other for a long time. The first to move was Lan WangJi.

His face was pale, but his eyes were clear. He first picked up a white piece of clothing from the ground to cover Wei WuXian, and then went to find something for himself.

Wei WuXian was still confused. He almost couldn't believe what had happened.

The push was as though a dream had turned into a nightmare, as though a bucket of water had poured down his head, as though somebody had just slapped him hard on the face. He finally found the ability to speak again. Voice hoarse, he tried, "Lan Zhan, you're... awake?"

Lan WangJi had already finished dressing himself. Sitting far on one side, he wiped his forehead with his right hand. He turned

around, facing the mess on the ground, with his back towards Wei WuXian. A while later, he finally whispered, "Mn."

Although Wei WuXian didn't know when he woke up, now that he was awake, Lan WangJi's reaction meant that one thing was clear: he didn't want to continue what they were doing. He didn't want to listen to Wei WuXian finish what he was saying, either.

Wei WuXian finally realized just how cruel what he did was.

## Chapter 96: Longing –Part Seven

Wei WuXian finally realized. All those promises of „I'll only ask him a few questions; I won't do anything else“ he made to himself before he made Lan WangJi drink were only self-deception. That the most disciplined person would throw tantrums, hit people, mess about after he was drunk, meant that Lan WangJi's drunken actions weren't self-controlled. And, even though Wei WuXian knew this, he still took advantage of the easy manipulation, purposely provoking him and leading him to do what he wanted.

No matter how ascetic he was, Lan WangJi was an ordinary man, after all. Having been teased so rudely by him, how could he have kept his calm? Just the day before, Lan WangJi was humiliated by Jiang Cheng with such a matter, and right now he was still worried about his brother, yet Wei WuXian had to mess things up like this...

Lan WangJi didn't say anything else after the „mn“, but Wei WuXian had already thought of a bunch of things on his own.

In the two lives he lived, he'd never learned how to write the word

„shame“, but right now, he understood more than anyone. His lips were still stinging and swollen, while the stickiness at his abdomen and between his legs embarrassed him even more. He could slam his head against the wall right now.

This situation clearly verified the worst possibility. Lan WangJi was indeed very nice towards him, but... it probably wasn't the kind of nice he hoped for.

Not wanting to make Lan WangJi feel awkward, Wei WuXian scrambled to put on his outer clothes and pants. As he dressed, he slapped one side of his forehead, speaking in a tone not much different from his usual one, “You're awake. Well, I'm pretty much awake too.”

Lan WangJi turned around and looked at him. Wei WuXian didn't dare take a guess at the emotions that were inside of his eyes.

Arms trembling slightly, he grabbed his clothes and hurried to put them over his head. He watched as Lan WangJi reached out towards him, after a moment of silence, as though wanting to help him wipe away the fluid on his body.

Wei WuXian blurted, “No thanks!!!”

Lan WangJi's hand paused in mid-air before being retracted.

Wei WuXian let out a sigh of relief, murmuring, “You don't have to. I'll do it on my own. You don't have to touch me.”

Someone like Lan WangJi would likely feel that he ruined the other's appearance after he did it with them. Wei WuXian definitely didn't have the face to let Lan WangJi clean him. He fumbled for a piece of undergarment, wiped himself with it, and

tossed it away, “Um, Lan Zhan, both of us probably drank too much tonight. My apologies.”

Lan WangJi didn't say anything.

Wei WuXian only put on one boot before continuing, “But you don't have to feel too apologetic either. Uh, it's normal for men to be like this sometimes. Please...don't take it too seriously.”

Lan WangJi looked at him quietly, “Normal?” His voice sounded more than calm.

Wei WuXian didn't dare respond. Lan WangJi asked again, “Do not take it too seriously?”

Originally, Wei WuXian thought that compared to having his feelings be found out and them become so awkward they couldn't even be friends, he'd much rather have Lan WangJi feel that he was a cheap, flippant person instead. But right now, he began to regret saying those idiotic things without thinking about them first. He whispered, “... I'm sorry.”

Lan WangJi suddenly stood up. Wei WuXian began to panic. At this point, the owner of the inn suddenly ran upstairs, knocking on the room door, “Young Masters, Young Masters! Are you in bed?”

Lan WangJi averted his gaze. Wei WuXian hurried to put on his other boot, “No! I mean, yes, yes we are. Hold on, I'll get up after I put on some clothes.”

Only after Wei WuXian dressed himself did Lan WangJi walk over and open the door. Wei WuXian, "What's wrong?"

Standing in the hallway, the owner smiled apologetically, "I'm really sorry to disturb your sleep so late at night. Please don't mind. But I have no choice, either. The guest sleeping below you said that water dripped into their room. I thought it might be from your room, so I came to check..." She looked inside the room and was immediately shocked, "W-W-W-What happened here?!"

Wei WuXian touched his chin, "I'm the one who should be sorry. My apologies, Ma'am. I drank too much tonight and wanted to take a bath. Things were going great so I slapped the tub a few times, and then it broke. I'm really sorry; I'll pay for it." Right after he said it, he remembered that he couldn't possibly pay. On their trip, Lan WangJi was the one responsible all of their expenses. In the end, Lan WangJi was still the one who'd pay for all this.

Although the owner kept on saying „it's fine" and „don't worry", her face was extremely distressed. She walked inside, "Just how did the water leak down... There isn't even a place to put my feet in this room..." She bent down, picked up a few sitting mats, and exclaimed again, "Why is there a hole here?!"

It was the one that Lan WangJi made using Bichen. Wei WuXian combed his hand through his somewhat messy hair. He could only repeat his apologies, "Yeah, that's my fault as well. I played around with my sword, and..."

Before he could even finish, Lan WangJi had already picked up the money pouch on the ground and placed a piece of silver on

the table. The owner's expression softened quite a lot, but she still had to say a few words, hand at her chest, "Young Master, no offense, but how could you throw around something as dangerous as a sword? It's not that big of a deal if you poke a hole through the mat and the floor, but what if you hurt someone?" Wei WuXian, "Yes, yes. You're right, Ma'am."

The owner took the money, "Then this'll be it for now. It's so late already too. You can rest first. I'll switch you two to a new room and deal with this one tomorrow morning."

Wei WuXian, "Yes, please, thank you... Wait! Then, could we have two rooms please?"

The owner mused, "Why two rooms?"

Wei WuXian didn't dare look at Lan WangJi. He lowered his voice, "... I go berserk whenever I drink. You saw, didn't you? I throw things around and play with my sword. Wouldn't want to hurt anyone, either."

The owner, "Indeed!"

After she answered, she indeed switched them to two rooms before she walked downstairs, holding the hem of her dress. Wei WuXian expressed his gratitude and opened the door to his room. Turning around, he saw Lan WangJi standing in the hallway, holding Bichen in one hand and fiddling with his forehead ribbon in the other. He looked down and said nothing.

Wei WuXian wanted to hide inside his room as soon as possible, but after he looked, he couldn't walk another step. With much

thought, he finally spoke, careful yet sincere, "Lan Zhan, about tonight, I'm sorry."

With a while of silence, Lan WangJi breathed, "You do not have to say this to me."

After he put on his forehead ribbon properly, he became the disciplined HanGuang-Jun once more. He nodded, "Rest well. We will talk about the Guanyin Temple and going to Lanling tomorrow."

With this, Wei WuXian felt a bit better. At least they had something to talk about tomorrow. He grinned, "Yeah, you too. Rest well. Let's talk about it tomorrow."

## Chapter 97: Longing –Part Eight

After stepping into the room and shutting the door behind him, Wei WuXian leaned against the doorframe. When he heard Lan WangJi close the door to his room, he immediately reached out and slapped himself on the face.

He plopped down onto the wooden bed and buried his still- steaming face into his palms. Even after a long while, the heat didn't melt away, both in his face and in his body. He even grabbed the teapot on the table and poured it over his head, but it was still no use at all. Right now, his entire body was covered in the Lan WangJi's scent.

Wei WuXian knew that if he continued to stay here, with the thought that Lan WangJi was just a wall away from him, in addition to what they were doing just a few moments ago, he probably wouldn't be able to calm down throughout the whole night. He definitely couldn't stay here. He pushed the window open and stepped onto the windowsill. Like a black cat, he lightly leaped out, landing without making a sound on one of the streets outside the inn.

It was already late into the night. There were no people on the street, which made it convenient for Wei WuXian to speed into a sprint.

Passing the wall that Lan WangJi had graffitied when he was drunk, Wei WuXian finally stopped in his tracks. On the wall were

rabbits, pheasants, and little figures, all in a disarray. As he looked, Wei WuXian once again recalled how dedicated Lan WangJi was when he drew these, along with how he dragged him over and wanted him to admire them. He couldn't help but smile a bit.

An unparalleled sense of regret rushed into his heart.

If only he didn't let himself go so wild when he was drunk.

At least he would've been able to pretend like he was all honest and full of integrity, sleeping soundlessly or pretending to sleep all snuggled up beside Lan WangJi without any shame. Instead, he was spending a sleepless night on the streets outside of the inn, running like a headless fly to let out his emotions.

Wei WuXian reached out, stroking the two kissing figures on the wall, and arrived at the words „Lan WangJi was here" right above it. He had to erase these words, but before he did so, he used his fingertip to trace the lines of the name „Lan WangJi."

Once. Twice. Thrice.

The more he traced them, the more he didn't want to let go.

Suddenly, picking up on a shuffling sound, he felt alarmed, as it was the middle of the night. As he walked around the corner and looked, he saw a black-robed figure lean forward against the wall, holding a file and trying to even out the graffiti marks on the wall with much dedication.

Wei WuXian, „..."

Wen Ning turned around. His face was covered in white dust, "Young Master, why are you here?"

Wei WuXian, "What are you doing?"

"Oh." Wen Ning, "Young Master Lan wrote so much. If the people here woke up tomorrow morning and saw this, it'd probably cause them quite a lot of trouble, so I'm here to get rid of some of

them..." After a pause, he asked, "Where's Young Master Lan?"

Wei WuXian looked down, "He went to bed. I went out to walk around."

Wen Ning noticed that his mood wasn't as usual. He paused what he was doing, "Young Master, did something happen?"

He walked a few steps towards Wei WuXian before suddenly halting, and quickly backing away.

Wei WuXian hesitated in confusion, "What are you doing this time?"

Wen Ning seemed as if he was scared, waving his hands, "No, no. Nothing!"

Wei WuXian could tell at first glance that he was feeling embarrassed. Unconsciously, he glanced at himself, and realized he had a few red fingerprints on his wrists, made by Lan WangJi when he grabbed him and pushed him onto the bed. He touched his lips. They were also still slightly swollen. When they dizzily rolled around on the bed, hugging so hard they almost became one, Lan WangJi bit and nibbled at his body. His neck was probably quite a scene as well.

If Wen Ning had any blood on his face, he would've been blushing so hard the bleed seeped out. At this point, Wei WuXian didn't know what to say either, "You... Ugh!" He sat down beside the corner of the wall and sighed, "I want alcohol."

Wen Ning immediately replied, "I'll go buy some."

Wei WuXian, "Come back! What are you running for?" Wen Ning came back again, "Searching for alcohol..."

Wei WuXian, "You... I was only saying that, and you really went to search. You're not really my servant, are you?"

Wen Ning, "I know."

Wei WuXian, "Besides, do you have money?" Wen Ning, "No..."

Wei WuXian, "You see?! I knew it!"

Wen Ning envied, "But Young Master Lan has a lot... a lot of money... It's so nice."

"Ugh." Wei WuXian slammed the back of his head onto the wall a few times, sighing a bunch, "Never mind. Iwon't drink ever again."

Wen Ning was surprised, "Why?"

Wei WuXian, "Alcohol makes things go wrong. I'm gonna go abstinent."

Wen Ning's lips twitched. Wei WuXian, "What do you mean by this? You don't believe me?"

Wen Ning mumbled, "No, no... But back then, didn't Sister failto get you off alcohol, even after trying everything she could..."

"Haha, haha." Wei WuXian recalled, "She just poked holes into my body with her needles every other day or so, didn't she?"

After he laughed for enough, Wei WuXian suddenly spoke up, "Wen Ning, have you ever thought about what you want to do, after this whole mess has ended?"

Wen Ning paused in surprise, "What I want to do?"

Right now, in this world, Wen Ning didn't have many close friends left. In fact, he didn't even know many of the people. Since long ago, he hadn't been good at thinking for himself, much less making decisions. He was either following Wen Qing or Wei WuXian. Apart from this, he likely didn't know where he should go or where he could go for that matter. But Wei WuXian had always hoped that he could find his own path. Saying it like this, though, seemed as if he was chasing him away.

He thought about it some more. Wen Ning didn't know where he was going, but he didn't know either, did he? In the beginning, when he was with Lan WangJi, he never thought about this problem at all. He took it as granted that they'd continue like this without change. But after tonight, maybe he and Lan WangJi wouldn't go back to how they were ever again. Without Lan WangJi, it seemed as if it wasn't too impossible for him to roam the world on his own.

But a voice in Wei WuXian's heart told him with clarity, No,you can't.

The words he said back on Koi Tower really proved to be true. The current Wei WuXian couldn't do without Lan WangJi.

Wei WuXian let out a long sigh, despairing, "I want to drink." The more he thought about it, the more dispirited he felt. The anxiety that had nowhere to go finally became a raging fire. He leaped up, "Fuck. Wen Ning, let's go!"

Wen Ning, "Where are we going?" Wei WuXian, "Looking for trouble!"

## Chapter 98: Hatred —Part One

Bringing Wen Ning with him, Wei WuXian dashed straight towards the Guanyin Temple inside the city. During the day, he and Lan WangJi had already searched the area. They'd originally planned to examine the place more carefully and break the array in the temple to see which creature was sealed there, whether it'd help in dealing with Jin GuangYao or not. However, he slept all the way until seven in the evening, and that kind of thing happened afterwards. Naturally, the plan fell through.

Currently, Wei WuXian felt discontent in every way possible, which was why he came to search for trouble with Jin GuangYao in the middle of the night.

All was quiet. The household lights had already been blown out, and the doors of the Guanyin Temple were shut tightly as well. From outside of the tall walls, the courtyard seemed to be pitch black, but as Wei WuXian leaped up the wall, before he even reached the roof, he suddenly paused. Something's wrong.

Wen Ning froze as well, whispering, "There's a barrier."

Wei WuXian gestured with his hand. The two landed soundlessly and left the main entrance. They went to a corner on the other side of the Guanyin Temple and carefully climbed up. After hiding behind a rooftop gargoyle statue, they finally peeked into the courtyard.

And both of the two gaped in shock.

Inside the Guanyin Temple was full of both people and candlelight. Half were monks, and the other half were cultivators wearing robes of Sparks Amidst Snow. The two groups stood mixed, all of people carrying bows and arrows on their backs and swords in their hands as if they were guarding something, ready to fight at any moment. Once in a while there would be whispers.

But due to the special camouflaging barriers that had been set up on all four sides of the Guanyin Temple, from the streets outside the walls, all seemed to be dark and silent inside. None of the sounds and lights leaked out.

But what gave Wei WuXian the shock wasn't the barrier. It wasn't the cultivators and fake monks either. Instead, it was the white-robed person standing in the center of the courtyard.

Lan XiChen.

Lan XiChen wasn't restrained by anything. Even his sword and his Xiao, Liebing, were worn at his waist. He stood amid the crowd so gently, and these monks and cultivator regarded him with respect as well, even answering all of his requests.

Wei WuXian observed for a while before turning to Wen Ning, his voice low, "Go back to the inn immediately. Bring HanGuang-Jun here as fast as possible!"

Wen Ning nodded and disappeared. Wei WuXian didn't see Jin GuangYao. He didn't know if he was here or if he had the Tiger Seal in his hand. After some thought, he bit his finger and moved his bleeding fingertip towards the Spirit-locking Pouch at his waist. He wanted use the few small ghosts to quietly summon a couple of dark creatures for him. Yet, at this point, a string of barks came from an end of the street outside the Guanyin Temple.

Wei WuXian immediately felt his soul fly away.

Almost petrified, he held back the urge to get the hell out of there, trembling as he hugged the sculpture on the roof tightly. Listening as the barks moved closer and closer, his chest was filled with fear, involuntarily chanting is his heart, help me, Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, help me!

After this, it seemed as if he got some courage from the name, and so he kept on trembling as he forced himself to calm down. Wei WuXian prayed with all he had that the dog was a wild one without an owner so that it'd get lost as soon as possible. But fate clearly wasn't on his side.

Amid the barks sounded the clear voice of a young man, who scolded, "Fairy, shut up! Do you want to wake up everyone living on this street in the middle of the night?!"

Jin Ling!

Lan XiChen's expression changed. Most of the LanlingJin Sect's cultivators knew their young

master's voice. They exchanged a look with one another and nocked arrows on their bows. Jin Ling's voice came rather quickly. It arrived at the doors of the Guanyin Temple soon afterwards, "Shh! Shh! I'll cook you if you keep on barking! ... Just where do you want me to go?" Wei WuXian's heart clenched among the terrors of all sorts, Jin Ling, you unfortunate thing! Quick, get out of here!!!

But Jin Ling had to stop right outside the Guanyin Temple. Fairy barked again and again, as though it was spinning around, digging at the dirt and the wall. Jin Ling mused, "This is it?" After some silence, he knocked, "Is anyone here?"

Amid the courtyard, all of the cultivators held their breaths. Resting on the bows, the arrows pointed towards the direction of the doors, waiting for orders. Lan XiChen lowered his voice, "Do not hurt him!"

His voice couldn't go through the barrier around the Guanyin Temple. The other people didn't relax or put down their bows

either. It seemed like Jin Ling noticed that something was wrong as well. Even if there was no-one on night watch, he'd been slamming the door so hard that he should be able to wake up anyone who was asleep. No matter what, it shouldn't be as quiet as this. And so, still outside the door, he stopped saying anything. Before Wei WuXian even had the chance to feel relieved, dog barks suddenly came from outside the walls again.

Jin Ling fumed, "Hey, why are you running back?!" Wei WuXian beamed, "Good Fairy!!!"

Jin Ling, "Fairy! Come back! Fuck!"

Wei WuXian, Kid, please disappear with it as soon as you can!!! I'm begging you!!!

However, just a moment later, Wei WuXian heard the almost unnoticeable sound of dust and crumbs falling onto the ground. He didn't know what the noise was at first, but a split-second later, he suddenly broke into a cold sweat, oh no, the brat's climbing the wall!

On the other hand, Jin Ling saw an entire courtyard of arrows aimed at him as soon as he arrived. His pupils shrank. One of the monks had probably never seen Jin Ling before, or perhaps he had the determination to kill off any intruders. He let go, and an arrow shot towards the direction of Jin Ling!

As soon as he heard the sharp whistle, Wei WuXian knew that the archer was a skilled one. If Jin Ling were to be shot, his chest would be pierced through for sure. There was only one thing he could use to block it right now. Under the emergency, Wei WuXian leaped up the wall and casted something out, at the same time shouting, "Run, Jin Ling!"

What he flung out was the bamboo flute he'd been carrying with him ever since he was reborn. It blocked the brutal attack, and the arrow's aim was off. The flute burst into pieces as well. Jin Ling's figure disappeared at the end of the wall. He should've run away already. But because of this, Wei WuXian's hiding spot was revealed. Hundreds of arrows flew at the speed of a rainstorm, shooting the sculpture Wei WuXian hid himself behind into a porcupine. Wei WuXian commented on the close call-in silence.

None of these people were bad at archery. Their cultivation must be high as well. It was still unknown if Jin Ling would be able to run away successfully. He hopped down the wall. As he formed a circle with his fingers, about to whistle, a smiling voice suddenly sounded behind his back, "I think it's best if Young Master Wei stops right there. It's nothing if your flute's broken, but if your tongue or your fingers went missing, it'd be such a shame."

Wei WuXian immediately put his hand away, agreeing, "You make so much sense."

The person, "May I request your company?" Wei WuXian nodded, "You're too polite, Sect Leader Jin." Jin GuangYao smiled, "It's my pleasure."

As if nothing was wrong, they walked a big circle all the way up to the main entrance of the Guanyin Temple. Wei WuXian was speechless. The doors of the Guanyin Temple were wide open already. As expected, Jin Ling wasn't able to run away. With a few monks pointing their swords at him, Jin Ling looked at them, and was still the first to say something, although after some hesitation, "Uncle." Jin GuangYao, "Hello, A-Ling."

## Chapter 99: Hatred —Part Two

Jin Ling stole a glance at Wei WuXian again. No dogs were with him, and Wei WuXian was finally able to get a hold of himself. He felt like he had a headache, “You kid... It’s so late. Why did you come here with your dog?”

But he didn’t know that after Lan WangJi, Wen Ning, and he departed from Lotus Pier, Jin Ling secretly went to find him. Realizing he was gone, he threw a tantrum at his uncle who ran madly around, making people unsheathe their swords. He criticized that Wei WuXian ran away all because of him, and Jiang Cheng slammed him on the ground right after. And so, Jin Ling decided that he might as well do everything, taking Fairy to trace Wei WuXian’s tracks. Fairy didn’t disappoint, arriving with accuracy at the Guanyin Temple by following Wei WuXian’s scent. However, when Jin Ling was knocking, Fairy sensed the killing intent hidden behind the doors and suddenly turned around, biting his owner’s clothes and barking to alarm him. Unfortunately, something seemed odd about this Guanyin Temple. Even if Wei WuXian wasn’t inside, Jin Ling felt he had to find out what it was. In the end, he still fell into the hands of the enemy.

Of course, Jin Ling wouldn’t speak the truth. He only snorted.

Along with a few people, Jin GuangYao stepped into the temple. Right before the doors closed, he turned to his subordinates, “Where’s the dog?”

A monk replied, “The dog was wild. It bit anyone in its path. I was unable subdue it, and it ran off.”

Jin GuangYao, “Find it and kill it. The dog’s quite bright. It wouldn’t do us well if it led someone over.”

“Yes!”

The monk left with his sword, and the doors finally closed. Jin Ling was more than astonished, blurting, “You’re really gonna kill it? You were the one who gave me Fairy!”

Jin GuangYao asked instead, “A-Ling, what are you doing here?” Jin Ling glanced at Wei WuXian, unsure of how to respond.

Suddenly, Lan XiChen spoke up, “Sect Leader Jin, Jin Ling is still a child.”

Jin GuangYao turned to him, “I know.”

Lan XiChen, “He is your nephew as well.”

Jin GuangYao broke into a smile, “Brother, what are you thinking? Of course, I know Jin Ling’s not only a child but my nephew as well. What did you think I’d do? Silence him by murder?”

Lan XiChen didn’t say anything. Jin GuangYao shook his head, turning to Jin Ling, “A-Ling, you heard him. If you make a ruckus, perhaps I’d do some scary things to you. Do as you see fit, please.”

Jin Ling had always had a good relationship with this uncle of his. In the past, Jin GuangYao doted on him quite a lot. Right now, he appeared to be as nice as always, but with the way things were, Jin Ling found it difficult to view him in the same light as before.

Quietly, he walked towards Wei WuXian and Lan XiChen, looking quite obedient.

Jin GuangYao turned around, “They still haven’t dug it up yet? Tell the people inside to hurry up!”

One of the monks answered, “Yes!” With a sword, he rushed into the Guanyin Palace.

Wei WuXian finally noticed that from the main palace came the sound of earth and stone being shuffled, as though many people were trying to dig something out. He thought, what’s he digging? A tunnel? The Tiger Seal? The thing that’s sealed here?

Jin GuangYao, “Speaking of it, there’s something I haven’t asked yet—Mr. Wei, how do you know this place? Please don’t tell me you and HanGuang-Jun just so happened to have arrived here on your vacation.”

Wei WuXian, “LianFang-Zun, you hid quite a big land deed in the secret chamber of Fragrant

Palace, right beside my manuscripts. Don't you remember?"

Jin GuangYao, "Oh, that would be my fault. I should've put them separately."

Wei WuXian, "Right now, we won't be able to run from your grasp no matter what, so could you perhaps tell me just what a creature is being suppressed in this Guanyin Temple, LianFang-Zun, and quench my curiosity a bit?"

Jin GuangYao smiled, "Quenching your curiosity doesn't come at a low price. Young Master Wei, are you sure you'd like to try?"

Wei WuXian, "Oh. On second thought, then, never mind."

At this point, Lan XiChen walked towards him. Wei WuXian finally noticed that although the sword at Lan XiChen's waist was an inch unsheathed, no light was shining. He asked, "ZeWu-Jun, what's with this?"

Lan XiChen, "It was quite a shame. I was fooled by lies and lost my spiritual powers. Even though I carry Shuoyue and Liebing, they will not be of much help."

Wei WuXian, "No need to feel ashamed. After all, lying is one of LianFang-Zun's greatest skills." Remembering the Empathy scene where Meng Yao feigned suicide to stab Nie MingJue behind the back as well as the news that „LianFang-Zun was heavily injured", he didn't find it too hard to deduce how Lan XiChen lost his spiritual powers.

Jin GuangYao ordered the monks, "Lay out an array. When HanGuang-Jun comes later, stop him as long as you can."

Wei WuXian, "How are you so sure that HanGuang-Jun would come?"

He was still rapidly thinking whether or not he should lie and lower Jin GuangYao's guard when Jin GuangYao smiled, as though he knew what he was thinking, "Of course he'd come. Since you were suspicious of this Guanyin Temple, Young Master Wei, of course HanGuang-Jun would know of the peculiarities here as well. Young Master Wei, don't tell me you think I'd believe you if you said he didn't come with you."

Wei WuXian, "Bravo."

Lan XiChen, "Young Master Wei, if WangJi is around, why is he not with you?"

Wei WuXian, "We're acting separately."

Lan XiChen, however, paused in surprise, "I heard you injured yourself when you left Burial Mound. Why would he act separately with you at such a time?"

Wei WuXian, "Who did you hear it from?" Jin GuangYao, "I told him."

Wei WuXian glanced at him before turning to Lan XiChen, "It's like this. I couldn't sleep tonight and took a stroll outside the inn. I only came here accidentally. HanGuang-Jun's in another room.

He doesn't know I went out."

Jin GuangYao found this strange, "You two got two rooms?"

Wei WuXian, "Who told you we'd definitely get one room?"

Jin GuangYao smiled, but said nothing. Wei WuXian, "Oh, I know." Lan XiChen told him. Wei WuXian, "You two really do talk about anything and everything."

However, there was no joking tone in Lan XiChen's voice, "Young Master Wei, did something happen between you two?"

Without the genial smile on his face, he looked even more like Lan WangJi with such a serious expression. Wei WuXian couldn't understand why his reaction was so big. He felt guilty in the first place, "Sect Leader Lan, what could've happened between us?"

As of the moment, let's turn our attention to dealing with this one."

He gestured to Jin GuangYao with his eyes. With the reminder, Lan XiChen replied, "I was too impatient. My apologies."

Yet, Jin GuangYao smiled, "So it seems that a problem indeed happened. And not a small problem, at that."

Wei WuXian returned a cold smile, "Right now, the entire cultivation world is about to crusade against you, LianFang-Zun, and you're still sitting back, aren't you? Still got the spare time to

worry about others? Aren't you a chatty one?"

Jin GuangYao, "Of course not. I just had to comment. HanGuang- Jun spent so many years in yearning, and even today he hasn't gotten his happy ending yet. Not only does Sect Leader Lan have a good reason to feel impatient, even an outsider can't bear watching it."

Wei WuXian whirled around, "What yearning? What happy ending?"

Hearing this, both Jin GuangYao and Lan XiChen seemed surprised. They examined his expression carefully, as though trying to see if he was purposely pretending to be oblivious. Wei WuXian's heart suddenly began to pound, like something that had been dead for more than half the night suddenly bursted alive in his chest again. He forced himself to be calm, "What do you mean?"

Jin GuangYao, "Young Master Wei, do you really don't understand what I mean? No matter what, if HanGuang-Jun heard this, it'd be a little hurtful, wouldn't it?"

Wei WuXian, "I really don't understand. Just say it out loud!!!"

Lan XiChen was shocked, "Young Master Wei, could it be that even after you spent such a long time together with WangJi, you still do not know of his feelings?"

Wei WuXian grabbed him at once, about to kneel on the ground and beg him to explain everything in one go, "Sect Leader Lan, Sect Leader Lan, w-what feelings do you mean by Lan Zhan's feelings?! Is it, is it..."

Lan XiChen forcefully drew his hand away, speaking in disbelief, "So you really know nothing. But have you forgotten how he received those whip scars? Have you not seen the brand mark at his chest?"

Wei WuXian, "Whip scars?!" He grabbed Lan XiChen again, "Sect Leader Lan, I really don't know. Please tell me, just how did he get those injuries? How could they possibly be related to me?!"

Anger could be seen on Lan XiChen's face, "If it were not related to you, could he have done those to himself without a reason?!"

ZeWu-Jun had always been an extremely patient person, but now that Lan WangJi was involved, he was truly angered. But after he scrutinized Wei WuXian's expression, he suppressed some of his anger, trying, "Your... memory is damaged?"

Wei WuXian, "My memory?" He immediately tried as hard as he could to think of things that he'd forgotten, "I don't remember my memory being... Yes!"

There was indeed a portion of his memories that was blurry. The massacre of the Nightless City! On the night back then, he thought Wen Qing and Wen Ning had already been turned to dust, he watched the cultivational world charge so passionately at him, he even saw Jiang YanLi die before him with his own eyes. In the end, he lost control and put the Tiger Seal together, letting it succumb to slaughter. Those killed by the corpses under the Seal's command became new corpses, creating an endless flow of killing puppets to build the hell of blood.

Afterwards, even though Wei WuXian could manage to support himself and remain standing, amidst the blur, he felt himself leave the slaughter house of a city. He was unconscious for a long time, and when he woke up again, he'd been sitting at the bottom of Yiling's Burial Mound for quite long.

Lan XiChen, "Do you remember now?"

Wei WuXian murmured, "The time at Nightless City? I-I've always thought I somehow walked back on my own. Could it be..."

Lan XiChen almost laughed out of the rage, "Young Master Wei! On the night at Nightless City, what faced you was how many

people? Three thousand! No matter what a prodigy you were, to be able to escape unscathed in those circumstances? Absolutely impossible!"

Wei WuXian, "What... What did Lan Zhan do?"

Lan XiChen, "What WangJi did—if you do not remember, I am afraid he would never tell you in this life, and you would never ask either. Fine, then. Let me be the one to say it." He continued,

“Young Master Wei, in that night, you took the two halves of the Stygian Tiger Seal and pieced them together. After you were satisfied with the killing, you were a spent arrow as well. WangJi was injured on your rampage. He was in no better shape than you, barely supporting himself by leaning on Bichen. In spite of this, as he saw you stumble away, he immediately followed.

“Right then, not many people were still conscious. I, too, was almost unable to move, and I could only watch as WangJi, whose spiritual powers were clearly about to be drained, staggered towards you. He brought you onto Bichen as soon as he grabbed you, and you two left.

“Four hours later, my spiritual powers, having finally been restored, I hurried back to the GusuLan Sect in search for assistance. I was worried that if those from another sect found you first, WangJi would be considered your accomplice. The best scenario was his name being forever tainted, and the worst his life being taken away right then. Thus, along with Uncle, we chose thirty-three seniors who had always thought highly of WangJi and searched for two days on our swords in secrecy. Only then did we find signs of you two within the Yiling region. WangJi hid you in a cave. When we arrived, you sat blankly on a rock within the cave. Holding your hand, WangJi was giving you spiritual energy. He kept on whispering to you. But throughout the whole time, you repeated the same two words at him.

“Get lost”!

Wei WuXian’s throat was dry. His eyes were red as well. He couldn’t say a single thing. Lan XiChen continued, “My uncle suddenly appeared before him and scolded him, asking for him to explain things. As if he knew all along he would be discovered by us, he said that there was nothing to explain, that this was it.

Growing up, he had never talked back to Uncle and me even once. But for you, not only did WangJi talk back to him, he even met with his sword the cultivators from the GusuLan Sect. He heavily injured all thirty-three of the seniors we asked to come...”

Wei WuXian dug his hands into his hair, “... I-I didn’t know...I really...”

Apart from repeating how he didn’t know, he wasn’t able to say anything else. Lan XiChen restrained himself for a moment, yet still continued, “Thirty-three whip scars! He was punished in one go, once for each person. You should know how much it hurts when it lands on your body, for how long you have to rest to recover! After he went out of his way to send you back to Burial Mound and returned in such low spirits to receive his punishment, how long he kneeled before the Wall of Rules! I told him when I went to see him, Young Master Wei had already made a grave mistake, there was no use augmenting it. But he said... that he could not say with certainty whether what you did was right or wrong, but no matter what, he was willing to be responsible for all of the consequences alongside you. They say those years were him reflecting on his mistakes, but in reality he was entirely bedridden. Even so, when he knew of your passing away, he still dragged such a body to Burial Mound to take one last look, no matter what...

“With the ways in which he looked and talked to you when he saved you and hid you in that cave, even someone who was blind

or deaf could perceive his feelings, which was why my uncle was in such anger. WangJi was a model for the disciples when he was young, and a prominent cultivator when he grew up. In his whole life he had been honest and righteous and immaculate—you were the only mistake he made! And you say... And you say you do not know. Young Master Wei, after you returned in your body, how did you pester him and confess to him? Every night... Every night, you had to... And you say you do not know? If you did not know, why did you do such things?”

Wei WuXian really wanted to go back to all those times and kill himself. It was precisely because he didn’t know that he dared do such things!

He suddenly felt terrified. If Lan WangJi didn’t know that he couldn’t at all recall what happened in the few days after the massacre at Nightless City, if Lan WangJi thought that he knew about his feelings all along, just how horrible were the things he did after he came back?

At first, he did those shameful, theatrical things in order to make Lan WangJi feel disgust and throw him out of the Cloud Recesses so that they wouldn’t meet each other again, going their

separate ways. Lan WangJi wouldn't have failed to see what his real attitude was. But even when this was the case... he still chose to keep him by his side, refusing to give Jiang Cheng the chance to approach and make things difficult for him. He answered all questions, granted all requests, indulged him and forgave him again and again. Even when faced with Wei WuXian's myriad of almost cruel teasing, he was still able to hold himself from crossing the line.

Then, back at the inn, when he pushed him away so suddenly, was it also because... he thought it was another instance of spur-of-the-moment presumption?

Wei WuXian really couldn't keep on thinking any longer. He rushed towards the Guanyin Temple's doors, and cultivators immediately stopped him. Jin GuangYao, "Young Master Wei, I do understand your current excitement..."

Right now, all Wei WuXian wanted to do was to rush back to the inn, rush to Lan WangJi's side, and tell him his feelings no matter how much he rambled. With one strike, he sent two monks who

tried to stop him flying away, roaring, "You understand my ass!"

After the strike, the seven or eight people all threw themselves over. Wei WuXian immediately felt his view darken. On the other side, Jin GuangYao was intent on finishing his words, "... I only wanted to tell you, there's no need to be in such a hurry. Your HanGuang-Jun—he's already here."

An icy blue sword glare shot from the sky, whistling as it forced back the silhouettes who encircled Wei WuXian before returning to someone's hand. Lan WangJi landed before the Guanyin Temple soundlessly and glanced at him, his expression no different from usual. But with nervousness, Wei WuXian felt all of

the things he wanted to say crumple up inside of his stomach. His abdomen cramped. He could only murmur, "... Lan Zhan."

Right before, Jin Ling was shocked speechless by Lan XiChen's words. Seeing that Lan WangJi was here, he was ecstatic at first, but his expression immediately twisted as he saw how Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian looked at each other.

Jin GuangYao sighed, "You see? That's what I said. If you're here, Young Master Wei, HanGuang-Jun would definitely come as well."

Lan WangJi turned the wrist of the hand with which he held Bichen. Just as he was about to move, Jin GuangYao smiled, "HanGuang-Jun, it's best if you take five steps back."

Wei WuXian suddenly felt a small, sharp sting come from his neck. Lan XiChen lowered his voice, "Be careful. Do not move!"

Lan WangJi's gaze landed on Wei WuXian's neck. His face paled slightly.

An almost unnoticeable guqin string, light and golden, was tied around Wei WuXian's neck.

# Chapter 100: Hatred —Part Three

The guqin string was extremely thin. It was covered in special paint as well, making it almost unseeable by the eye. Along with how disoriented Wei WuXian was, unable to pay attention to anything else, he didn't notice it when it wrapped around the vital region.

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan, don't! Don't back away!"

But Lan WangJi immediately walked five steps back without any hesitation. Jin GuangYao, "Wonderful. Now, please unsheathe Bichen."

With a clank, Lan WangJi obeyed again. Wei WuXian raged, "Don't ask for too much!"

Jin GuangYao, "This is already asking for too much? Next, I'm even going to ask HanGuang-Jun to seal away his spiritual powers. What would that be called?"

Wei WuXian seethed, "You..."

Before he could finish, the sharp pain of flesh being lacerated came from his throat. Something dripped down his neck. Lan WangJi's face was pale. Jin GuangYao, "How could he not listen to me? Just think about it, Young Master Wei, his\* life is in my hands."

\*T/n: Not a typo, WWX is LWJ's life, that's a fact.

Lan WangJi spoke a word at a time, "Do not touch him."

Jin GuangYao, "Then you know what to do, HanGuang-Jun." A moment later, Lan WangJi responded, "Yes."

Lan XiChen sighed. Lan WangJi raised his hands. With two strong taps, he locked his own spiritual powers.

Jin GuangYao smiled, his voice soft, "This really is..." Lan WangJi's eyes were locked on them, "Let him go."

Wei WuXian, however, stopped him, "Lan Zhan! I-I have to tell you something."

Jin GuangYao, "Let's save it for later."

Wei WuXian, "No. It's really urgent."

Jin GuangYao, "Then you can also say it right now."

It was only an offhand comment, but Wei WuXian seemed as if he realized something, "You're right." Right after, Wei WuXian shouted with all he could, "Lan Zhan! Lan WangJi! HanGuang-Jun! Back then, I-I really wanted to sleep with you!"

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

Jin GuangYao's hands loosened, and the string fell. As soon as he felt the stinging at his neck disappear, Wei WuXian threw himself at Lan WangJi, unable to wait a second longer.

The shocking confession just now struck Lan WangJi with such force that he still hadn't finished processing it. A few rare streaks of loss and confusion appeared on his normally calm face. It wasn't the first time Wei WuXian hugged him as if he was clinging on for dear life, but this time, it was as though Lan WangJi's body had turned into a heavy log. He froze so much that he didn't even know where to put his hands.

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan, did you hear what I said?!"

Lan WangJi's lips moved. A moment later, he spoke, "You..." He'd always been concise and comprehensive with his words, never pausing at all. But right now, he paused with more hesitance than ever. Another moment later, he continued, "You said..."

He seemed as if he wanted to repeat it to make sure he didn't hear it wrong. But to Lan WangJi, those words were indeed too hard to say. Immediately, Wei WuXian decided to say it again, "I said I really wanted to..."

"Ahem!" Standing on the side, Lan XiChen clenched his right hand into a fist and put it to his lips. After some thought, he sighed, "... Young Master Wei, it certainly isn't the best time and place to say such words."

Wei WuXian apologized without any sincerity, “I’m really sorry, Sect Leader Lan, but I really couldn’t wait a second longer.”

Jin GuangYao also seemed like he couldn’t wait a second longer. He turned around, “Have you still not dug it out yet?!”

One of the monks responded, “Sect Leader, you buried it too deep back then...”

Jin GuangYao’s expression twisted, his face pale. Even despite this, he didn’t scold his subordinate, “Hurry up!”

Before he finished, a white streak of lightning climbed across the sky. A moment later, thunder boomed. Jin GuangYao gazed at the sky, his face dark. Soon, thin strands of rain fluttered in the sky. Wei WuXian clung to Lan WangJi. He was still trying to let the endless words burst from his chest when the cold rain blew onto his face, calming him down.

Jin GuangYao turned to Lan XiChen, “ZeWu-Jun, it’s raining. Let’s take shelter in the temple.”

Even if Lan XiChen was already under his control, he still faced Jin GuanYao with complete courtesy, not treating him with the slightest bit of harshness. He didn’t seem any different from before except for being especially polite. It was hard to vent off to him even if one was angry. After all, one couldn’t slap a smiling face, much less someone like Lan XiChen who didn’t get angry much to begin with. Jin GuangYao stepped over the threshold first and entered the main palace. The rest of the group followed.

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi had already come inside once during the day. The inside of the building was quite wide and grand. The red walls and the golden lacquer were all good as new. It was clear that people often cleaned the place. The monks and cultivators were digging at the back of the palace. However deep they’d dug already, they still hadn’t dug up what Jin GuangYao buried. Wei WuXian looked up unintentionally, and was immediately surprised.

The Guanyin statue atop the altar had beautiful features. Compared to the usual Guanyin statues, this one had less kindness and more grace. What made him somewhat surprised was that the Guanyin Temple seemed a bit familiar, like someone he knew. Wasn’t it Jin GuangYao, who was standing right there?

It wasn’t so stark at first glance, but when compared to Jin GuangYao, the two seemed more and more alike. Wei WuXian thought, Is Jin GuangYao really such a self-obsessed person? It wasn’t enough to be the Chief Cultivator of the entire world—he even had to carve a heavenly statue in his appearance to receive the worship of tens of thousands of people? Or is this some sort of dark cultivation technique that I don’t know about?

Lan WangJi’s voice suddenly rang beside his ears, “Sit.”

Wei WuXian’s thoughts immediately returned. Lan WangJi gathered four cushions from the temple, giving two to Lan XiChen and Jin Ling and two to Wei WuXian and him. But for some reason, both Lan XiChen and Jin Ling moved their cushions quite far away from them. And coincidentally, they gazed into the distance in unison.

Jin GuangYao and the rest had already gone behind the palace to inspect how the digging was going. Tugging Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian sat down on the cushion. Perhaps because his mind was far off, Lan WangJi’s figure wobbled from the tug before sitting down properly. Wei WuXian calmed himself a bit before gazing at Lan WangJi’s face.

His eyes looked down. Not many emotions could be seen. Wei WuXian knew that with just those words, Lan WangJi probably couldn’t believe him yet. He was tortured by a smiling, oblivious person who knew nothing of his crimes. It was only natural that he didn’t believe it. After he thought so, Wei WuXian felt his chest go heavy. His heart hurt so much it shivered. He didn’t dare think of it any longer, but he knew that he should increase the dose.

He spoke, “Lan Zhan, l-look at me.”

His voice was still a bit tight. Lan WangJi, “Mn.”

After a deep breath, Wei WuXian whispered, “... I really do have a bad memory. I can’t remember a lot of the things that happened in the past, including the time at the Nightless City. I don’t remember a single bit of what happened during those days.”

Hearing this, Lan WangJi's eyes widened slightly.

Wei WuXian suddenly reached out and grabbed his shoulders, continuing, "But! But, from now on, what you say to me, what you do for me, I'll remember all of them—I won't forget a single thing!"

"..."

Wei WuXian, "You're really great. I like you." "..."

"Or in other words, I fancy you, I love you, I want you, I can't leave you, I whatever you."

"..."

"I want to night-hunt with you for the rest of my life." "..."

Wei WuXian put three fingers together, pointing at the sky, the earth, and finally his heart, "And I want to sleep with you every day. I swear it's not the heat of the moment or joking around like I've done in the past. I'm not doing it out of gratitude either.

Anyways, it's not because of anything else. I really just like you so much I want to sleep with you. I don't want anyone but you—it can't be anyone but you. You can do anything you want to me, however you like it. I'll accept everything, as long as you're willing to..."

Before he even finished, a gust of wind suddenly surged inside, putting out the rows of candles within the Guanyin Temple.

Without anyone noticing, the sprinkle had become a storm. The colliding lanterns outside the temple had already been dampened by the rainwater as well. Their surroundings suddenly sunk into darkness.

Wei WuXian couldn't let out another sound. Amidst the darkness, Lan WangJi had already embraced him tightly, stopping him with his lips.

Lan WangJi's breaths were short and disordered. His hoarse voice whispered beside Wei WuXian's ear, "... fancy you..."

Wei WuXian hugged him tight, "Yes!" Lan WangJi, "... love you, want you..." Wei WuXian raised his voice, "Yes!"

Lan WangJi, "Cannot leave you... do not want anyone but you... it cannot be anyone but you!"

He repeated over and over again the words Wei WuXian said to him, his voice and his body trembling at the same time. Wei WuXian was almost under the illusion that he was about to cry. After every sentence, the arm he wrapped around Wei WuXian's waist tightened. Wei WuXian hurt from the embrace, but the arms he wrapped around Lan WangJi's back tightened as well, almost making him unable to breathe. But still, he savored every moment as he wished to hug him even tighter.

He couldn't see anything.

But their chests were right against each other's. The two hearts couldn't hide at all. Wei WuXian felt it with clarity—Lan WangJi's throbbing heart, the heat that was about to break out of that chest, and something that landed at his neck before disappearing soundlessly, something that might have resembled a tear.

At this point, a series of quickened footsteps entered the main palace. Jin GuangYao, who had gone behind the palace to check on the situation with a few cultivators, returned again. Facing the strong wind, two monks stood each on one side, finally managing to shut and bolt the temple's doors after exerting all their strength.

Jin GuangYao fished out a fire talisman. After a light blow, the talisman ignited, and he used it to light up the red candles again. The dim, yellow flames were the only source of light in this lone temple amidst the night rain. Suddenly, two crisp knocks came from outside the door.

Hearing that someone was knocking, all of the people within the temple perked up their ears, looking at the entrance. The two monks who closed the doors seemed as though they faced a great threat. Soundlessly, they pointed their swords towards the doors.

Jin GuangYao's expression didn't change at all, "Who is it?" The person outside, "Sect Leader, it's me!"

It was Su She's voice. Jin GuangYao gestured, and the two monks took off the bolt. Su She

entered along with the roaring storm.

Affected by the wind and rain, the row of candles fluttered and flickered. The two monks immediately shut the doors again. Su She was drenched by the storm. His face was cold, and his lips were frozen to become a shade of purple. In his right hand he held his sword, and in his left a person. After he entered, he was just about to throw the person down when he saw Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi on two cushions by the side, still stuck together and refusing to part. Su She had just suffered quite some losses from these two. His expression changed, and he immediately unsheathed his sword, glancing at Jin GuangYao. Seeing how he looked like nothing was wrong, Su She knew that these two were definitely under control already. He finally calmed down.

Jin GuangYao, "What's wrong?"

Su She, "I met him on my way here. I thought he might be useful, so I caught him."

Jin GuangYao approached and looked down, "Did you hurt him?"

Su She, "No. He was scared and passed out." As he spoke, he tossed the person onto the ground.

Jin GuangYao, "MinShan, don't be so rough with him. He can't take scares and falling down."

Su She hurried, "Yes." He then picked up the person whom he threw around and carefully placed them beside Lan XiChen. Lan XiChen had been staring at the person. He pushed aside their wet, messy hair and looked. The person who had been scared unconscious was indeed Nie HuaiSang. He'd probably been caught by Su She after he finished resting at Lotus Pier, on his way back to Qinghe.

He looked up, "Why did you seize HuaiSang?"

Jin GuangYao, "With another sect leader here, the others would be to some extent more careful anyways. But Brother, please don't worry. You know how I've always been towards HuaiSang. When the time comes, I'll definitely let you two leave without harm."

Lan XiChen's voice sounded indifferent, "Should I believe you?"

Jin GuangYao, "It's your choice. Whether you believe me or not, Brother, you can't do anything about it, can you?"

At this point, Su She threw his cool gaze towards Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi. He snickered, "HanGuang-Jun, Patriarch YiLing,

who would've thought we'd meet so soon? And the tables have completely been turned. So how does it feel?"

Lan WangJi didn't say anything. He never paid attention to such meaningless provocations. Wei WuXian thought to himself, how have the tables been turned? You were running away defeated back on Burial Mound, but aren't you also running away defeated right now?

Perhaps Su She had been holding it back for too many years. He'd keep on rambling all on his own even without anyone provoking him. He examined Lan WangJi from top to bottom and mocked, "Things are already like this, and you're still holding up the front you think looks so calm and collected. How long do you want to keep it up for?"

Lan WangJi was still silent. Lan XiChen, however, spoke up, "Sect Leader Su, when you were studying in the GusuLan Sect, I believe we never treated you badly. Why do you attack WangJi like this?"

Su She, "How dare I attack Second Young Master Lan, who's been so talented ever since he was young? I just can't bear looking at how he always thinks he's such a big deal."

Although it wasn't the only time Wei WuXian knew that hatred could come without a reason, he still couldn't help but be baffled, "Has HanGuang-Jun ever said he thinks he's a big deal? If I remember correctly, isn't „arrogance is forbidden" part of the GusuLan Sect's rules?"

Jin Ling, "Why do you know what's part of the GusuLan Sect's rules?"

Wei WuXian touched his chin, "I've copied them too manytimes, you know?"

Jin Ling blurted, "Why would you copy the GusuLan Sect's rules? It's not like you're..." He wanted to say „it's not like you're from his sect", but before he could finish, he felt where the oddness was.

He stopped talking, his face darkening.

Wei WuXian grinned, "Is it because HanGuang-Jun's had such an icy face ever since he was young, Sect Leader Su, that you think about him this way? If so, then HanGuang-Jun is so unfortunately misunderstood. He's obviously like this towards everyone. You should be glad you didn't study at the YunmengJiang Sect, Sect Leader Su."

Su She's voice was cold, "Why?"

Wei WuXian, "Or else you would've long since been angered to death by me. When I was young, every day I wholehearted believed that I was a prodigy, that I was such a fucking big deal. And not only did I believe it in my heart, I even flaunted it everywhere."

Veins lined Su She's forehead, "Shut up!" He seemed as if was about to strike when Lan WangJi pulled Wei WuXian towards his chest, firmly protecting him with his arms. Su She's movements paused, debating whether or not he should attack.

Wei WuXian immediately peeked from behind Lan WangJi's back, "It's best if you don't do anything, Sect Leader Su. LianFang-Zun is still fairly respectful towards ZeWu-Jun. If you hurt HanGuang-Jun, do you think LianFang-Zun would be happy?"

This was also the reason why Su She stopped. But now that Wei WuXian said it, he felt abnormally annoyed. He mocked again out

of defiance, "I never imagined that the YiLing Patriarch, who legendarily strikes fear in both the living and the dead, would be scared of death himself!"

Wei WuXian responded shamelessly, "You really flatter me. But, it's not that I'm scared of death. I just don't want to die yet."

Su She sneered, "Mincing words. Hilarious. Is there any difference between being scared of death and not wanting to die?"

Wei WuXian snuggled against Lan WangJi's chest, "Of course there is. For example, right now, I don't want to get up from Lan

Zhan versus I'm scared of getting up from Lan Zhan—could they possibly be the same?" After some thought, he continued, "I'm sorry. I retract my words. I feel like they're pretty much exactly the same thing."

Su She's face was almost green. To anger him was Wei WuXian's original intention, anyways. But suddenly, from above him came a light laugh.

It was so extremely light that one would doubt they heard wrong.

But Wei WuXian immediately looked up. He very clearly saw beside Lan WangJi's lips the transient glimpse of a soft smile that resembled sunlight reflected over snow. This time, not only Su She, even Lan XiChen and Jin Ling paused in astonishment.

Everyone knew that HanGuang-Jun was always cold and never smiled, almost unlively. Only few had seen what he looked like when he smiled, even if it was just a slight curl of his lips. Nobody expected to see his smile under such circumstances.

Wei WuXian's eyes were immediately opened wide and round.

A moment later, he gulped. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down, "Lan Zhan, you..."

Right then, knocking sounds again came from outside the Guanyin Temple.

Su She unsheathed his sword, holding it in his hands as he asked in alarm, "Who is it?!"

Nobody answered. The doors shot open!

From amidst the storm that had just broken inside, a crackling streak of purple lighting struck right against Su She's chest, sending him flying backwards. Su She slammed into one of the mahogany pillars, and immediately heaved a mouthful of blood. The two monks guarding the temple door were also affected by the echoes of the attack, thrown onto the ground and unable to get up. A purple figure stepped steadily over the threshold and into the main palace.

The rain blew hard outside the temple, but the figure wasn't too wet. Only the violet at the hems of his clothes darkened slightly. He held a paper umbrella in his left hand. Rain drops crashed onto the umbrella, water splashing everywhere. The cold light of Zidian continued to sizzle in his right hand. His face was darker than the stormy night.

## Chapter 101: Hatred —Part Four

Jin Ling sat up at once, shouting, “Uncle!”

Jiang Cheng’s eyes swept over, responding coldly, “You wish! Now you’re calling me uncle—why did you run so fastearlier?!”

After he finished, he turned the direction of his gaze either intentionally or not towards Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi. Before the pairs of eyes could meet, Su She had already steadied himself with his sword, Nanping, and lunged at Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng hadn’t even attacked when a string of dog barks sounded. Fairy charged into the temple like a flying fish and threw itself straight at Su She.

Hearing the dog, Wei WuXian immediately felt his hair rise. He shrunk back into Lan WangJi’s arms, half-dead with fright, “Lan Zhan!”

Lan WangJi had already embraced him without needing any reminder, replying, “I am here!”

Wei WuXian, “Hug me!”

Lan WangJi, “I am hugging you!” Wei WuXian, again, “Hug me tight!”

Lan WangJi, also, “I am hugging you tight!”

Even without the view, just listening to the voices was enough to make Jiang Cheng’s facial muscles twitch. He originally wanted to look that way, but now he gained complete control over his neck. Right this moment, from behind the palace rushed a couple of monks and cultivators, attacking with their swords. Jiang Cheng laughed coldly before he raised his right hand, painting a brilliant streak of purple amid the Guanyin Temple. Any who was struck by the purple were sent flying backwards, yet he still held the umbrella steadily in his hand. Only when everyone in the palace lay in disorder on the ground, jerking and quivering as if they were still being shocked, Jiang Cheng finally closed his umbrella. On the other hand, Su She yelled in anger, trying to tackle the dog.

Jin Ling yelled from the side, “Fairy! Watch out! Fairy, bite him! Bite his hand!”

Lan XiChen called out, “Sect Leader Jiang, be careful of the guqin!”

Before he even finished, notes of the guqin sounded from behind the Guanyin Temple. However, back on Burial Mound, Jiang Cheng had already suffered quite a lot because of the dark melody. He was naturally more than alert. The moment the first note echoed, he kicked the ground, using the tip of his foot to bring up a sword that a cultivator dropped. With his left hand, he tossed away the paper umbrella and grabbed the sword, and with his right he unsheathed Sandu from his waist. With a sword in each hand, he slashed them against each other with force.

The two blades scraped, letting out an extremely harsh noise that overcame Jin GuangYao’s guqin.

It was quite the effective method! But there was only one shortcoming—the sound was just too painful to hear! It was so painful that it felt as if one’s ears would be pierced through by the terrible noise. And to Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi who grew up in the GusuLan Sect, it was even more unbearable. Both of the two frowned slightly. However, Lan WangJi was in the middle of doing his job, hugging Wei WuXian, and was unable to cover his ears.

And so, as Wei WuXian trembled, listening to the dog barks, he reached out and covered Lan WangJi’s ears for him.

With a hardened face, Jiang Cheng continued to create the nasty noise with the two swords in his hands as he approached the back of the palace. But before he even reached the place, Jin GuangYao walked out on his own, covering his ears, “Sect Leader Jiang, I must admit my defeat against such a power move.”

Jiang Cheng swung Zidian towards Jin GuangYao, who dodged out of the way, “Sect Leader Jiang! How did you get here?”

Jiang Cheng refused to talk to him. Jin GuangYao’s spiritual energy wasn’t as high as his, so he didn’t dare face him directly. He could only dodge nimbly, again and again, remaining composed

as his subordinates attacked Jiang Cheng, “Did you chase after A-Ling when he was running around? Fairy must’ve led the way for you as well. Well, I was the one who gave it to him, after all, but it gives me no face or whatsoever.”

Hugged so tightly by Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian didn’t feel as scared anymore, even when he heard the dog barks. He even had the spare energy to ponder, recalling a certain someone as he watched how Jin GuangYao smiled and batted his eyes even as he fought. He whispered, “He really is the same as Xue Yang.”

Lan WangJi, however, didn’t say anything. Having received no answer, Wei WuXian looked up to realize that he was still covering Lan WangJi’s ears. Lan WangJi didn’t hear what he said at all, and that had to be why he didn’t answer. He let go at once.

At this point, Jin GuangYao’s tone suddenly changed, smiling, “Sect Leader Jiang, what’s wrong? Ever since we started, your eyes have been so shifty, almost like you’re scared of looking that way. Is anything over there?”

Jiang Cheng, “You’re the chief cultivator, after all. Fight me if you can—why the chit-chat?”

Jin GuangYao, “You’re still avoiding it? Nothing is over there except for your shixiong. Did you really come here chasing after A-Ling?”

Jiang Cheng, “What do you think?! Whom else would I be looking for?! ”

Lan XiChen, “Do not answer him!”

Jin GuangYao had always been good with words. As soon as Jiang Cheng began to talk with him, his attention would be directed elsewhere and his emotions involuntarily influenced. Jin GuangYao, “Fine. Mr. Wei, you see? Your shidi didn’t come looking for you. He doesn’t even want to spare you a single glance.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Now those are strange words. It’s not the first day Sect Leader Jiang treats me like this. Do I need you to keep on reminding me?”

Hearing this, Jiang Cheng’s lips twisted slightly. Veins popped from the back of the hand with which he held Zidian. Jin

GuangYao turned to him again, sighing, “Sect Leader Jiang, look—it’s just so difficult being your shixiong, isn’t it?”

Noticing how Jin GuangYao kept on directing the topic of conversation at him, Wei WuXian began to worry. Jiang Cheng returned the sarcasm, “Sect Leader Jin, isn’t it more difficult being your sworn brother?”

Jin GuangYao didn’t care about whether or not Jiang Cheng was listening to him at all, “Sect Leader Jiang, I heard yesterday you threw a tantrum in Lotus Pier without a reason, running around holding the sword that belonged to the YiLing Patriarch, telling everyone you met to unsheathe it.”

Jiang Cheng’s expression was enough to send shivers down one’s spine.

Wei WuXian suddenly shot up from Lan WangJi’s arms. His heart skipped a beat as well. In his head, a voice ranted, My sword? He means Suibian? Didn’t I leave Suibian to Wen Ning? No, when I saw him yesterday, it’s true I didn’t see him carrying it... How did it end up in Jiang Cheng’s hands?! Why would Jiang Cheng tell others to unsheathe it?! Has he tried unsheathing it himself yet?

Just as his mind tensed, Lan WangJi reached out and stroked his back. Wei WuXian finally calmed down somewhat. And as he saw Jiang Cheng’s sudden silence, Jin GuangYao’s eyes shone, “I heard nobody could unsheathe the sword, but you managed to unsheathe it yourself. How curious. The sword sealed itself away over thirteen years ago, when I first collected it. Apart from the YiLing Patriarch himself, nobody would ever be able to unsheathe it...”

Jiang Cheng charged with both Zidian and Sandu, raging, “Shut up!”

Jin GuangYao, however, continued on his own, grinning, “And so I remembered. Back then, Young Master Wei was so willful. He never brought his sword anywhere, and found a different excuse every single time. I’ve always found this peculiar—what about you?”

Jiang Cheng roared, “Just what do you want to say?! ”

Jin GuangYao raised his voice, "Sect Leader Jiang, you're truly extraordinary, the youngest sect leader who rebuilt the YunmengJiang Sect on his own. But I recall that you could never beat Mr. Wei in anything, in the past. Could you tell me how you rose above him after the Sunshot Campaign? Did you perhaps take any golden elixirs?"

At the words „golden elixirs", his pronunciation was both clear and sharp. Jiang Cheng's features had almost become distorted.

Zidian also bloomed in a dangerous white light. Amid the chaos, a weakness appeared amid his movements.

What Jin GuangYao had been waiting for was precisely the moment of weakness. He flung out the guqin string that he'd been hiding. Jiang Cheng immediately steadied himself to counter the attack, Zidian entangling with the string. Feeling a numbness at the center of his hand, Jin GuangYao retreated at once. Yet, immediately after, he laughed lightly. With his left hand, he whipped out another string and attacked Wei WuXian!

Jiang Cheng's pupils shrank to become just a point. With a flip of his wrist, he turned Zidian's direction to defend against the guqin string. Jin Ling, however, blurted, "Uncle, watch out!"

With this chance, Jin GuangYao unsheathed the sword that had been wrapped around his waist and thrusted it into the center of Jiang Cheng's chest!

Face dark, Jiang Cheng clutched his chest. Blood leaked from between his fingers, immediately dying the fabric a blackish purple. Right Zidian stopped the guqin string, it became the silver ring once more and returned to his hand. When its owner was bleeding excessively or severely injured, the spiritual weapon would return to its lowest form on its own. Using the opportunity, Jin GuangYao hurried over and sealed away his spiritual flow. He took out a handkerchief from his sleeve to clean his sword and wrapped it back around his waist.

Jin Ling had long since rushed over to hold Jiang Cheng up. Lan XiChen sighed, "Do not move rashly. Help him sit down slowly."

## Chapter 102: Hatred —Part Five

Although he was pierced right through the chest, Jiang Cheng wasn't so weak as to have died right then. It just wasn't the best for him to move or conjure up his spiritual powers. He didn't like it when others tried to help him, turning to Jin Ling he said, "Fuck off."

Jin Ling knew Jiang Cheng was still mad at him for running around. He felt guilty and didn't dare defend himself. The dog's barks came from afar, followed by a sudden wail. Jin Ling shuddered as he remembered what Jin GuangYao said, shouting, "Fairy, run! They're gonna kill you!"

Soon, Su She rushed through the storm, furious. Jin GuangYao, "You didn't kill it?"

Su She's expression darkened, "I couldn't. Can't believe the dog's so spineless. It's wild when somebody's there to help it, but as soon as it's at a disadvantage, it runs away faster than anyone!"

Jin GuangYao shook his head, "It might lead someone else over. We should finish things quickly here."

Su She, "Those good-for-nothings! I'll go make them hurry."

Jin Ling, on the other hand, let out a sigh of relief. Seeing Jiang Cheng sit on the ground, still dark-faced, he turned to Lan WangJi after some hesitation, "HanGuang-Jun, are there any more sitting mats?"

The four mats that they'd been sitting on were all gathered by Lan WangJi. However, there were only four within the temple. After some silence, Lan WangJi stood up and pushed over the one he'd been sitting on.

Jin Ling hurried, "Thank you! It's fine. I'll just give him mine..." Lan WangJi, "There is no need." As soon as he finished, he sat down beside Wei WuXian. Even as the two sat so seriously on the same sitting mat, they didn't seem too cramped. Now that the mat was handed over already, Jin Ling scratched his head before dragging Jiang Cheng over. Jiang Cheng first pressed onto an acupoint at his chest, stopping the blood flow. After he sat down, he looked up and glanced over at Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi. He soon looked down again. His face was gloomy, disclosing nothing of what he was thinking.

Right at this point, an ecstatic cry came from behind the palace, "Sect Leader! We got it! A corner is out already!"

Jin GuangYao's expression relaxed quite somewhat. He quickly walked back behind the palace, "Press on! Please be careful.

There's not much time left."

Over a dozen streaks of lightning twisted their way across the edge of the sky. They were soon followed by a series of roaring thunder. Over there, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi sat together while Jiang Cheng sat at the side. Jin Ling dragged his own mat over as well. Amid the pounding of the rain, there was a long while of dead, awkward silence. Nobody spoke up.

But for some reason, Jin Ling seemed as if he really wanted to talk to them. After some glancing around, he suddenly began, "Uncle, good thing you stopped that guqin string earlier on, or else things would be pretty bad."

Jiang Cheng's face darkened, "You can shut up!"

If not for him leaving Jin GuangYao with a chance for a sneak attack due to his own unstable emotions, he wouldn't have landed in the enemy's hands either. On top of that, in reality, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi could've completely dodged the attack on their own. Even though, right now, Lan WangJi had no spiritual powers and Wei WuXian's were low to begin with, their skills were still there. They couldn't attack, but they were still able to dodge.

Clumsily, Jin Ling was trying to speak for his uncle, yet the deliberation made the situation even more awkward.

After being scolded, Jin Ling stopped talking, embarrassed. Jiang Cheng sealed his lips together and didn't speak again.

Wei WuXian didn't say anything either. In the past, he'd definitely laugh at Jiang Cheng for being so easily-provoked that he gave the opponent an opportunity. But now, recalling what Jin GuangYao said, he understood everything.

Jiang Cheng knew the truth already.

Lan WangJi stroked Wei WuXian's back a few more times. Wei WuXian looked up. Lan WangJi didn't seem at all surprised. His eyes were almost gentle. Wei WuXian felt his heart skip a beat. He couldn't help but whisper, "... You knew?"

Lan WangJi nodded slowly.

Wei WuXian let out a light breath, "... Wen Ning."

Wen Ning had originally been keeping Suibian, but now it was in Jiang Cheng's hands. And on their way back from Lotus Pier, Wen Ning said nothing of such a matter.

Wei WuXian, "When did he say it?"

Lan WangJi, "While you were unconscious."

Wei WuXian, "This was how we left Lotus Pier?!"

If not that Wen Ning hadn't found them yet, Wei WuXian would definitely have begun glaring at him already.

Lan WangJi, "He always felt sorry for you."

Wei WuXian's tone was tinged with anger, "... I told him somany times not to say it!"

Out of the blue, Jiang Cheng spoke up, "Not to do what?" Wei WuXian paused in surprise, turning to him along with Lan

WangJi. Jiang Cheng covered his wound with one hand, his voice chilly, "Wei WuXian, you're such a great, selfless person. You did the best things possible, and you swallowed all the suffering and

didn't let anyone know. What a touching story. I should kneel down and cry in gratitude, shouldn't I?"

Hearing the mocking tone that lacked any courtesy, Lan WangJi's face grew cold. Jin Ling saw the displeased expression and immediately stood in front of Jiang Cheng, scared that Lan WangJi would kill him with one strike, "Uncle!"

Wei WuXian's expression worsened as well. He never expected Jiang Cheng to make up with him after he found out the truth, but he didn't think his tone would be as unkind as ever, either. Witha moment of silence, he replied, voice muffled, "I never asked you to thank me."

Jiang Cheng let out a hah, "Of course. Giving without expecting anything in return. What a high level. Unlike me, of course. So

that's why my father always said you were the one who truly understood the Jiang Sect's motto and did things the Jiangway, back when he was alive."

Wei WuXian couldn't keep on listening any longer,interrupting him, "Enough."

Jiang Cheng's voice harshened, "What do you mean, enough? It's enough as long as you say so? You know everything! You're better than me at everything! Whether it be talent or cultivation or spirituality or personality, you guys knew everything while I was much lower—then what am I?!?!"

He suddenly reached out, as if to seize Wei WuXian's collar. Lan WangJi grabbed Wei WuXian's shoulder with one hand, letting Wei WuXian stand behind him, and with his other hand he forcefully pushed away Jiang Cheng's hand. Rage could be seen hidden within his eyes. Although his push held no spiritual energy,

it was quite powerful in terms of strength. The wound at Jiang Cheng's chest ripped apart again. Blood surged.

Jin Ling cried, "Uncle, your wound! HanGuang-Jun, spare some mercy!"

However, Lan WangJi's voice was cold, "Jiang WanYin,spare some virtue!"

Lan XiChen took off his outer robe and lay it over the shivering Nie HuaiSang, "Sect Leader

Jiang, please do not be so agitated. Your injury will worsen.”

Jiang Cheng shoved Jin Ling, who'd been holding him up helplessly, out of the way. Even though he was losing blood, it rushed to his head unceasingly. His face switched between white and red, “Why? Wei WuXian, just fucking why?”

Behind Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian replied stiffly, “Why what?”

Jiang Cheng, “Just how much did we the Jiang Sect give you? I'm supposed to be his son, I'm supposed to be the heir of the YunmengJiang Sect, yet all these years I've been outdone by you at every single thing. You paid for your bringing-up with life! The lives of my dad, my mom, my sister, and Jin ZiXuan! Because of you, all that's left is a parentless Jin Ling!”

Jin Ling trembled. His shoulders sunk, and his face sagged as well. Wei WuXian moved his lips, but he couldn't say anything. Lan WangJi turned around to hold his hand.

On the other hand, Jiang Cheng refused to give up, shouting, “Wei WuXian, who was the one who broke his promise and betrayed the Jiang Sect first? Tell me. That I'd be the sectleader and you'd be my subordinate, that you'd help me your whole life, that so long as the GusuLan Sect had its Two Jades, the YunmengJiang Sect would have its Two Prides, that you'd never betray me or betray the Jiang Sect—who was the one that said these?! I'm asking you—who was the one that said all these?! Did you eat all your fucking words?!”

He got more agitated as he ranted on, “And in the end? You go and protect outsiders, haha! The Wen Sect's people, even. How much of their rice did you eat?! Defecting with such resolution! What did you take our sect to be?! You did all the best things, yet every time you do the worst ones, it's involuntary! Forced! With some unspeakable grievances! Grievances?! You told me nothing, you played me for a fool!!!

“Just how much do you owe the Jiang Sect? Am I not supposed to hate you? Can I not hate you?! Why is it that now it's like I'm supposed to have wronged you?! Why do I have to feel like I'm a fucking clown all these years?! What am I? Do I deserve to be blinded by all your dazzling splendor?! Am I not supposed to hate you?!?”

Lan WangJi shot up. With panic, Jin Ling stood in front of Jiang Cheng, “HanGuang-Jun! My uncle's hurt...”

Jiang Cheng slapped him onto the ground, “Let him come! Am I scared of him?!?”

But after the slap, Jin Ling froze. Not only him, Wei WuXian, Lan WangJi, and Lan XiChen all stopped moving.

Jiang Cheng was crying. Tears poured from his eyes as he forced through his teeth, “... Why... Why didn't you tell me?!”

Jiang Cheng clenched his fist, like he wanted to hit someone, like he wanted to hit himself. In the end, he still slammed it onto the ground. He should've been able to loathe Wei WuXian without a care. But right now, the golden core revolving within him took away all that confidence.

Wei WuXian didn't know what to say.

In the beginning, it was precisely because he didn't want to see such a Jiang Cheng that he decided not to tell him.

He remembered every single thing he promised Jiang FengMian and Madam Yu—to help and take care of Jiang Cheng. If someone as unhealthily competitive as him found out about this, he'd be dispirited his whole life, too tortured to face himself.

There'd always be something he could never overcome, reminding him that he could only reach where he was because of another's sacrifice. It wasn't at all his cultivation and his achievement. No matter if he won or lost, he'd long since lost the right to compete.

Afterwards, it was because Jin ZiXuan and Jiang YanLi died for him that he had no face to let others know. To tell Jiang Cheng after what happened then would be like shirking responsibility, hurrying to demonstrate that he'd contributed as well. It'd be like telling Jiang Cheng, don't hate me, look I've contributed to the YunmengJiang Sect too.

Jiang Cheng cried soundlessly, but tears had already streaked across his face. To cry in such an unsightly way in front of others was almost impossible for him in the past. But every single moment that passed from now on, as long as the golden core remained in his body, as long as it could still revolve, he'd forever remember this feeling.

He choked, "... You said I'd be the sect leader and you'd be my subordinate, you said you'd help me your whole life, you said you'd never betray the Yunmeng Jiang Sect... You said so yourself."

"..." After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian replied, "I'm sorry. I broke my promise."

Jiang Cheng shook his head, burying his face deep into his palms. A second later, he suddenly burst out with a laugh. His muffled voice mocked, "It's such a time already, and I still need you to say sorry to me. What a fragile person I am."

## Chapter 103: Hatred –Part Six

Sect Leader Jiang's words were eternally tainted with mockery. But this time, whom he mocked was no one but himself.

“Suddenly, he said, “I’m sorry.”

Wei WuXian hesitated, “... You don’t need to say sorry.”

At this point, it was impossible to figure out who should apologize to whom.

Wei WuXian continued, “Take it as my repayment to the Jiang Sect.”

Jiang Cheng looked up. He looked at him with teary, bloodshot eyes, and a hoarse voice, “... Repayment to my father, my mother, my sister?”

Wei WuXian pressed his temples, “Forget it. It’s all in the past now. Let’s not mention it again.” It wasn’t something he liked to reminisce about. He didn’t want to be reminded again and again of what it felt like when his core was cut out or what price he had to pay. If this were exposed in the past, he’d most likely laugh and comfort Jiang Cheng, „It’s not that big of a deal anyways. Look at me all these years. Without the core, I still managed to come through, didn’t I? Beating everyoneI

wanted to beat, killing everyone I wanted to kill.” But now, he indeed didn’t have the strength left to put up such a confident, nonchalant pretense.

From the bottom of his heart, he knew he wasn’t so indifferent about it after all.

Was it really that easy to move on from such a thing? Of course not.

In truth, when Wei WuXian was seventeen or eighteen, his pride wasn’t much lower than Jiang Cheng’s. He once had strong spiritual powers, more talented than others. No matter how much he fooled around, staying up all night pulling pranks on others, he was still far ahead of his classmates who worked so hard.

But every time he tossed and turned as he lay awake at night, knowing he’d never reach the stars using proper means, knowing he’d never wield his sword with the excellence that was supposed to bring astonishment to so many eyes, he wondered if Jiang

FengMiang hadn’t taken him back to Lotus Pier, perhaps he wouldn’t cross paths with cultivation his whole life. Then he would have never known that such a magnificent path existed in this world. He’d only be a head beggar who roamed the streets, fleeing at first sight of a dog, or maybe looking after cows and stealing other people’s crops in the countryside, playing his flute to pass his time. He wouldn’t have known to cultivate, and he definitely wouldn’t have had the chance to form a core. With such thoughts, he’d felt much better.

Take it as repayment, or take it as redemption. Take it as he’d never received the golden core to begin with.

After explaining things to himself like this again and again, it was as though he was truly as confident and as nonchalant as he made it seem like on the surface, and along the way he could even praise himself for such a state of mind, whether he was lying or not.

But that was in his past life.

Wei WuXian, “Uh, I think it’s best if you... also stop keeping it on your mind. I know you’ll definitely always keep it on your mind, but, how should I say it...” He clenched Lan WangJi’s hand, saying to Jiang Cheng, “Right now, I do really think... it’s all in the past. It’s been too long. There’s no need to struggle with it any longer.”

Jiang Cheng wiped his face roughly, drying his tears. He took in a deep breath and closed his eyes.

At this point, still enveloped in Lan XiChen’s robe, Nie HuaiSang gradually woke up. Moaning lightly, he managed to crawl up, still bleary-eyed, “Where am I?”

Yet, the instant he got up, he saw Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi sitting together so tightly on the same sitting mat. The YiLing Patriarch was basically sitting on HanGuang-Jun’s lap. He immediately let out a wail, as if he was about to faint again. At the same time, a series of strange

sounds came from behind the Guanyin Temple, as though something was being spurt out. A moment later, the cultivators who'd been digging began to wail too.

The expressions of everyone in the temple changed. Immediately, a somewhat pungent odor drifted outside. As Lan XiChen covered his face with his sleeves, some worry could be seen in his eyes.

Soon, two figures staggered outside.

Su She was holding Jin GuangYao up. The two looked pale, while the wails from behind the palace continued. Su She, "Sect Leader, how do you feel?!"

Cold sweat seeped from Jin GuangYao's forehead, "Fine. Thank you for back then."

His left hand dangled, unable to be lifted. His entire arm trembled, as though he was suffering extreme pain. With his right hand he took a bottle of pills from his lapels. He wanted to open it, but it was difficult with just one hand. Seeing this, Su She immediately took over the bottle and tipped a pill into his palm. Jin GuangYao lowered his head, gulping it down with a frown. His brows relaxed immediately.

Lan XiChen hesitated for a moment before asking, "What happened?"

Jin GuangYao paused in surprise. Blood finally seemed to have rose to his cheeks as he managed a smile, "An accident."

He took out some medicinal powder and sprinkled it over his hand. An area of red had appeared from the back of his left hand to his wrist. With observation, it could be seen that the skin seemed like cooked meat. The skin was completely ruined. Jin GuangYao tore off a part of his white sleeves, his fingers

trembling slightly, "MinShan, wrap it tight around my wrist." Su She, "It's poisonous?"

Jin GuangYao, "The poison is still flowing upwards. It's not a big deal. The poison can be ejected with some rest."

Right after Su She treated his wound, Jin GuangYao wanted to return behind the palace to inspect. Su She hurried, "Sect Leader, let me go!"

The pungent smell dissipated gradually. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi got up as well. A tall mountain of dirt could be seen beside a deep ditch. Quite a delicate coffin lay at one side, atop it a pitch-black box. Both of the two had been opened already, and thin, white smoke continued to rise from within. The odor came from the white smoke, which meant it must be some sort of fatal poison. Corpses that belonged to the cultivators who'd been digging so earnestly lay scattered all around the coffin. Right now, they had been burned alive. Even their uniforms and robes and had been corroded to black fragments. It was obvious just how poisonous the white smoke was.

Leading the way, he used his sword energy to repel the remaining smoke. The tip of his blade flicked across the black box. The iron chest fell to the ground. It was empty.

Jin GuangYao finally couldn't hold himself back any longer. He stumbled towards the edge of the coffin. The blood that had returned to his face immediately faded again. It could be seen just by his expression that the coffin was empty as well.

Lan XiChen approached. After he saw the horror that had become of the palace, he was shocked, "What in the world did you bury here? How could this be??"

Nie HuaiSang only had a glance before he collapsed to the ground, retching. Jin GuangYao's lips trembled. He couldn't say anything. A streak of lightning exploded, reflecting against the pale white of his face. His expression was terrifying indeed, sending chills down Nie HuaiSang's spine. He didn't even dare vomit too loudly, covering his mouth behind Lan XiChen's back, shivering whether out of fear or the cold. Lan XiChen turned around and said a few words of comfort to him, while Jin GuangYao didn't even have the strength to upkeep his kind, gentle front.

Wei WuXian, "ZeWu-Jun, now you're doing wrong to Sect Leader Jin here. He wasn't the one who buried the things here at all.

Even if he buried something in the beginning, it should be long since someone switched them

with something else.”

Su She pointed at him with his sword, his voice cold, “Wei WuXian! Is this a trick of yours?!” Wei WuXian, “I’m not trying to brag, but if I were the one who pulled a trick on you, an arm might not be all that’s wounded on your sect leader. Sect Leader Jin, do you still remember the letter Qin Su brought you, back on Koi Tower?”

Jin GuangYao’s eyes slowly moved towards him.

Wei WuXian, “The one who told Qin Su the good things you did was Madam Qin’s previous maid, BiCao. But when BiCao suddenly decided to expose everything, did you really believe nobody was pushing things forward from behind? And Maiden SiSi, the one you locked up. Who saved her? Who was the one that told her to go to the YunmengJiang Sect with BiCao and expose your secrets in front of everyone? If they could find out every single one of those hidden secrets of yours, Sect Leader Jin, what’s so hard about coming here beforehand and switching what you wanted to dig up with poisonous smoke to give you when you came?”

Suddenly, a monk spoke, “Sect Leader, there are signs of displacement in the dirt here. Somebody’s dug in from the other side before!”

As expected, someone was here first. Jin GuangYao turned around, slamming his fist on the empty coffin. Nobody could see his expression, but all could see his trembling shoulders.

Wei WuXian grinned, “Sect Leader Jin, have you ever thought that perhaps tonight you’re a mantis, yet there’s an oriole\* behind you? The one who’s been watching you might be hiding in the dark this exact moment, observing your every move. No, maybe, it’s not a person...”

TN: The full saying is “the mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind”.

The storm muffled the thunder. As he heard the words „not a person”, for a split second, something that could be described as fear flashed across Jin GuangYao’s face.

Su She sneered, “Wei WuXian, stop with the empty intimidation...”

Jin GuangYao raised his right hand to stop him. The fear on his face went as soon as it came. All of his emotions were quickly under control. He spoke, “Don’t waste your energy on arguing. Treat the injury on your body. After I remove the poison, gather the rest of the people at once and prepare to depart.”

Su She, “Sect Leader, what about the thing that’s been dug out?”

Jin GuangYao’s lips were a bit pale, “If it’s been dug out already, it’s definitely be impossible to take back. We shouldn’t stay here for long.”

Su She, “Yes!”

Back when Su She fought with Fairy, he’d been wounded in many places by its claws. His clothes were ripped both at his arms and his chest, and at his chest especially, the wounds dug deep into his flesh. Blood seeped through the white robes. If the wounds weren’t treated properly, he might not be able to face whatever emergency situations that happened, as time went on. Jin GuangYao took out a pouch of medicine from his lapels and passed it to him.

Su She received it with both hands, “Yes.”

Indeed, he stopped talking to Wei WuXian as he turned around and took off his clothes to treat his wounds. Jin GuangYao still couldn’t move the hand burned by the poisonous smoke. He could only sit on the ground and concentrate on expelling the poison. The remaining cultivators held their swords as they walked back and forth inside Guanyin Temple, keeping guard. As he saw these glaring blades, Nie HuaiSang’s eyes went straight ahead. He had no guards beside him, so he didn’t even dare let out a loud breath. Shrunken against the corner behind Lan XiChen, he let out quite a few sneezes.

Wei WuXian thought, To other people, Su She’s quite sarcastic, and to Lan Zhan, he’s even more resentful. But he’s sure quite respectful towards Jin GuangYao.

As he thought this, he couldn’t help glancing at Lan WangJi, just in time to see a streak of ice flash before his eyes.

Voice cold, Lan WangJi spoke to Su She, “Turn around.”

Su She was looking down, applying medicine to the scratch marks at his chest, facing them sideways. As he heard Lan WangJi's almost inviolable command, he involuntarily turned around. As he turned around, both Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling widened their eyes. The grin on Wei WuXian's face disappeared as well. He almost couldn't believe it, "... It's you!"

## Chapter 104: Hatred —Part Seven

Su She finally realized what went wrong, immediately covering up his chest with his lapels. However, the people who'd been facing him had already seen with clarity the part of his chest that was revealed. The skin closest to his heart was thickly dotted with over a dozen hideous holes that varied in size.

Marks of the Hundred Holes curse!

And this definitely wasn't a curse mark left behind by the curse. If that were to be the case, judging from how spread-out these holes were, right now Su She's organs or even golden core should be covered in holes. He definitely wouldn't be able to use his spiritual powers. However, he could still use the transportation talisman repetitively, which drained spiritual energy. Then there could only be one explanation for where these marks came from—they had to be marks left after he cursed someone else and received a backlash!

Back then, it wasn't that Wei WuXian didn't try his hardest to find whom the culprit was in attempt to rectify his name, but there were just too many people. On top of that, finding the culprit wouldn't at all be able to sort out what happened afterward, and so, he let go of the hope. Yet tonight, so long after the fruitless searching, it fell right into his lap! Jin Ling didn't understand. Nie HuaiSang probably didn't understand either. But Lan XiChen had already looked to Jin GuangYao, "Sect Leader Jin, was this also part of the plan to attack Qiongqi Path?"

Jin GuangYao, "Why do you think so?"

Jiang Cheng's was cold, "Is it necessary to ask? If Jin ZiXun weren't cursed, nothing that happened afterwards would have to happen! The attack helped you remove Jin ZiXuan and Jin ZiXun, both of whom were of the same generation as you. It cleared away everything that obstructed your path to the LanlingJin Sect and the position of Chief Cultivator. Su She was behind the curse, and he's a trusted subordinate of yours. Is it really necessary to ask whose orders he followed?!"

Jin GuangYao refused to answer, as though he was focused on meditation. Wei WuXian laughed out of rage, staring at Su She, "Have I done anything to you? I held no enmity towards you—I didn't even know you!"

Jin GuangYao, "Young Master Wei, shouldn't you be the one who knows this the most? Could you be safe just because you hold no enmity? How could that be? In this world, everyone began without enmity. Someone would eventually lunge with the first stab."

Jiang Cheng's voice was drenched in hatred, "You insidious scum!!!"

Yet, Su She smiled coldly, "Stop thinking so highly of yourself. Who told you I cursed Jin ZiXun in order to frame you? Back then,

I wasn't working for Sect Leader at all. I cursed him simply because I wanted to!"

Wei WuXian, "Then do you hold enmity towards Jin ZiXun?"

Su She, "Those as arrogant as him—I'll kill every single one who comes my way!"

Wei WuXian knew that the „arrogant" person he hated the most had to be Lan WangJi. He couldn't help but ask, "What even happened between HanGuang-Jun and you? Just which part of him is arrogant?"

Su She, "Which part isn't? If Lan WangJi weren't born with such a good background, what right does he have to be so arrogant?"

Why do they always say I imitate him?! Everyone praises him for being so noble and pure—for a person like HanGuang-Jun to fool around and do such filthy deeds with the YiLing Patriarch whose immorality the entire world condemns? What a joke!"

Just as Wei WuXian was about to speak, he suddenly felt that the gloomy yet furious expression was somewhat familiar. He seemed to have seen it somewhere before.

He suddenly remembered, "It's you!"

Caiyi Town, Biling Lake, the waterborne abyss, the sword that vanished underwater, and the Xuanwu of Slaughter, the disciple who pushed MianMian out—Su She!

All of a sudden, Wei WuXian burst out in laughter. He said, “I understand now.”

Lan WangJi, “Understand what?”

Wei WuXian shook his head.

He knew what kind of person Jin ZiXun was. Back then, he often treated those from affiliated sects with disregard, thinking that they were the same as servants. He even thought that partaking in a banquet alongside them would be beneath his dignity. And as a part of one of the LanlingJin Sect’s affiliated sects, Su She must travel to Koi Tower once in a while to attend banquets, and it was impossible for him not to run into Jin ZiXun. One was intolerant and unforgiving, while the other was conceited and arrogant—if something bad happened between the two, it wouldn’t be strange at all for Su She to bear grudges on Jin ZiXun.

If so, the reason behind Jin ZiXun being cursed with a Hundred Holes had nothing to do with him. But in the end, he was the one who bore the charge.

The cause of the attack at the Qiongqi Path was that Jin ZiXun was cursed with a Hundred Holes. If this cause didn’t exist, the LanlingJin Sect would’ve had no reason to attack him, Wen Ning wouldn’t have lost control and gone on the rampage, Wei WuXian wouldn’t have had to be responsible for a life as heavy as Jin

ZiXun’s, and the things that happened later wouldn’t have had to happen.

Yet now, he finally realized even the reason behind culprit’s curse wasn’t to frame him. Even the cause didn’t have anything to do with him!

Such a fact was truly difficult to accept.

As he laughed, Wei WuXian’s eyes reddened. He mocked, whether at himself or otherwise, “I can’t believe it’s because of someone like you... because of such a ridiculous reason!”

But Jin GuangYao seemed like he knew what he thought, “Young Master Wei, you really shouldn’t think like this.”

Wei WuXian, “Oh? You know what I think?”

Jin GuangYao, “Of course. It’s quite easy. You’re definitely

thinking about how unfortunate you are. In reality, you’re not. Even if Su She didn’t curse Jin ZiXun, Mr. Wei, you’d receive a siege sooner or later, because of some other reason.” He smiled, “Because that’s what kind of a person you are. At best, you’re the untamed hero; at worst, you offend people wherever you go.

Unless all those whom you’ve offended lived their lives safely, as soon as something happened to them or someone did something to them, the first person they suspect would be you and the first person they seek revenge on would also you. And this is something you have no control over.”

Somehow, Wei WuXian smiled, “What should I do? For some reason, I think you make a lot of sense.”

Jin GuangYao, “And even if you didn’t lose control at the Qiongqi Path, could you guarantee you didn’t lose control sometime in the rest of your life? Thus, someone like you is destined to have a short life. You see? Doesn’t it feel a lot better if you think about it this way?”

Jiang Cheng raged, “You’re the one who’s got a fucking short life!”

With no regard to his heavy injuries, he grabbed Sandu and was ready to charge. Immediately, blood gushed out. Jin Ling hurried to press him back down. Unable to move, Jiang Cheng was full of resentment, cursing, “You son of a prostitute, who bears no shame as long as you can rise! You weren’t the one who told Su She to do it?! Who are you trying to fool?!”

Hearing the words „son of a prostitute”, Jin GuangYao’s smile froze for an instant.

He looked toward Jiang Cheng. After some thought, he began in a lukewarm tone, “Sect Leader Jiang, calm down a bit, won’t you? I understand what you’re feeling right now. You’re in such a terrible mood only because you know the truth behind your golden core. When you think back on what you did all these years, your proud heart feels a tinge of guilt, and so you’re anxious to

find a culprit for what happened to Young Master Wei in his past life, a villain onto whom you can push all liability. Then, you'd lash out at him, both in vengeance for Young Master Wei and to ease some of your burden.

"If being determined that everything from the Hundred Holes curse to the attack at the Qiongqi Path was part of my singlehanded scheme would ease your troubles, then feel free to think whatever you please. But what you have to understand is that, for what happened to Young Master Wei in the end, you are responsible too and in fact, you are very much so. Why did so many people crusade against the YiLing Patriarch? Why did they shout their support, no matter if they were involved or not? Why was he one-sidedly condemned by so many? Was it really their sense of justice? Of course not. A part of the reason is you."

Jiang Cheng laughed coldly. Lan XiChen knew Jin GuangYao was going to start calling white black again. He shouted in a hushed voice, "Sect Leader Jin!"

Jin GuangYao wasn't swayed, continuing with a smile, "... Back then, the LanlingJin Sect, the QingheNie Sect, and the GusuLan Sect had already finished fighting over the biggest share. The rest could only get some small shrimps. You, on the other hand, had just rebuilt Lotus Pier and behind you was the YiLing Patriarch, Wei WuXian, the danger of whom was immeasurable. Do you think the other sects would like to see a young sect leader who was so advantaged? Luckily, you didn't seem to be on good terms with your shixiong, and since everyone thought there was an opportunity, of course they'd add fuels to your fire if they could.

No matter what, to weaken the YunmengJiang Sect was to strengthen themselves. Sect Leader Jiang, if only your attitude towards your shixiong was just a bit better, showing everyone that your bond was too strong to be broken for them to have a chance, or if you exhibited just a bit more tolerance after what happened, things wouldn't have become what they were. Oh, speaking of it, you were also a main force of the siege at Burial Mound..."

Wei WuXian, "Looks like being called the son of a prostitute is really Sect Leader Jin's weak spot. No wonder you killed ChiFeng-Zun." With the mention of Nie MingJue, Lan XiChen's expression changed. Jin GuangYao's smile paused as well. Immediately afterwards, he stood up. Now that he finished meditating, he tried the fingers of his left hand to find that they were finally able to move properly. He spoke at once, "Prepare to depart."

Su She, "Yes!" Two monks held Lan XiChen, one on each side. Just as they were about to open the doors, Jin GuangYao suddenly spoke, "I almost forgot."

He turned to Lan XiChen, "Now that I think of it, ZeWu-Jun's sealed spiritual pathways should be restored soon." Lan XiChen's cultivation was much higher than his. For Jin GuangYao to seal his spiritual pathways, he had to seal them once every two hours, or else Lan XiChen would be fight out of the seal on his own. He walked towards Lan XiChen, "Excuse me."

Just as he was about to reach out, something white and heavy suddenly plummeted to the ground before him. Alert, Jin GuangYao crossed over it. As his eyes focused, he saw that it was a pale body! A completely bare woman crawled on the ground, face-down, twisting her body and limbs as though she wanted to go in the direction of Jin GuangYao. Su She lunged with his sword. The woman screamed, and fire erupted around her. She stood up, staggering as she reached out at Jin GuangYao again. Both her body and her face were burned black amid the flames, but the extreme hatred in her eyes remained. With another lunge, Su She slashed across her body, causing her to evaporate. Before Jin GuangYao could walk a few steps back, he tripped over something, turning around only to find two entangled bodies. One of them grabbed his ankle. At this point, a whistle came from behind. Su She seethed, "Wei WuXian!"

Without anyone realizing, on the Guanyin statue in the temple were painted in blood many jumbled talismans.

The eye of the array was right inside of the Guanyin Temple. And now, since it'd already been destroyed by Wei WuXian without anyone noticing, those that were sealed inside now surged out incessantly!

Suddenly, Jin Ling cried, "What is this?"

Jiang Cheng kept on using his hands to slap Jin Ling robes. The hems of his clothes had already begun to burn, all on its own. Jin Ling was already relatively fine. A few monks were already surrounded by flames, rolling on the ground screaming. Su She and Jin GuangYao knew they had to wipe off the blood Wei WuXian painted over the Guanyin statue, but they were obstructed by the cultivators rolling on the ground and the naked ghouls that kept on appearing. Under Wei WuXian's command,

the ghouls didn't attack Jiang Cheng, Jin Ling, and the rest, but Jin Ling still crossed Suihua before himself, "What in the world are these things? I've never seen such..."

Such naked, shameless ghouls!

Rage burst from Jin GuangYao's eyes. With one strike, fire exploded. He finally reached the Guanyin Statue. Just as he was about to wipe at the talismans that Wei WuXian painted, he suddenly felt something cold at the back of his waist.

Lan XiChen's low voice sounded, "Do not move."

Jin GuangYao was about to counter the attack when Lan XiChen struck once on his back. Jin GuangYao, "ZeWu-Jun... your spiritual powers are back."

Before Lan XiChen could answer, on the other side, Su She's sword Nanping had already thrusted toward Wei WuXian.

However, it came into contact with a sword the glare of which seemed similar but the glow of which was much more crystalline.

Bichen!

As the two swords hit, Nanping snapped into two!

Right then, Su She's palm tore. Blood dripped everywhere. All of the joints in his arm crackled. The sword fell to the ground, and he held his right arm with his left, face as pale as ash. On the other hand, Lan WangJi gripped Bichen in one hand as he grabbed Wei

WuXian's waist with his other, pushing Wei WuXian behind him for better protection. In reality, Wei WuXian had no need for his protection, but he still leaned against his body with both comfort and compliance.

All of these happened in just a few seconds. After a few blinks, the LanlingJin Sect's cultivators finally realized what happened. Yet, Su She still held his bleeding right arm. The wound at his chest had already opened up. Bichen's blade was right against Jin GuangYao's throat.

Now that their main pillars were restricted, none of them dared do anything too rashly.

Just as Lan XiChen was about to speak, the expressions of everyone within the Guanyin Temple changed. Lan XiChen, "Young Master Wei, please... remove these things first."

Not only were these ghouls naked and filthy, they were even letting out embarrassing moans, making it rather clear what they were doing. Nobody had seen such indecent ghouls before. Lan XiChen turned his head to the side, Jiang Cheng's face was dark, while Jin Ling was between pale and flushed. Wei WuXian glanced at Lan WangJi, who stood beside him. He thought it'd be a bit too unreasonable to make someone who responded to pornography with extreme embarrassed rage when he was young view such a thing. He protested, "I only wanted to let out the ghouls he sealed at the Guanyin Temple so that we could delay them for as long as possible. I never thought I'd let out these things..."

Like Lan XiChen, Lan WangJi retracted his gaze after taking only one look at those ghouls. Turning to another direction, he said two words, "A fire."

Wei WuXian nodded immediately, continuing in all seriousness, "Yes. All of these ghouls were burned to death. It looks like a big fire once erupted here, burning quite a lot of people to death. And afterwards, to hide everything as well as to seal away these ghouls who formed because of their deaths, Sect Leader Jin decided to build a Guanyin Temple here."

Lan XiChen, "Sect Leader Jin, is the fire related to you?" Jiang Cheng's voice was cold, "Those ghouls abhor him. Is it possible that it isn't?"

## Chapter 105: Hatred –Part Eight

Lan XiChen, “Sect Leader Jin... Could you give us a full explanation?”

Jin GuangYao said nothing. His knuckles turned white.

Wei WuXian, “Looks like Sect Leader Jin doesn’t want to say it.” He raised his hand and a naked female corpse immediately appeared beneath it. Wei WuXian put his palm atop her head, “But just because you don’t say it, do you think I won’t find a way to know?”

Just as he entered Empathy, before he even opened his eyes yet, Wei WuXian found himself surrounded by an intense aroma of rouge and powder. A coquettish voice came out of his mouth, “... Her? She wants to marry, of course. She was over twenty when she met the man. At such an age, she’d lose her popularity in just a few years. And so, she had to bear a son knowing she’d be scolded. She just wanted to get out, after all. But then again, the man had to have wanted the son.”

He opened his eyes. What he saw was a wide hall that could be described as beautiful. About a dozen round tables rested within the hall, a couple of clients and fair-looking women sitting at each. Of the women, some showed their shoulders, some wore unfastened hair, some sat on the customers’ laps, some fed wine to others. All of their expressions seemed sweet and drunken.

It was clear what this place was at first glance.

Wei WuXian thought, So the one who got burned to death in this Guanyin Temple is a prostitute. No wonder all those ghouls were naked. They were probably all prostitutes and clients.

One of the clients chuckled, “A son is a son, after all. Did the man not want him?”

The woman, “She herself said that the man’s a big shot from a cultivation sect. Then he must have many sons in his house. Nothing is cherished that isn’t rare. Could he have cared about this one outside? She waited and waited and nobody came to get

her, and so she could only raise him herself, couldn’t she? It’s been fourteen years since.”

A few of the clients asked, “A big shot? Did such a thing really happen?”

The woman, “Oh, why would I lie to you about something like this? Her son is running errands for us right now. There, that’s the one.” The woman twisted her waist, waving at a boy holding a tray, “Xiao-Meng! Come here!”

The boy did as he was told and walked over, “AnXin-jie\*, what’s up?”

TN: -jie is the female alternative of -xiong.

All at once, Wei WuXian understood everything.

The clients scrutinized Meng Yao with judging eyes. Meng Yao asked again, “Am I needed for something?”

AnXin grinned, “Xiao-Meng, are you still learning those things lately?”

Meng Yao paused, “Which things?”

AnXin, “The things your mom wants you to learn, things like calligraphy, etiquette, swordsmanship, meditation... How are those things going?”

Before she even finished, the clients began to chuckle as if they found something to be funny.

AnXin turned around, “Don’t laugh, I’m telling the truth here. His mom’s raising him as a young master of a wealthy family. She taught him how to read and write, bought him all those swordsmanship pamphlets, and even wants to send him to school.”

The client exclaimed, “Send him to school? Did I hear wrong?”

AnXin, “No! Xiao-Meng, tell these young masters. You’ve gone to the library before, haven’t you?”

The client, “Is he still going?”

AnXian, “Nah, he came back just a few days later. He wouldn’t go again no matter what. Xiao-Meng, do you not like studying or do you not like the place?”

Meng Yao didn’t say anything. AnXin giggled, poking a finger-painted bright red at Meng Yao’s

forehead, "Little one, you angry?"

She pressed quite hard. A light, red mark appeared in the center of Meng Yao's forehead, almost like a shadow of a vermillion mark. He touched his forehead, "No..."

AnXian waved her hands, "Enough, enough. We've got nothing for you. You can go." Meng Yao turned around. Before he walked a few steps, she picked up something from the table and coaxed, "Here's a fruit for you."

Meng Yao turned around and the emerald fruit hit his chest, falling to the ground and rolling away. AnXin complained, "Why are you so slow? Can't even catch a fruit. Hurry and pick it up. Don't waste it."

Meng Yao curved the corners of his mouth. He should be fourteen already but, perhaps because he was unusually small, he seemed to be only twelve or thirteen. It was extremely uncomfortable seeing such a smile appear on his face.

He bent down slowly, picked up the fruit, and wiped it on his clothes, his smile even deeper, "Thank you, Sister AnXin."

AnXin, "No worries. Go work hard." Meng Yao, "Call me if you need me."

After he walked away, one of the clients commented, "If my son were at such a place, I'd take him back no matter what."

Someone else followed, "His father was really a big shot from a cultivational sect? Shouldn't it be more than easy to buy a prostitute's freedom and give her some money to raise herself? It's only the lift of a finger."

AnXin, "You can't believe everything this woman says, can you? No matter what, that big shot only exists in her words. In my opinion, it might've just been a well-off merchant before she exaggerated so much..."

Suddenly, someone screamed. The sound of cups and saucers shattering on the ground came from the second floor as a guqin crashed down, smashing to pieces as it hit the center of the hall. It scared the wits out of the people enjoying themselves at the nearby tables. AnXin had also almost tripped, yelling, "What happened?!"

Meng Yao cried, "Mom!"

AnXin looked up. A burly man dragged a woman out of a room by her hair. AnXin tugged the client beside her, whether nervous or excited, "She's at it again!"

Meng Yao rushed upstairs. Covering her scalp, the woman tried her hardest to pull her clothes up her shoulders. As she saw Meng Yao run over, she hurried, "I told you not to come upstairs! Go down! Go down this instant!"

Meng Yao went to peel away the client's hands as he received a kick in the stomach and rolled down the stairs, causing a wave of exclamations.

This was the third time Wei WuXian saw him roll down flights of stairs from a kick.

With a loud scream, the woman had her hair pulled by the client again, all the way until she was dragged downstairs, stripped, and tossed onto the street. He spat on her naked body, cursing, "Hags do nothing but haggle—an old whore thinks she's freshmeat!"

Panicking, the woman lay prone in the center of the street, scared to get up. With one move, everyone would see everything. The passersby on the street were both astonished and thrilled, lingering as they pointed with glinting eyes. The doors to the brothel were also cramped with the women inside, chuckling as they told the story of the poor old woman to their clients just like AnXin did. Only one of the ladies squeezed through the doors.

She took off the gauze robe that was so flimsy to begin with, revealing half of her full, snowy breasts enwrapped by a crimson slip, her waist was exceptionally thin as well. She was more than eye-catching and everyone hurried to take a look at her.

The lady spat, cursing, "Keep on looking, you bastards! Do you have the right to look at someone like me? With each look you gotta pay—where's the money?! Come, where's the money?!"

As she cursed, she reached out and asked the bystanders for money. The crowd dispersed somewhat, and she threw the robe

she took off onto the woman, the two of them staggering into the main hall. She scolded as she walked, “It’s been so long since

I’ve told you to change things up. What’s the pride for? You’ve had your lesson, huh? Remember it next time!”

Wei WuXian thought, the woman somehow looks a bit familiar. Where have I seen her before? The woman whispered, “A-Yao, A-Yao...”

From the kick, Meng Yao wasn’t able to get up for a long time, still lying on the ground. The lady grabbed one with each hand and dragged away both mother and son.

A client beside AnXin inquired, “Who’s the pretty one?”

AnXin spat out two sunflower seed shells, “A famous vixen. She’s quite scary.”

Someone sighed in disappointment, “This is the talented Meng Shi from back then? How did she end up like this?”

AnXin switched up a grin, “She sure did. She was set on bearing a child. Could a woman keep up her looks after she gives birth? If not because she could manage to live off her past name of being

„talented”, there might not be any who comes to her. I say it’s all because of the books.”

A client showed his deep understanding, “Of course. Those who’ve touched ink always have that inexplicable pride with them. They don’t want to give up the notion.”

AnXin, “If she could feed herself with the books she’s read, then I wouldn’t be saying anything, but it’s just a gimmick to attract men after all. I’m gonna be blunt here—we’re all bitches, and you’re

better just because you’ve read some books? What’s the pride for? Not only do the people outside look down on her, do you think our other sisters here like her either? The clients here sometimes choose to see a young maiden keep up her modesty as a change of pace but who’d pay for an old, ugly one? It’s long since her fame dwindled. Everyone knows, and she’s the only one who doesn’t understand...”

At this point, someone patted AnXin from behind. As AnXin turned around, she saw the lady from back then stand behind her, raising her hand to slap. With a path, AnXin took the slap. She was blank for a moment before she raged, “You whore!!!”

The lady, “You whore!!! Chit-chatting every single day—does that tongue of yours have nothing else to do?!”

AnXin screamed, “The fuck does what I say have to do with you?!”

The two women fought on the first floor of the hall, using both their nails and their teeth, pulling on each other’s hair asthey

cursed with “I’ll cut apart your face sooner or later” or “nobody will want you even if you give him money.” The vulgarity of their words were almost intolerable to the ear.

Many of the prostitutes came to stop them, “SiSi! Stop it!”

SiSi? Wei WuXian finally realized why he felt familiarity when he saw the lady’s face. If seven or eight scars crisscrossed overthe face, wouldn’t it be SiSi, the woman who came to Lotus Pier to expose the secret?!

Suddenly, he felt a wave of heat crash into his face. The entire hall had at once sunken into an ocean of fiery red. Wei WuXian immediately pulled himself out of Empathy!

As he opened his eyes, Lan WangJi asked, “How was it?”

Lan XiChen spoke up as well, “Young Master Wei, what did you see?”

Wei WuXian drew in a breath to calm himself before replying, “I’m guessing that the Guanyin Temple was where Sect Leader Jin grew up.”

Jin GuangYao remained collected. Jiang Cheng, “Where he grew up? Didn’t he...” He was just about to say „didn’t he grew up at a brothel” when he suddenly understood as well, “This Guanyin Temple used to be a brothel. He burned the place down and built a Guanyin Temple on top of it!”

Lan XiChen, “You really started the fire?” Jin GuangYao, “Yes.”

Jiang Cheng laughed coldly, "You're acknowledging it quite well, aren't you?"

Jin GuangYao, "At this point, is there any difference between one thing more and one thing less?"

After a moment of silence, Lan XiChen asked, "Was it to remove the traces?"

Although many knew that LianFang-Zun grew up at a brothel, through all these years, nobody knew which exact brothel he was from. This was quite strange indeed. Everyone understood that LianFang-Zun was pulling the strings behind the scenes but not many would have expected that he burned down the whole place at which he was born and grew up.

Jin GuangYao, "Not entirely."

Lan XiChen sighed and didn't continue. Jin GuangYao, "Aren't you going to ask me why?"

Lan XiChen shook his head. A moment later, he spoke, but without answering the question, "In the past, it was not that I did not know what you did, but that I believed you had your reasons behind doing them."

He continued, "But, you have done too much. And I... no longer know if I should believe you."

Fatigue and disappointment sunk heavily into his tone.

The storm raged on outside. Wind seeped through the slit between the temple's doors. Amid the shrill wails, Jin GuangYao suddenly collapsed onto the ground.

Everyone paused in surprise. Wei WuXian, who'd just confiscated the sword at his waist, was surprised as well. Weakly, Jin GuangYao began, "Brother, I'm sorry."

"..." Hearing this, even Wei WuXian felt embarrassed for him. He couldn't help from saying, "Um, I mean, let's fight nicely instead of talking. Can't we just fight?"

His face changed just like that, and his legs gave out just like that. There was no dignity or whatsoever. Lan XiChen's face was a mixture of emotions as well.

Jin GuangYao continued, "Brother, you've known me for many years. No matter what, you know how I treat you. I no longer want the position of Chief Cultivator, and I've completely destroyed the Stygian Tiger Seal as well. After tonight, I'll be travelling to

Dongying without returning ever again. For the sake of this, let me live, won't you?"

Travelling to Dongying, in simpler terms, would be to make a run for it. It sounded quite shameless but Jin GuangYao had always been known for flexibility—if he could soften, he'd never face steel with steel. With its forces, the LanlingJin Sect could surpass just a few sects, but if all of the sects joined together to crusade against it, walking the paths of the QishanWen Sect's destruction, it was only a matter of time. Compared to lingering until then, it was much better to retreat this moment to lie low and conserve energy. In the future, there might be a chance to make a comeback and rise again.

Wei WuXian, "Sect Leader Jin, you said the Tiger Seal had been completely destroyed. Could you take it out for me to take a look at it?"

Jin GuangYao, "Young Master Wei, the restored version isn't the original one after all. There's a limit on how many times it can be used. It's become completely useless already. Besides, you know best just how much dark energy it hosts. Do you think I'd carry with me a piece of scrap that's lost its use and could only bring disaster?"

Wei WuXian, "I wouldn't know. Perhaps you could find another Xue Yang?"

Jin GuangYao, "Brother, every word of what I say is true." His tone was more than earnest. Ever since he captured Lan

XiChen, he'd indeed been treating him with respect. At this point, Lan XiChen wasn't able to turn against him yet. He could only sigh, "Sect Leader Jin, I have already said, when you went your

own way to scheme such havoc at Burial Mound, that there was no longer the need to call me 'Brother.'"

Jin GuangYao, "What happened at Burial Mound was an accident, a mistake. But, I can't go back anymore."

Lan XiChen, "What do you mean you cannot go back?"

Lan WangJi frowned slightly, his voice cold, “Brother, do not engage in excessive conversation with him.”

Wei WuXian reminded him as well, “Sect Leader Lan, do you remember what you said to Sect Leader Jiang? Don’t spend too long talking to him.”

Lan XiChen knew as well just how much Jin GuangYao could do when he opened his mouth. But whenever he heard there might be hidden reasons, he just had to hear it. This was exactly what Jin GuangYao aimed at. He lowered his voice, “I received a letter.”

## Chapter 106: Hatred —Part Nine

Lan XiChen, “What letter?”

Jin GuangYao, “A letter of threat. The letter said... those things would be publicized for the world to see in seven days. They wanted me to either turn myself in and apologize, or... wait for the day of my death.”

Everyone understood. Of course, Jin GuangYao couldn’t just wait for his death to come. Instead of having his name be ruined and his sect be overthrown by the mockery of all the sects, he’d be the one to strike first. At that time, even if the opponent really spread the rumors of all his past deeds everywhere, after the siege, the sects would be drained of the energy to bother him.

Unfortunately, it was all wrecked by Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi.

Lan XiChen, “Even so, you cannot go the entire way and settle on murder! Like this, you...”

He didn’t even give Lan XiChen a reason to speak in favor of him! Jin GuangYao, “Or else what could I do? Wait until everything’s been exposed, wait until the rumors soar above the cities, wait until I’ve become the laughing stock of all the world of cultivation before I kneel down and apologize, begging for their pardon by placing my face under their feet for them to step on? Brother!

There is no third path. It is either their death or mine.”

Anger began to appear over Lan XiChen’s face. He stepped away, “Is this not all because you... because you did the things in the letter?! If you never did those things, how could anyone come across the evidence to hold against you?”

Jin GuangYao, “Brother, listen to me. I don’t deny that I did those things...”

Lan XiChen, “How could you deny them? There are both witnesses and proof!”

Jin GuangYao, “And so I said I don’t deny them! But to have killed my father, my wife, my son, my brother—if not because I had no other choice, why would I have done those things? Could it be

that I’m really so out of my mind in your eyes?!”

Lan XiChen’s expression calmed somewhat, “Fine. I will ask you a few questions. You can explain one by one.”

Lan WangJi, “Brother!”

He unsheathed Bichen. Seeing how he seemed like he was about to end Jin GuangYao right there, Lan XiChen hurried, “Do not worry. He is injured, and his weapon is confiscated as well. He is at a great disadvantage. With so many people here, he cannot do anything.” On the other side, Wei WuXian gave Su She a kick, stopping his intention to move in secrecy. Lan XiChen, “Go deal with things over there. I will stay here.”

Hearing Su She’s enraged roar, Lan WangJi walked over. Wei WuXian knew that Lan XiChen still had some feelings towards this sworn brother of his. He had some inexplicable expectations of him and just had to give him this chance to speak. Similarly, Wei WuXian wanted to hear a few words from Jin GuangYao’s perspective as well, and so he listened. Lan XiChen, “First, your father, Former Sect Leader Jin, did you really use such a method to...”

Jin GuangYao spoke carefully, “I’d like to answer this question last.”

Lan XiChen shook his head before continuing, “Second, your... wife...” As though he couldn’t say it, he immediately changed his phrasing, “Your sister, Qin Su, did you really marry her while knowing what blood relationship you had with her?”

Jin GuangYao stared blankly at him. Suddenly, tears rolled down his eyes. He answered with pain, “... Yes.” Lan XiChen took in a deep breath. His face was almost ashen. Jin GuangYao whispered, “But I really had no choice.”

Lan XiChen scolded, “How could you have no choice?! It was your marriage! Would it not have been fine as long as you chose not to marry her? Even if you hurt Qin Su’s heart because of it, it would have been better than destroying a woman who loved you

and respected you with all her heart. A woman who had never treated you badly!"

Jin GuangYao, "Did I not love her with all my heart?! But I had no choice, that's all there is to it! Yes! It was my marriage, but could I really not have married her with just my word?! Brother, there has to be a bottom line to your naivety—I spent so much effort, went through such lengths for Qin CangYe to answer my proposal, and as the wedding day approached, I finally satisfied both Qin CangYe and Jin GuangShan, but now you're telling me I should have called off the wedding just like that? What reason should I have used? What should I have told the two of them?!"

"Brother, do you know how I felt when Madam Qin came to me to secretly reveal the truth, just as I thought everything was perfect?!"

It wouldn't have scared me more if a streak of lightingsliced through my skull! Do you know why she didn't go to Jin GuangShan and instead begged me in secrecy? It was because she was raped by Jin GuangShan! That good father of mine, he didn't even let the wife of a subordinate who's been with him for so long ago. He didn't even remember he had a new daughter! For so many years, she didn't dare tell this to her husband, Qin CangYe. If I suddenly broke off the engagement, they would have noticed what was going on and Jin GuangShan and Qin CangYe would have fallen out with each other. Who do you think would be the one that was shunned by both sides and met the worst end?!"

Although it wasn't the first time they heard of Jin GuangShan's shameless acts in this realm, the people present still felt some disgusted chills, whichever emotion was greater. Lan XiChen, "Then... Then even though you married Qin Su with no choice, you could have treated her coldly. Why did you... And why did you have to kill your own son with your own hands, after A-Song was born?!"

Jin GuangYao hugged his head, his voice bitter, "... I never touched A-Su again after our marriage. A-Song... we had him before we married. Back then, I was afraid of further delay and additional issues..."

So, he and Qin Su consummated their marriage beforehand. If not because of this, he wouldn't have somehow ended up engagingin incest with his younger sister. At this point, he didn't know which to detest more—his father who wasn't like a father at all or himself who was so suspicious of others!

With a sigh, Lan XiChen continued, "Third, do not try to avoid it and answer me—did you plan the death of Jin ZiXuan on purpose?!"

Hearing his father's name, Jin Ling, who'd been holding Jiang Cheng, widened his eyes.

Lan WangJi raised his voice somewhat, "Brother, you believe him?"

Lan XiChen's expression was complicated, "Of course I do not believe that Jin ZiXuan ran into the attack at Qiongqi Path by accident, but... let him speak first."

Jin GuangYao knew he wouldn't be believed if he denied it no matter what. He clenched his teeth, "... I indeed didn't run into Jin ZiXuan by accident."

Jin Ling immediately clenched his fists.

Jin GuangYao continued, "But I've never thought of planning everything that happened afterward either. You don't have to think of me as so clever and faultless. Many things can't be controlled at all. How could I have known that he'd definitely die by Wei

WuXian's hands together with Jin ZiXun? How could I have predicted that Wei WuXian would definitely lose control and the Ghost General would definitely run riot?"

Wei WuXian's voice was harsh, "And you said you didn't run into him by accident? Isn't that self-contradiction?!"

Jin GuangYao, "I don't deny that I told him about the attack at Qiongqi Path on purpose, but I only thought that he'd encounter some difficulties if he ran into you when you were being troubled by his cousin since he'd never been on good terms with you. How could I have known that you would simply kill everyone present, Mr. Wei?"

Wei WuXian laughed, enraged, "You're really..."

Suddenly, Jin Ling screamed, "Why?!" He stood up from beside Jiang Cheng. Eyes red, he rushed toward Jin GuangYao as he shouted, "Why did you have to do this?!"

Nie HuaiSang hurried to pull back Jin Ling, who seemed as though he wanted to fight with Jin GuangYao. Jin GuangYao

returned the question, "Why?" He turned to Jin Ling, "A-Ling, then could you tell me why? Why is it that even if I face everyone with a smile, I might not even receive the lowest form of respect, while even though your father was extremely arrogant, people flocked to him? Could you tell me why we were born from the same person but your father could relax at home with the love of his life playing with his child, while I never even dared be alone for long with my wife, shivering out of fright at first glance of my son? And I was ordered to do such a thing by my father as if it was natural—to kill an extremely dangerous figure who could flip out and conjure up a bloody massacre with his corpses anytime!

"Why is it that even though we were born on the same day, Jin GuangShan could host a grand banquet for one son, and watch with his own eyes how his subordinate kicked his other son down Koi Tower, from the first stair to the last!"

He finally revealed the hatred hidden deep within him. It wasn't directed at neither Jin ZiXuan nor Wei WuXian, but rather his own father.

Wei WuXian, "Stop making excuses! Kill whomever you want dead—why touch Jin ZiXuan?!"

Jin GuangYao responded calmly, "As you've seen, I killed all of them."

Lan XiChen, "And even in such a way."

Tears rested at the corners of Jin GuangYao's eyes. He kneeled on the ground, back straight as he smiled, "Yes. An old stallion that gets in a rut wherever it goes really deserves such a death, doesn't it?"

Lan XiChen shouted, "A-Yao!"

Only after the word came out did he remember that he'd already one-sidedly broke off with Jin GuangYao, and thus he shouldn't call him like this. However, Jin GuangYao seemed as if he didn't notice it, his expression collected, "Brother, don't be surprised that I can call him such dirty things. To this father of mine, I once had hopes as well. In the past, as long as it was his command, whether it be to betray Sect Leader Wen or protect Xue Yang or remove anyone who disagreed, no matter how foolish it was, how hated I'd be, I'd obey regardless. But do you know what it was

that made me lose hope completely? I'll answer your first question now. It wasn't that I'd never be worth a single hair on Jin ZiXuan

or one of the holes in Jin ZiXun, it wasn't that he took back Mo XuanYu, it wasn't that he tried every possible way to make me a mere figurehead either. It was the truth he once told the maid beside me when he was out indulging himself again.

"Why was a sect leader who spent money like water unwilling to do the smallest favor and buy my mother's freedom? Simple—it was too much trouble. My mother waited for so many years, weaving together so many difficult circumstances when she talked to me, imagining for his sake so many hardships. And the real reason was only a single word: trouble.

"This is what he said, „It's especially women who've read some books who think they're a level higher than other women. They're the most troublesome, with so many demands and unrealistic thoughts. If I bought her freedom and took her back to Lanling, who knows how much fuss she'd make. It was best that I let her stay where she was just like that. With her conditions, she'd probably be popular for a few more years. She wouldn't have to worry about her spendings for the rest of her life.”

„Son? Oh, forget it.”

Jin GuangYao's memory was extraordinary. With such a word-by-word repetition, one could even imagine that drunk expression of Jin GuangShan's when he said these words, "Brother, look, these three words are all that I'm worth to my father, „Oh, forget it.” Hahahaha..."

Pain flashed before Lan XiChen's face, "Even if your father... you..." He still couldn't find an

appropriate comment and gave up, sighing instead, "What is the use of saying all this now?" Jin GuangYao shrugged as he smiled, "I can't help it. To seek pity even after doing all the bad things—that's the kind of person I am."

At the word „pity”, he suddenly flipped his wrist. A red guqin string wrapped around Jin Ling's neck.

Tears still hung at the corners of Jin GuangYao's eyes as he spoke, voice low, "Don't move!" This was a surprise indeed. Jiang Cheng roared, "Wei WuXian! Didn't you confiscate his weapons already?!"

Under such circumstances, he somehow directly shouted at Wei WuXian, his voice the same as how it was when he was a boy.

Wei WuXian shouted as well, "I did confiscate all his strings!"

It couldn't be that Jin GuangYao's cultivation was so high that he could pull things out of thin air, could it?!

Lan WangJi saw it through at one glance, "He hid it inside his body."

The rest of the people followed his words to see a slowly expanding cluster of red on the white cloth at the side of Jin GuangYao's waist. The string was red because it was covered in blood. Of course, Wei WuXian couldn't find it earlier on. Jin GuangYao didn't hide it on him, but instead hid it within his body. With the conversation, Lan XiChen's emotions were affected while other people's attention was diverted as well, and Jin Ling even rushed forward to approach him. The time was ripe, and so he caught everyone off guard as he quickly pierced his abdomen with his finger to dig it outside his body.

Who knew that Jin GuangYao could do such a thing to himself in order to keep such a move? Although the string was as thin as possible, it was a piece of metal swimming around in his blood and flesh, after all, so it wouldn't have felt too pleasant.

Jiang Cheng cried, "A-Ling!" Wei WuXian couldn't help from moving as well, but immediately someone grabbed him. As he turned around to see that it was Lan WangJi, he finally managed to steady himself and remain collected.

With Jin Ling under control, Jin GuangYao stood up, "Sect Leader Jiang, there's no need to be so agitated. I watched A-Ling grow up, after all. Same as before, after we walk our own paths for a while, you'll see a perfectly unharmed A-Ling in some time."

Jiang Cheng, "A-Ling, don't move! Jin GuangYao, if you want hostage, it's the same if it's me!" Jin GuangYao answered in all honesty, "No, it isn't. Sect Leader Jiang, you're injured. It's difficult for you to move. You'll hold me back."

Wei WuXian felt sweat at his palms, "Sect Leader Jin, didn't you forget to take something with you? Your loyal subject is still here."

Jin GuangYao looked towards Su She, who was still being held back with Bichen by Lan WangJi. Su She immediately called, throat hoarse, "Sect Leader, there's no need to care about me!" Jin GuangYao immediately replied, "Thank you."

Lan XiChen spoke slowly, "Sect Leader Jin, you lied again." Jin GuangYao, "Just this once. There'll be no next time."

Lan XiChen, "This was what you said last time. I can no longer tell which of your words are true."

Just as Jin GuangYao was about to speak, a thunder of unprecedented volume roared. It was far in the distance, but sounded almost as if it was right next to one's ear. He couldn't help but shiver and swallow what he was about to say.

Immediately after, three strange thumps bellowed outside the temple's doors.

Compared to the act of „knocking on the door, it had a greater resemblance to „crashing into the door." It didn't sound like the slaps of a man's arm, more like someone held another's head and smashed it against the door again and again. The thumps got louder as the crack in the door bolt

grew in size. The expression on Jin GuangYao's face became more twisted by each moment. At the fourth strike, the door bolt finally broke. Dense strands of rain as well as a pitch-black figure whirled through the door.

Jin GuangYao's figure trembled, as though he wanted to dodge, but soon he stopped the urge. The figure didn't fly in his direction, but instead in Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi's. Calmly, the two parted for an instant before naturally standing side-by-side again. Turning around, Wei WuXian called, "Wen Ning?"

Wen Ning crashed into the Guanyin statue within the temple. With his feet above his head, he hung for a while before he plopped down and answered, "... Young Master."

Seeing him, both Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling grew darkish in their faces. On the other hand, Nie HuaiSang cried, "Brother!!!"

Apart from Wen Ning who flew inside, a taller silhouette stood before the temple's doors. His figure was firm, while two blank eyes rested on his ashen face.

It was ChiFeng-Zun, Nie MingJue!

Like a tower of steel, he stood in front of the Guanyin Temple amid the storm, blocking the paths of everyone. His head sat level on his neck. Black, closely-packed stitches could be seen at his throat. Somebody had somehow used a long thread to sew together the head and the headless body!

Lan XiChen, "... Brother."

Jin GuangYao also murmured, "... Brother."

Within the temple, three people called Nie MingJue's corpse

"Brother" but the three tones were drastically different. Jin GuangYao's face was full of a drowning fear. His entire body began to shiver. No matter dead or alive, the person Jin GuangYao was most scared of was none but this sworn brother of his whose temper tolerated no evil. As his body shivered, his hands shivered as well, and the bloody guqin string he clutched tightly in his hand also began to shiver. At this instant, Lan WangJi suddenly unsheathed Bichen and slashed.

In the blink of an eye, he'd flashed before Jin Ling while holding something. While Jin GuangYao felt his arm lighten. With a short pause, he looked down only to finally discover that his right hand was gone. His right hand was cut off from his forearm. What Lan WangJi held was the palm he'd been using to grip the guqin string.

At once, blood spilled everywhere. Jin GuangYao's face paled in pain. He didn't even have the energy to scream and only

staggered backwards a couple of steps. Unable to hold himself up, he collapsed onto the ground. Su She, on the other hand, began to scream. Lan XiChen seemed as though he wanted to help him for an instant, but in the end he dared not.

Lan WangJi peeled open the fingers of the severed palm. The guqin string loosened, and Jin Ling was finally out of danger. Just as Jiang Cheng was about to rush over to see if he was hurt or not, Wei WuXian moved faster than him and grabbed Jin Ling's shoulders, examining carefully. After he'd determined that the skin on his neck was unscathed, without a single scratch, he finally let out a sigh of relief.

In the past, whenever Lan WangJi attacked, he always left a few degrees of lenience. But right then, the situation was dangerous indeed. The guqin string was extremely sharp. In the hands of someone who knew the chord assassination technique, it could cut through meat and bone as if through vegetables. On top of

that, Jin GuangYao's hands were shaking. If he shook just a bit more or, with a more frightening possibility, if he forgot that he still had someone on his leash, and ended up making a run for it while holding the string... If Lan WangJi didn't sever the right hand with which he held the string so decisively, blood might've already spewed out of Jin Ling's severed head and body!

The blood that came from where Jin GuangYao's hand broke off splashed right onto Jin Ling, drenching over half of his body and a portion of his face. He was still muddled, having not

realized what happened yet. Wei WuXian, however, pulled him into a tight hug, “Stand farther away from dangerous people next time, you brat, why did you go so close?!”

If the only son of Jiang YanLi and Jin ZiXuan died in front of his eyes, Wei WuXian would truly be at a loss as to what to do.

Jin Ling wasn’t used to being hugged by someone like this. Blood immediately flushed to his pale face as he pushed away from Wei WuXian’s chest. Grabbing him, Wei WuXian hugged a couple more times, with more force, slapping his shoulder hard before he shoved him towards Jiang Cheng, “Go! Don’t run around anymore. Go to your uncle!”

Jiang Cheng caught Jin Ling, who still felt a bit dizzy. Looking across at Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi standing together, he hesitated for a moment before he turned to Lan WangJi, lowering his voice, “Thank you.” Although his voice was low, there was no vagueness.

Jin Ling said as well, “Thank you for saving my life, HanGuang- Jun.”

Lan WangJi nodded and said nothing. Bichen pointed at the ground with a slant. No drops of blood clung to the bright, crystalline blade as they all rolled onto the ground. He turned the blade to point at Nie MingJue, who stood at the doorway.

Wen Ning slowly crawled up and attached a broken arm, “Be careful... His resentful energy is abnormally strong.”

## Chapter 107: Concealment —Part One

Clenching his teeth, Jin GuangYao struck a few acupoints of his arm. Amidst the dizziness that came from a loss of blood, he suddenly saw Nie MingJue walk a step towards him, his eyes locked on him. He was immediately half-dead with fear.

On the side, Su She coughed out some more blood, shouting his throat hoarse, “You idiots! Why are you still standing there?! Stop him! Stop the thing at the door!”

The cultivators of the LanlingJin Sect who’d been spacing out for a while now finally took up their swords and approached, although the first two were immediately sent flying off by Nie MingJue’s palm. With his left hand, he sprinkled medicine where his hand was cut off, but the powder was washed away by the blood at once. Almost tearing up, he tore at the hem of his clothes in hope to cease the blood flow by bandaging the wound, but his left hand was burned by the poisonous smoke within the coffin and his chest was as well, unable to exert strength. He tore for quite some time, trembling, yet he still couldn’t tear it off, only adding to his pain. Su She threw himself over and ripped off a piece of white fabric from his own clothes to bandage his wound.

At the same time, Lan XiChen led Nie HuaiSang to somewhere that was safe. Su She searched for extra medicine on him, but to no avail, turning to Lan XiChen, “Sect Leader Lan! Sect Leader Lan, do you have medicine? Help him out—Sect Leader has always treated you with respect! Just take it as doing him a favor!”

As Lan XiChen saw how terrible Jin GuangYao looked, almost passing out, slight hesitation passed through his eyes. At this time, a few screams came from over on the other side. With a heavy punch, Nie MingJue smashed three of the cultivators into a scarlet puddle of flesh!

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi stood in front of Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling. Wei WuXian, “Wen Ning! How did you run into him?!”

After Wen Ning put his arm back in place, he shifted to attach his broken leg, “Young Master... I’m sorry... You told me to go back and find Young Master Lan. I couldn’t find him in the inn, so I could only search for him in the streets. Before I could find Young Master Lan, I saw ChiFeng-Zun walking out in the open, as though he was looking for something. A group of beggar children saw him and went to fool around with him. They didn’t know what he was. ChiFeng-Zun was completely unconscious. With his bare hands, he almost... I could only keep fighting with him all the way here...”

It was entirely needless for Wei WuXian to ask why he couldn’t find Lan WangJi at the inn. He couldn’t sleep next door to Lan WangJi, so could Lan WangJi have slept next door to him? It was natural that he, too, went out and roamed around before he saw Fairy who fled the scene, searching for help. The sudden storm

must’ve began after Wen Ning and Nie MingJue started to fight as well.

A creature such as the „corpse” attracted darkness in the first place, much less two of these unusual fierce corpses!

Although the LanlingJin Sect cultivators couldn’t at all compete with Nie MingJue, they continuously rushed forth with bravery. Yet, as their swords met with Nie MingJue’s body, it was as though they met with fine steel, unable to carve even the slightest wound. Nie HuaiSang peeked carefully from behind Lan XiChen’s back, his voice both frightened and eager, “B-B-Brother, I-I’m...”

Nie MingJue’s pupil-less eyes stared, widened, before he charged at him. Lan XiChen lowered his chin slightly. With a sob of Liebing, Nie MingJue’s figure froze.

Lan XiChen, “Brother, this is HuaiSang!”

Nie HuaiSang, “Brother can’t even recognize me...”

Wei WuXian, “Not only can’t he recognize you, he can’t even recognize whom he himself is right now!”

Nie MingJue had already become a corpse controlled by the heavy energy of resentment. He was fierce and violent, attacking indiscriminately. After he'd rested for a while, Wen Ning sunk into battle again, but Wen Ning's resentful energy wasn't as heavy as his, and his physique wasn't as tall either. On top of that, Wei WuXian's flute had broken, unable to provide any assistance. He was somewhat in the disadvantage. Just as Jin GuangYao, who'd been lying on the ground, finally staunched the bleeding from his wound, Su She got up and put him over his back, wanting to run away amid the chaos. The movement made the alert Nie MingJue notice them again. He threw Wen Ning off and walked in large strides towards Jin GuangYao. Jin Ling exclaimed, "Uncle! Run!"

Hearing that he even dared say something to remind his enemy, Jiang Cheng slapped him on the back of his head, shouting in rage, "Shut up!"

Jin Ling only realized after he took the slap. But, after all, it was his uncle, someone who'd watched him grow up. In the past decade or so, it wasn't that Jin GuangYao was unkind to him. As Jin Ling saw that he was about to die in the hands of the fierce corpse, he couldn't help but to exclaim. Yet, as Nie MingJue heard him, he turned around almost as if in confusion.

Wei WuXian felt his chest tighten, lowering his voice, "Oh no!"

Now that Nie MingJue had become a fierce corpse, his resentful energy was of course highest when directed at his enemy, Jin GuangYao. However, fierce corpses didn't tell people apart through their eyes!

Jin GuangYao was quite close to Jin Ling in terms of bloodline. To creatures of darkness, the blood and breath of both these two humans seemed somewhat familiar, and those in a state of disorientation would find it even more difficult to tell the two apart. Right now, blood poured from Jin GuangYao's lost arm. With weak breaths, and he was almost half dead, while Jin Ling was still alive and jumping. Nie MingJue's dead, thoughtless brain naturally held greater interest in him.

Lan WangJi commanded Bichen forth to attack straight at Nie MingJue's chest. As expected, the blade stopped as soon as it landed. As Nie MingJue looked down and saw the glittering sword, he roared and reached for it. Lan WangJi immediately summoned back Bichen, which flew into its sheath with a loud clang. Nie MingJue ended up empty-handed. Right after, with a turn of his left hand, he flipped out the Wangji guqin and placed it on his palm. Without any hesitation, he strummed a stream of notes. Lan XiChen returned Liebing to his lips again as well. With a wave of his hand, Wei WuXian sent out over fifty talismans flying towards Nie MingJue, but before they even got close, they were ignited by his resentful energy and burned to ashes in the air!

With a roar, Nie MingJue grabbed at Jin Ling. Both Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling had backed away to the corner of the wall, unable to retreat further. Jiang Cheng could only stuff Jin Ling behind him and unsheathe Sandu, which at the moment was unable to use spiritual energy, forcing himself to fend off the attack. Although both the guqin and the Xiao had sounded, they were going to be too late!

Nie MingJue's heavy fist punched through a body.

But the body was neither Jiang Cheng's nor Jin Ling's.

Wen Ning blocked himself before the wall, in front of the two of them. With both his hands, he grabbed Nie MingJue's iron arm

and slowly pulled it out of his chest, leaving behind a large, hollow hole. There was no bleeding. Only a couple of black organ crumbs fell out.

Wei WuXian, "Wen Ning!!!"

While Jiang Cheng looked as though he could lose his mind right there. He stammered, "You? You?!"

The punch was too strong. Not only did it pierce through Wen Ning's chest, it also shattered a part of his larynx. Unable to say a single thing, he collapsed. With where he stood, he fell right onto Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling's bodies. He was momentarily unable to move, but his eyes were

still open, staring at them unblinkingly.

Jin Ling originally loathed the murderer, the weapon that pierced his father's heart. Ever since he was young, he'd sworn countless times that if he had the opportunity, he'd definitely cut off the flesh from Wei Ying's and Wen Ning's bodies, piece by piece. Later, as he didn't want to hate Wei WuXian, he hated Wen Ning with double the energy. But right now, as he watched the murderer,

the weapon had his heart be pierced in the same way, he couldn't even push Wen Ning rudely away so that he didn't lean on them.

He knew he was dead. Much less having a hole in his body, even if he were to be snapped into two from his waist, he might not even end up with any serious consequences. But for some reason, he couldn't stop his tears from spilling over his eyes.

After the punch, Nie MingJue's movements paused as well.

With a duet from Lan WangJi and Lan XiChen, the guqin was like an icy river while the Xiao like high winds. Both sounds stirred up hatred within Nie MingJue, while the duet pained him even more, stirring up a thickness around him almost as if somebody bound him with an invisible rope. As the rope tightened, his anger rose as well before he finally exploded, forcing his way out of the constraint of Sound of Vanquish as he flew at the person playing the guqin. Calmly, Lan WangJi twirled to dodge his attack. The melody didn't stop for the slightest. Nie MingJue's fist punched through the wall, this time. As he was about to turn around, he suddenly heard two bright chirps.

He jerked his fist out of the wall and looked toward the direction of the sound.

Wei WuXian whistled two more times, grinning, "Hello, ChiFeng- Zun. Do you recognize who I am?" Nie MingJue's hideous white eyeballs were glued to him. Wei WuXian, "It's fine if you don't, as long as you recognize the whistles."

Lan XiChen moved Liebing slightly to the side, "Young Master Wei!"

He wanted to remind Wei WuXian that his current body belonged to Mo XuanYu, and Mo XuanYu was related to Jin GuangYao by blood as well, with even more proximity than Jin Ling. If Nie MingJue directed his resentful energy to him because of this, the situation would be even more difficult. But before he continued, Lan WangJi's gaze shifted over. Calm and collected, he shook his head.

Lan XiChen understood at once that he was telling him—there was no need to worry.

Lan WangJi believed that Wei WuXian would be fine.

Whistling, Wei WuXian sauntered around. The whistles were light and relaxed, yet within this Guanyin Temple amid a heavy storm, overflowing with corpses, the clarity of the sound appeared to be abnormally eerie. As Wen Ning heard it, still lying at the corner on top of Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling, he seemed to have a strangely strong urge to stand up. Whether he held it back or he hadn't regained the strength to move yet, he struggled for a while and collapsed again. Without thought, Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling went to catch him in unison, but after they caught him, they displayed the same hesitating expression of wanting to throw him down right then.

Grinning widely, Wei WuXian whistled the almost jocular tune as he backed away calmly, hands behind his back. Nie MingJue stood where he was. With the first step Wei WuXian took, his reaction was cold; at the third step, he still remained motionless; yet at the seventh step, it seemed as if he finally couldn't hold his urge back any longer, taking a stride toward the direction in which Wei WuXian backed away.

And the direction in which Wei WuXian controlled him to walk was precisely the almost luxurious empty coffin at the back of the Guanyin Temple. As long as he got inside, Wei WuXian had a way to seal him.

The white, poisonous smoke had long since evaporated. It was too thin to pose as threat. Dark-faced, Nie MingJue was led towards the empty coffin, even though he instinctively felt resistance. Wei WuXian walked a circle around the coffin.

Everyone held their breaths as they stared at the scene, especially Lan WangJi. As Wei WuXian whistled unhurriedly, he sent his unhurried gaze over there. As soon as their eyes met, he blinked his left eye almost flirtatiously at Lan WangJi.

As though he'd been pricked by a pin made of sugar, an unnoticeable wave rippled within the melody played by Lan WangJi's fingers before quickly disappearing. Wei WuXian turned around, somewhat pleased with himself and patted the coffin before Nie MingJue.

At last, Nie MingJue slowly bent down. But just as he was about to tilt his upper body inside, a scream suddenly came from behind Lan XiChen.

Nie MingJue's movements immediately stopped. Like everyone, he spun around to look. Su She carried the half-conscious Jin GuangYao on his back, with one hand holding his leg and another holding a bloodied sword. On the other hand, Nie HuaiSang lay on the ground, rolling on the ground in pain as he hugged his leg.

With this, Shuoyue's sword energy smashed into the hand with which Su She held the sword. Su She's face was full of shock as the sword fell out of his hand. The blade had already injured Nie HuaiSang. The scent of blood wafted through the air. Wei WuXian cursed in silence, how could this be—how dare he mess things up for me at such a critical time!

Nie HuaiSang and Nie MingJue were half-brothers with the same father. If Nie MingJue caught the scent of his blood, no killing

intent would be agitated within him, but it'd make him extremely curious. And with curiosity, when his attention was directed over there, he'd notice Jin GuangYao for sure. After he killed Jin GuangYao, his killing intent would definitely become stronger, and he'd be more difficult to subdue!

As expected, gurgles came from within Nie MingJue's throat. His body turned away from the empty coffin as well. At once, he realized whom the person lying on Su She's back was. Wei WuXian's whistles could no longer stop him either. Like a gust of wind, Nie MingJue rushed over, his palm flying towards Jin GuangYao's head.

Su She dodged to the side with force. With the tip of his foot, he picked up the sword that had fallen to the ground and conjured up all of his spiritual energy in one thrust at Nie MingJue's heart.

Perhaps because of the dire situation, the attack was abnormally swift and ruthless. Brimming with spiritual energy, the blade glowed brightly, enveloped by swirling radiance. It was so much better than all of the previous seemingly-elegant attacks that even Wei WuXian wanted to praise its excellence. Nie MingJue was forced a step back by the explosion of an attack as well. As the light dimmed somewhat, Nie MingJue went forth again, clawing at

Jin GuangYao unstoppably. Su She threw Jin GuangYao at Lan XiChen with his left hand, while with his right he sliced at Nie MingJue's throat.

Nie MingJue's entire body was as impenetrable as fine steel, but not the thread that stitched his neck together!

## Chapter 108: Concealment —Part Two

If the neck attack succeeded, even if it wouldn't defeat Nie MingJue entirely, it'd still be able to save them some time. However, the sword had been infused with so much spiritual energy, due to Su She's sudden explosion, that it could no longer withstand it. Halfway through the lunge, it broke into pieces with a crack.

On the other hand, Nie MingJue's punch landed right in the center of Su She's chest. Su She's splendor left as quickly as it came.

He couldn't even spit out a mouthful of blood or say a few last words, no matter with dignity or cruelty, before the life in his eyes went out.

Collapsed beside Lan XiChen, Jin GuangYao saw this scene as well. Whether because the bleeding and the pain intensified at his arm and stomach or from some other reason, the glisten of tears could be seen in his eyes. But before he had a chance to catch his breath or lick his wounds, Nie MingJue turned around after he pulled his fist back and stared hungrily in his direction.

The harsh, stern expression on his rigid face held a sense of judgement that was no different from before he died. Even his tears had been scared away as Jin GuangYao turned to Lan XiChen for help, his voice trembling, "Brother..."

Lan XiChen turned the direction in which his blade pointed, while Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi sped up their melodies as well. But the effects of the whistle had already been overcome. It would be much harder than before for it to take effect again.

At this point, somebody on the side suddenly called, "Wei WuXian!"

Wei WuXian answered immediately, "What?"

Only after he answered did he realize that the one who called him was Jiang Cheng. Wei WuXian felt somewhat surprised. Jiang Cheng didn't respond directly. Instead, he took something out from his sleeve and tossed. Wei WuXian caught it by instinct and looked, only to find a black, gleaming flute along with a crimson tassel.

It was the ghoul flute, Chen Qing!

As he felt the flute that he was more than familiar with, Wei WuXian didn't even have the spare time to feel surprised. Without hesitation, he lifted it to his lips and called, "Lan Zhan!"

Lan WangJi nodded. No more words had to be exchanged as the notes of the guqin and the flute sounded in unison. The former was like a frozen river and the latter like flying birds; one suppressed while the other lured. Under the duet, Nie MingJue's body wavered before it was finally half-forced to move its steps away from Jin GuangYao.

One stride at a time, controlled by the guqin and the flute, he once again walked toward the empty coffin, limbs stiff. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi also followed, step by step. The moment he fell into

the coffin, they kicked the coffin lid, that'd been on the ground, at the same time. The heavy lid flew up before it fell. Wei WuXian flipped nimbly on top of the coffin. He stuck Chenqing back at his waist with his left hand and quickly bit into his right hand's finger, smoothly painting an entire string of wild, bloody incantations without a moment of pause from top to bottom!

Only then did the beast-like howls from within the coffin die off gradually. Lan WangJi put his hand over the seven vibrating strings and halted the guqin's sounds. Wei WuXian let out a light breath. He waited for a while, cautious. Only after he was finally able to determine that energy no longer came from below the coffin lid did he stand up, "What a bad temper, right?"

He was much taller standing on the coffin. Lan WangJi put his guqin away and looked up at him with the pair of light eyes. Wei WuXian looked down and couldn't help but touch the fair face with his right hand, adding a few blood-red marks, by accident or on purpose.

Lan WangJi didn't worry too much about it, "Come down."

Wei WuXian hopped down with a grin before he was caught right inside those arms.

Things were quieting down, but on the other side, Nie HuaiSang began to groan in pain. He pleaded, "Brother XiChen! Come tell me if my leg and my body are still connected or not!" Lan XiChen walked over, pressing him down to examine, "HuaiSang, you are fine. There is no need to be so afraid. Your leg is not broken. There is only an incision."

Nie HuaiSang exclaimed in terror, "An incision! How could I be not afraid if there's an incision?! Did it go all the way through? Help me, Brother XiChen!"

Lan XiChen didn't know whether he should laugh, "It is not so severe."

Still, Nie HuaiSang rolled on the ground, hugging his leg. Lan XiChen knew he was most afraid of pain, so he took out a bottle of pills from in his lapels and placed it into Nie HuaiSang's hand, "Pain relief."

Nie HuaiSang opened it at once, eating as he rambled on, "How come I'm so unfortunate? Caught by that Su MinShan on the way for no reason—he had to stab me even when he was running away! Didn't he know he could've just pushed me out of the way to deal with me? Did he have to use his sword..."

Lan XiChen got up and turned around. Jin GuangYao sat fallen on the ground, his face as pale as paper. His hair was somewhat disheveled as well, and cold sweat dotted his forehead. He had lost all his composure. Perhaps because the pain from his arm

was too much, he couldn't help but moan a little. He looked up at Lan XiChen. Even though he said nothing, but merely from how he looked, holding his severed wrist with such dejected eyes, was enough to make anyone feel pity.

Lan XiChen looked at him for a while before he sighed and still took out the medicine that he carried with him.

Wei WuXian, "Sect Leader Lan."

Lan XiChen, "Young Master Wei, right now, he... he should not be able to do anything else like this. If he is not treated, he might die right here. Many things still remain unanswered."

Wei WuXian, "Sect Leader Lan, I know. I'm not saying you can't help him. I just wanted to remind you to be careful. It's best if you silence him so that he doesn't say anything."

Lan XiChen nodded, turning to Jin GuangYao, "Sect Leader Jin, you heard him. Please do not carry out meaningless acts any longer. Or else, in precaution, if you do anything, I will spare no mercy and..." He took in a deep breath, "Take your life."

Jin GuangYao nodded and whispered weakly, "Thank you, ZeWu- Jun."

Lan XiChen bent down and treated the wound at his wrist with much caution. Jin GuangYao kept on trembling. Seeing his sworn brother who used to have so much potential end up like this, Lan XiChen didn't know what to say either. He could only sigh in silence.

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked to the corner. Wen Ning was still lying on top of Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling in an awkward, half-collapsed way. Wei WuXian laid him flat on the ground. After

he examined the hole through his chest, he felt quite worried, "Just look at you... How should I block it up?"

Wen Ning, "Young Master, is it really severe...?"

Wei WuXian, "No. It's not like you need the organs here. But it looks ugly."

Wen Ning, "It's not like I need to look nice..."

Jiang Cheng was silent, while Jin Ling hesitated between speaking up or not.

Over on the other side, Lan XiChen was treating Jin GuangYao's wound. Seeing that Jin GuangYao almost passed out from the pain, Lan XiChen, who in the beginning wanted to use this to punish him, still didn't have the heart to bear it, turning around, "HuaiSang, give me the bottle of medicine."

Nie HuaiSang had put the bottle into his lapels after he ate two pills and stopped the pain. He hurried, "Oh, sure." And looked down to search for it. After he found it, just as he was about to pass it to Lan XiChen, his pupils suddenly shrunk, exclaiming in fright, "Brother XiChen, behind you!!!"

Lan XiChen hadn't let down his guard around Jin GuangYao in the first place, tense from caution. As he saw Nie HuaiSang's expression along with the warning, he felt something in his heart go cold. Without hesitation, he unsheathed his sword and stabbed to the back.

The sword pierced right through Jin GuangYao's chest. His face was shocked.

The others were also surprised by the sudden turn of events. Wei WuXian shot up, "What happened?!"

Nie HuaiSang, "I-I-I... saw Brother... no, I saw Sect Leader Jin put his hands behind him. I didn't know if he..."

Jin GuangYao looked down at the sword that penetrated his chest. His lips twitched, as though he wanted to say something, but he couldn't even argue for himself as he'd been silenced. Wei WuXian felt that something seemed off about this situation.

Before he had the chance to ask, Jin GuangYao coughed up quite some blood, his voice hoarse, "Lan XiChen!"

He forcefully broke through the spell of silence.

At the moment, Jin GuangYao was injured from top to bottom. His left hand was burned by the poisonous smoke, his right hand was severed, and his stomach was missing a chunk of flesh. Covered in blood, he couldn't even manage to sit upright, yet right now he stood on his own without any help, like one last streak of light from a setting sun. He called again in a voice filled with hatred, "Lan XiChen!"

Lan XiChen was beyond both disappointment and sorrow, "Sect Leader Jin, I told you. If you act again, I would show no mercy."

Jin GuangYao spat, his voice fierce, "Yes! You said so. But did I act?!"

He'd always kept up a gentle, graceful appearance in front of others, yet right now he displayed such a savage look. Seeing just how abnormal he was, Lan XiChen also felt that something was wrong. He immediately turned back to look at Nie HuaiSang.

Jin GuangYao laughed, "Enough! What are you looking at him for? There's no use! What could you see? You never even saw through me after all those years. HuaiSang, you're truly impressive." Nie HuaiSang was tongue-tied, as though he was scared speechless from the sudden accusation. Jin GuangYao

spoke with loathing, "How unexpected for me to fall in your hands like this..."

He tried to walk to Nie HuaiSang, but the sword was still stuck at the center of his chest. With just one step, he was immediately overcome with agony. Lan XiChen could neither give him a fatal blow nor pull out the sword rashly, exclaiming, "Do not move!"

In reality, Jin GuangYao couldn't move either. With one hand, he grabbed the blade before his chest, steadying himself as he spat out a mouthful of blood, "What a „Head Shaker"! No wonder... It must've been quite hard to have hidden yourself for so many years!"

Nie HuaiSang trembled, "Brother XiChen, trust me, back then I really did see..."

Jin GuangYao's face was twisted as he shouted, "You!"

He wanted to rush at Nie HuaiSang once more, and the sword sank an inch deeper into his chest. Lan XiChen shouted as well, "Do not move!"

Back then, he'd suffered many great losses from Jin GuangYao by believing in his lies. This time, it was only natural for Lan XiChen to be cautious, suspicious that he accused Nie HuaiSang on purpose after Nie HuaiSang saw through what he was going to do, just so that Lan XiChen would be caught off guard again. Jin GuangYao easily read what his eyes meant, laughing out of anger, "Lan XiChen! In this life, I've lied countless times, killed countless times. Like you said, I killed my father, my brother, my wife, my son, my teacher, my friend—of all the evil in the world, what haven't I done?!"

He took in a breath, rasping, "But I've never even thought of harming you!"

Lan XiChen was astonished.

Jin GuangYao panted harder, gripping the word as he spoke through clenched teeth, "... Back then, when the Cloud Recesses was burned down and you fled

outside, who was the one that saved you from all the danger? And when the GusuLan Sect was rebuilding the Cloud Recesses, who was the one that helped with everything he had? In all these years, when have I ever cracked down on the GusuLan Sect, when have I responded with anything but support?! Apart from this time, when I've only temporarily staunched your spiritual powers, when have I ever wronged you or your sect? Why have I ever demanded gratitude?!"

Hearing these questions, Lan XiChen could no longer persuade himself to silence him again. Jin GuangYao, "Su MinShan could repay me in such a way just because I remembered his name back then. You, on the other hand, ZeWu-Jun, Sect Leader Lan, are as intolerant of me as Nie MingJue—you refuse to spare me even a single breath of life!"

After he said this, Jin GuangYao suddenly drew back. Shuoyue was pulled from his chest, taking out a few splatters of blood.

Jiang Cheng shouted, "Don't let him get away!"

Lan XiChen went forth in just two steps, seizing him again without any difficulty. In such a shame, Jin GuangYao wasn't able to get anywhere no matter how fast he was. Jin Ling could catch him

even with his eyes closed. On top of that, he was injured in many places and received a fatal wound. There was no longer a need to be careful of him.

Wei WuXian, however, suddenly realized something as he shouted, "He's not trying to get away!!! ZeWu-Jun, move away from him right now!"

It was already too late. The blood from Jin GuangYao's severed limb trickled onto the coffin. The blood climbed across where Wei WuXian painted on, destroying the incantations, and dripped inside the coffin through the crack.

Nie MingJue, who had been sealed, broke out from the coffin!

The coffin lid burst into pieces. A pale hand grabbed Jin GuangYao's neck, while another searched for Lan XiChen's. Jin GuangYao wasn't trying to run away. Instead, he was fighting with his last breath to lead Lan XiChen towards Nie MingJue, so that they could die together!

Lan WangJi summoned Bichen, which shot at them with at speed of lighting, but Nie MingJue wasn't at all afraid of these spiritual weapons. Even if Bichen hit him, it would likely be unable to stop him from closing the small gap between him and Lan XiChen's throat.

Yet, just as the hand was an instant from grasping Lan XiChen's neck, Jin GuangYao used the only hand he had left to strike Lan XiChen's chest, pushing Lan XiChen away.

He, himself, on the other hand, was dragged into the coffin by Nie MingJue, then held up like holding a puppet. The scene was beyond frightening. Jin GuangYao used his one hand to peel away at Nie MingJue's steel-like palm. He struggled ceaselessly

from the pain, hair tangled, as heavy malice shot from his eyes. He cursed with all the energy he had left, "Fuck you, Nie MingJue! You think I'm really scared of you?! I..."

With much difficulty, he coughed up some blood. Everyone present heard a crack that was abnormally clear and brutal.

A whimper of a last breath left Jin GuangYao's throat.

Jin Ling's shoulders shivered. He shut his eyes and covered his ears, too afraid to keep watching and listening.

## Chapter 109: Concealment —Part Three

Lan XiChen staggered a few steps back from the push. He hadn't realized what happened yet. Meanwhile, Lan WangJi struck the back of the fair-featured Guanyin statue at the center of the temple. The statue vibrated as it flew towards the coffin. Nie MingJue was still inspecting the corpse in his hand, the head had already dipped. As the heavy statue hit him, he fell right back where he'd been.

Wei WuXian leaped over and stepped onto the Guanyin's chest. The coffin lid had broken already. They could only use the Guanyin statue as a lid to seal away Nie MingJue and his rampage. Down below, Nie MingJue struck the statue again and again in attempt to break free, while Wei WuXian also shook again and again, reeling so much he was almost thrown off. He wobbled, realizing that he wasn't able to paint a talisman at all, "Lan Zhan, quick, quick, come up beside me. One more person would mean more weight. With a few more slaps, the statue might fall apart again..."

Before he finished, Wei WuXian suddenly felt both his body and his line-of-sight tilt. Lan WangJi held one end of the coffin and lifted it up.

Which meant, with only a left hand, he lifted the wooden coffin, the two dead bodies within the coffin, the Guanyin statue above the coffin, and Wei WuXian atop the statue.

Wei WuXian gaped in astonishment. He'd long since known that Lan WangJi had shocking arm strength, but this... was a bit too shocking!

Lan WangJi's expression hadn't changed. His right hand unleashed a silver guqin string. As if on wings, the string zipped dozens of times around the coffin and the Guanyin statue, tying the two tightly together. And then a second one, and a third... Having determined that Nie MingJue and Jin GuangYao were sealed away properly, he finally his left-hand drop. The one end of the coffin plummeted to the ground, letting out a loud echo. Wei WuXian tilted as well. Lan WangJi welcomed him by breaking his fall with his arms before he placed him steadily on the ground.

The hands that had just conquered almost a thousand pounds were more than gentle when wrapped around Wei WuXian.

Lan XiChen stared at the coffin enveloped in seven guqin strings. He was still lost in thought. Nie HuaiSang extended a hand and waved it before his eyes, terrified, "... B-Brother XiChen, are you alright?"

Lan XiChen, "HuaiSang, just now, was he really trying to catch me off guard with an attack?"

Nie HuaiSang, "I think I saw it..."

Hearing his hesitation, Lan XiChen pressed, "Think it over some more."

Nie HuaiSang, "If you ask melike that, I can't be sure either... It really did seem like..."

Lan XiChen, "Cut out the „seem like"! Did it happen or not?!"

Nie HuaiSang answered with difficulty, "... I don't know, I really don't know!"

This was the only thing Nie HuaiSang knew to say when he was desperate. Lan XiChen buried his forehead in his palm. He seemed as if his head was about to split, unwilling to speak again.

Suddenly, Wei WuXian called, "HuaiSang-xiong." Nie HuaiSang, "Huh?"

Wei WuXian, "Back then, how did Su She stab you?"

Nie HuaiSang, "He was carrying Brother... carrying Sect Leader- Jin when he was running away. I blocked his way, so..."

Wei WuXian, "Really? With where you stood, I don't recall you blocking their path of escape."

Nie HuaiSang, "I couldn't have run into him purposely trying to be stabbed, could I?"

Wei WuXian smiled, "I never said that."

Nie HuaiSang, "Then what are you trying to say, Wei-xiong?"

Wei WuXian, "It's just that I suddenly connected a few things together."

Nie HuaiSang, "What things?"

Wei WuXian, "Jin GuangYao said someone gave him a letter that threatened to tell the world

what he did. Let's first assume he wasn't lying and was speaking the truth. Then, this certain person was doing the unnecessary." He continued, "If you wanted to expose a person's sins, instead of exposing them directly, why would you go out of your way to notify them that you had evidence of their crimes?"

Nie HuaiSang, "Didn't Brother... Didn't Sect Leader Jin say that the person wanted him to apologize by turning himself in?"

Wei WuXian, "Wake up. It's more than obvious that Jin GuangYao wouldn't choose to turn himself in. What was the point of doing it then? There seemed to be no point. But would someone who could uncover those old secrets of Jin GuangYao's really play a useless move? Such an unnecessary act had to have a goal, whether to induce or instigate something."

Lan XiChen was startled, "Induce? Induce what?"

Lan WangJi's voice was low, "Jin GuangYao's killing intent."

If it were the usual ZeWu-Jun, he couldn't have failed to fathom this. But right now, it was likely he had no more space in his mind to think.

Wei WuXian, "That's right. It was precisely this letter that induced Jin GuangYao's killing intent to an unprecedented level. Didn't it say he should wait for his death in seven days? Then he would be the first to strike. He'd topple all of the main forces of the cultivation world at Burial Mound within the seven days to say who'd be the first to die."

Lan XiChen, "You mean this was the goal of the one who sent him the letter? Only to urge him to take action?"

Wei WuXian, "That's what I'm thinking."

Lan XiChen shook his head, "... Then just what does the person who sent him the letter want to do? Whether to expose Jin GuangYao or to destroy the sects?"

Wei WuXian, "It's quite simple. Look at what happened after the siege failed. When everyone was gathered at Lotus Pier, at the peak of their excitement, they welcomed SiSi and BiCao—I don't think the arrival of the two witnesses was a coincidence. And so, everything piled up and exploded." With a pause, Wei WuXian continued, "They wanted not only for Jin GuangYao's name to be ruined. They also wanted Jin GuangYao to be the world's enemy. And it had to be fatal at first blood—there had to be no possibility of a reversal."

Nie HuaiSang, "Sounds like this person started to plan this a long time ago."

Wei WuXian looked at him before suddenly asking, "Right, weren't you the one responsible for safekeeping ChiFeng-Zun's body, Sect Leader Nie?"

Nie HuaiSang, "I kept it at first, but I just received the news tonight that my brother's body at Qinghe suddenly disappeared. Or else why would I hurry over to Qinghe and be caught by Su She on my way..."

Wei WuXian asked again, "Sect Leader Nie, I heard you often travel between the GusuLan Sect and the LanlingJin Sect, correct?"

Nie HuaiSang, "Yeah."

Wei WuXian, "Then did you really not know Mo XuanYu?" Nie HuaiSang, "Huh?"

Wei WuXian, "I remember the first time I met you after the sacrifice succeeded, you seemed like you didn't recognize me at all. You even asked HanGuang-Jun whom I was. In any case, Mo XuanYu had once bothered Jin GuangYao, even capable of looking at the manuscripts that Jin GuangYao had in his collection. You, on the other hand, also frequented Sect Leader Jin to air your grievances. Even if you weren't familiar with Mo XuanYu, have you really never seen him even once?"

Nie HuaiSang scratched his head, "Wei-xiong, Koi Tower is that big; I couldn't have seen every single person, much less remember everyone I've seen. And on top of that..." He seemed a bit awkward, "You know what Mo XuanYu's background was. It was a bit... The LanlingJin Sect tried its hardest to keep it a secret. It's not that strange I hadn't seen him, is it? Brother XiChen might not have even seen him."

Wei WuXian, "Oh, indeed. ZeWu-Jun didn't know MoXuanYu either."

Nie HuaiSang, "Right?! And I don't really understand. Even if I'd seen Mo XuanYu, why should I pretend like I didn't know himon purpose? Was there any need?"

Wei WuXian smiled, "Nothing. Something seemed a bit off. Iwas only asking."

Yet in his heart, he replied, Of course to find out if this 'Mo XuanYu' really was the real Mo XuanYu. How could Mo XuanYu, who was so timid and fearful in others" description, conjure up the courage to take his life and sacrifice his body? Why would that left hand of ChiFeng-Zun's be released? Did Jin GuangYao really let it out by pure accident? And why did it appear at Mo Village, where he sacrificed his body, so that Wei WuXian ran into it right after he was reborn? Why wasn't it some other place?

ChiFeng-Zun's corpse was buried by the QingheNie Sect. In all these years, did Nie HuaiSang, who had always admired his elder brother, really fail to notice that the corpse had been switched? Wei WuXian preferred this other case instead.

Perhaps before Nie MingJue passed away, Nie HuaiSang really knew nothing. But after Nie MingJue's death, he knew everything. Including that Nie MingJue's corpse had been switched. Including the true colors of the brother he once trusted. He tried to search for his elder brother's corpse, but after somany years and so much hard work, he could only find a single left hand.

He was stuck at this step, without anything that could lead to the next. In addition, the left hand was abnormally fierce, too difficult to suppress. If it was left by his side, it'd keep on resulting in bloodshed. So, he remembered someone. Someone who was best at dealing with these things, these problems. The YiLing Patriarch. But the YiLing Patriarch had been torn into pieces already. What should he do now? And so, he remembered someone else. Mo XuanYu, who'd been kicked out of Koi Tower. Perhaps to gain information from Mo XuanYu, Nie HuaiSang talked to him once. From Mo XuanYu's grievances, he knew that Mo XuanYu had once read the fragmented manuscript that recorded an ancient, forbidden technique in Jin GuangYao's collection. He then urged Mo XuanYu, who had had enough of the humiliation coming from his own clan members, to seek revenge using the forbidden technique of body sacrifice.

And which fierce ghost was summoned?

It was the YiLing Patriarch again, of course.

Mo XuanYu, no longer able to put up with his circumstances, finally painted the blood array, and Nie HuaiSang also used the opportunity to release the hot potato he was no longer able to keep: ChiFeng-Zun's left hand.

From then on, the plan successfully began. He no longer needed to exert his energy on searching for the remaining limbs of Nie MingJue, instead leaving all of the dangerous and bothersome things to Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi. He only needed to monitor their every move.

The time that Jin Ling, Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the other juniors ran into the odd incident of dead cats on their way, someone was clearly creating abnormalities on purpose. Along with the nonexistent „hunter" who showed them the way in the nearby village, it was doubtless that the goal was to lead these naive disciples into Yi City. If Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi was just a bit more careless and weren't able to protect them completely, whatever happened to the disciples at Yi City would likely also be blamed on Jin GuangYao.

Anyhow, the more that could convict Jin GuangYao, the better it was; the more that could lead the cautious villain to make mistakes and leave traces, the better it was; the more that could result in a tragic death of his, the better it was.

Lan WangJi used the tip of Bichen's blade to turn over the black chest beside the coffin. He glanced at the incantations engraved over it before he turned to Wei WuXian, "The head."

The chest was probably used to hold Nie MingJue's head. After Jin GuangYao moved the head away from Koi Tower, he probably buried it here.

Wei WuXian nodded at him, "Sect Leader Nie, do you know what was originally inside of the coffin?" Nie HuaiSang, "How could I know? But with how Brother... oh, no—with how Sect Leader Jin looked, it was probably something really important to him, huh?"

## Chapter 110: Concealment —Part Four

Wei WuXian, “Coffins are used to hold corpses, of course. I’m guessing that what had been buried here was the corpse of Jin GuangYao’s mother, Meng Shi. He came here tonight likely to retrieve his mother’s corpse and travel to DongYing with her.”

Lan XiChen said nothing. Nie HuaiSang exclaimed with an „ah”, “Oh, yeah. It sounds very reasonable.”

Wei WuXian asked, “What do you think the person would do after they dug out the corpse of Jin GuangYao’s mother?”

Nie HuaiSang, “Wei-xiong, why do you keep on asking me? No matter how much you ask, I don’t know anything.” With a pause, he continued, “But...” Slowly, Nie HuaiSang brushed together his storm-drenched hair, “I think that if this person hates Jin GuangYao so much, they’d probably be entirely merciless towards something he cherishes more than his life.”

Wei WuXian, “Like cutting apart his corpse and keeping his limbs at different places, like what happened to ChiFeng-Zun?”

Nie HuaiSang jumped, stumbling backwards, “Th-Th-That’s... That’s a bit too much, isn’t it...”

Wei WuXian stared at him for a while before finally averting his gaze. Conjectures were conjectures, after all. Nobody had evidence.

Perhaps the confusion and helplessness on Nie HuaiSang’s face right now was all pretense. He didn’t want to admit that he used others as pawns, treating human lives as nothing. Perhaps this wasn’t the entirety of his plan. He had to hide his true colors to do more things, reach higher goals. Or, perhaps it wasn’t at all so complicated. There was someone else who sent the letter, killed

the cats, and pieced together Nie MingJue’s head and body. Perhaps Nie HuaiSang was a complete, authentic good-for-nothing.

Maybe the last words Jin GuangYao said was a last-minute lie after his intention of attack was seen through by Nie HuaiSang, so that Lan XiChen’s thoughts would be disrupted while Jin GuangYao dragged them towards the same death. After all, Jin GuangYao was a big liar with countless past offenses. It wouldn’t be strange no matter when he lied or what he lied about.

As for why he changed his mind at the last moment, and pushed Lan XiChen out of the way, who could know just what exactly he was thinking?

Veins suddenly lined the back of the hand in which Lan XiChen placed on his forehead. His voice sounded muffled, “... Just what does he want to do? I once thought I knew him well, and then I realized I did not. Before tonight, I thought I knew him well once more, but now I do not.” Nobody could give him an answer. Lan XiChen repeated in frustration, “Just what does he want to do?”

Yet, as even he who was closest to Jin GuangYao didn’t know, it was impossible that others had an answer.

After a while of silence, Wei WuXian spoke, “Let’s stop standing around for nothing. Get a few people to go find assistance. Save a few to stand by here and watch the thing. The coffin and the guqin strings won’t be able to seal ChiFeng-Zun for long.”

As though to verify his judgement, loud noises echoed within the coffin again, along with a nameless fury. Nie HuaiSang shivered. Wei WuXian glanced at him, “You see? You have to switch to a firmer coffin right now, dig a deep ditch, and bury it once more.

You won’t be able to open it in at least a hundred years. If you do, it’s guaranteed it’ll continue to haunt, resulting in endless consequences...”

Before he could finish, a loud, clear bark came from afar.

Wei WuXian’s face changed at once, while Jin Ling managed to gain some energy, “Fairy!”

The thunder had died and the pouring rain had become a sprinkle. The darkest part of the night had already passed. Light could be seen.

Sprinting, the soaking-wet dog flew in like a black wind, throwing itself at Jin Ling. Its round eyes were damp as it stood up on its hind legs, clinging to Jin Ling's lap and whimpering. Wei WuXian watched as its crimson tongue extended from its white, sharp teeth and licked Jin Ling's hand. His face paled and his eyes glazed over. As he opened his lips, he felt that his soul was about to become a wisp of green smoke and fly to the Heavens through his mouth. Quietly, Lan WangJi placed himself in front of him, blocking the line of sight between him and Fairy.

Immediately, hundreds of people surrounded the Guanyin Temple, each looking alarmed with swords unsheathed as though they were ready for a big fight. However, after those who rushed into the temple first saw the scene before their eyes, they all hesitated in surprise. Those lying on the ground were all dead; those who didn't die were half-lying, half-standing. In summary, corpses and general chaos were plastered all over the floor.

Of the two who were at the foremost position, the left was the chief manager of the YunmengJiang Sect, while the left was Lan QiRen. Lan QiRen still had on a face full of shock and doubt.

Before he even opened his mouth to ask, the first thing he saw was Lan WangJi, so close to Wei WuXian that they were practically one person. Within the blink of an eye, he'd forgotten everything he wanted to ask. Rage surged onto his face. Brows knitted together, he huffed and puffed, sending his mustache flying into the air.

The chief manager immediately went forth to help Jiang Cheng up, "Sect Leader, are you alright..."

While Lan QiRen raised his sword and shouted, "Wei..."

Before he even finished a few white-clothed figures rushed out from behind his back, all of them shouting, "HanGuang-Jun!"

"Senior Wei!" "Senior Patriarch!"

The last boy bumped into Lan QiRen so hard he almost tipped over. He fumed, "No running! No making clamor!"

Apart from Lan WangJi, who turned to him and called, "Uncle", nobody paid him any attention. Lan SiZhui grabbed Lan WangJi's sleeve with his left hand and Wei WuXian's arm with his right, beaming, "This is great!

HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei, what a relief that both of you are fine. With how anxious Fairy was, we thought you came into something truly difficult."

Lan JingYi, "SiZhui, really? How could there be a situation HanGuang-Jun cannot deal with? Told you you were worrying too much."

"JingYi, were you not the one who was worried the entire way here?"

"Go away! Stop speaking nonsense."

Lan SiZhui saw Wen Ning, who was finally able to get up from the ground, out of the corner of his eye. He immediately dragged him over as well and stuffed him into the circle of boys, who explained what had happened, all chirping at once.

After Fairy bit Su She, it sprinted all the way towards a dependent sect of the YunmengJiang Sect's that was located around this town, barking unstoppably at its door. As the young sect leader saw the special collar at its neck, including a golden sign and a crest, he knew that this spiritual dog was probably of important background. With blood all over its body, it was clear that it had been in battle, with its owner having likely come across danger.

Afraid of mishandling this, he immediately mounted his sword and brought it to Lotus Pier to notify the real sect presiding over the area, the YunmengJiang Sect. The chief manager at once recognized that this was the spiritual dog, Fairy of Young Master Jin Ling, and sent assistance immediately.

At the time, the GusuLan Sect was also about to leave Lotus Pier. Lan QiRen, however, was stopped by Fairy. It hopped up, tore off a thin white fabric from the hem of Lan SiZhui's robe, and used his paws to shove it onto its head, as if it wanted to make the

white cloth into a circle around its forehead. It then lay on the ground and pretended to be dead. Lan QiRen had no idea what was happening, but Lan SiZhui had a moment of epiphany, "Mr. Lan, does it not seem like it is imitating the forehead ribbon of our sect? Does it want to tell us that either HanGuang-Jun or someone from the Lan Sect is also in danger?"

And so, the YunmengJiang Sect, the GusuLan Sect, and a few other sects that hadn't left yet finally gathered everyone and came to assist them together.

Lan JingYi clicked his tongue, "We keep on calling it „Fairy“ this, „Fairy“ that, but who would have known it really is a spiritual dog!"

But no matter how spiritual, how magical it was, it was still a dog, the scariest creature in this world, to Wei WuXian. Even with Lan WangJi in front of him, he still shivered from his head to his toes. Ever since the Lan Sect juniors came, Jin Ling kept on sneaking glances at them, watching how they surrounded Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi in chatter.

Seeing Wei WuXian's complexion grow even paler, he slapped Fairy's butt and whispered, "Fairy, you go outside first." Fairy shook his head and his tail, continuing to lick him. Jin Ling scolded, "Get out. Not listening to me anymore?"

Fairy gave him a pitiful state and jogged out of the temple, tail wagging. Wei WuXian could finally let out a sigh of relief. Jin Ling wanted to go over, but he felt somewhat embarrassed. Just as he was hesitating, Lan SiZhui suddenly saw what was at Wei WuXian's waist. He paused for a moment, "... Senior Wei?"

Wei WuXian, "Hm? What?"

Lan SiZhui seemed to be in a trance, "Could... Could you let me take a look at your flute?"

Wei WuXian took it off, "What about the flute?"

Lan SiZhui received the flute with both hands and frowned a bit, some confusion on his face. Lan WangJi looked at him, while Wei WuXian looked at Lan WangJi, "What's wrong with your SiZhui?

He likes my flute?"

Lan JingYi exclaimed, "What? You finally lost that bad, out-of-tune flute of yours? This new one seems quite good!"

But he didn't know that this new, „quite good“ flute was the spiritual tool he'd always wanted to take a look at—the legendary ghost flute „Chenqing“. He only beamed in his heart, Great! Now at least he will not lose face for HanGuang-Jun when he plays a duet with HanGuang-Jun. Heavens! The flute he had was ugly to both the eye and the ear!

Lan WangJi, "SiZhui."

Lan SiZhui finally snapped out of it. He gave Chenqing back to Wei WuXian with both hands again, "Senior Wei."

Wei WuXian took the flute. Remembering that Jiang Cheng was the one who brought it, he turned over there and commented casually, "Thanks." He waved Chenqing, "I'll... be keeping this?"

Jiang Cheng glanced at him, "It was yours in the first place."

After a moment of hesitation, his lips moved slightly, as though he wanted to say something else. However, Wei WuXian had already turned to Lan WangJi. Seeing this, Jiang Cheng remained silent.

Of the people here, some were cleaning up the scene, some were solidifying the seal on the coffin, some were thinking about how to move it safely, and some were feeling angry. Lan QiRen raged, "XiChen, what in the world is wrong with you?!"

As his hand pressed the corner of his forehead, Lan XiChen's face was full of an unspeakable grief. He seemed tired, "... Uncle, I am begging you. Ask no further. Really. Right now, I really wish to say nothing."

Lan QiRen had never seen Lan XiChen, a child he single-handedly brought up, look so agitated and discomposed. He looked at him, then looked at Lan WangJi, surrounded by disciples alongside Wei WuXian, and felt more irritated the more he looked. He felt that of these two of

his proudest disciples who had been absolutely perfect, neither listened to him anymore and both gave him much worry.

The coffin that sealed away Nie MingJue and Jin GuangYao was not only abnormally heavy, but also required careful treatment.

Thus, a few sect leaders were the ones who volunteered to handle it. As one sect leader saw the features of the Guanyin statue, he first paused in surprise, then pointed at it for others to see as though he found something new and interesting, "Look at its face! Doesn't it look like Jin GuangYao?"

Everyone mused after they looked, "It's his face indeed! Why would Jin GuangYao make such a thing?"

Sect Leader Yao, "To declare himself a god with wild arrogance, of course."

"Arrogant indeed, then, hahaha."

Wei WuXian thought to himself, No, not necessarily.

Jin GuangYao's mother was seen as the lowest prostitutes, so he decided to carve a Guanyin statue with his mother's appearance, receiving the worship of tens of thousands.

But there was no use in saying all that. Nobody knew with more clarity than Wei WuXian that nobody would care and nobody would believe him. Anything related to Jin GuangYao would be given the most malicious conjectures and passed through the mouths of the crowd. Soon, this coffin would be sealed within a larger, firmer coffin. It'd be secured with seventy-two mahogany nails and buried deep underground, sealed under some mountain with stone tablets of warning. And the things sealed inside would never see light again, under heavy barriers and endless scorn.

Nie HuaiSang leaned against the wall beside the door, watching a few sect leaders carry the coffin across the Guanyin Temple's threshold. He looked down and dusted the dirty mud at the lower hem of his clothes. As if he saw something, he paused. Wei WuXian looked over as well. What had fallen to the ground was Jin GuangYao's cap.

Nie HuaiSang bent down and picked it up. Only afterwards did he begin to saunter outside.

Fairy was waiting anxiously outside for his master, barking a couple of times. Hearing the barks, Jin Ling suddenly remembered that when Fairy was still a clumsy little puppy that couldn't even reach his knees, Jin GuangYao was the one who brought it over.

Back then, he was only a few years old. He fought with the other children of Koi Tower, and didn't feel satisfied even after he won,

smashing everything in his room as he bawled his eyes out. None of the maids and servants dared approach him, afraid to be hit.

Grinning, the younger uncle of his snuck inside to ask, "A-Ling, what's wrong?" He immediately smashed half a dozen vases beside Jin GuangYao's feet. Jin GuangYao, "Uh-oh, how fierce. I'm so scared." He shook his head as he left, pretending to be scared.

The second day, Jin Ling refused to go outside or eat anything as he sulked. Jin GuangYao walked around right outside his room.

With his back against the door, Jin Ling shouted to be left alone, and suddenly the bark of a puppy came from outside the door.

He opened the door. Half-squatting, Jin GuangYao had in his arms a glistening-black puppy with round, wide eyes. He looked up and smiled, "I found this little thing but I don't know what to call it. A-Ling, do you want to give it a name?"

The smile was so kind, so genuine that Jin Ling couldn't believe Jin GuangYao faked it. All of a sudden, tears fell from his eyes again.

Jin Ling had always thought crying was a sign of weakness, treating such an act with contempt. Yet, apart from a flood of tears, there was no other way to release the pain and anger in his heart.

He didn't know why, but he felt like he couldn't hate or blame anyone. Wei WuXian, Jin GuangYao, Wen Ning—every one of them should be responsible to some extent for the deaths of

his parents, every one of them gave him a reason to loathe them with all he had. But it also seemed like every one of them gave him a reason that made him unable to do so. But if he didn't hate him, whom could he hate? Did he deserve to lose both his parents when he was young? Was he not only able to seek revenge, but also unable to hate someone purely and entirely?

He somehow didn't want to let go. He felt wronged. He'd rather die together with them and end everything.

Watching him cry soundlessly as he stared at the coffin, Sect Leader Yao asked, "Young Master Jin, why are you crying? For Jin GuangYao?"

Seeing that Jin Ling said nothing, Sect Leader Yao spoke in a tone with which seniors often scolded juniors of their sect, "What are you crying for? Hold back your tears. Someone like your uncle doesn't deserve anyone's tears. Young Master, I mean no offense, but you can't be so weak! This is the kindness of the fairer sex. You should know what's right and what's wrong, and straighten up your..."

If this were at the time the leader of LanlingJin Sect was still the Chief Cultivator who led the entire world of cultivation, the sect leaders of other sects would never have had the guts to patronize the Jin Sect's disciples no matter what. Right now, Jin GuangYao had died already. Nobody was able to uphold the LanlingJin Sect. Its name had also been pretty much ruined, and likely it wouldn't be able to rise again in the future, thus some people dared.

Jin Ling had thousands of thoughts and feelings whirling around in his heart in the beginning. Hearing Sect Leader Yao's comments, a fire surged into his heart. He roared, "So what if I want to cry?! Who are you? What are you? Won't leave me alone even for crying?!"

Sect Leader Yao didn't expect to be shouted at either. He was a sect leader that had some fame as well. At once, his face

darkened. Some others comforted him in low voices, "Let it go. Don't bother with children."

He finally retracted the embarrassed anger, snorting coldly, "Of course. Hah, why bother with young brats who know nothing about what's right and what's wrong?"

Lan QiRen watched as the coffin was hauled onto the cart. He turned around and was surprised, "Where is WangJi?"

He'd just been planning to abduct Lan WangJi back to the Cloud Recesses and talk to him for a hundred and twenty days, and perhaps ground him again if it still didn't work. Who knew he disappeared in the blink of an eye. He walked around a bit, raising his voice, "Where is WangJi?!"

Lan JingYi, "Just now I said we brought Lil" Apple and kept it right outside the temple. And HanGuang-Jun, along with... along with... went to greet Lil" Apple."

Lan QiRen, "And then?"

It was needless to say what happened afterwards. Not a sliver of Wei WuXian"s, Lan WangJi"s, and Wen Ning's shadows remained outside the Guanyin temple.

Lan QiRen watched Lan XiChen who followed behind him sluggishly, still absent-minded, and sighed forcefully before he left with a flip of his sleeves.

Lan JingYi looked around, yelling in surprise, "SiZhui? What happened? When did SiZhui disappear too?"

When Jin Ling heard that Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi were gone, he rushed outside, almost tripping on the threshold of the

Guanyin Temple. But no matter how anxious, he was no longer able to find their figures. Fairy giddly ran circles around him, wagging his tongue.

Jiang Cheng stood below a tall, straight tree within the Guanyin Temple. He glanced at him and spoke coldly, "Wipe your face."

Jin Ling rubbed his eyes roughly, wiping his face before running back, "Where are they?"

Jiang Cheng, "Gone."

Jin Ling exclaimed, "You let them go just like that?"

Jiang Cheng mocked, "Or else? Have them stay for dinner? Say thank you and sorry after the meal?"

Jin Ling began to simmer, pointing at him, "No wonder he wanted to go. It's all because of that attitude of yours! Why are you so annoying, Uncle?!"

Hearing this, Jiang Cheng raised his hand with glaring eyes, scolding, "Is this how you talk to someone older than you? You asking to be beaten up?!"

Jin Ling shrunk back. Fairy tucked in its tail as well. Yet Jiang Cheng's slap never landed at the back of his head. Instead, it was retracted powerlessly.

He spoke, irritated, "Shut up. Jin Ling. Shut up. We're going back. Each to their own sect."

Jin Ling paused in surprise. After some hesitation, he shut up obediently. Head hanging, he walked a few steps beside Jiang

Cheng before looking up again, "Uncle, you had something to say, didn't you?"

Jiang Cheng, "What? No."

Jin Ling, "Just now! I saw it. You wanted to say something to Wei WuXian, and then you didn't."

After a moment of silence, Jiang Cheng shook his head, "There's nothing to say."

What could he say?

That, back then, I wasn't caught by the Wen Sect because I wanted to go back to Lotus Pier to retrieve my parents' corpses. That, at the town we passed on our way, when you were buying food, a group of Wen Sect cultivators caught up. That, I discovered them early and left where I sat, hiding at the corner of the street and didn't get caught, but they were patrolling the streets and would soon run into you outside.

That this was why I ran out and distracted them.

But just like how the past Wei WuXian couldn't tell him the truth of giving him his golden core, the current Jiang Cheng wasn't able to say anything either.

# Chapter 111: WangXian —Part One

The sun hadn't risen yet. It was still quiet over the streets. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked together, hearing only the soft taps of the donkey's hooves clicking on the ground.

Sitting on the back of the donkey, Wei WuXian gave its buttocks a few pats. The pouch at its girdle was full and hard, filled with apples that were probably snacks from the Lan Sect's juniors.

Wei WuXian fished out an apple from inside and placed it near his mouth. Staring at Lan WangJi's handsome face from the side, he gave it quite a loud crunch. Watching its apple be shamelessly stolen, Lil" Apple was so furious that it flared its nostrils, slamming its hooves. Wei WuXian had no time to pay attention to it, giving it a few more slaps as he stuffed the unfinished apple into its

mouth, "Lan Zhan, did you know? The one named SiSi seemed to have been a friend of Jin GuangYao's mother's."

Lan WangJi, "I did not."

Wei WuXian didn't know if he should laugh, "I was only making a comment, not that I was really asking you. I saw it back at the Guanyin Temple, in Empathy with the ghoul woman. She looked after Jin GuangYao and his mother quite well."

With a moment of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "Thus, Jin GuangYao let the woman go."

Wei WuXian, "It should be the case. I was afraid ZeWu-Jun would go soft on him again, so I didn't say everything. Even now I still don't we should tell him."

Lan WangJi, "If he should ask in the future, I will let him know." Wei WuXian, "Might as well."

He turned and glanced back, letting out a rare sigh, "I don't want to care about any of those nasty things anymore. This is it."

Lan WangJi nodded and tightened Lil" Apple's reins. He continued to walk with it.

Each could only deal with their own troubles. Even if Lan XiChen was his brother by birth, Lan WangJi couldn't do anything to help him right now. Comfort was useless. It'd all be in vain.

After a pause, Lan WangJi spoke, "Wei Ying." Wei WuXian, "What?"

Lan WangJi, "There is something I have never told you." Wei WuXian somehow felt his heart skip a beat, "What is it?"

Lan WangJi stopped and stared straight at him. Just as he was about to speak, from behind the two of them came a series of rushed footsteps. Wei WuXian, "Goodness, somebody's already caught up with us?"

Somebody had caught up indeed, but it was much better than expected. Lan SiZhui ran over, panting, "H-HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei!"

Wei WuXian propped his arm on the donkey's head, "SiZhui-er, I'm eloping with HanGuang-Jun. Why are you here? Aren't you scared Old Mr. Lan would scold you?"

Lan SiZhui blushed, "Senior Wei, do not be like this. I-I came to ask a very important question!"

Wei WuXian, "What is it?"

Lan SiZhui, "I remembered a few things that I could not confirm, so... so I came to ask HanGuang-Jun and Senior Wei."

Lan WangJi glanced at him before he looked to Wen Ning. Wen Ning nodded. Wei WuXian, "What things?"

Lan SiZhui puffed up his chest and drew in a deep breath. He began, "Claimed he had top-notch cooking skills, yet made dishes that were pungent both to the eye and to the stomach."

Wei WuXian, "Huh???"

Lan SiZhui added, "Buried me in a field of carrots, saying I would grow taller quickly with water and sunlight, and maybe a few more children would sprout and play with me."

Wei WuXian, "..."

Lan SiZhui continued, "Promised to treat HanGuang-Jun to a meal but ran off before paying,

leaving HanGuang-Jun to pay again.”

Wei WuXian widened his eyes. He almost couldn't steady himself on the donkey's back. He stammered, “You... You...”

Lan SiZhui's eyes were glued to Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, “Maybe because I was too young, I cannot remember most of the things from back then. But, I am sure that... my surname used to be Wen.”

Wei WuXian's voice trembled, “Your surname was Wen? Isn't it Lan? Lan SiZhui, Lan Yuan...” He murmured, “Lan Yuan... Wen Yuan?”

Lan SiZhui nodded heavily. His voice was shaking as well, “Senior Wei, I... I am A-Yuan...”

Wei WuXian hadn't yet wrapped his mind around what was going on, still confused, “A-Yuan... Didn't he die? He was left alone on Burial Mound back then...”

Before he finished, Lan XiChen's words echoed beside his ears,

“They say those years were him reflecting on his mistakes, but in reality he was entirely bedridden. Even so, when he knew of your passing away, he still dragged such a body to Burial Mound to

take one last look, no matter what...”

He spun to look at Lan WangJi, “Lan Zhan, was it you?!?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.” He gazed at Wei WuXian, “This was what I never told you.”

For a long time, Wei WuXian couldn't say anything.

At least, Lan SiZhui couldn't hold it any longer. With a loud cry, he leaped up. One hand around Wei WuXian and the other around Lan WangJi, he pulled the two into a tight embrace. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi bumped into each other from the hug. Both of them were surprised.

Lan SiZhui buried his head between their shoulders, “HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei, I... I...”

Hearing his muffled voice, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi exchanged a look, only inches apart. They both saw something soft within each other's eyes.

Wei WuXian fixed his mood and put his hand on Lan SiZhui's back, patting, “Enough, what are you crying for?”

Lan SiZhui, “Not crying... Just... I suddenly feel so frustrated, but so happy as well... I do not know how to describe it...”

After some silence, Lan WangJi laid his hand onto his back as well and patted. Lan WangJi, “There is no need to describe it then.”

Wei WuXian, “That's right.”

Lan SiZhui didn't say anything. He hugged them even tighter.

Soon, Wei WuXian exclaimed, “Hey, hey, hey, why are your arms so strong? Definitely deserving of HanGuang-Jun's teachings...”

Lan WangJi glanced at him, “You taught him as well.” Wei WuXian, “No wonder he grew up so nicely.”

Lan SiZhui, “Senior Wei never taught me anything.”

Wei WuXian, “Who said I didn't? You were just too young back then. You forgot everything I taught you.”

Lan SiZhui, “I did not forget. Now I remember. I think you did teach me.”

Wei WuXian, “Right?”

Lan SiZhui had on a serious face, “You taught me how to disguise pornography as normal books.”

Wei WuXian, “...”

Lan WangJi glanced at Wei WuXian.

Lan SiZhui added, “You also taught me that when pretty maidens walked by...”

Wei WuXian, “Absolute nonsense. Why do you remember these things only? You must be dreaming. How could I teach these two young children?”

Lan SiZhui looked up, “Uncle Ning can testify. He should also have been present when you

taught me these things.”

Wei WuXian, “Testify what? No such things happened.” Wen Ning, “I... I don’t remember anything...”

Lan SiZhui swore, “HanGuang-Jun, every word of mine is true.” Lan WangJi nodded, “I know.” Wei WuXian threw a tantrum atop the donkey, “Ugh, Lan Zhan!” With another thought, he asked, “Speaking of it, how did you remember, SiZhui?”

Lan SiZhui, “I do not understand either. Something just felt really familiar when I saw Chenqing.”

As expected, it was Chenqing. Wei WuXian, “Oh, of course it’d feel familiar. You loved eating Chenqing back then. You always drooled on it and made it so that I couldn’t play it.”

Lan SiZhui’s face flushed red at once, “R-Really...”

Wei WuXian, “Yup, or else why did you remember everything the moment you saw it? You wanna listen to more stories of when you were young?” He made two butterflies with his hands, “HanGuang-Jun, do you remember the time I treated you to a meal, when he held a pair of butterflies and mumbled around, saying „I like you”, „I like you too”...”

Lan SiZhui’s face grew even redder. Wei WuXian added, “Oh right, that time you even called HanGuang-Jun „Dad” in front of everyone’s eyes. Poor HanGuang-Jun. What a pure, wholesome young man he was back then, yet he inexplicably became someone’s dad...”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!” Lan SiZhui yelled, blushing, “HanGuang-Jun, I apologize!”

Lan WangJi looked at the grinning Wei WuXian and shook his head, his eyes gentle.

Wei WuXian spoke again, “Right, Wen Ning, you knew about this?”

Wen Ning nodded. Wei WuXian was shocked, “Then why didn’t you tell me?”

Wen Ning gave Lan WangJi a glance, speaking carefully, “Young Master Lan didn’t say to tell you, so...”

Wei WuXian was infuriated, “Why do you listen to him so much? You’re the Ghost General—why should the Ghost General be afraid of HanGuang-Jun? Doesn’t it make me lose face?”

Lan SiZhui was still shouting, “HanGuang-Jun, I apologize!”

...

The four parted ways in a forest at the edge of Yunping City. Wen Ning, “Young Master, we’ll be going this way.”

Wei WuXian, “Which way?”

Wen Ning, “Didn’t you ask me what I wanted to do when

everything ended? I’ve talked to A-Yuan about it. We’ll be going to Qishan first to bury the ashes of our people. I also wanted to look around there to see if I could find the things from when my sister was still alive, to build her a cenotaph.”

Wei WuXian, “A cenotaph. I built one for you and her back on Burial Mound, but they were burned down. We can go to Qishan too.”

He turned around to ask Lan WangJi, yet Wen Ning answered, “There’s no need.”

Wei WuXian hesitated, “You won’t be going with us?”

Lan SiZhui, “Senior Wei, you should go with HanGuang-Jun.”

Wei WuXian was about to speak again when Wen Ning spoke again, “Really, it’s fine, Young Master Wei. You’ve done enough.”

After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian asked, “Then what about after you’ve done these things?”

Wen Ning, “Send A-Yuan back to the Cloud Recesses, and then I can take some time to think about what to do next. You can let me walk the rest of the way on my own.”

Wei WuXian nodded slowly, “... I might as well.”

It was the first time in all these years that Wen Ning made his own decision and stopped walking the same path he walked. Wei WuXian guessed that perhaps he had something he wanted to do out of his own will.

It was what he hoped all this time. Each to their own path. But now that the day really came,

watching Wen Ning and Lan SiZhui's figures walk slowly, slowly away until they finally disappeared, he felt somewhat dejected.

Lan WangJi was now the only one who stood by his side. Luckily, Lan WangJi was also the only one he wished to have by his side.

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan." Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "You taught him very well."

Lan WangJi, "There will come many instances for you to meet again."

Wei WuXian, "I know."

Lan WangJi, "After Wen Ning sends SiZhui back to the Cloud Recesses, he can settle down nearby. You will be able to see him often."

Wei WuXian looked at him, "Lan Zhan, you're really scared of me telling you „thank you", aren't you? I suddenly remembered. Many of the times we parted ways in my past life, I said „thank you" to you right before. And every time we separated, I worsened the next time we met."

The time they killed Wen Chao and Wen ZhuLiu at the courier station, the time they met each other through the flowers at the

tower in Yunmeng, the time they parted at Yiling's Burial Mound. Every time, he used the word to mark a clear line between him and Lan WangJi, stretching out the distance between them.

With a long while of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "Between you and me, there is no need for „thank you" and „sorry"."

Wei WuXian grinned, "Sure, then let's talk more about some other things, like..."

His voice lowered as he gestured with his hand for Lan WangJi to approach him, as if he was going to whisper something to him.

Lan WangJi approached as expected. Yet, Wei WuXian reached out his right hand, lifted Lan WangJi's chin, and bent down to press his lips onto Lan WangJi's.

Only after a long time did Wei WuXian part the tiniest bit. Eyelashes brushing against each other's, he whispered, "How is it?"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, give me some reaction, won't you?"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Wei WuXian, "You're so cold. Right now, shouldn't you be pinning me onto the ground..."

Before he could finish, Lan WangJi wrapped his hand around his neck. With rough motions, he pressed Wei WuXian's head down, and the two started kissing again.

Lil" Apple was flabbergasted. Even his apple-chewing mouth was left hanging. He was as frozen as donkey statue. Soon, Lil"Apple was no longer able to hold up Wei WuXian. Lan WangJi held his back with his left hand and knees with his right. At once, he carried Wei WuXian off of the donkey.

As he wished, Wei WuXian was pinned onto the ground and smooched for a long while. Suddenly, he exclaimed, "Wait, wait!"

Lan WangJi, "What?"

Wei WuXian squinted, "I suddenly have a feeling..."

Woods, bushes, grass, forceful motions, intertwined tongues. It felt like déjà vu. He thought for a while. It felt more familiar the more he thought about it. He concluded that he had to ask the question, and tried, "The hunt at Phoenix Mountain, the time I covered my eyes, Lan Zhan, you...?"

He didn't finish asking. Lan WangJi didn't answer either, but his fingers twitched slightly. The moment Wei WuXian felt something was off about his expression, he propped his upper body up with

his elbow and pressed his ear onto his chest. As expected, he heard thundering throbs.

"..." Wei WuXian was shocked, "Oh, it was really you!?" Lan WangJi's Adam's Apple bobbed, "I..."

Wei WuXian was astonished, "Lan Zhan, who could've known? You'd do such a thing?"

Lan WangJi, “...”

Wei WuXian, “You know, I’ve always thought some shy girl did it because she had a crush on me and didn’t dare say it.”

Lan WangJi, “...”

Wei WuXian, “You’ve had dirty thoughts about me eversince then?”

“...” Lan WangJi’s voice sounded muffled, “I, back then, knewI was wrong. Very wrong.”

Wei WuXian recalled how Lan WangJi broke a tree in half alone in the woods when he later found him, “That was why you were so mad?”

Wei WuXian thought he was mad about someone else. He had no idea that Lan WangJi was mad at himself—mad that he acted upon his urges, that he couldn’t control himself, that he took advantage of another in a way that was neither righteous nor abiding by his sect rules.

Seeing how low Lan WangJi’s head was buried, almost as ifhe was reflecting upon his mistakes again, Wei WuXian scratched

his chin, “Alright, stop struggling so much. Well, I’m beyondhappy that you kissed me so early. It was my first kiss, after all.

Congratulations, HanGuang-Jun.”

Lan WangJi suddenly looked at him, “First kiss?” Wei WuXian, “Yeah, or else what did you think?”

Lan WangJi stared straight at him. Something strange glowed in his eyes. He started, “Then...”

Wei WuXian, “Then what? Stopping in the middle of the sentence isn’t your style, Lan Zhan.”

Lan WangJi, “Then, back then, why did you... did you...” Wei WuXian was confused, “Why what?”

Lan WangJi’s lips moved, “... Why did you notresist?” Wei WuXian paused.

Lan WangJi’s voice sounded muffled again, “You... clearly did not know whom the person was, so why did you not resist? And

afterward, why did you tell me...” Tell him what?

Wei WuXian finally remembered.

Back when he „ran into” Lan WangJi, he proudly showed off to him, saying things like he had lots of experience, like nobody would’ve dared kiss Lan WangJi and Lan WangJi definitely wouldn’t kiss someone else, even something like how hethought

Lan WangJi would never give anyone his first kiss for the rest of his life...

All of a sudden, he bent over and broke into roaring laughter. Wei WuXian pounded the ground, “Hahahahahahaha...” Lan WangJi, “...”

Laughing, Wei WuXian hugged him and gave him a kiss, “With all that, back then you were really that angry because you thought I’d really kissed someone else, weren’t you? Are you an idiot, Lan

Zhan?! You fucking believed all that nonsense! Only a lil”fuddy- duddy like you would believe me hahahahaha...”

His laughter was too loud, too unbridled. Finally, out of patience, Lan WangJi pressed him onto the ground. Abandoning Lil”Apple on the spot, the two rolled behind a shrub.

So soon after the storm, a few droplets of water still hung amid the grass, dampening Lan WangJi’s white robes. Regardless, the robes were stripped off by Wei WuXian right away. He breathed, “Don’t move.”

The fresh scent of grass enveloped Wei WuXian’s neck and perfused within his lips, while on Lan WangJi, it was the cold fragrance of sandalwood. Wei WuXian kneeled between Lan WangJi’s legs and proceeded to kiss downward, starting from his forehead. In between his brows, the tip of his nose, both of his cheeks, his lips, his chin. His Adam’s apple, his collarbones, the center of his chest.

He kissed down the rises and falls, seeming ever so devout.

As he kissed the firm abdomen and ventured down, a few thin strands of hair slid off his shoulders and teased at the dangerous area along with his soft, thin breaths. Lan WangJi

seemed like he couldn't take it any longer. He reached to grab Wei WuXian's shoulder, but Wei WuXian caught his wrist instead, "Don't move, I told you already. I'll do it."

He pulled off his hair tie to refasten his somewhat disheveled hair before bending down again. Lan WangJi realized what he wanted to do. With a slightly unsettled expression, he lowered his voice, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Yes." He gently took Lan WangJi into his lips.

Making sure to not bite Lan WangJi with his teeth, he carefully wrapped him inside his mouth. As he tried to swallow as deeply as possible, he felt a bit strained with it rubbing against his throat. Lan WangJi noticed his discomfort at once and reached out to push him away, worried that he was forcing himself, "Enough."

Wei WuXian moved his hand away and started to slowly suck on it.

Lan WangJi, "You..."

Soon he was no longer able to say anything.

The number of pornographic collections that Wei WuXian had read ever since he was young could add up to fill a whole room in the GusuLan Sect's Library Pavilion. As he was also quite a clever person, he used his lips and tongue according to what he'd seen and learned, diligently attending to the burning erection.

With the most sensitive part of his body held inside warm, moist lips and treated with such effort, it was terribly tormenting just for

Lan WangJi to control himself from doing some awful act of violence.

Wei WuXian felt Lan WangJi's breaths become faster. The fingers that gripped his shoulders tightened as well. Speeding up, just as his cheeks and his neck were starting to feel sore, he finally felt a warm stream pour into his throat.

The fluid was thick and steaming, full of the strong odor of musk. As it suddenly hit the walls of his throat, Wei WuXian choked on it and immediately let the shaft out of his mouth. Lan WangJi patted on his back as he coughed, speaking in a surprisingly discomposed manner, "Spit it out, quick. Spit it out."

Wei WuXian covered his mouth with his hand and shook his head. A while later, he took his hand away and stuck out his tongue toward Lan WangJi, showing him the inside of his mouth, "I swallowed it."

The tip of his tongue was a bright red while his lips crimson, corners brimming with a speck of white and many traces of a smile. Lan WangJi stared at him blankly, unable to produce any words.

He was one of the most disciplined cultivators, yet at the moment, his usually cold composure was completely crushed. Even the tips of his eyes and brows were tinted a soft shade of pink. With a few touches of color added, it made him seem as if he'd been bullied in some cruel way. Seeing his appearance, Wei WuXian was more than delighted. Stripped to the waist, he put his arms around Lan WangJi's shoulders, kissing the corners of his lips and the lids of his eyes, "Good boy, don't be scared. Next time, when it's your turn to taste mine, you'll need to perform as good as this, understood?"

His lips were stained with Lan WangJi's ejaculation. After the kiss, it dotted the corner of Lan WangJi's lips as well. On top of his somewhat glazed expression, he seemed quite pitiful. Wei WuXian kissed him again, "Lan Zhan, I love you so much."

Lan WangJi turned to him slowly.

Wei WuXian didn't know if it was an illusion or not, but there seemed to be a layer of red over his eyes.

Wei WuXian didn't notice the forced, almost insufferable endurance in his gaze. He thought he hadn't had enough yet, adding, "Let's forever be like this from now on, yeah?"

Suddenly, Lan WangJi flipped him over and forced him down onto the grass.

In the instant, the two switched positions. As he felt Lan WangJi begin to bite all over his body, Wei WuXian pushed his head away with a grin, "There's no need to hurry so much. I said next

time you can..." With a sudden throb from below, he exclaimed with an „ah", frowning slightly, "Lan Zhan, what did you put inside?"

He could tell that it was someone's slim finger, only asking out of convenience. Involuntarily, he drew his legs together, but the foreign sensation felt even stronger. The second finger went in as well.

Wei WuXian had viewed quite the selection of pornography, but he hadn't seen any on the topic of homosexuality. He never thought he had such interests or was curious about it, and thus he naturally thought that was all there was to the love-making between men—kissing, hugging, at most with hands or lips. As he was pressed onto the ground by Lan WangJi, being massaged finger by finger, he finally managed to realize that it wasn't the case. On top of the slight pain, he found it somewhat surprising and perhaps funny as well. But at the addition of the third finger, Wei WuXian couldn't laugh any longer.

He was already feeling quite sore and uncomfortable, yet the three fingers were still quite a few sizes smaller than what he'd been swallowing. He interrupted, "Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, uh, s-stop for a bit. Is it really alright like this? You sure you didn't get it wrong? It's here? I think it's a bit..."

But it seemed like Lan WangJi was no longer able to listen to Wei WuXian's words, curtly muffling Wei WuXian's mouth with his own. Sinking down, he thrust inside.

Wei WuXian widened his eyes. His legs sprang up. The two-lay flesh against flesh, their hearts and their breaths racing.

Lan WangJi's voice was hoarse, "... Sorry... I could nothold back."

Seeing his blood-shot eyes, clearly from holding himself back, Wei WuXian knew that it was all because of his teasing. He clenched his teeth, "Don't hold back if you can't... Then what should I do now?"

Only out of desperation did Wei WuXian ask him of all people. Lan Wangji, "... Relax."

Wei WuXian murmured, "Okay, relax, relax..."

He relaxed a bit, and Lan WangJi tried to push inside some more. Immediately, Wei WuXian couldn't help but tense the muscles around his hips and abdomen.

Lan WangJi, "... Does it hurt?"

Arms clinging to him, Wei WuXian couldn't help from shivering, holding back tears, "Yes, it's my first time—of course it hurts."

With this, he felt Lan WangJi grow harder within his body.

One could easily imagine what it'd feel like when the soft, fragile insides were forcefully invaded by a hard, foreign object. But the moment he thought of how Lan WangJi reacted to just those simple words of his, Wei WuXian burst out with a laugh again.

As a man, he knew how uncomfortable Lan WangJi felt right now, stuck inside yet still constraining himself from forcing his way in.

Wei WuXian felt his heart go soft. He took the initiative to draw his neck forwards, whispering by his ear, "Lan Zhan, my good Lan Zhan, Er-gege, I'll tell you what to do. Kiss me right now. It won't hurt if you kiss me..."

A bright red flushed Lan WangJi's fair earlobes.

He spoke through much difficulty, "... S-Stop calling me like that."

Hearing that he even stammered a bit, Wei WuXian broke into laughter, "You don't like it? Then I'll call you something else.

WangJi-didi\*, Zhan-er, HanGuang, which one do you... Ahhhnmff!"

TN: Younger brother.

Biting his lips, Lan WangJi sent it all the way inside.

All of Wei WuXian's cry was sealed within his throat as he clutched tight onto Lan WangJi's shoulders, brows knitted, tears seeping from his eyes. His legs wrapped stiffly around Lan

WangJi's waist, afraid to move. Mind finally clearing up a bit, Lan WangJi breathed in a few

times, "Sorry."

Wei WuXian shook his head, forcing a smile, "You said before. Between you and me, there's no need for this."

Carefully, Lan WangJi went to kiss him, his movements somewhat clumsy. Wei WuXian closed his eyes, opening his mouth to let him in deep. After a while of tongues twirling around, out of the blur he saw the brand mark below Lan WangJi's collarbone.

He put his hand there, covering up the scar. His smile had mostly faded, "Lan Zhan, tell me. Is this related to me as well?"

With a moment of silence, Lan WangJi responded, "Nothing. I was drunk."

After he brought Wei WuXian back to Burial Hill after the massacre at Nightless City, what awaited him was three years of confinement. Yet in those days, he heard the news that what went around always came around, that one's deeds would be paid no matter what—that the YiLing Patriarch finally died, both body and soul.

His confinement hadn't ended yet when he forced his way out of the Cloud Recesses and towards Yiling with that still-wounded body of his. He searched for many days atop the entire mountain. Apart from Wen Yuan, whom he fished out still from a half-burned tree hole, still unconscious due to a high fever, he could find nothing. Not even a piece of bone, a scrap of flesh, a single strand of a weak, dissipating soul.

On the way back to the GusuLan Sect, Lan WangJi bought a jar of „Emperor's Smile" from Caiyi Town.

The wine was fragrant. And mellow. It was clearly not of the pungent kind, yet his throat burned the moment it went down, on fire from his eyes all the way to his heart.

He didn't like the taste, but he felt he understood why that person liked it.

That night was the first time Lan WangJi ever drank, as well as the first time he was inebriated. He had no memories of what he did when he was drunk. For a long time, all of the Lan Sect's people, no matter disciple or cultivator, held disbelief in their eyes when they looked at him. Some said that night he broke through the storage room of the Cloud Recesses, ransacking the chests in search of who-knew-what. When Lan XiChen asked, he said he wanted a flute, his eyes lost.

Lan XiChen gave him the finest flute made of white jade, yet he threw it away in fury, saying this wasn't the one he wanted. He couldn't find it no matter what, when all of a sudden, he saw the iron rods that had been sealed away after being confiscated from the QishanWen Sect.

After he sobered up, a scar the same as the brand mark Wei WuXian received in the cave of the Xuanwu of Slaughter appeared over his chest as well.

Lan QiRen seemed both upset and angered, but he never ended up scolding him for it.

No matter reproach or punishment, he'd had more than enough.

With a sigh, he no longer opposed Lan WangJi's decision to keep Wen Yuan. Lan WangJi saluted him and went to receive his punishment, kneeling in silence at the Cloud Recesses for a day and a night.

He drank the wine he drank, suffered the wounds he suffered.

Until now, it'd been thirteen years since scab grew overthis wound.

Lan WangJi began to thrust, while Wei WuXian shut his eyes tightly, gasping to fix his breaths to Lan WangJi's motions. When he was just getting used to the overwhelming object, Wei WuXian moved his hips involuntarily and a sudden bout of pleasure ripple from down below, crawling across his whole body through his spine.

Wei WuXian immediately discovered how to enjoy such a position. He buried his hands inside Lan WangJi's sweat-

drenched hair, lifting the forehead ribbon as he grinned, his voice velvet, "... Does it feel good? Inside of me?"

Lan WangJi bit down on his lower lip, answering question with even fiercer thrusts.

Wei WuXian was fucked so hard sweat dripped down his back, glistening from top to bottom.

Gasping, he rambled on, “Lan Zhan... You’re doomed. We’re still missing the last prostrate of the three. We haven’t even married yet. To do such a thing before we’re married—you know what it’s called? If your uncle knew he’d drown you in a pig cage\*.”

\*TN: An Ancient Chinese torture method often used to punish people for sexual promiscuity. The person/people is put inside a cage made for pigs then sunken underwater, either just with the head above the water to keep them alive or drown them entirely. More often than not used as an idiom to warn people against such acts.

Lan WangJi almost glowered as he forced a response, “... I have long since been so.”

What followed was another deep plunge. Wei WuXian threw his head back in both pain and pleasure, exposing his defenseless throat. Lan WangJi bit down on it.

The almost too intense pleasure made Wei WuXian’s mind go blank for a short while. Amid the haze, his first thought was, ... Can’t believe it. Why the fuck didn’t I do this with Lan Zhan back when I was fifteen? I’ve really pissed away all my days, haven’t I?

During such activities, Lan WangJi was definitely the „doer”—more action than talk and flirtation. After some daze, Wei WuXian regained his composure and began to ramble on about the dirtiest things, right beside Lan WangJi’s ear, “Second Young Master Lan, when did you start having feelings for me? If you liked me since such a long time ago, why didn’t you take me sooner? The back mountains of your Cloud Recesses would be quite a good location, wouldn’t it? When I snuck out to fool around alone, you should’ve tied me up and dragged me away, pinned me onto the grass like right now to do whatever you want to me... Ah... Go softer. It’s my first time. Be nicer to me...”

“Where was I? Let’s continue. You’re so strong, so I couldn’t have resisted. If I screamed, you could’ve silenced me. Or your Library Pavilion also would’ve been a great place, right in the middle of the scriptures scattered on the ground. We could’ve bought a few cut-sleeve booklets to compare and learn, any position at all... Brother! Brother! Er-gege! Spare me, spare me please. Fine, fine, I’ll stop talking. You’re too much, you’re way too much. I can’t take it, I really can’t, so don’t...”

Lan WangJi couldn’t take his teasing at all. With the thrusts, Wei WuXian felt like everything inside him had been stirred together.

He begged nicely, yet Lan WangJi went even harder. Having been held down for almost an hour without changing positions at all, Wei WuXian’s back and buttocks had been slammed numb. After the numbness came pain and itch, almost as though millions of ants crawled within his bone marrow.

Now that he finally had a taste of the seed he’d sown, Wei WuXian pleased him with kisses and rambled on, lacking all pride, “Er-gege, do me a favor and spare me a last breath. We’ve got so much time on our hands. Let’s continue next time, let’s continue with you hanging me up, yeah? Spare this virgin today, won’t you? HanGuang-Jun is too strong and the YiLing Patriarch has lost miserably. They shall fight again next time!”

Veins stood out from Lan WangJi’s forehead as he spoke with difficulty, a word at a time, “... If you truly want to stop... then... shut your mouth and stop talking...”

Wei WuXian, “But I’ve got a mouth and mouths do nothing but talk! Lan Zhan, when I said I wanted to sleep with you every day, can you pretend like you didn’t hear it?”

Lan WangJi, “No.” Wei WuXian felt his heart shatter, “How could you do this? You’ve never turned me down before.” Lan WangJi offered him a faint smile, “No.”

Seeing the smile, Wei WuXian’s eyes lit up again, so ecstatic that he almost forgot where he was. But the next second, Wei WuXian was forced to cry from the fierce motions providing stark contrast to the smile that was like sunlight on snow. He gripped the grass with both hands, shouting hoarsely, “Then four days, how about once every four days? If not four days then three works too!” At last, Lan WangJi concluded with resonating determination, “Everyday means everyday.”

## Chapter 112: WangXian —Part Two

Three months later, at Guangling.

Over a mountain, a crowd of villagers holding torches and farm tools as weapons slowly surrounded a patch of woods on the mountain.

There was a nameless graveyard atop the mountain, which hadn't been peaceful for the past few months. Having been continuously haunted by ghosts, the villagers down the mountain couldn't take it any longer and asked a few cultivators who were passing by to go up the mountain together and destroy the root of the hauntings.

As dusk fell, the chirps of insects grew even clearer. Rustles now and then came from within the waist-high grass, as though some unknown creature lurked within, ready to attack. But when one parted the grass nervously, casting the torch light on it, it'd prove to be another false alarm. Holding swords, the cultivators led the villagers carefully across the grass and into the woods.

Right inside the forest was the graveyard. The tombstones made of either stone or wood were partly falling and partly fallen. Dark, gloomy winds blew across the scene. Exchanging a look, the cultivators took out their talismans and prepared to start exorcising the spirits. Seeing their calm composure, a few of the villagers let out a sigh of relief, inferring that the situation shouldn't be too difficult.

But before they were relieved for long, they heard a loud slam. A badly mutilated corpse crashed into a pile of dirt before them.

The villager closest to the pile of dirt shrieked, throwing his torch as he scrambled away. Immediately after, a second, a third, and a fourth bloody corpse had landed as well. Almost as if raining down from the sky, the corpses fell to the ground ceaselessly.

Screams at once echoed throughout the woods. The cultivators had never seen such a situation before, but they remained unafraid despite the shock. The leader shouted, "Don't run! Don't panic! It's only a few small ghosts..."

Before he finished, as though his neck had been strangled, his voice was cut off.

He saw a tree.

A person sat on the tree, dangling a slice of his black robes. A slim, black boot swung lightly back and forth, in a relaxed, almost amused way.

Beside the person's waist was a dark, gleaming flute, and below the flute hung a blood-red tassel, swishing slowly alongside his leg.

The cultivators' expressions changed at once.

The villagers had originally been losing their minds. With the shout, just as they felt somewhat soothed, they saw the pale-faced cultivators and bolted at once, rushing out of the woods and down the mountain like a gust of wind. They abandoned the cultivators with the assumption that there must be some terrible creature atop the mountain that these cultivators couldn't even manage. Within the blink of an eye, they scattered like a crowd of frightened animals. One of the villagers ran a bit slower, falling

behind as he tripped on the ground, eating a mouthful of mud. He thought he was dead for sure, having ended up alone, but he suddenly saw a young man in white stand before him. His eyes immediately lit up.

Hanging a sword at his waist, the man seemed like he was enveloped in a hazy light, almost heavenly amid the dark forest. He didn't seem like the average person. The villager hurried to call for help, "Young Master! Young Master! Help me, there's a ghost! H-H-Hurry and..."

Before he finished, another corpse landed in front of him. The bleeding features stared straight into his eyes.

Just as the villager was about to pass out from fear, the man said one word to him, "Go."

It was only a single word, but the villager felt an inexplicable sense of ease, almost as though he was saved from death. Strength suddenly gushed back into his body as he crawled up and fled

without looking back.

The man in white glanced at the corpses crawling in the woods, as if he didn't know what to think of it. He looked up. The black- clothed person who'd been sitting atop the tree hopped off as well, instantly darting beside him and pinning him onto a tree. He whispered, "Huh, isn't this the pure and noble HanGuang-Jun, Lan WangJi? What brings you to this territory?"

Surrounded by corpses creeping on the ground, either cruel or confused or committed, the person propped one hand on the tree trunk. Lan WangJi was stuck in the space between his arm and the tree, expressionless.

The person continued, "Since you're making such a nice little home delivery, I'll... Hey, hey, hey!" With a single hand, Lan WangJi had locked both his wrists.

The tables turned. The one in black exclaimed, having been overpowered, "Good Heavens, HanGuang-Jun, you're too powerful. I can't believe it—this is shocking, this is unthinkable! You conquered me with only one hand and I can't resist at all! What a scary man!"

Lan WangJi, "..."

His hands involuntarily tightened, and the other's surprise turned into terror, "Ow, it's so painful. Let me go, HanGuang-Jun. I won't dare do such a thing ever again. Don't seize me like this, and please don't tie me up, or force me onto the ground..."

Watching his words and actions become even more exaggerated, Lan WangJi's eyebrow twitched. He finally interrupted him, "... Stop fooling around."

Wei WuXian was right in the middle of his plea, surprised, "Why? I haven't finished begging for mercy yet."

"..." Lan WangJi, "You beg for mercy every day. Stop fooling around."

Wei WuXian drew nearer toward him, whispering, "Isn't it what you wanted... Everyday means everyday."

His face was so close it seemed like he was going to kiss Lan WangJi, yet he refused to make direct contact. Their lips were near yet apart, separated by a mere paper's width, as if an amorous but stubborn butterfly flitted around a prim petal, denying it a kiss. With the tease, Lan WangJi's light eyes flickered. He moved slightly, as though he couldn't hold back any longer and the petal was finally going to touch the butterfly's wings out of its own will. Yet, Wei WuXian lifted his face all at once and dodged his lips.

He raised a brow, "Call me Gege." Lan WangJi, "..."

Wei WuXian, "Call me Gege. I'll let you kiss me if you do." "..." Lan WangJi's lips fluttered.

He'd never used this soft, saccharine honorific to call anyone. Even when talking to Lan XiChen, he'd always used the proper

„Brother“\*. Wei WuXian coaxed, "Just let me hear you say it. I've said it to you so many times. We can do other things after we kiss, if you say it."

\*TN: Gege and Xiongzhang—what LWJ uses—both mean Brother, although Gege is cuter and Xiongzhang is more formal.

Even if Lan WangJi was almost going to say it, after this, he was still defeated by Wei WuXian and couldn't open his mouth. After a long while, the only thing that came out was, "... Shameless!"

Wei WuXian, "Aren't you tired of holding me with one hand? It's so inconvenient doing everything with just one hand left."

Regaining his composure, Lan WangJi asked in quite a polite manner, "Then what should I do?"

Wei WuXian, "Let me teach you. Wouldn't it be convenient if you take off your forehead ribbon and tie my hands up?"

Lan WangJi looked quietly at the grinning face. He slowly took off his forehead ribbon and spread it out for Wei WuXian to see.

And then, as swift as lightning, he tied a knot around the wrists and firmly positioned Wei WuXian's troublemaking hands over his head before sinking into his neck. Right at this point, a shriek came from within the grass.

The two parted at once. Lan WangJi put his hand on Bichen's handle, but he didn't unsheathe it rashly, for the shriek just now was crisp and dainty, clearly that of a child. It'd be awful if they accidentally hurt an ordinary person. The waist-high grass rustled and the ripples of movement went farther and farther. It seemed like they snuck away. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi followed for a few strides before a woman's ecstatic voice came from below the hill, "MianMian, are you alright? How could you run around somewhere like this? Mommy was scared to death!"

Wei WuXian paused, "MianMian?"

He felt like the name sounded familiar. He had to have heard it somewhere before. A man's voice scolded, "Told you not to run around on night-hunts, and you still rushed out all on your own. What should your mom and I do if you were eaten by a ghost?! ... MianMian? What's wrong? Why is she like this?" The last sentence was likely directed at the woman, "QingYang, come take a look. Did something happen to MianMian? Why is she like this? Did she see something that shouldn't be seen up there?"

... She indeed saw something... that shouldn't be seen...

Lan WangJi glanced at Wei WuXian, who returned the look with an innocent face, mouthing, "What a sin."

He clearly felt no guilt about having tarnished a child's eyes. Lan WangJi shook his head. The two of them left the graveyard together and walked downhill. The three below looked at them with both shock and caution. The man and woman were husband and wife, both squatting on the ground, while standing in the middle was a young girl around ten years old, wearing looped pigtails. The woman was a young mother with fair features, wearing a sword at her waist. The moment she saw Wei WuXian, she unsheathed her sword, pointing it at him as she yelled, "Who is it?!"

Wei WuXian, "No matter who I am, I'm a person after all, andnot something else."

The woman wanted to speak again, but she saw Lan WangJi standing behind Wei WuXian. She immediately hesitated, "HanGuang-Jun?"

Lan WangJi wasn't wearing his forehead ribbon, so for an instant she couldn't be sure. If not for just how unforgettable his face was, she might've hesitated just a bit longer. She turned hereyes back to Wei WuXian, a bit dazed, "T-Then you're-you're..."

It was long since the news that the YiLing Patriarch returned to the living spread across the world. Whomever stood beside Lan WangJi right now had to be him, so he didn't feel strange that he was recognized. Seeing that she seemed somewhat excited, along with the familiar face, Wei WuXian thought, Perhaps the madam knows me? Have I wronged her? Have I upset her? No, I never knew a maiden called QingYang... Ah, MianMian!

Wei WuXian realized, "You're MianMian?"

The man stared, "Why are you calling my daughter's name?"

So, it turned out that the little girl who ran around and accidentally saw them was MianMian's daughter. Her name was MianMian as well. Wei WuXian found it quite amusing, There's a big MianMian and a small MianMian.

Lan WangJi nodded in salutation to the woman, "Maiden Luo."

The woman brushed the somewhat disheveled hair by her cheek behind her ear, returning the salute, "HanGuang-Jun." She then looked to Wei WuXian, "Young Master Wei."

Wei WuXian grinned at the woman, "Maiden Luo. Oh, now I know what your name is."

Luo QingYang smiled shyly, like she suddenly recalled some old, embarrassing stories. She pulled the man up, "This is my husband."

Noticing that they held no malicious intent, the man softened visibly. After some chatter, Wei WuXian asked out of convenience, "Which sect do you belong to and which kind of cultivation do you practice?"

The man answered frankly, "None of them."

Luo QingYang gazed at her husband, smiling, "My husband isn't of the cultivating world. He used to be a merchant. But, he's willing to go night-hunting with me..."

It was both rare and admirable that an ordinary person, and a man at that, would be willing to give up his originally stable life and dare travel the world with his wife, unafraid of danger and wander. Wei WuXian couldn't help feeling respect for him.

He asked, "Did you come here to night-hunt as well?"

Luo QingYang nodded, "Yes. I heard spirits are haunting a nameless graveyard on this mountain, disturbing the lives of the people here, so I came to see if there's any way I could help. Have you two cleaned it up already?"

If Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi had already dealt with it, further intervening would be needless. Yet, Wei WuXian said, "You were fooled by the villagers."

Luo QingYang paused, "How so?"

Wei WuXian, "They told outsiders there were spirit hauntings, but in reality they themselves robbed the graves and messed with the bodies of the dead first, before they were faced with a counterattack from those who were buried."

Luo QingYang's husband sounded confused, "Really? But even if it were a counterattack, they wouldn't have taken so many lives, would they?"

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi exchanged a glance, "This was a lie too. No lives were lost. We looked it up. Only a few villagers who robbed the graves were bedridden for a while after being scared by the ghosts, and another broke his own leg when running away. Apart from these, there were no casualties. All those lives were made up for dramatic purposes."

Luo QingYang's husband, "So this was what happened? That's absolutely shameless!"

Luo QingYang sighed, "Oh, these people..." She seemed as if she remembered something, shaking her head, "They're the same everywhere."

Wei WuXian, "I scared them a bit earlier on. They probably won't be robbing the graves again after this, so of course the spirits won't disturb them either. It's finished."

Luo QingYang, "But if they find other cultivators to forcefully suppress them..."

Wei WuXian grinned, "I've shown my face."

Luo QingYang understood. If the YiLing Patriarch had shown his face, the cultivators would definitely spread the news after they saw him. The others would only think that he'd taken this place as his own territory. Which cultivator would have the guts to come over and provoke him?

Luo QingYang smiled, "So this was the case. When I saw how scared MianMian was, I thought she ran into some spirit. If there was any discourteousness, please don't mind."

Wei WuXian thought, No, no, no, I think we're the more discourteous ones here. Yet on the surface, he spoke in all seriousness, "Of course not, of course not. Please also excuse us for scaring little MianMian."

Luo QingYang's husband picked up his daughter. Sitting on her father's arm, MianMian glared at Wei WuXian with puffed cheeks, clearly mad from the embarrassment but too ashamed to say it.

She wore a light pink dress, with deep black eyes that looked like crystal grapes adorning her sweet, snowy face. Seeing this, Wei WuXian felt a strong urge to go squeeze her cheeks, but as her father was watching, he only pinched her dangling pigtail, grinning with a hand behind his back, "MianMian looks so much like you when you were young, Maiden Luo."

Lan WangJi glanced at him and said nothing. Luo QingYang broke into a smile, "Young Master Wei, don't you feel guilty saying it? Do you really remember what I looked like when I was young?"

The smiling face seemed to overlap with that of the young girl back then who wore the pink gauze robes. Wei WuXian didn't feel the slightest bit of shame, "Of course I do! You weren't so different from right now. Right, how old is she? I should give her some money to ward off evil spirits\*."

\*TN: The folklore of an old couple using money to ward off evil spirits from their child eventually led to the tradition of giving red envelopes of money to children on New Year's Eve.

Luo QingYang immediately declined with her husband, “It’s fine, it’s fine.”

Wei WuXian laughed, “It’s not, it’s not. I’m not the one who’s paying anyways. Haha.”

The couple paused in surprise. Before they knew what was going on, Lan WangJi had already put something into Wei WuXian’s hand. Wei WuXian took the heavy coins from his hand and insisted on giving them to MianMian. Seeing that she couldn’t decline it, Luo QingYang turned to her daughter, “MianMian, go thank HanGuang-Jun and Young Master Wei.”

MianMian, “Thank you, HanGuang-Jun.”

Wei WuXian, “MianMian, I was the one who gave them to you, wasn’t I? Why didn’t you thank me?”

MianMian offered him a furious glare. No matter how much he teased her, she refused to talk to him as she looked down and tugged on a red string hanging around her neck, pulling out a delicate little perfume pouch. With much care, she put the money inside. Soon, the group had gone down the mountain, and Wei WuXian could only say goodbye to them with some regret, continuing on another path alongside Lan WangJi.

After their silhouettes disappeared, Luo QingYang lectured her daughter, “MianMian. You were so impolite. That was someone who saved your mother’s life.”

Her husband was shocked, “Really?! MianMian, you heard her? Look at how impolite you were!” MianMian mumbled, “I... I don’t like him.”

Luo QingYang, “If you really didn’t like him, you would’ve thrown away the money a long time ago.”

MianMian buried her small, ruddy face against her father’s chest, whining, “He did bad things!”

Luo QingYang didn’t know whether to laugh or not. Just as she was about to speak, her husband mused, “QingYang, I heard you mention this HanGuang-Jun before. I remember he was an important person from a prominent sect. Why would he appear at such a small place and hunt such small prey?”

Luo QingYang explained to her husband patiently, “This HanGuang-Jun is different from the other famous cultivators. He always appears wherever the chaos is. As long as there’s a haunting, no matter the level of the night-hunt’s target or if he’d receive credit, he’d always provide assistance.”

Her husband nodded, “What a true cultivator.” He continued to ask, both anxious and confused, “Then what about that Young Master Wei? You said he saved your life, but I don’t think I’ve ever heard you mention such a person? Has your life ever been in danger?!”

Luo QingYang took over MianMian, an unusual gleam in her eyes. She smiled, “That Young Master Wei...”

On the other path, Wei WuXian spoke to Lan WangJi, “Can’t believe the little girl from back then already has a daughter who’s a little girl as well!”

Lan WangJi, “Mn.”

Wei WuXian, “But this isn’t fair. Back then she should’ve seen that you were the one doing bad things to me. Why does she find me more disagreeable?” Before Lan WangJi answered, Wei WuXian spun in a circle and faced Lan WangJi, walking backwards as he continued, “Oh, I know. She definitely likes me in secret. Just like a certain somebody from back then.”

Lan WangJi brushed the nonexistent dust from his sleeve, his voice cool, “Please give me back my forehead ribbon, Wei YuanDao\*.”

\*TN: To those who don’t remember, the poem goes “mian miansi yuan dao”, which translates roughly into “the ceaseless bounds of grass yearn for miles and miles on”. WWX tells her his name is YuanDao, since then it’d mean MianMian yearns for him.

Hearing the unfamiliar name, Wei WuXian only understood after a moment of thought. He clicked his tongue, laughing, “Hey, Second Young Master Lan, you’re drinking vinegar\*, aren’t you?”

\*TN: Drinking vinegar is an idiom for being jealous in Chinese. It's just a really accurate metaphor so I thought I'd keep it the way it is.

Lan WangJi looked down. Wei WuXian stopped in front of him, one arm around his waist and the other lifting his chin, face serious, "Tell me the truth. How long have you been drinking from this bottle for? How have you hidden it so well? I couldn't smell a single trace of the vinegar." As usual, Lan WangJi cooperated and raised his chin, only to feel a certain naughty hand slide to his chest. As he looked down, however, Wei WuXian's hand had left already, holding a particular object. He feigned surprise, "What's this?"

It was Lan WangJi's money pouch.

Wei WuXian spun the delicate little pouch in his right hand as he pointed at it with his left, "HanGuang-Jun, oh, HanGuang-Jun, to take without asking is to steal. What did they call you back then? Heir of a prominent sect? Leading all disciples by example? What a disciple, who drinks strong vinegar in secret and stole the perfume pouch a little girl gave me to make it his own money pouch. No wonder I couldn't find it wherever I looked, after I woke up. If the perfume pouch hanging at little MianMian's chest weren't the exact same as this one, I wouldn't even have remembered. Just look at you, tsk tsk. Tell me. How did you take it from me when I was unconscious? How long did you spend taking it?"

Tiny ripples flashed across Lan WangJi's face as he reached out to grab it. Wei WuXian tossed the money pouch, avoiding his hands as he stepped back, "Grabbing it by force since you can't argue against me? Why the embarrassment? Getting embarrassed by something like this—I finally know why I'm so shameless. We're really destined to be together. It's definitely because all my shame is left in your care so that you can store it for me."

Soft pink tinted Lan WangJi's earlobe, but his face was still tight. His hands were quick, but Wei WuXian's feet were quicker, refusing to let him have it, "In the past, you wanted to give me your money pouch yourself. Why won't you give it to me now?"

Just look at you. You not only stealing in secret, but you're also having an affair in secret."

Lan WangJi plunged over and finally caught him, holding him tight in his arms as he protested, "We have prostrated thrice, so we already are... husband and wife. It does not count as an affair."

Wei WuXian, "You can't keep on forcing me like you've done, even between husband and wife! You always make me beg you, and you never stop even if I do. Now that you've become this, all of the GusuLan Sect's ancestors must be furious..."

Unable to take it any longer, Lan WangJi finally muffled his mouth with his own.

## Chapter 113: WangXian —Part Three

WangXian (Instrumental)

The day after they met Luo QingYang and her husband, the two arrived at a small town in Guangling.

Wei WuXian put his hand above his brows, peering at the flapping flags promising good wine, "Let's take a rest over there."

Lan WangJi nodded, and the two walked over, side-by-side.

After the night at Yunmeng's Guanyin Temple, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi roamed around night-hunting along with Lil' Apple, being „wherever the chaos was" as before. They'd visit wherever they heard was haunted by the creatures of the dark and deal with the disturbances, touring the region and getting to know the local customs while they were at it. Three months passed as such, with blissful freedom and no regard to matters of the cultivation world.

They went in the wine shop and sat down at a table in a plain little corner. A servant in the shop approached them. Seeing their appearance and bearing, along with the sword at Lan WangJi's waist and the flute at Wei WuXian's, he couldn't help but connect them with the two figures whose stories had been spread far and wide these days. But after he scrutinized them for quite a while, he still couldn't be sure, seeing that the white-clothed customer wasn't wearing the GusuLan Sect's forehead ribbon.

Wei WuXian asked for wine, and Lan WangJi ordered a few plates. Wei WuXian listened to his deep voice state the names of the dishes, with one hand propping up his cheek and another underneath the table, fingers wrapped around a snowy white ribbon. He had a big grin on his face. Only after the servant was

gone did he begin, "So many of them are spicy. Can you eat them?"

Lan WangJi picked up a teacup from the table and took a sip, his voice calm, "Sit properly."

Wei WuXian, "There's no tea in the cup."

"..." Lan WangJi filled the teacup and took it to his lips again. A while later, he repeated, "... Sit properly?"

Wei WuXian, "I'm still not sitting properly? It's not like I'm putting my legs on the table like before."

After a moment of endurance, Lan WangJi spoke, "Do not put them elsewhere either."

Wei WuXian's expression looked confused, "Where did I put them?"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Wei WuXian, "You've got so many demands, Second Young Master Lan. How about you tell me how to do it?"

Lan WangJi put down the teacup and glanced at him. Smoothing out his sleeves, just as he was about to stand up and teach him properly, roars of laughter suddenly exploded from the table in the center.

One of the few sitting at the table gloated, "I knew Jin GuangYao had to plummet sooner or later with the things he did! I've been waiting for this day for so long, and now he's finally exposed, hah! One's deeds will be paid, one way or another—what goes around always comes around!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian felt quite reminiscent. Both the tone and content of the criticism felt quite familiar, and only the target was changed. He couldn't help but pay attention. Another cultivator picked up his chopsticks and pointed, "As expected, there's no fault in those past sayings! Of the ones above, the cleaner they looked, the dirtier they were behind their backs!"

"That's right. There's not a single good one. No matter what „venerated gentlemen" they are, is there a single one of them who's not wearing a second outer skin?"

Drinking large gulps of wine and swallowing large chunks of meat, another person spat,

“Speaking of it, that SiSi used to be quite the well-known prostitute back in the days. With how old she is, I couldn’t even recognize her. What a fucking hag. It was quite the torturous death for Jin GuangShan too, hahahaha...”

“Props to Jin GuangYao for thinking of such a way to kill his dad. A perfect match. Absolutely perfect!”

“It’s quite a mystery—why didn’t Jin GuangYao kill that old prostitute? Witnesses should be silenced. Is he an idiot?”

“Why should he be an idiot? He’s the seed of Jin GuangShan, after all. Maybe he’s a lover of affairs too. Maybe he’s got special tastes and has... haha, an unspeakable relationship with SiSi?”

“Hah, I think so too, but don’t the stories say? Because he engaged in incest with his sister-by-blood, Jin GuangYao was so shocked he somehow fell ill in an unspeakable way, so even if he wanted to, he couldn’t, hahaha...”

These stories and rumors were indeed familiar. Wei WuXian recalled how back then countless people told stories of him kidnapping a thousand virgins to his demonic cave at Burial Mound, ravishing them day and night to cultivate the dark path.

He found it somewhat funny, Fine. No matter what, the things

they said about me were definitely better than what they’re saying about Jin GuangYao.

The conversation grew in an even more revolting direction. Lan WangJi began to frown as well. Fortunately, the more normal people on the table could also no longer take it. One of them whispered, “Quiet down a bit... It’s not music to the ears or anything.”

The laughing few couldn’t care less, “What’s there to be scared of? Nobody knows us here.”

“That’s right! And what if someone heard it? Do they really have so many fucks to give?”

“You think the LanlingJin Sect right now is same as before? Could they really shut anyone up? Could they really play the tyrant again? You don’t wanna hear it? Then suck it up!”

Someone switched the subject, “Enough, enough. Why talk about these things? Eat up, eat up No matter how powerful that Jin GuangYao used to be, right now he could be stuck in a coffin brawling with Nie MingJue.”

“I don’t think so. They loathe each other to the core, after all. I bet his bones have already been torn apart by Nie MingJue.”

“Indeed! I went to the sealing ceremony. The resentful energy in that coffin was so strong that no life grew within five hundred feet of it. I’m doubting it, really—could the coffin really seal them for a hundred years?”

“No matter what, it’s none of your business. It’s all a matter of those few sects. Anyways, the LanlingJin Sect is over now. The skies have completely changed, haven’t they?”

“Still, during the ceremony, ZeWu-Jun looked absolutely terrible.” “What would you expect? In the coffin were his two sworn

brothers, while his sect’s juniors kept on running around with a fierce corpse—they even need its assistance on night-hunts! No wonder he’s in secluded cultivation so often. If Lan WangJi still doesn’t go back, I bet Lan QiRen’s gonna start cursing...”

Lan WangJi, “...”

Wei WuXian into laughter.

The discussion continued, “Speaking of it, the ceremony impressed me indeed. Nie HuaiSang did quite a good job, didn’t he? When he volunteered in the first place, I thought he was definitely gonna mess things up. He’s the head-shaker, afterall.”

“Me too! Who would’ve known he hosted it no worse than Lan QiRen did?”

Hearing their astonishment, Wei WuXian commented in silence, What’s so special about this? After all, in the next few decades, perhaps this leader of the QingheNie Sect’s would gradually begin to show his edges, bringing the world even more surprises.

Both the food and the wine had arrived. Wei WuXian filled a cup to the brim and downed it slowly.

Suddenly, he heard a young man's voice, "Then is the TigerSeal really inside the coffin?" A cloud of silence fell over the wine shop. A moment later, someone answered, "Who knows? Perhaps. What could Jin GuangYao have done with the Tiger Seal except for carrying it on him?" "But there's no way of telling. Didn't they say the Seal's become just a piece of scrap iron? There's no use for it anymore."

The boy sat alone at a table, holding a sword in his arms, "Is the coffin really firm enough? What would happen if someone wants to see if the Tiger Seal is inside or not?"

Immediately, someone raised his voice, "Who'd dare?"

"The QingheNie Sect, the GusuLan Sect, and the YunmengJiang Sect all sent people to guard the cemetery. Who in the world would have the guts to do it?"

Everyone expressed their agreement. The boy didn't speak up again. He took the teacup from his table and sipped, as though he gave up on his idea. Yet, his eyes hadn't changed at all.

Wei WuXian had seen those types of eyes on many faces. And he knew that this definitely wouldn't be the last time he saw them.

After they left the shop, Wei WuXian still sat on Lil" Apple while Lan WangJi held the reins in front.

Swaying left and right atop the donkey, Wei WuXian took the flute from his waist and placed it by his lips. The limpid notes flew across the sky like birds. Lan WangJi halted and listened quietly.

It was the song he sang for Wei WuXian when they were stuck in the Xuanwu cave. It was also the song that Wei WuXian just so happened to have played at Dafan Mountain, the song that enabled Lan WangJi to confirm his identity.

When he finished, Wei WuXian winked his left eye towards Lan WangJi, "How was it? Beautiful, huh?"

Lan WangJi slowly nodded, "For once."

Wei WuXian knew that „for once" referred to how his memory was good for once. He couldn't help but smile, "Don't always be so angry about it. It was my fault in the past, alright? Besides, my

terrible memory should be accredited to my mom."

Wei WuXian propped his arm on Lil" Apple's head, spinning Chenqing in his hand, "My mom said you have to remember the things others do for you, not the things you do for others. Only when people don't hold so much in their hearts would they finally feel free."

This was one of the only things he remembered about his parents.

After his thoughts wandered for a bit, Wei WuXian pulled them back together again. Seeing how devoted Lan WangJi's gaze was, he continued, "My mom also said..."

Hearing how he refused to continue, Lan WangJi asked, "Said what?"

Wei WuXian curled his finger at him, his expression solemn. Lan Wang walked closer. Wei WuXian bent down and spoke beside his ears, "... that you're mine now." The tip of Lan WangJi's brows twitched. Just as his lips were about to part, Wei WuXian

interrupted, "Shameless, impudent, frivolous, ridiculous, spouting nonsense again—right? Alright, I've said it for you. Back and forth

it's always the same words. You really haven't changed at all. I'm also yours. We're even, yeah?"

With words, Lan WangJi could never beat Wei WuXian. His voice was cool, "If you say so."

Wei WuXian tugged the donkey's reins, "But really, I've come up with almost ten names for this song. And there's not a single one of them you like?"

Lan WangJi stated firmly, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Why not? I think it'd be great if it's called Love Song of Lan Zhan and Wei Ying."

Lan WangJi said nothing. Wei WuXian blathered on, "Or Everyday Song of HanGuang and YiLing also sounds great. You just know it's got a story behind it..."

Lan WangJi seemed like he didn't want to hear anothername, "There is."

Wei WuXian, "There is what?" Lan WangJi, "A name."

Wei WuXian was surprised, "There is? Then you should've said its name earlier. Why didn't you tell me for so long? You made me try for so long to come up with a name, wasting my wisdom."

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi answered, "WangXian." Wei WuXian, "Huh?"

Lan WangJi, "The song is named WangXian."

Wei WuXian widened his eyes.

Soon, he exploded into laughter, "Hahahahahahahaha, no wonder you never told me. So, you gave it a name like this all on your own. The reason behind it is just so obvious. Good for you, Lan Zhan! When did you come up with it?

Hahahahahahahaha..."

Lan WangJi seemed like he'd long since expected Wei WuXian to react like this. Watching him convulse in laughter on Lil" Apple's back, he could only softly shake his head. His expression seemed to be of surrender, yet a light curve had already bloomed soundlessly at the corners of his lips. Something hazy drifted through his eyes as well.

He raised his arm to hold Wei WuXian's waist so that he didn't plunge from the donkey's back. When he finally laughed enough, Wei WuXian spoke in all seriousness, "WangXian, good, wonderful! I like it. Yes, that's what it should be called."

Lan WangJi was expressionless, "I like it too."

Wei WuXian, "It sounds very righteous, very GusuLan-esque. In my opinion it should be straight-up recorded into the song collections and made a required piece for all of the GusuLan Sect's disciples to study. If they ask, HanGuangJun, how should we interpret the name of the song? You can then tell them how the song came to be."

Listening to his nonsense, Lan WangJi only grasped the reins of Lil" Donkey with Wei WuXian on it and clenched the thin rope in his palm, continuing on their way. Wei WuXian was still talking, "Where are we going next? I haven't had Emperor's Smile in a long time. How about we go back to Gusu and first play around for a bit in Caiyi Town?"

Lan WangJi, "Sure."

Wei WuXian, "It's been so many years. The waterborne abyss there should be completely cleaned up, right? If your uncle can bear looking at me, then hide me along with those jars of wine in your room; if he can't, then let's go tour some other place. I heard SiZhui and the others are having loads of fun night-hunting with Wen Ning.

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "But I heard there's a renewed version of the GusuLan Sect's rules? Hey, is there even more room on that Wall of Rules in front of the mountain to your sect..."

A gentle breeze came, and both their robes rippled like spring water.

Facing the wind, Wei WuXian squinted at Lan WangJi's silhouette. As he crisscrossed his legs, he shockingly found that he could somehow manage to balance himself in such an odd position on the back of Lil" Apple.

It was only something trivial, yet he looked as if he just discovered a new and interesting occurrence. He couldn't hold himself back from sharing this with Lan WangJi, calling, "Lan Zhan, look at me, look at me now!"

Just like before, Wei WuXian called his name with a grin, and he looked over as well.

From then on, he could never move his eyes away again.

# GDC Chapter 113.5: Postscripts

## New Version

Finally finished editing.

Having finally completed such an important task after such a long time, I should've screamed my message across three times with one exclamation mark after each word. Still, I said it this plainly.

The first version had 520k words in its main story, and the edited version 570k. To me, it was a huge undertaking. Both the writing and the editing took a couple of months. I can't say which one was harder or which one I struggled with more, but with both there was bliss amidst the pain.

During the serialization, because of reality's pressure on top of the rush in one update per day, I had to hurry across many places I originally wanted to expand upon. There were also many details and problems with logic I didn't have time to go through. Now, I've finally written to my contentment, having added the plot and rivalry scene I wanted. For example: the uncontrollable kiss that happened at the hunt competition in WWX's past life was one I skipped because during the serialization I didn't have the energy to slowly think through how such a large-scale competition/recruitment fair would work; the path of how NMJ and JGY turned from friends to enemies; LWJ following WWX to Burial Mound and the battle of the blood corpses at Burial Mound in WWX's present life were ones I skipped because I didn't have the patience to write fight scenes; acknowledging SiZhu's background was simply one I forgot...

The areas where I got lazy were filled up one by one during the editing process. In summary, the new version that came the edits is in my heart closer to this story's original form. In other words, to me, this one right now is the 'original' MDZS.

I know too many people have read the old version and that some impressions were too deeply rooted for all of its effects to be removed without difficulty, as well as that there'd definitely be many voices of doubt. But I've heard my fair share of voices of doubt back when MDZS was serializing. They were there the whole way. I know there are lots of things that can't satisfy everyone, so I chose to satisfy myself. When I look back at this story, at least I've written everything I wanted to write, and there wouldn't be too many regrets.

Apparently when writing summaries and postscripts one has to reminisce the past times, so I'll be reminiscing a bit as well. When I started to work out the outline of this story was the last year of university. Every night over at the field, I'd take a stroll listening to music, worrying about the goddamn graduation thesis as I uncontrollably made things up in my head.

What first drove me to write such a story seemed to be a blurry scene that appeared in my head: in a forest surrounded by rain and darkness, a person in black with a pale complexion and blood on his face snapped in half something in his hand, his expression cold. It was either a flute or an arrow.

I don't remember how this scene appeared either. There was no logic to support it. I neither knew whom the person was nor why he had such an expression on his face, but I was indeed touched by an inexplicable feeling. And then I suddenly grew interested. I began to think what kind of person he'd be, what kind of journeys he would've come through, trying hard to create detailed, logically-complete plots for him, transform everything into words, and then attempt to touch others.

First there was an emotion, then a character, and at last a story. In the process of transformation, expression, and conveyance, the energy would naturally be shifted and lost. But with my current self, I've tried my best.

Anyways, there are many things I'd need to fumble and learn.

Thinking and writing about scenes with chemistry or conflict (also known as flirting and

fighting) were beyond wonderful experiences. The former were like smuggling Emperor's Smile, copying scriptures sitting across each other when they were young, Caiyi Town (yes I adore every single scene from when they were students), getting all touchy-bitey in the Xuanwu cave, as well as scenes of Forceful President HanGuang-Jun and His Mad Yet Passionate Runaway Wife (???), and so on. The latter were like Madam Yu against Wang LingJiao, Yi City's candidates doing the you-stab-me-and-I-stab-him, Jiang Cheng attacking WangXian at the ancestral hall in Lotus Pier for being shameless gays (hey!), and so on...

All these were the biggest joys the MDZS story has brought me. They're joys no other thing could ever compare to.

To me, MDZS was definitely an especially important story. At first, I had no idea that so many people would come across this story. Because of it, I experienced many unthinkable things and got to know many great people. It was a rollercoaster of emotions both inside and outside the story. There was a time when I seemed like I came right out of an asylum. Because it was an experimental work, it had too many immature sections. In some places, no matter how hard I try to change things, the framework was already set and it was very difficult for me to edit it until I was completely satisfied. But looking back on it now, it was another footprint of my growth.

But I really don't want to write or edit it again. Not only does it not correspond with how online novels are read, it also brings me a second round of torture... So, from now on, I'll complete the draft and publish it after all edits.

During the first period of serialization when I tried to get used to things, I wrote with quite a lot of choppiness and caution, but the more I wrote, the deeper connections I felt with the characters of the story. While serializing and editing I felt tired to death, wondering why haven't I finished yet, but after I really finished, typing the Enter key a couple of times at the end of the Word document and writing 'The End', I instead felt rather unwilling to part.

Even though I knew it was only the end of the main story and there'd be extras to come, I still didn't want to part with it.

The day the main story was completed, in feigned culture, I originally decided to end with a line from a poem. The line was "the melody ceases and none is to be seen; the river streams beneath columns of mountains green"\*. But in the end, I never ended up using it, probably because even though the poem was beautiful, sophisticated, and very meaningful, it wasn't the ending I hoped for. It was too lonely, too melancholy.

\*TN: Translated with reference to unknown translation "The song is ended, no one is to be seen. On the river the mountain peaks are so blue!" from dict.cn.

And what I hoped for was "on and on the WangXian melody drifts; the song ceases yet the figures persist".

The clamor will take its exit, while you and I will persist.

—Mo Xiang Tong Xiu 2016.08.12

Old Version

Finally finished writing...

This is my second long series as well as my second original danmei. During the serialization process, there have been many ups and downs. After the last chapter, I do feel a sense of being freed from suffering, but when I saw the page that recorded my outline finally be blank after deleting it bit by bit, I also feel somewhat unwilling to part with it.

After I finished Scum Villain, I'd been mulling over this story for half a year. This is the first time I challenged a story with a greater number of characters and more complex relationships. I spent a long time writing the outline, always feeling unsatisfied with it and changing things here and there. In the end, I really couldn't drag things on anymore, and grit my teeth and published it. The first few chapters were fairly rushed, and my drafts were intermittent as well.

The longest draft was the part where they killed that turtle, with seven thousand words. The rest were mainly raw updates without any drafts. It was all thanks to Mr. Outline that I could keep up with daily updates for a while. But after all, the outline wasn't detailed enough. There were still times when I felt so stuck I could ram my head and hands into the wall.

Nice details and interactions need to be perfected by time and energy, and time and energy were exactly what frequent updates lacked. During the serialization, it wasn't that I couldn't see the many problems, but rather that I knew, yet I couldn't pay attention to them and could only force my way forward. And so... after a period of rest, I'll make heavy edits on the entire story, enriching the details, adding plot elements, changing places that didn't logically make sense, editing sentences. At around May or June, I'll replace the old version on JJWXC altogether. If any readers would like to come back and revisit it, they'd probably find many Easter eggs in the edited version XD.

The following includes some of my thoughts during the writing process.

First, on the fantasy setting:

One good thing about fantasy stories is that you don't have to be too historically correct and you can make changes to certain customs however you want. The conventions in this story are mainly from the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties as well as the Tang Dynasty. Chairs were rare. To 'sit' usually means to sit on one's knees. The ceremonial clothes were mostly the Tang cap and the round-collar robe. However, chilli peppers and apples appeared even though they only happened in the Ming Dynasty. The hip-and-gable roof on the buildings were named in the Qing Dynasty. The vocabulary and poem allusions were even more examples of time-travelling. And the age at which one was given a courtesy name was lowered to fifteen. Anyhow, the author pretty much massaged together all of the Ancient China elements she liked and brewed them in a pot. There's no accuracy at all. So, whatever. Just read about the characters and the story.

But there's just one thing. People from the past really did call their mothers 'Mom'.

Second, on character:

Both WWX and LWJ are highly ideal characters, so there wouldn't be too much dispute on their moral standing. They're perfect as the protagonists. Of course, I do like WWX a lot, but if I'm looking for a boyfriend, sorry, I'll only have LWJ please.

All of their character elements were created in binary opposition. The bold and the principled, the concealed yearning and the flaunting coquetry, the red rose and the white rose, the cold, dignified one and the devilish, untamed one... The more different they were, the better. Still, their core was the same. Which usually means their outlook on life is the same? In any case, this isn't the point. The point is that I love the chemistry between them!

The characters Xiao XingChen and Xue Yang are pretty much old friends of mine. In high school, every evening self-studying session\* I'd pay no attention to studying, sneakily writing things down on a notebook. That was when I settled on their names and overall personalities. But back then, there wasn't a full plot or any context. There were only a few fragments of their interactions, some of which I directly put into the story, such as drawing sticks to determine who to purchase the vegetables. To have characters and pieces of dialogue that previously only existed in my head be seen by everyone and discussed so fervently is a curious feeling indeed.

\*TN: In China, a day in class may last for quite a long time. Apart from class, there are also morning and evening self-studying sessions where you have to remain at school. The evening ones can last until nine or ten.

When writing paragraphs about Xue Yang, I had to adjust my mentality to be in the darkest, cruellest state, while it was the exact opposite for Xiao XingChen, from whom I felt holy light every time I wrote about him. Switching between the angel and the devil brought quite some satisfaction. But ever since XY officially walked onstage, the comments section suddenly exploded. He's indeed the owner of Jiangzai\*.

TN: Jiangzai, XY's sword, means to release catastrophe.

There was only one key word in A-Qing's original character setting: 'bouncy'. Apart from this, there was almost nothing. I only came up with her name the day before she appeared. After the details were fleshed out, I sometimes even feel that she's kind of cute. But writing about her really felt so noisy... almost as if there was really a girl chirping around in a high pitch.

Before I finished coming up with anything else about Wen Ning, what I first decided on was, "He has to die!" "I'm going to make him die!" The original plan was to make him turn into ash on the boat leaving Lotus Pier, but when I wrote up to that point, I turned around and found that there wasn't enough foreshadowing. And there wasn't a reason he had to die, was there? Killing him off would be very abrupt, almost as if I was angsting for the sake of angst. So even though I really wanted him to die, I could do nothing but give up. It was the same with our little princess Jin Ling. He was also supposed to die. In order to defeat the big villain, he turned himself into a fierce corpse to replace Wen Ning. But since Wen Ning didn't die, he wouldn't have to replace him either.

Everyone should know what Jiang Cheng's keyword is without me saying it. In the beginning, I thought with XY's existence, Jiang Cheng's negative energy would definitely seem skimpy. Who knew he became the ultimate superstar of the comment section? Compared to him, XY was almost a poor, has-been idol. Only now and then would someone decide to drag him out again. Of course, in the end, under the combined PDA attacks of WWX and LWJ, the past and present superstars were obliterated.

LXC. I have no idea why some readers think he's someone who 'hides his wit deep inside. In truth... I've never shown any traits of his that could be interpreted this way. To be able to see through his brother's little thoughts doesn't mean it's the same with others, and to become sect leader didn't require deep thoughts and acute perception. Perhaps it was only because he had a high birth, nice personality and excellent performance... Maybe it was because I accidentally made him too favorable in the beginning that in the end everyone was like 'WTF you're actually just sweet, pure, and oblivious?!' I feel so bad for him with how much fans he lost on his way. Pat pat, LXC.

JGY. Fine. Sometimes I do feel a bit bad for you but sorry please return to your glorious state of death.

NHS. Ugh... I really feel sorry for him. I deleted so much of his part and I even got rid of a good partner for him... Let me see if I could fix things up in the edited version... Anyways, NHS, I'm sorry.

Those who caused the most debate were mostly round characters, and so there is of course flat characters to foil them, like Wen Chao, JiaoJiao, and the people who only follow the herd. Flat characters actually have an important responsibility. Their standpoint is clear. Everyone could curse at them to let off some steam unlike the former, whom some hated and some loved, creating endless dispute. And thus, this was the type of character that SQH\* likes to write about. If all of the characters in a book are complex and round, I don't know if the readers would feel tired. Anyways, with my current abilities, it'd definitely tire me out when writing them...

TN: Here the author refers to Shang QingHua, one of the characters in her previous novel The Scum Villain's Self-Saving System who is an author himself. His pen name has been translated differently by different translators and the pun's kind of hard to deal with, but just generally it means "fapping towards the sky". Yep. For more on Scum Villain check out BC Novels at <http://bcnovels.com/the-scum-villains-self-saving-system/>.

Third, on practice:

I've said in the 'Author's Notes'\* of the first few chapters that this is a work of self-fulfillment written to improve my abilities.

\*TN: Most of these haven't been translated because they either only pertain to the drama of the Chinese fandom (false plagiarism accusations, problems with copyright, attempts to regulate the actions of toxic fans, etc.) or just simple comments that don't matter all that much. You're

not missing out on anything, trust me.

When I was stuck at the outline, I've already anticipated many negative comments that I'd soon receive, preparing myself for what was to come. For example: the main character is too forgiving; too much holding back and not enough lashing out; the flashbacks are just too annoying; why do the side characters get so many scenes; too easy to forget about what happened before after reading what happened next... A lot of these did indeed happen.

What I was most worried about was that she might not be good.

Scum Villain had the advantage of including popular elements, such as parody, tsukkomi\*, and transmigrating into a novel. But, after all, parody and tsukkomi aren't intrinsic things. So, this story was an attempt to see if without these things, what I write would still be readable.

\*TN: The Japanese term for a comedian in a double-act who plays the 'straight man' who berates and comments on the acts of the boke, or the 'funny man'. This has a Chinese alternative which is called tucao. The two are similar in many ways, and tucao humor is quite popular in net-novels.

During the practicing process, more and more questions were dug up.

Like Empathy. The goal of Empathy is simple—to insert the stories of side characters. I was using it like a variation of the point-of-view switch, but the technique is so simple that it's almost a shortcut.

And also, like the agonizingly long flashbacks that so many criticized. It's not a favored writing method. Ever since the first section, readers have abandoned the story because of it. More and more happened as time went on, and the controversy got bigger and bigger as well, but I still followed the outline and insert three uber-long flashbacks.

When I was writing the outline, I'd also considered if I should disassemble the plot of WWX's past life and the pieces bit by bit inside the story. My conclusion was that if it were disassembled, the structure and timeline would be even messier and it'd be even harder to read. The completeness of the plot would be destroyed, and the emotions wouldn't flow smoothly either. Strictly speaking, this story consists of two parallel stories of the past and present lives, of two segments of life. A few minor memories could be fragmented, but the important phases and the transitional events couldn't be summarized. And in the end, I still decided to use a method I thought could express things the best. When writing, on some things one should take suggestions, but on others it's best to persist. No matter if others think it was 'the best' or 'the worst', it was still my attempt.

There were also a few plot elements that I blurred over because I wasn't in the best state, and a few characters didn't end up as strong as they could've been... I hope I could fix all these things during the editing process.

Fourth, on gratitude:

The perception of the author and the reader are often poles apart. It's rather difficult for the author to predict what comments they'd receive after the story is published or whether or not it'd be liked and acknowledged by the reader. The author might feel great, but the reader might not get it at all; a plot element on which the author spent tons of effort might not be received well in the eyes of the reader. Situations where the author scribbled around and the reader enthusiastically chased after it were very common.

I wrote this story with the determination that it'd fail and that'd be alright. Inserting so many flashbacks into a net-novel was an absolute indicator that it was going to fail. On top of that, even though the hot element of rebirth was tagged, it unfortunately had none of the pleasure-points that most rebirth novels include. This was why ever since the first few chapters I'd been emphasizing over and over again that this would be different from the last book, worried that readers who liked Scum Villain might not find this one palatable. I wouldn't want you to be disappointed after you come all the way here to support me.

But I never expected that even though the last book was completed more than a year ago, the readers on JJWXC are still as passionate as ever. It's just like what I said. You really give me an

utmost surprise every single time.

Thank you!

There are too many subjects, too many characters, and too many stories I want to write about. There's a whole pile in my notes, of which I don't know which one to begin first. I'm currently still searching around, writing and learning at the same time. I hope every story is different, so I can't guarantee every book I write the readers will love. I can only guarantee that I'll pour my heart in every one of them. If you just so happen to find it decent, I'm happy to inform you that we'll be able to walk yet another path together (:

## GDC Chapter 114: Extra—Banquet —Part One

Lan WangJi turned to Wei WuXian, “Wait for me.”

Wei WuXian, “How about I go in along with you?”

Lan WangJi shook his head, “He will be angrier if you go in as well.”

Wei WuXian thought about it and agreed. Whenever Lan QiRen saw him, it was as if he was a flickering candle about to have a heart attack. Even his breaths became heavier than usual. Wei WuXian felt he should do him a favor and save him the exasperation by getting out of his sight. Lan WangJi looked at him, as though he wanted to say something. Wei WuXian immediately added, “Fine, I know. No walking too fast, no speaking too loud, no this, no that, am I right? Don’t worry. Now that I’m back with you, I’ll definitely be as careful as possible to not violate any of the sect rules on your Wall. As careful as possible.”

Lan WangJi didn’t even think about it, “It is fine. Even if you violate them...”

Wei WuXian keenly picked up, “Hm?”

Lan WangJi seemed as if he finally realized that what he said wasn’t too appropriate. He turned his head to the side for a moment before turning back, his face serious, “... Nothing.”

Wei WuXian looked confused, “What did you say would happen even if I violate them?”

Lan WangJi knew he was asking even though he knew the answer. He maintained the strict face, “Wait for me outside.”

Wei WuXian waved his hand, “Waiting it is, then. Don’t be so aggressive. I’ll go play with your rabbits.”

And so, Lan WangJi went to face Lan QiRen’s lecture alone, while Wei WuXian was dragged behind Lil’ Apple, sprinting. Ever since Lil’ Apple entered the Cloud Recesses, it seemed especially excited and full of strength. Wei WuXian couldn’t even slow it down as it hauled him onto the verdant patch of grass.

Quietly curled-up within the grass were more a hundred plump little snowballs. Their pink, three-petaled mouths twitched now and then, at times shaking their long, rosy ears. Head held high, Lil’ Apple squeezed amongst them and found an area for itself, while Wei WuXian squatted on the ground and randomly grabbed a rabbit, scratching its stomach as he thought, were there so many the last time I came? Is this one male or female? Oh... Male.

When he thought so, Wei WuXian finally realized that he’d never cared to notice whether Lil’ Apple was male or female. He couldn’t help but glance at it. But before he could get a nice view, he suddenly heard something and turned around to look.

Holding a little basket, a young, petite girl was hesitating on coming over. Seeing that Wei WuXian turned to face her so suddenly, she momentarily didn’t know what to do, her entire face glowing red shyly.

The girl was clothed in the GusuLan Sect’s uniform and also wore with formality a white forehead ribbon without the pattern of flowing clouds. Wei WuXian, this is extraordinary! Can’t believe I ran into a real one!

This was a female cultivator. A female cultivator of the GusuLan Sect.

Known for its stringency, the GusuLan Sect had recited things like men and women were different and thus should not be over-intimate with each other for tens of thousands of times by the ears of its disciples. The studying and resting quarters for male and female cultivators were strictly separated so that nobody could walk a step over the line. They rarely wandered out of their own areas, and even night-hunts were mostly separated by gender, either all men or all women, almost never both. The inflexibility was almost horrifying. Back when Wei WuXian was studying at the Cloud Recesses, he’d almost never seen any maidens here, holding quite heavy doubts about whether or not female cultivators really existed in the Cloud Recesses. A couple of times, he thought he heard the sound of girls reciting from the scrolls and curiously wanted to see. Immediately, a few acute disciples who were patrolling the grounds discovered

him and called Lan WangJi over. After a few times, Wei WuXian had lost all enthusiasm and never went out exploring again.

But right now, he actually ran into a real female cultivator in the Cloud Recesses. A real! Female cultivator!

Wei WuXian straightened up at once, his eyes glowing. Just as he was about to gravitate over, Lil' Apple had already shot up and rushed over to the girl, almost having ran over him.

Wei WuXian, "?"

After it approached the girl, it meekly lowered its head and moved its forehead and ears towards her hand out of its own will.

Wei WuXian, "???"

Blushing, the girl looked at Wei WuXian and paused in surprise, not knowing what to say. Wei WuXian squinted, feeling that she looked somewhat familiar. A moment later, he remembered—wasn't this the round-faced girl whom he met on his departure from Mo Village and ran into quite a couple of times at Dafan Mountain?

Even if she were a complete stranger, he'd be able to make a few jokes and immediately warm up, let alone she was a maiden with a nice personality he'd met a few times. He immediately waved at her, "It's you!"

The girl clearly had a solid impression of him, whether with a clean face or not. After some embarrassment, fingers twisting around the basket, she replied quietly, "It is me..."

Wei WuXian tossed to the side the rabbit he pet and determined the gender of. Hands behind his back, he walked a few steps closer. As he saw the carrots and cabbage in her basket, he smiled, "Here to feed the rabbits?"

The girl nodded. With Lan WangJi gone, Wei WuXian was just in the middle of having nothing to do, his interest growing, "Do you want me to help?"

The girl didn't know what to do. In the end, she nodded, and Wei WuXian took out a carrot. The two squatted down together on the grass. Lil' Apple poked its head into the basket and searched around. Having failed to find any apples, he made do and caught a carrot with his teeth, nibbling on it.

The carrots in the basket were extremely fresh. Wei WuXian first bit a chunk off himself before putting it near the rabbits' mouths, "Have you been feeding these rabbits?"

The girl, "No... I only began recently... When HanGuang-Jun is here, HanGuang-Jun is the one who cares for them. When he is not, it is Young Master Lan SiZhui and the rest. When even they are gone, then we come and help..."

Wei WuXian, how did Lan Zhan feed the rabbits? Since when did he start taking care of them? Did he also come over here, holding a little basket?

Shaking a few scenes overloaded with cuteness out of his head, Wei WuXian asked again, "You're a disciple of the GusuLan Sect now?"

The girl replied meekly, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "The GusuLan Sect's pretty nice. When did you come?"

The girl stroked a fluffy rabbit as she spoke, "Soon after that time at Dafan Mountain..."

At this point, both of the two heard the soft noise of boots stepping over grass. Wei WuXian turned around to look. As expected, Lan WangJi was walking towards them.

Hurrying, the girl stood up at once, saluting with respect, "HanGuang-Jun."

Lan WangJi nodded, while Wei WuXian was still sitting on the grass, grinning at him. The girl seemed to be quite scared of Lan WangJi—this was only normal, as not a single one of the juniors her age weren't afraid of Lan WangJi. Flustered, she held up her dress hems and ran. Wei WuXian called from behind, "Maiden, Meimei!\* Your basket! Hey, Lil' Apple! Come back, Lil' Apple! What are you running for?! Lil' Apple!"

\*TN: Female counterpart of Gege.

No person or donkey was stopped by him. Wei WuXian could only poke the remaining few carrots in the basket, turning to Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, you scared her away."

If Lan WangJi didn't want his footsteps to be heard, how could he have let both of the two hear them?

Wei WuXian grinned as he held a carrot towards him, "You want some? You'll feed the rabbits, and I'll feed you."

"..." Lan WangJi looked down at him, "Get up."

Wei WuXian tossed the carrot backwards, lazily extending a hand, "Pull me up."

With a pause, Lan WangJi reached out to pull him, yet Wei WuXian suddenly exerted strength and pulled him down instead.

Their territory having been seized by strange humans, the rabbits seemed as though they faced a great enemy, aimlessly running around the two piled on the ground. The few that were especially familiar with Lan WangJi even stood up and clung to his side, as if worried why their master would collapse so suddenly. Lan WangJi gently shooed them away, his voice calm, "The seventh sect rule on the Wall of Rules of the Cloud Recesses—disturbing female cultivators is prohibited."

Wei WuXian, "You said it's fine even if I violate them."

Lan WangJi, "I did not."

Wei WuXian, "Why are you like this? Just because you didn't finish your sentence means you never said it? What happened to the HanGuang-Jun who always did what he promised?"

Lan WangJi, "Everyday."

Wei WuXian caressed his face, his tone tender, "Did your uncle scold you? Tell me. Let your Gege spoil you dearly."

Even with such an abrupt change of topic, Lan WangJi didn't expose him, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Really? Then what did he say to you?"

Lan WangJi hugged him soundlessly, "Nothing. It is rare that we are all together and a banquet will be held tomorrow."

Wei WuXian grinned, "A banquet? Alright, alright, I'll definitely be on good behavior and not lose face for you." Suddenly, he thought of Lan XiChen and asked, "What about your brother?"

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "I will see him afterwards."

ZeWu-Jun had been in secluded mediation for days on an end. Lan WangJi was definitely going to have a long, heartfelt talk with him. Wei WuXian hugged Lan WangJi back and patted his back softly. Soon, he began again, "Speaking of it, why didn't I see SiZhui and the squad this time back?"

In the past, these juniors would've crowded around them and begun chirping all the way from the entrance of the mountain. Hearing him mention SiZhui and the juniors, Lan WangJi's brows relaxed somewhat, "I can take you to see them."

After he led Wei WuXian to find Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the others, the juniors didn't do anything apart from calling out in delight. It wasn't that they didn't want to do anything, but rather they really couldn't.

The dozen-or-so all stood on their hands in the veranda hallway. All of them had taken off their outer robes, dressed in light, snowy strip. Head at the bottom and feet on top, they faced a few blank pieces of paper and a cake of ink. They supported themselves with their left hands and held a brush with their right, writing tight-knit characters on the paper with much difficulty. Since they couldn't let their forehead ribbons touch the ground, they clenched the ribbon tails in their mouths, dripping with sweat. Thus, they couldn't say anything either. The so-called 'calling out' was only some muffled noise accompanied by bright eyes. Watching the teetering, trembling bodies, Wei WuXian asked, "Why do they have to do handstands?"

Lan WangJi, "As punishment."

Wei WuXian, "I know it's punishment. I can see that they're copying the Lan Sect's rules—I've memorized Righteousness already. What did they do to be punished?"

Lan WangJi's voice was cool, "They returned to the Cloud Recesses after the prescribed time limit."

Wei WuXian, "Oh."

Lan WangJi, "They accompanied General Ghost on a night-hunt."

Wei WuXian, "Hah! You've really got guts."

Lan WangJi, "For the third time."

Wei WuXian touched his chin, thinking it was only natural that Lan QiRen who hated all evil would punish him like this. Merely copying the sect rules while doing a handstand was already quite easy.

He squatted before Lan SiZhui, "Oh SiZhui, why is the pile in front of you especially thick? Am I imagining things?"

Lan SiZhui, "No..."

Lan WangJi, "He led the rest."

Wei WuXian wanted to give Lan SiZhui's shoulder a few pats, but there was no place for him to put his hand. After a pause, he put his hand underneath and patted from bottom to top, confident, "I knew it."

Lan WangJi walked before the boys, glancing at their papers to examine them somewhat. He spoke to Lan JingYi, "The script is improper."

Biting his forehead ribbon, Lan JingYi replied through tears, "Yes. HanGuang-Jun. I'll recopy this one."

The rest who hadn't been picked on had passed the examination. All of them let out sighs of relief. As the two left the hallway, Wei WuXian recalled the suffering he went through when he himself received punishment back then, feeling quite sorry, "Just maintaining the position is hard enough. I might not be able to write when I'm upside-down. And I might not be able to write properly even when I'm sitting."

Lan WangJi glanced at him, "Indeed."

Wei WuXian knew he also remembered the days when he supervised him when they copied sect rules, "Was it the same when you were young?"

Lan WangJi, "Never."

Of course. Lan WangJi had been the leading example of the disciples ever since he was young. Every word and every act of his seemed like they'd been measured by a ruler. How could he make a mistake? And if he never made any mistakes, how could he receive punishment?

Wei WuXian grinned, "I thought your shocking arm strength was trained by this."

Lan WangJi, "There was no punishment. But it was still trained by this."

Wei WuXian wondered, "Why would you do handstands if you're not punished?"

Lan WangJi stared straight forward, "It calms the mind."

Wei WuXian was right beside Lan WangJi's ear, his voice almost like a hook, "Then what exactly was it that made the icy HanGuang-Jun feel less than calm?"

Lan WangJi looked at him without saying anything. Wei WuXian gloated, "With what you said, if you began to practice your arm strength ever since so young, you can do absolutely anything upside-down, can't you?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Seeing his eyelids droop, almost as if he was a bit embarrassed, Wei WuXian grew even bolder in his words, "You can even do me upside-down?"

Lan WangJi, "I can try."

Wei WuXian, "Hahahahaha... What did you say?"

Lan WangJi, "I can try tonight."

Wei WuXian, "..."

## GDC Chapter 115: Extra—Banquet —Part Two

Despite everything, that night, the two didn't immediately get the chance to 'try'. Lan WangJi first had to see and talk to Lan XiChen, who had been in secluded meditation for a while.

These days, Wei WuXian adopted a strange habit. He liked to sleep on top of Lan WangJi's body, no matter lying on him or clinging to his chest face-to-face. Anyhow, without this human pillow, he wasn't able to sleep. Shamelessly, he turned the jingshi upside-down, and did indeed manage to dig out some things.

Lan WangJi had been prim and proper with everything he did, ever since he was young. His calligraphy, paintings, and essays were all extremely organized, ordered by year. Wei WuXian started from the handwriting practice he did when he was young, laughing as he flipped through them with relish. He'd feel his teeth ache every time he saw Lan QiRen's red comments. But, even after thousands of pages, he only found one piece of paper with a mistake on it. Afterwards, Lan WangJi used another piece of paper to copy with all seriousness the mistaken character a hundred times. Wei WuXian clicked his tongue, Poor kid. He probably didn't even recognize the character after so much copying.

He was going to continue flipping through these old, yellowing pages when a faint light lit up amid the darkness outside the Jingshi.

He didn't hear footsteps, but Wei WuXian skillfully rolled onto Lan WangJi's bed, hauling the blanket from his feet up to his head. When Lan WangJi gently pushed the door open and entered, what he saw was the illusion that the person inside the room was sleeping soundly.

Lan WangJi's motions were absolutely noiseless in the first place. Seeing that someone was already 'asleep', he held back his breathing and slowly shut the Jingshi's door. After a moment of silence, he finally approached the bed.

Before he even got near, his entire upper body was wrapped into a flying blanket.

Lan WangJi, "..."

Wei WuXian leaped down, tightly hugging Lan WangJi whose entire head was covered, and pushed him onto the bed, "Rape!"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Wei WuXian's hands vulgarly touched and fumbled around his body, yet Lan WangJi still lay as quiet as dead, letting him do whatever he pleased. Wei WuXian lost interest just a while later, "HanGuang-Jun, why don't you even resist a bit? If you're just lying there not even moving, what's the fun of me raping you?"

Lan WangJi's muffled voice came through the blanket, "What do you want me to do?"

Wei WuXian advised, "When I hold you down, you're gonna push me and not let me get on top of you, and squeeze your legs together and struggle as hard as you can, at the same time scream for help..."

Lan WangJi, "Making noise is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses."

Wei WuXian, "Then you can call for help lightly. And also, when I rip your clothes apart, you should try your best to resist and protect your chest."

The blanket was silent for a while.

A moment later, Lan WangJi replied, "It sounds rather difficult."

Wei WuXian, "Really?!"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "I'm out of ideas, then. How about we change things up and you rape me instead..."

Before he finished, his view spun and the blankets flew off. Lan WangJi had already pushed him onto the bed.

Because he was smothered inside the blanket by Wei WuXian for quite a while, even his eternally-neat hair tie and forehead ribbon were somewhat crooked. His hair was somewhat

disheveled, a few strands dangling down, and his originally jade-white cheeks shone through with soft pink. Under the candlelight, he was quite the bashful beauty. Unfortunately, though, the beauty's arm strength was absurdly great, firmly locked around Wei WuXian like clamps of iron as he begged, "HanGuang-Jun, HanGuang-Jun, to forgive is a virtue."

Lan WangJi's eyes didn't waver, while the two bright flames of the candle trembled in their reflection. His expression was calm, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "Yes what? Handstand? Rape? Hey! My clothes."

Lan WangJi, "You said so yourself."

As he spoke, he set his body between Wei WuXian's legs and stayed for a while. Wei WuXian waited for a while, but nothing came, "What!"

Lan WangJi straightened up slightly, "Why do you not resist?"

Wei WuXian squeezed his waist with his legs, rubbing slowly and refusing to let him leave. He grinned, "Well what can I do? When you push me down, my legs open themselves involuntarily. I can't close them at all, so how do I have the strength to resist? It's hard for you, but it's hard for me too... Stop, stop, come here, let me show you something first." He fished out a piece of paper from his lapels, "Lan Zhan, let me ask you—how could you make a mistake on such an easy character? Not studying properly? What was going on in that head of yours?"

Lan WangJi glanced at the paper and said nothing, but the meaning of his gaze was more than clear—how faceless that someone like Wei WuXian, who used a wild cursive when copying scriptures and made so many mistakes in the process of slacking off, would berate him for making a mistake on one character.

Wei WuXian pretended to not understand those eyes as he continued, "Look at the date you wrote at the bottom. Let me see... You were already fifteen or sixteen at that time, weren't you? To make a mistake like this at such an age, you..."

But when he thought about the date at the bottom more carefully, he found that it just so happened to match up with the three months he spent studying at the Cloud Recesses.

Wei WuXian was immediately overjoyed, speaking on purpose, "Could it be that when Lan Ergege was young, he didn't pay attention to reading and writing because I was the only thing he could think about?"

Back when Wei WuXian was grounded at the Library Pavilion, he threw tantrums and lounged around every day in front of Lan WangJi, harassing him in a hundred ways. He stirred up Lan WangJi's peace and quiet so much that it was difficult for Lan WangJi not to 'think about' him, but just not that sort of 'think about'. Under such circumstances, it was extremely admirable that Lan WangJi managed to pull through, supervising Wei WuXian's scripture-copying as he himself kept on doing his own things, making only one mistake.

Wei WuXian, "Huh, why is it my fault again? You're gonna blame it on me again."

"..." Lan WangJi's voice was low, "Your fault!"

His breaths hitched as he tried to grab the piece of paper that was a stain in his otherwise-perfect life. Wei WuXian loved it when Lan WangJi was forced into a corner. He immediately stuffed the paper inside his clothes and hid it near his flesh, "Come at me if you're so good."

Lan WangJi didn't hesitate at all as he reached inside. And he didn't take his hands out.

Wei WuXian, "You're incredible indeed!"

The two messed around for over half of the night. Only in the second half were they able to hold a serious conversation.

Wei WuXian still clung to Lan WangJi's chest, face buried at his neck as he felt the sandalwood aroma on Lan WangJi's body grow even richer. He felt lazy all over, eyes closed, "Is your brother alright?"

Lan WangJi embraced his naked back, stroking again and again. After a while of a silence, he answered, "Not really."

Both of the two were sticky with sweat. Wei WuXian felt an itch crawl from his skin all the way to the bottom of his heart as Lan WangJi stroked him. He twisted somewhat uncomfortably,

swallowing Lan WangJi even deeper.

Lan WangJi lowered his voice, "In the years when I was in secluded meditation, Brother had always been the one to comfort me."

Yet now the situation was the exact opposite.

Wei WuXian didn't need to ask what Lan WangJi did during the years he was in secluded meditation. He kissed Lan WangJi's fair earlobe and pulled up the blanket at the side, covering the two under it.

The second morning, Lan WangJi got up at five as usual.

In the few months he and Wei WuXian begun living together, he'd tried to set Wei WuXian's sleeping habits right, but it was always in vain. After a disciple brought over the warm water used for bathing, Lan WangJi, who'd long since dressed himself, peeled the stark-naked Wei WuXian out of the thin blanket and carried him into the wooden tub. Somehow, Wei WuXian could continue to sleep even as he was steeped in water. Lan WangJi pushed him gently, and he'd catch Lan WangJi's hand, kissing it both on its palm and its back, rubbing it on his cheek before he went back to sleep. When the pushing really began to annoy him, he'd whine a couple of times and pull Lan WangJi down, eyes still shut, cupping Lan WangJi's face as he kissed a few more times, murmuring, "Good boy, stop messing with me. Pretty please? I'll get up in just a bit. Yeah."

And with a yawn, he'd fall back asleep, clinging to the edge of the tub.

Although he knew, even if the room burned down, Wei WuXian would probably find some other place and sleep, Lan WangJi still persevered in waking him up starting at five, then endure dozens of pecks expressionlessly.

He brought breakfast to the Jingshi and laid it on the desk that in the past only held ink, paper, and brush, then fished the dead-asleep Wei WuXian out of the tub to wipe him clean, dress him, and tie his sashes. Only then did Lan WangJi finally take a book from the shelves and flip open to the page with the dried flower bookmark, sitting by the desk and slowly beginning to read.

As expected, at almost eleven, Wei WuXian jerked up from the bed with extreme punctuality before feeling his way down the bed almost as though he was sleep-walking. He first felt Lan WangJi, hauling him into his arms for a few rubs, then squeezed his thigh out of habit. After a lightning round of washing his face and brushing his teeth, he was finally a bit more awake, floating towards the desk. Wei WuXian first finished an apple in just a couple of bites. When he saw the amount of food piled in the meal box, a corner of his lips twitched, "Don't you have a banquet today? Is it alright to eat so much beforehand?"

Calmly, Lan WangJi fixed the hair tie and forehead ribbon that Wei WuXian messed up while rubbing, "Fill your stomach first."

The food of the Cloud Recesses was something that Wei WuXian had once encountered. With watery broth and vegetables as the main dish, it was green and only green across the table, full of medicinal herbs ranging from root to bark. Every single dish emitted a pungent bitterness, and amid that bitterness was an odd tinge of sweet. If it weren't for this, back then Wei WuXian wouldn't have gotten the idea to barbecue the two rabbits either. A banquet at their sect probably wouldn't do much to satisfy one's hunger.

Wei WuXian knew that the GusuLan Sect valued this aspect of things quite heavily. Whether or not they let him attend the sect banquet was basically whether or not they acknowledged his status as Lan WangJi's partner in cultivation. Lan WangJi definitely pressed Lan QiRen over and over again to gain him such a right. He let out a breath and grinned, "Don't worry. I'll definitely do my best and not lose face for you."

It was called a sect banquet, but the Cloud Recesses' sect banquet was completely different from what Wei WuXian thought sect banquets were.

The sect banquet of the YunmengJiang Sect involved setting up a dozen big, square tables at Lotus Pier's outdoors training field. Everyone sat wherever they wanted and called one another

whatever they wanted. The kitchen was brought outside as well. The fire and the smell shot up high in the air from an entire row of pots and stoves. One had to go over and take whatever they wanted to eat. More would be cooked if there wasn't enough. Although he'd never gone to the LanlingJin Sect's banquet, their sect never spared spreading the extravagant details everywhere, like famous sword-dancing acts as entertainment, trees of coral and pools of wine, or miles and miles of red brocade carpets. It was an astonishing scene.

In comparison, the sect banquet of the Cloud Recesses was neither lively nor lavish.

The GusuLan Sect's discipline had always been terrifyingly strict, allowing no speaking when eating or sleeping. Even though the banquet hadn't begun yet, nobody amongst the seats said anything. Apart from those who just entered the hall, who'd whisper as they saluted at their seniors, almost nobody talked, and laughter was nonexistent. They wore the same white clothes, the same white forehead ribbons adorned with patterns of flowing clouds, the same solemn, almost numb expressions—almost as if they were carved from the same template.

Looking at the entire hall of 'mourning clothes', Wei WuXian pretended like he couldn't see the looks of surprise or even hostility from the others, commenting in silence, Is this a sect banquet? It's even graver than a funeral.

At this point, Lan XiChen and Lan QiRen entered the banquet hall. Lan WangJi, who'd been sitting quietly beside Wei WuXian, finally moved slightly.

Likely because Lan QiRen got a heart attack whenever he saw Wei WuXian, he simply decided not to look at him, staring straight forward. Lan XiChen was pleasant as always, holding the hint of a smile at his lips that always seemed like spring wind. Yet, perhaps because of the secluded meditation, Wei WuXian felt that ZeWu-Jun looked a bit frail.

After the sect leader was seated, Lan XiChen began with a few simple words of courtesy, and the banquet began.

The first course was a soup.

To drink soup before the meal was a habit of the GusuLan Sect's. The dish was held in a plain bowl made of black, smooth porcelain, small enough to be held in one's palm. Under the dainty lid was, as expected, a whole lot of green and yellow leaves, roots, and bark.

Just looking at it made Wei WuXian's brows twitch. After he brought a spoonful into his mouth, even though he prepared himself for it, he couldn't help but closed his eyes and buried his forehead in his hand.

Only a while later did he return from the daze to which his heavily-attacked tastebuds sent him. He managed to prop up his body with his elbow, thinking, If the Lan Sect's founder was a monk, he was definitely an ascetic.

Wei WuXian couldn't control himself from reminiscing the big pot filled to the brim with lotus root and pork rib soup on the training field when Lotus Pier held sect banquets. The aroma wafted miles and miles, luring all of the nearby children over as they clung to Lotus Pier's outer walls and peeked inside, saliva drooling down their mouths. When they went home, they all sobbed and begged to be disciples at the YunmengJiang Sect. In comparison, at this moment, he didn't know whether to pity himself, who was so full of the strange bittersweet taste, or Lan WangJi, who grew up on this since birth.

But as he watched all of the other Lan Sect members finish the medicinal soup without a change of face, their motions and expressions a mixture of calm, elegant, and natural, Wei WuXian didn't have the face to leave so much in his bowl either. On top of that, in the four thousand—no, he didn't know how many thousands there were now—sect rules, he recalled there were regulations to dining courtesy either, such as no picking, no wasting, and no eating more than three bowls. Although he felt these rules were absolutely ridiculous, he didn't want to be spurned by Lan QiRen just yet.

However, just as he was about to brave up and down the entire bowl of the weird medicinal soup all in one gulp, he suddenly realized that the bowl in front of him was already empty.

Wei WuXian, "???"

He couldn't help but picked up the delicate little bowl, thinking, I did just drink one tiny sip, didn't I? Is there a hole on the bottom and everything leaked out?  
But the table was spick and span, without a single trace of soup.

Wei WuXian looked to the side. At the same time, Lan WangJi had his last sip of the soup as though nothing happened. After he closed the porcelain lid, he looked down, and was currently using a snowy handkerchief to wipe the corner of his mouth.

But Wei WuXian clearly remembered that Lan WangJi had long since finished his bowl.  
He also discovered that Lan WangJi's table seemed to be a lot nearer to his than before the banquet started. It was like it'd been shifted stealthily.

Wei WuXian, “...”

He raised a brow, mouthing towards Lan WangJi—HanGuang-Jun, your moves are pretty fast, huh?

Lan WangJi laid down the handkerchief. He looked over here for a moment before he calmly averted his gaze.

\*Heights (attached by author at the end of this particular chapter):

Nie MingJue 191 (6'3)

Lan XiChen 188 (6'2)

Lan WangJi 188 (6'2)

Wei WuXian 186 (6'1)

Jin ZiXuan 185 (6'1)

Jiang WanYin 185 (6'1)

Xiao XingChen 185 (6'1)

Wen QiongLin 183 (6'0)

Mo XuanYu 180 (5'11)

Nie HuaiSang 172 (5'8)

Jin GuangYao 170 (5'7) (without cap, but it's dubious whether or not there are height-increasing wedges in his shoes)

## GDC Chapter 116: Extra—Banquet —Part Three

The more serious he was, the more Wei WuXian couldn't suppress the desire to make mischief within him.

He knocked lightly on the black porcelain bowl with his finger, letting out crisp sounds only the two of them could pick up. Hearing the noise, Lan WangJi's eyes moved a few unnoticeable inches towards him.

Wei WuXian knew that no matter how much Lan WangJi's eyes shifted, he wouldn't miss a single movement of his through the corner of his eye. And so, he lifted the bowl and pretended to take a sip. Turning it in his hand, he stopped where Lan WangJi drank, and covered the edge of the bowl with his lips.

As expected, although Lan WangJi's hands were originally placed properly on his lap, right now his position still hadn't changed, but the fingers quietly hidden underneath the white sleeves curled up slightly.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian felt his heart grow wings. Momentarily relaxed, he was just about to lean against Lan WangJi uncontrollably when a harsh cough suddenly came from Lan QiRen. Wei WuXian immediately straightened his half-slanted body, returning to the proper seating posture.

Only a while after the soup had been finished was the main course finally brought forth. On every table were three dishes placed in small plates, either green or white. They were no different from the food served when Wei WuXian was studying here. After all these years, apart from the increasing bitterness, there was no change at all. Partly because of geography and partly because of personality, Wei WuXian liked strong tastes, especially spice, and regarded meat as a necessity. When faced with such plain dishes, he didn't really have an appetite, munching them down without even knowing what he ate. Meanwhile, Lan QiRen's eyes swept by once in a while, glaring at him just like back when he taught him, ready to pick on him and make him leave at all time. It was because Wei WuXian was abnormally well-behaved that he couldn't do anything and had to give up.

After the tasteless meal, the servants took away the plates and tables. As usual, Lan XiChen started to summarize the recent plans for the sect. But after listening for just a few sentences, Wei WuXian began to feel that he was a bit absent-minded. He even remembered two night-hunting locations wrong and didn't realize after he spoke, causing Lan QiRen to throw a couple of sideway looks at him and puff his goatee into the air. A while later, he finally couldn't help but interrupt him. Fortunately, the sect banquet finally ended, although somewhat hastily.

A dreary beginning, a dreary process, and a dreary ending—Wei WuXian was forced to be dreary for over two hours. There was neither delicious food nor good entertainment. It was so suffocating that he felt he'd had fleas on his body for half a year. And even afterwards, Lan QiRen strictly called Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi away, likely going to give them a lecture again, and two of them at once at that. He had no-one to mess with. After he strolled around a bit, he spotted a few juniors walking together. Just as he was about to greet them and snatch them away to have some fun, however, something changed on Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the rest of the juniors' faces the moment they saw him. They spun around and proceeded to leave.

Wei WuXian understood. He ventured to a somewhat more secluded piece of woods. He waited for a while, and the kids from back then finally snuck out again. Lan JingYi, "Senior Wei, we did not ignore you on purpose, but Sir said anyone who ever talks to you will copy the Lan Sect's rules from top to bottom..."

'Sir' was the honorific by which all disciples and cultivators of the GusuLan Sect referred to Lan QiRen. Any mention of 'Sir' meant him and only him. Wei WuXian gloated, "It's fine, I knew. It's not the first day your Sir is fireproof, thief-proof, and Wei-Ying-proof. You've seen his success rates? He probably feels like his well-nurtured cabbage was dug up by a pig\*. It's only

natural he's a bit more fiery than usual, hahahaha..."

\*TN: This is a common saying in China used to describe what parents feel when their cherished daughter falls in love.

Lan JingYi, "..."

Lan SiZhui, "... Hahaha."

Wei WuXian had finished laughing, "Right, you said back then you were punished because you went night-hunting with Wen Ning." He asked Lan SiZhui, "How has he been doing?"

Lan SiZhui, "He is probably hidden in some corner down the mountain, waiting for us to find him again the next time we go night-hunting." After some thought, he continued with a tone of worry, "But when we parted, Sect Leader Jiang seemed to be quite mad still. I hope we did not make things difficult for him."

Wei WuXian, "Huh? Jiang Cheng? How did you run into him while night-hunting?"

Lan SiZhui, "We invited Young Master Jin to join our night-hunt last time, so..."

Wei WuXian immediately understood.

One could even guess that while Lan SiZhui led the group in the night-hunt, Wen Ning naturally wouldn't be idle either. He must've followed them in the dark to protect them, so that he could provide assistance when they encounter danger during the night-hunt. Jiang Cheng must've been sneaking behind Jin Ling as well, scared something would happen to him again. And so, the two ran into each other under dangerous circumstances. He asked, and this was exactly what happened. Wei WuXian didn't know whether or not he should laugh.

After a pause, he asked again, "How have Sect Leader Jiang and Jin Ling been?"

Following Jin GuangYao's death, the most pure-blooded heir of the LanlingJin Sect was Jin Ling. However, there were still many elders in side branches of the sect that watched hungrily, eager for the opportunity. The LanlingJin Sect was scorned by others on the outside, and on the inside held a mixture of different self-interests. Jin Ling was still young. How could he keep everything down? In the end, Jiang Cheng still went up Koi Tower, Zidian in hand, and walked once around, for him to finally be able to temporarily secure his position as sect leader. As for what would happen in the days to come, nobody knew.

Lan JingYi pouted, "They seem pretty fine. Sect Leader Jiang is the same as before, always lashing out at people with his whip. Young Mistress's temper has been getting better. In the past he could talk back thrice to his uncle after he scolds him once. Now he can do ten times."

Lan SiZhui reproached, "JingYi, how could you call someone like that behind their back?"

Lan JingYi protested, "I clearly call him the same thing to his face."

Hearing Lan JingYi say so, Wei WuXian relaxed slightly. In truth, he knew that these weren't what he really wanted to ask. But as it sounded like Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling had been doing quite well, there was nothing left to say. He stood up and dusted off the lower hem of his clothes, "Sure, then. It's pretty fine indeed. They can keep up the good work. You guys can continue. I need to go take care of something."

Lan JingYi disdained, "You have always been lounging about here in the Cloud Recesses. What things do you need to take care of?"

Wei WuXian didn't even turn around, "Nibble my cabbage!"

It was rare he woke up so early in the morning. After he returned to the Jingshi, he first slept for a long while. The result of such a lopsided sleep schedule was that when he woke up, it was already dusk. He missed dinner and there wasn't anything else for him to eat. Wei WuXian didn't feel hungry either. He continued to search through Lan WangJi's old calligraphy prints and essay drafts as he waited. Yet, even until nightfall, his big cabbage didn't return.

Finally, Wei WuXian felt how empty his stomach was. But the time had already passed the Cloud Recesses' curfew. According to sect rules, unauthorized people weren't allowed to roam outside, much less climb the wall and venture outside—if this were back then, no matter what he 'couldn't' do, no matter what was 'forbidden', Wei WuXian only cared about eating when he was hungry, sleeping when he was tired, teasing when he was bored, running when he got into

trouble. But the situation now was different. Those would count as faults of Lan WangJi now. No matter how hungry, how bored he was, he could only let out a long sigh and endure it. At this point, a slight noise came from outside the Jingshi. The door was pushed a slit open. Lan WangJi returned.

Wei WuXian pretended to be dead on the ground.

He heard Lan WangJi walk gently towards the desk and place something on top, never saying anything. Wei WuXian wanted to continue playing dead, but it seemed as if Lan WangJi opened the lid of something as a strong savor of spice overwhelmed the cold sandalwood that originally perfused the Jingshi.

At once, Wei WuXian got up from the ground with a roll, “Er-gege! I’ll do everything you say for the rest of my life!”

Expressionless, Lan WangJi took out the dishes from within the box and laid them on the desk. Wei WuXian gravitated towards him. The sight of the red color atop the half-a-dozen white plates made him so joyous that his eyes glowed red, “You’re too kind, HanGuang-Jun, it’s so thoughtful of you to go out of your way and bring back food for me. You can order me around no matter what you do from now on.”

At last, Lan WangJi took out a pair of ivory white chopsticks and placed them horizontally over the bowl, his voice cool, “Speech is forbidden when dining.”

Wei WuXian, “And you say speech is forbidden when sleeping. Every night when I say so much and make so much noise why have you never stopped me?”

Lan WangJi glanced at him. Wei WuXian, “Fine, fine, fine, I’ll stop. We’re like this already, so why is your face still so thin? You get embarrassed so easily, but that’s exactly what I like about you. Did you bring this from the Hunan cuisine at Caiyi Town?”

Lan WangJi didn’t say anything, so Wei WuXian took it as a silent confirmation. He sat down at the desk, “I wonder if that restaurant is still open. In the past, we always ate there, or else if we only ate your sect’s food, I might not even have pulled through those few months. Oh, just look at this. This is what a sect banquet should really be.”

Lan WangJi, “We?”

Wei WuXian, “Jiang Cheng and I. Sometimes Nie HuaiSang and the other few as well.”

Sweeping his eyes over Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian grinned, “Why are you looking at me like this? HanGuang-Jun, don’t forget. Back then I’ve invited you to dine out together before. How passionately I tried! You were the one who refused to go. Every time I talked to you you’d glare at me, and everything you said started with a ‘no’. I’ve really met so many obstacles. I haven’t even squared things with you yet, and here you are unhappy. Speaking of it...” He slipped to Lan WangJi’s side, “I only forced myself not to sneak out because I didn’t want to violate any sect rules, waiting for you inside so obediently. Yet who would’ve thought you violated the rules yourself and went out to find food for me, HanGuang-Jun. Violating the rules like this—if your uncle knew, his heart’s gonna hurt again.”

Lan WangJi lowered his head and wrapped his arms around Wei WuXian’s waist. He looked quiet and motionless, yet Wei WuXian could feel his fingers stroke his waist, whether intentional or not. The fingers were so warm that the heat seeped through his clothes and went straight into his skin. The sensation was extremely clear. Wei WuXian embraced him as well, whispering, “HanGuang-Jun... I drank your sect’s soup and now my whole mouth is bitter. I can’t eat anything. What do I do?”

Lan WangJi, “One sip.”

Wei WuXian, “Yes. I did only drink one sip, but this soup of yours truly has a strong aftereffect. The bitterness slid all the way from the tip of my tongue down into my throat. Tell me—what should I do?”

After some silence, Lan WangJi replied, “Balance it.”

Wei WuXian asked with humility, “How should I balance it?”

Lan WangJi raised his head.

A mild, medicinal aroma was weaved in and out of both of their lips. The slight bitterness made the kiss especially lingering.

When they finally managed to part, Wei WuXian breathed, “HanGuang-Jun, I just remembered. You drank two bowls of that soup. You’re even more bitter than me.”

Lan WangJi, “Mn.”

Wei WuXian, “But you still taste quite sweet. How strange.”

“...” Lan WangJi, “Eat first.” After a pause, he added, “We can do it after you finish.”

Wei WuXian, “I’ll eat the cabbage first.”

Lan WangJi frowned slightly, as though he was confused as to why he’d mention cabbages so suddenly. Wei WuXian laughed as he curled his arm around his neck.

Those so-called banquets were best held behind shut doors.

## GDC Chapter 117: Extra—Incense Burner

Wei WuXian found an old incense burner in the treasure pavilion of the Cloud Recesses—the ‘Chamber of Ancients.’

The incense burner had the body of a bear, nose of an elephant, eyes of a rhinoceros, tail of a bull, and limbs of a tiger. With its stomach as the main unit, it spouted soft smoke from its mouth after the incense was lit up.

In the Jingshi, Wei WuXian played with it for a while, “This thing looks kind of fun. It’s got no killing intent or malicious energy, so it’s definitely not something used to harm people. Lan Zhan, do you know what this is for?”

Lan WangJi shook his head. Wei WuXian sniffed the scent. He didn’t find anything wrong with it either. Since neither of the two saw it as suspicious, they put the incense burner away and decided to investigate it further at some later date.

Yet before the two had laid down for long, they felt extremely tired and fell into a deep sleep. An unknown period of time later, Wei WuXian woke up and discovered that he and Lan WangJi weren’t at the Jingshi of the Cloud Recesses, but rather amidst the wilderness of a forest.

Wei WuXian crawled up from the ground, “What’s this place?”

Lan WangJi, “Not the real world.”

Wei WuXian, “Not the real world? No way,” he shook his sleeve, feeling it quite clearly, “What could this be if not reality?”

Lan WangJi didn’t answer. He walked in silence towards a river and gestured for him to look down. Wei WuXian walked over and glanced at his reflection. He was immediately startled.

Reflected against the river’s surface was how he looked in his past life!

Wei WuXian immediately looked up, “Because of the incense burner?”

Lan WangJi nodded, “Likely so.”

After staring for a while at the familiar features in the water, Wei WuXian finally averted his gaze, “It’s fine. I tested the incense burner. There’s no resentful energy, so it’s definitely not a weapon of evil. Some master probably made this either to cultivate or just for the sake of amusement. Let’s walk around for now and look into our situation.”

And the two began to stroll within this forest that was an illusion or otherwise. Soon, a small, log cabin came into their view.

Wei WuXian saw the log cabin and exclaimed with a ‘huh’. Lan WangJi, “Yes?”

Wei WuXian scrutinized the cabin, “The cabin looks a little familiar to me.”

The cabin was a home that looked more than common, which was why even though he was suspicious, he couldn’t determine if he’d seen it or not. At this point, the squeaks of the loom came from the cabin.

The two exchanged a glance with each other. Without more words, they approached together. But at the door of the cabin, as they looked inside, both of them stopped in surprise.

What was within the cabin was far from even the worst-case scenario they imagined. There were neither villains nor beasts. In fact, there was only one person, and a person they were both rather familiar with, at that.

In the cabin sat a ‘Lan WangJi’!

This ‘Lan WangJi’ had the same handsome features and the same tall build as the one beside Wei WuXian. The plain yet not at all crude garb of blue and white cotton, when over his body, seemed to become the heavenly robes of a renowned cultivator. At the side, the loom moved on its own like it was maneuvered using a spell, squeaking as it weaved cotton. On the other hand, he himself sat at the side with a book in his hand, reading attentively.

The two had already walked in front of the door and even made quite some noise, while ‘Lan WangJi’ seemed as though he didn’t notice anything. With a distant expression, he flipped over

a page with fair, slim fingers.

Wei WuXian looked at the Lan WangJi beside him, then at the ‘Lan WangJi’ inside, reaching an epiphany, “I see, I see!”

Lan WangJi’s brows raised just a bit. The slight motion meant that he was surprised. He asked, “What?”

Wei WuXian, “Th-Th-This, this is my dream!”

Before he finished, a slender figure clothed in black swept into the cabin, extending his speech, “Er-gege, I’m back!”

Looking at the beaming ‘Wei WuXian’ who carried a hoe on his shoulder, a creel in his hand, and a straw in his mouth, Lan WangJi was even more silent. If this was Wei WuXian’s dream, it was only natural that the people inside the dream couldn’t see them. The weaving ‘Lan WangJi’ finally looked up. When he saw ‘Wei WuXian’, he even curled his lips slightly, but the smile faded at once. He stood up and poured him a cup of water.

‘Wei WuXian’ spat out the straw in his mouth and sat down at the wooden little table, grabbing the cup and downing it in a few gulps. He finally began, “Today the sun’s way too bright outside. I’m absolutely scorched. I left the things at the field. Not gonna work anymore. Maybe I’ll pick it up again later.”

‘Lan WangJi’ replied, “Mn.” Then he took out a snowy towel and handed it to him. ‘Wei WuXian’, however, moved his face over with a grin. It was more than obvious that he wanted ‘Lan WangJi’ to wipe his face for him.

And ‘Lan WangJi’ didn’t refuse either. He really began to wipe his face, earnest and dedicated. ‘Wei WuXian’ enjoyed it as he rambled on, “I played around over at the river and got two fish. Cook me fish stew tonight, Er-gege!”

“Mn.”

“How are crucians usually cooked over at Gusu? Do you know how to cook chilli pickled fish\*, Lan Zhan? I like that. But please don’t make it sweet. I tried it once and almost threw up.”

\*TN: <http://ali.xinshipu.cn/20141226/original/1419534344443.jpg>

“Mn. I do.”

“The weather’s getting hotter and hotter. There’s no need to boil the bathwater so hot today, so I only cut half the usual amount of firewood.”

“Mn. That is fine.”

“...” Lan WangJi stared at the two making casual conversation, “Your dream?”

Wei WuXian was laughing so hard he might suffer from an internal injury, “Pwahahahahahahaha, uh, yes. For a certain period of time, for some reason, I keep on having these dreams. I’d dream that we retired to seclusion to the countryside. I go out to hunt and farm, while you stay at home to guard the house, weaving and cooking food for me. Oh right, you’re also in charge of my money and doing accounts for me. At night you even mend my clothes. Every time I dream about telling you to boil the bathwater so that we could bathe together at night, but every time we were about to take off our clothes I’d wake up. What a shame, hahahahahahahaha...”

He didn’t at all feel embarrassed that such a dream was seen by Lan WangJi. Instead, he was quite pleased with himself. Seeing how giddy he was, Lan WangJi’s eyes grew soft, “One might as well.”

This dream of Wei WuXian’s was full of trivial odds and ends, like cooking, eating, feeding chicken, cutting firewood. As expected, when the bathwater had finished boiling, the dream halted abruptly. The two walked just a few steps out of the cabin and arrived at an elegant pavilion. Outside stood a magnolia tree with branches drawn out, effusing a quiet, refreshing fragrance.

The dream’s location changed, this time somewhere both of the two should definitely recognize. This place was the Library Pavilion of Gusu’s Cloud Recesses.

Candlelight leaked out a wooden window on the second floor, along with indistinct voices. Wei

WuXian looked up, “Let’s go inside and check things out?”

For some reason, Lan WangJi had surprisingly stopped. He stared at the window, lost in thought, as if he was hesitating. Wei WuXian found this strange. He couldn’t think of a reason why Lan WangJi might not want to go in, asking, “What’s wrong?”

Lan WangJi shook his head vaguely. After some silence, just as he was about to speak, a string of unrestrained laughter suddenly exploded from within the Library Pavilion.

Hearing this, Wei WuXian’s eyes lit up. He dashed into the Pavilion and leaped up the stairs in just a few strides.

Now that he entered, of course Lan WangJi wouldn’t stay outside all by himself either, so he went in as well. Together, the two walked into the lamp-lit chamber, and they indeed saw something very interesting.

On a light-colored sitting mat beside a surface set for the punishment of copying scriptures, a sixteen-year-old Wei Ying was roaring with laughter as he slammed the desk, “Hahahahahahahahahahahaha!”

Thrown onto the ground was a yellowing booklet, which a similarly young Lan Zhan treated as if it were a snake or scorpion. He had already backed away up to a corner of the Pavilion, currently howling in anger, “Wei Ying—!”

Young Wei Ying laughed so hard he almost rolled under his deck. He finally managed to raise his hand, “Here! I’m here!”

And over here, Wei WuXian was also splitting his sides with laughter. He tugged at Lan WangJi who stood beside him, “What a nice dream! I can’t anymore, Lan Zhan, look at you, look at how you were back then, that expression, hahahahahaha...”

For some reason, Lan WangJi’s face looked even stranger. Wei WuXian pulled him over to sit on a mat at the side, grinning as their adolescent versions fought and argued, propping his chin on his hand.

There, young Lan Zhan had already unsheathed Bichen. Wei WuXian hurriedly grabbed Suibian, revealing a few inches of its sheath as he reminded, “Manners! Second Young Master Lan! Watch your manners! I brought my sword today as well. If we start fighting, do you think your Library Pavilion will end up fine?”

Lan Zhan raged, “Wei Ying! Just... Just what sort of person are you?!”

Wei Ying raised a brow, “What sort of person could I be? I’m a man!”

“...” Lan Zhan lashed out, “You have no shame!”

Wei Ying, “So I have to feel ashamed about this? Don’t tell me you’ve never read something like this before. I won’t believe you.”

After trying to hold it back for a while, Lan Zhan charged over with his sword, face cold as frost. Wei Ying was astonished, “What, you’re really gonna fight?!” He attacked as well. Just like this, the two really began to spar within the Library Pavilion.

At this point, Wei WuXian exclaimed with a ‘huh’. He turned sideways to look at Lan WangJi, musing, “Is this what happened? Why don’t I remember us actually fighting back then?”

Lan WangJi didn’t make a single sound. Wei WuXian looked at him, but he unnoticeably averted Wei WuXian’s gaze. The feeling that something had been off about him tonight deepened within Wei WuXian.

Just as he was about to ask, he heard young Wei Ying joke as he fought, “Nice, nice, nice! Firm yet free, curb after release—beautiful swordsmanship! But Lan Zhan, oh, Lan Zhan, look at how red your face is. Is it because of fighting with me, or is it because of what you just looked at?”

Young Lan Zhan wasn’t blushing at all. He swung his sword across, “Nonsense!”

Wei Ying leaned backwards with extreme flexibility to dodge the attack. Then he straightened up and nimbly pinched Lan Zhan’s fair cheek, “How was it nonsense? You should feel yourself. Your face is almost burning, haha!”

Lan Zhan’s face switched between red and white. He was just about to slap the hand away when Wei Ying retreated first. His slap landed on nothing as he almost ended up slapping himself.

Turning around, Wei Ying continued with all the ease, "Lan Zhan, oh, Lan Zhan, no offense, but look at the other people your age. Is there any one of them who blushes so easily? Can't take it after just this tiny bit of thrill—you're such an amateur."

If this situation was neither something that really happened nor one of his dreams, it had to be one of Lan WangJi's dreams. Wei WuXian enjoyed the spectacle, "Lan Zhan, you get me so much. This is indeed something I'd say."

Yet, he didn't notice that the current Lan WangJi almost looked somewhat anxious.

Over there, Wei Ying rambled on, "Copying scriptures is so boring. Why don't I teach you about these things while you copy them? Let's just say it's to thank you for supervising me..."

Having endured his blather for so long, Lan Zhan finally couldn't take it any longer. Bichen zipped forward. The two swords clashed, and both were knocked out the window. Seeing that Suibian fell out of his hand, Wei Ying was slightly surprised, "Hey, my sword!"

As he shouted, he was about to leap out the window and grab his sword when Lan Zhan plunged toward him from behind and pushed him onto the ground. Wei Ying's head bumped against the ground. He hastily began to struggle, and the two quickly became a brawling mess. Wei Ying kicked as hard as he could, elbows thrashing, but he couldn't break free from the constraint of Lan Zhan's limbs no matter what, almost as if he was wrapped inside an impenetrable net of iron, "Lan Zhan! What are you doing, Lan Zhan! I'm kidding, I'm kidding! Why are you so serious?!"

Lan Zhan grabbed his wrists, pressing his body onto his back. His voice was low, "What, did you, want to teach me?"

His tone sounded cold, but it seemed volcanoes were about to erupt within his eyes.

They were originally quite matched in terms of skill. Out of carelessness, Wei Ying had been pinned down on the ground, vulnerable. He could only feign ignorance, "No? Did I say something?"

Lan Zhan, "You did not?"

Wei Ying replied with confidence, "I didn't!"

He began again, "Don't be so straight, Lan Zhan, don't take every single thing I say so seriously. I can't fathom how you'd believe all that nonsense. What's there to be angry about? I'll stop, alright? Hurry up and let me go. I haven't even finished copying today's scriptures. I'll quit, I'll quit."

Hearing this, Lan Zhan's face calmed as he seemed to relax his arms slightly. Yet, right after Wei Ying pulled his wrists out, he grinned mischievously and struck with his palm.

However, almost as if he was long since on guard, Lan Zhan caught Wei Ying the moment he attacked, holding him down once more. This time, he went even harder, and Wei Ying's wrist was twisted into an even greater curvature. He exclaimed, "I already said I was kidding! Lan Zhan! Can't you even take a joke?!"

Flames seemed to dance within Lan Zhan's eyes. Without saying anything, he tore off the ribbon on his forehead and wrapped it thrice around the hands of Wei Ying who was underneath him, locking them in place with a fast knot.

With such a turn of events, Wei WuXian was absolutely dumbfounded, watching from the side! A few moments later, he finally turned around to look at Lan WangJi beside him, only to find that although Lan WangJi's face was still snowy white, tinged with not a single trace of red, his earlobes had already become pink.

Wei WuXian slithered over, up to no good, "Lan Er-gege... something seems to be wrong with this dream of yours, huh?"

"..." Lan WangJi suddenly stood up, "Stop looking!"

Wei WuXian immediately grabbed him, who was just about to get up and leave, "Don't go! I still want to see what would happen in your dream. We haven't even arrived at the best part yet, have we?"

By the desk in the Library Pavilion, Wei Ying howled for a while, tied up by Lan Zhan. After he

quieted down, he tried to reason with the other, "Lan Zhan, a gentleman uses his tongue instead of his fists. You'd be narrow-minded if you're like this. Think about it. Did I say anything about you?"

Lan Zhan breathed soundlessly, his voice cold, "Think on your own, what you said about me." Wei Ying protested, "I only said that you were an amateur, that you didn't know about some things. Isn't it the truth? There are some adult things that you really don't understand, right? Treating me like this just because you were exposed—what could you be if not narrow-minded?"

Lan Zhan was indifferent, "Who said I do not understand?"

Wei Ying raised a brow, smirking, "Ohhhh, really? Stop being so stubborn. It'd be beyond mind-blowing if you actually do hahahahaha... Ah!"

He suddenly exclaimed, for Lan Zhan suddenly gripped a part of him down below.

Lan Zhan's handsome yet still somewhat callow features were cold as he repeated, "Who said I do not understand?"

Wei WuXian clung onto Lan WangJi, almost biting his earlobe, "Yeah, who said you didn't understand? What you think about in the day you dream about at night. Lan Zhan, tell me the truth, you really want to do this to my past self, don't you? I can't believe... that you're this kind of HanGuang-Jun."

Although Lan WangJi was still expressionless, the pink had already snuck up to his fair neck. The fingers resting at his knee also curled up unnoticeably.

Over there, with his manhood having been seized, young Wei Ying gasped a few times, "What the Hell are you doing, Lan Zhan?! Are you mad?!"

Lan Zhan's entire body had already jammed between Wei Ying's legs. Such a position indeed made one feel threatened. Seeing his disadvantage, Wei Ying immediately changed his words, "... No, no, no! Nobody said you didn't understand! L-L-L-Let go of me first—let's talk things over!"

He swung his arms agitatedly, but the GusuLan Sect's forehead ribbon was made of fine cloth. No matter how he floundered about, he couldn't break out of the bondage. With a few more swings, he saw the book that landed nearby and grabbed it immediately, throwing it onto Lan Zhan in hope that the holy illustrations would knock him sober, "Calm down first!"

The book first crashed into Lan Zhan's chest before it landed between Wei Ying's wide-open legs, flipping a few pages. Lan Zhan looked down, and he could no longer move his eyes.

Coincidentally, the page just so happened to land on an illustration that depicted an extremely obscene position in an extremely bold way. On top of that, both of the illustrated figures were men!

Wei WuXian remembered that the collection he showed Lan WangJi back then had nothing to do with cut-sleeves, so there definitely wasn't such a page. He couldn't help but once again marvel at this. The details within Lan WangJi's dream were... so comprehensive that he could almost gasp in admiration!

Lan Zhan looked down, staring at the page without a single blink. Wei Ying saw the illustration as well. Immediately, he felt a bit awkward, "... Umm..." He wailed again and again within his heart. Insisting that actions were more powerful than words, he used all his strength to pull out a foot and kick forward. Yet, with only one hand, Lan Zhan grabbed the back side of his knee and opened his legs into a wider position. He stripped Wei Ying's belt and trousers with just a few motions.

Wei Ying only felt his bottom half go cold. Looking down, he felt as if his heart went cold as well, exclaiming, "What are you doing, Lan Zhan?!"

Over at the side, Wei WuXian was absolutely engrossed as he watched, so excited that he shouted in silence, what do you think?! He's gonna do you!

Stripped of his pants, Wei Ying's legs, slim and white, were stark naked as he kicked them around. Lan Zhan pressed his legs down. Referring to the illustrations, his right hand searched

for the tight, fleshy spot within the two snowy cheeks.

Wei Ying's entire lower half was restrained firmly. Even when such a private region was forcefully touched, he had nowhere to hide. With two fingers, Lan Zhan rubbed the pink spot. Wei Ying shivered. A flash of embarrassment buzzed across his face, yet he forced it down and struggled as hard as he could, writhing madly. The youth on top of Wei Ying, however, continued to massage the region calmly with his right hand, eyelids lowered and lips sealed shut. Slowly, he exerted more strength, until the spot gradually softened. From the rubbing, a pink slit opened slightly, swallowing a small segment of the fair finger almost shyly.

Wei WuXian glanced at Lan WangJi with a smirk, "So this is why you refused to come in here earlier on, HanGuang-Jun. To do such a thing to me in your dream and have it seen by me—you're really gonna want to go hide in a hole, huh?"

Lan WangJi sat straight by his side. He looked down, and his eyelashes seemed to tremble. Resting his chin on his hand, Wei WuXian faced the scene, watching his young self be pinned down fingered by a young Lan Zhan. He grinned, "If you were able to dream about it afterwards, HanGuang-Jun, you should've just did it to me back then. I..."

Before he could finish, Lan WangJi grabbed his hands and pushed him onto the ground, covering his lips with his own. Wei WuXian could feel his boiling cheeks as well as the fiercely beating heart within his chest. He found it somewhat amusing. As the moist lips parted, he murmured, "What, embarrassed again?"

Lan WangJi's breaths were abnormally rough. He didn't answer. Wei WuXian, "Or... Are you hard instead?"

At the same time, Wei Ying let out a long, crying moan by the desk.

Lan Zhan had already leaned his entire body on top of Wei Ying. The two were tightly connected below, clearly in the process of intrusion. As the hard, foreign object penetrated his body bit by bit, Wei Ying felt so uncomfortable that both his legs curled up, yet because his hands were tightly bound by the forehead ribbon, he couldn't move at all. In pain, he slammed his head loudly against the wall a few times. Lan Zhan put his hand under Wei Ying's head to act as cushion. At the same time, he sent his member entirely inside Wei Ying's body.

In the beginning, it was difficult for the fleshy spot to even take in a single finger, yet now it was stretched open with a large object both hot and hard. The delicate creases were also spread smooth. Wei Ying was still somewhat dazed, as if he didn't know what was going on. But when Lan Zhan slowly began to thrust, consulting the illustrations, Wei Ying began to let out soft, subconscious whimpers.

Wei WuXian turned to Lan WangJi, "You were small back then, Lan Zhan, but your size definitely wasn't. 'I am a virgin, after all, so I say this is gonna be a rough round.'"

He spoke as he rubbed and nudged his knees against Lan WangJi's legs on purpose. Now that he'd seen with his own eyes a live session with him being the protagonist, he was very much turned on and wanted to experience the prowess of the erection again.

Before long, Lan WangJi ripped apart his trousers and the lower hem of his clothes without saying a word, while Wei WuXian naturally parted his legs and coiled them around his waist. Lan WangJi held the shaft of his erection and kneaded it against the entrance.

The two made love almost every single day. Both Wei WuXian's body and heart were long since acquainted with Lan WangJi's. He hugged Lan WangJi's neck tightly and drew in a deep breath, and he was pierced through by the blade.

The entry proceeded quite smoothly. The soft entrance and the warm, moist inside tightly sucked on the intruding object, almost as if he was born to hold the one on top of him. Soon, from where they were connected came moist squelches and the sound of flesh beating flesh.

Lan WangJi's member was quite impressive in its weight, and the shape of its shaft also curved slightly upwards. With every thrust, it'd accurately grind against the weakest, most sensitive spot on the inner wall. Every time the spot was hit, it was a whirling wave of pleasure for the both of them.

Wei WuXian felt light-headed from Lan WangJi's thrusts, his insides contracting sporadically. He shivered from the top of his head to the tip of his toes, arching his neck with relish. From this angle, he could just barely see the sixteen-year-old Wei Ying of Lan WangJi's dream, who was also in the middle of suffering such pleasure.

He lay amongst the books scattered on the ground, wrists bound together and weakly fixed above his head. His red ribbon had long since disappeared. Hair disheveled, he was on the verge of crying, tears blurring his squinting eyes. Atop him, Lan Zhan worked for a while. As if he thought Wei Ying's legs weren't far enough apart, he held Wei Ying's leg and put it over his shoulder before plunging in again. The leg couldn't hang any longer, and fell to the curve of his elbow. Both the smooth lines of the leg and the muscles at the inner thigh twitched slightly. It was obvious that Wei Ying was also driven mad by the curved, burning object that drilled through him ceaselessly. This being his first time, he could do nothing but hold tightly onto Lan Zhan's shoulders as though he was drowning. He probably couldn't even figure out where he was right now, much less recall that his current agony was afflicted by the one wreaking havoc within his body.

As he watched his sixteen-year-old self-blush and tremble while being fucked by the sixteen-year-old Lan Zhan, Wei WuXian felt that it still wasn't enough. Young Lan Zhan should be even rougher, even fiercer, and bully young Wei Ying until he cried out loud. Right now, was far from enough.

Within the small area of the Library Pavilion, the two titillating acts played out. Wei Ying, who had been feeling quite hazy, seemed as if he was somewhat brought back by the sounds of the slapping meat. Staring at the ceiling of the Library Pavilion, he shivered before he slowly shifted his gaze down, as though he wanted to see what the situation below his body was like but didn't have the courage to do so. Coincidentally, after Lan Zhan toiled for a while, he raised both of Wei Ying's thighs and hung them at his shoulders. After he leaned forward and charged again, Wei Ying's waist was bent into a flexible curvature. Through the blur of the tears, he could see what it was like between his buttocks.

The clean little spot of pink was now a ripe shade of deep red from the work of Lan Zhan's member, its edges so swollen that it almost seemed pitiful. The weapon, long and hard, was still thrusting in and out. The milky secretion, the thin streaks of blood, and a clear fluid of unknown origin swished around where the two connected, making a mess of things. And in the front, his own member was also raised slightly, spouting some white at its head.

Seeing the horror, Wei Ying was shocked speechless. Soon, he suddenly struggled as hard as he could, conjuring up all his strength, and fought out of Lan Zhan's grip. Flipping around, he crawled forward on his knees, wanting to escape.

For a long while he'd been fucked roughly, pressed on the ground. He'd long since lost all energy. His thighs and his knees quivered as he fumbled only a bit forward before he straight-up collapsed on the ground. The position displayed his round, snowy buttocks high in the air. White and red instantly dribbled out of the opening, rolling down the thighs. Inside the thighs was covered with red and purple handprints, able to induce one's sadism with just one look.

And all of this fell right inside the eyes of Lan Zhan right behind him. With searing eyes, he chased after him without saying a word. Wei Ying felt something tighten around his waist. He was locked in place, and the place that had been empty for a few seconds was immediately filled again.

He moaned, whispering, "No..."

Having endured so much torment, he was already soft and slick, easily able to swallow whole the erection that had just been violating him. Wei Ying groveled on the mat, his body shifting forward with each thrust. Terror flashed across his face. In the past, when he went out into the mountains to fool around, he always saw beasts mate in this position. And thus, being entered from behind, it was only natural he felt even more embarrassed, his insides clenching tight. Pinching his waist, Lan Zhan fucked even harder, still without any method. After a while at

such a level of intensity, Wei Ying finally couldn't take it any longer.

Half his face and his upper body were pressed down on the ground with extreme force. He rambled incoherently, "S-Spare me, spare me... Lan Zhan, Second Young Master Lan, spare me..."

Apart from bringing about deeper and faster dives, of course this kind of plea was utterly useless. Wei WuXian laughed, "Good Heavens, I'm almost gonna get hard. Please don't spare him no matter what. The right thing to do is to fuck him all the way... Ah..."

Lan WangJi picked him up so that Wei WuXian sat on him. The weight of his body made Wei WuXian swallow the rod even deeper, so deep that his brows knit together and his face twitch slightly. He quickly diverted his attention to riding Lan WangJi, adjusting his position. He no longer had the spare energy to spout shameless comments.

As the squelches and the sounds of body slapping against body became even louder, Wei Ying's cries also became more miserable, "Lan Zhan... Lan Zhan... Did... Did you hear me... It's too deep... Don't come in all the way... My stomach hurts..."

Every time Lan Zhan went in, it was as if he was going to pierce him through. The absolute force was the exact opposite of that face of his. Wei Ying was already all red and numb from the onslaught. His entire lower body almost couldn't feel anything anymore. He tried hard to move forward, but every time he'd be dragged back roughly, forced to take Lan Zhan's shaft into the depths of his body. With a few such repetitions, he mumbled almost as if he was on his last breath, "Listen... Listen to me, outside, o-outside there are people waiting for me. Jiang Cheng and the rest... are still waiting for me outside... Ah!"

Hearing this, Lan Zhan withdrew from his body all of a sudden and turned him over.

Wei Ying let out a tear-streaked whimper and immediately curled into a ball, almost as if he wanted to hide himself like an infant. He was mostly erect at the front, on the verge of coming. Fluids were sprawled across the end of his thigh, trickling down. It was quite the spectacle. The hole that'd been forcefully used for so long was swollen, yet it still opened and closed intermittently, seeping white and red. It was as if it was hungry and didn't want Lan Zhan to leave his body.

Wei WuXian, on the other hand, had his waist and hips be supported by Lan WangJi as he rode atop his body. Even now, Lan WangJi's face was cold and elegant. If not for his somewhat scattered breathing, it was impossible to tell what he was doing just by looking at his face. It'd be even harder to guess that right now, he cupped Wei WuXian's buttocks with both hands as he squeezed and kneaded without at all controlling his force, leaving blue and purple prints on the two round halves. He then lowered his head and held the spot of red at Wei WuXian's left chest into his lips, nipping gently. As Wei WuXian swallowed his member in and out, the wet, purplish rod disappeared again and again into the deep crevice. It felt so good his scalp tingled. Over there, Lan Zhan stared for a while at Wei Ying, who seemed like he was about to pass out. Suddenly, he tore apart the clothes in front of him and pinched the pink at his left chest before burying into his body again. Wei Ying finally got the time to catch his breath. Right now, his entire body was sensitive to an extreme. How could he be treated like this? With a whimper, his insides squeezed tight. Tears immediately rolled down. It seemed as if Lan Zhan was angry at the two buds on his chest, rubbing and pinching them so hard that they were erect and swollen red. Every time he was touched. Wei Ying's inner walls contracted fiercely. The warm, delicate flesh sucked the blade tightly, perfectly outlining the shape of Lan Zhan.

Wei Ying cried, "Lan Zhan, I was wrong, I was wrong. I shouldn't have called you an amateur, I shouldn't have said you didn't understand, I won't teach you anymore. Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan did you hear me? Second Young Master Lan, Lan Er-gege..."

Hearing the sweet, nasal tone of the last word, Lan Zhan's motions slowed slightly. He indeed showed some mercy. With blurred eyes, he drew towards Wei Ying's face and gently kissed his thin, pleading lips.

Wei Ying felt as though his entire lower body had been crushed by a boulder. He felt searing

hot down below and sore around his waist, while his nipples were still being teased. He was just starting to drift off when he suddenly felt the attacks below him slow down somewhat. The two's foreheads bumped against each other as two cold lips approached. They tasted a bit sweet. He opened his eyes. As he saw how Lan Zhan's long, dark eyelashes were less than inch away as he kissed him dedicatedly, he somehow felt a tinge of comfort. And so, Wei Ying opened his mouth as well, sucking on Lan Zhan's lips softly. He murmured, "... I want more..." What he meant was the kiss, yet Lan Zhan understood him wrong, increasing speed. Wei Ying gasped a few times. He quickly hugged his neck and took the initiative in the kiss.

In the beginning, Wei Ying only thought that it was absolutely terrifying for such a long, hard object to jab around his insides. But after so long, he also discovered a sensation apart from soreness, pain, and fatigue, gradually getting aroused. Especially when Lan Zhan's somewhat curved erection pressed hard against a certain spot inside him, it felt as if currents passed through his entire body, sending so much pleasure that he trembled. He got harder and harder in front, secreting more and more of the white fluid. He couldn't control his body from moving his hips,. Sometimes when even, Lan Zhan didn't hit the right spot, he'd send his lower half forth and try his hardest to accommodate. What went out of his mouth also ceased to be pleas. Wei Ying, "... Ge... Er-Gege... Lan Er-Gege... Pl... Please..."

Lan Zhan caught his breath, his voice deep, "What?"

Wei Ying cupped his cheeks and kissed unstoppably, whispering, "Do it up there, just like before, hit that spot, alright...?"

As he wished, Lan Zhan ground his hips in the direction he wanted. These few thrusts seemed especially heavy. Wei Ying cried in surprise, limbs wrapping around his body as he called, "What..."

Lan Zhan had already blocked his lips, concentrating on the kiss.

Wei WuXian also lingered in the kiss with Lan WangJi, his tongue sketching the outline of the other's lips. Hearing what happened over there, Wei WuXian spoke, "HanGuang-Jun, you came over there."

A sweaty Lan Zhan embraced a similar Wei Ying, lying quietly on the mat that had already been wrinkled. Wei Ying's chest heaved up and down, his eyes still somewhat hazy. The two hadn't parted yet. He was still sucking tightly on Lan Zhan's member. The semen was sealed tightly inside and not a single drop had leaked.

Wei WuXian grinned, "Look over here. Shouldn't we also..."

Lan WangJi nodded and laid him flat on the mat. Hips steady, he lunged a few times before letting it out inside Wei WuXian's body.

Wei WuXian let out a breath of relief. It felt wonderful, yet his back and buttocks weren't made of steel. After messing about for so long, watching the two younger ones, he was pretty much drained of all energy. Yet, Lan WangJi didn't pull out just yet. Instead, still inside of him, he adjusted him into another position.

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-... Jun?"

Lan WangJi let out a small smile. He approached his ear and said a few soft words.

Wei WuXian, "... Umm, wait? By fuck him all the way, I meant for the young Lan Zhan in your dream to fuck the me in the dream all the way? I didn't mean... Lan Zhan? Er-Ge... Ge? Spare me!!!"

# GDC Chapter 118: Extra—Villainous Friends

13 Years ago

Xue Yang sat beside the small, wooden table of a street side vendor, one leg stepping on the bench as he ate a bowl of glutinous rice dumplings soaked in rice wine. He tapped his spoon on his bowl. It was quite a satisfactory meal in the beginning, but in the end, he suddenly realized that even though the dumplings were sticky, the rice wine wasn't sweet enough.

Xue Yang stood up and kicked the stall over.

The vendor himself had been busying himself all over the place. He was shocked speechless by the kick. He stared as the young man perpetrated his assault and, after the kick, said nothing as he turned around to leave, a wide grin on his face. Only a few moments later did the vendor realize what happened. He caught up and scolded, "What are you doing?!"

Xue Yang, "Wrecking your stall."

The vendor was half-dead with anger, "You're sick! You're mad!"

Xue Yang didn't move an inch. Pointing at his nose, the vendor continued, "You little bastard! You eat my food, you don't give me money, and you have the guts to wreck my stall?! I..."

Xue Yang's thumb shifted. The sword at his waist was unsheathed with a 'clank.'

The sword shone coldly. He gently patted the vendor's cheek with Jiangzai's blade, his voice saccharine, "The dumplings were nice. Add more sugar next time."

After he finished, he turned around and continued to march forth.

The vendor was a mixture of shock and fear. He was mad, but he didn't dare say anything, gaping as he walked into the distance. Suddenly, he was filled with rage and frustration. A moment later, he let out a furious roared, "... Under broad daylight without rhyme or reason—why, why?!"

Xue Yang waved his hand without even looking back, "There's no why. There are lots of things in this world that happen without rhyme or reason. This is called an unexpected disaster. Goodbye!"

With light paces, he walked past a few blocks. A while later, someone came up from behind him and calmly caught up to his strides, hands folded behind.

Jin GuangYao sighed, "I only turned around for a second and you stirred up so much trouble for me. I only had to pay for a bowl of dumplings in the beginning, and now I have to pay for his table, chairs, pots and pans, and even bowls."

Xue Yang, "You'll miss the couple of coins?"

Jin GuangYao, "No."

Xue Yang, "Then why are you sighing?"

Jin GuangYao, "I don't think you'll miss the couple of coins either. Why can't you try being a normal customer once in a while?"

Xue Yang, "Back in Kuizhou I never paid for anything I wanted. Just like this." As he spoke, he casually plucked off a stick of sugared haws off a vendor's pole. It might be the first time the vendor saw such a shameless person. As he stared open-mouthed, Xue Yang took a bite, "Besides, you can deal with the trouble of me wrecking a tiny stall, can't you?"

Jin GuangYao smiled, "You little delinquent. Wreck stalls however you want. I wouldn't even care if you burned down the entire street. Just one thing—don't wear the Stars Amidst Snow robes and cover up your face. Don't let anyone know who did it, or it'd be trouble for me."

He tossed the money to the vendor. Xue Yang spat out a mouthful of haw pits. Through the corner of his eye, he saw a small area of purple at Jin GuangYao's forehead that wasn't hidden properly. He laughed, "Where did that come from?"

Jin GuangYao glanced at him in a somewhat reproachful way. He straightened his cap and hid the bruise properly, "It's a long story."

Xue Yang, "Nie MingJue did it?"

Jin GuangYao, "If he were the one who did it, do you think I could still be standing here and talking to you?"

Xue Yang felt that it very much made sense.

The two left Lanling City and approached a strange building amongst the wilderness. The building wasn't pretty. After the tall walls was a row of long, black houses. Before the row was a square, enclosed by steel fencing as high as one's chest. The fences were packed with red and yellow talismans. Within the field were all kinds of odd tools, like cages, guillotines, like tacked boards. A few "people" dressed in rags also walked slowly by.

All of the "people" had blue skin and empty gazes. They walked around the clearing without any purpose, bumping into one another at times and leaking strange noises from their throat.

It was a corpse training ground.

Back then, Jin GuangShan lusted after the Stygian Tiger Seal. He beat around the bush a couple of times, using all his skills, yet Wei WuXian didn't give in no matter what, and it made him run into a bunch of obstacles. He thought, if you can do it, why can't others? I don't believe that you Wei Ying are the only person in this world who can do it. The day will come when you're surpassed by someone and laughed at by everyone. Will you still be so arrogant then?

And so, Jin GuangShan sought after all those who imitated Wei WuXian in cultivating the ghostly path and gathered them under his rule. He spent a great amount of money and resources and these people, ordering them to study and analyze the structure of the Tiger Seal in secrecy so that they could replicate and restore it. Among them, not many achieved anything, while the one who walked the furthest was the youngest Xue Yang, recommended by Jin GuangYao alone.

Jin GuangYao was overjoyed. He accepted him as a guest cultivator and gave him high rights and freedom. The corpse training ground was an area of land Jin GuangYao specially requested for Xue Yang for him to research in secrecy, which meant for him to fool around however he wanted to.

When they approached the corpse training ground, two fierce corpses were currently engaged in a fight in the center of the square.

These two were evidently different from the other walking corpses. They were perfectly clothed and had white eyes, holding blades. As the two swords clashed, sparks were sent flying everywhere. Before the steel fence were positioned two chairs. The two sat down at the same time. Jin GuangYao fixed his collar, and a quivering corpse shifted over, presenting a tray.

Xue Yang, "Tea."

Jin GuangYao glanced at it. A purplish, peculiar object rested sunken in the bottom of the teacup, swollen from the soak, whatever it was.

With a smile, he pushed the teacup away, "Thank you."

Xue Yang pushed the teacup here again, asking affectionately, "This is tea I made with my own hands. Why don't you want to drink it?"

Jin GuangYao pushed the teacup away once more, explaining in a kind tone, "It's precisely because you made the tea with your own hands that I don't dare to drink it."

Xue Yang raised a brow. He turned around and continued to watch the corpse battle.

The two fierce corpses fought even harder, using both their swords and their claws as the tore off blood and flesh. The boredom on his face grew even denser. A short moment later, he suddenly snapped with his fingers and made a certain gesture. The two corpses immediately turned their swords around, bodies twitching, and slashed off their own heads. The remaining headless bodies plummeted to the ground, still shaking.

Jin GuangYao, "Hadn't they just gotten to the interesting part?"

Xue Yang, "They were too slow."

Jin GuangYao, "They were a lot faster than the two I saw last time."

Xue Yang reached out with the hand wrapped in a black glove, extended a finger, and wagged it, "That depends on what you compare them against. Something like this—let alone Wen Ning,

they wouldn't even last long against the average fierce corpses that Wei WuXian controlled with his flute."

Jin GuangYao smiled, "Why the hurry? Even I'm not hurried. You can take it easy. Tell me if you need anything. Right—"

He took out something from within his sleeve and passed it to Xue Yang, "Perhaps you need this?"

As he skimmed through what it was, Xue Yang's body suddenly sat upright from the chair, "Wei WuXian's manuscripts?"

Jin GuangYao, "That's right."

Xue Yang flipped through the pages, his eyes glowing. Soon, he looked up, "Is this really his actual manuscripts? The ones he wrote when he was nineteen?"

Jin GuangYao, "Of course. Everyone fought for it as hard as they could. It took me quite some effort to gather all of them."

Xue Yang whispered something vulgar, the excitement in his eyes growing even stronger. After he flipped through, he spoke, "It's not complete."

Jin GuangYao, "The fight and fire on Burial Mound were more than destructive. It's fortunate enough that I could find these fragments. Cherish them carefully."

Xue Yang, "What about his flute? Can you get me Chenqing?"

Jin GuangYao shrugged, "Not Chenqing. Jiang WanYin took it."

Xue Yang, "Doesn't he hate Wei WuXian the most? Why would he need Chenqing? Didn't you also get that sword of Wei WuXian's? Give him the sword in exchange for the flute. It's long since Wei WuXian stopped using his sword, while Suibian sealed itself and nobody can pull it out. What's the use of keeping a fucking piece of decoration?"

Jin GuangYao, "You really ask me to do the impossible, Young Master Xue. Do you think I haven't tried? How could anything be that simple. That Jiang WanYin has already gone mad. He still thinks Wei WuXian hasn't died. If Wei WuXian returned, he might not search for his sword, but he'd definitely come for Chenqing. And so, he would definitely not give up Chenqing. A few more words of mine, and he might blow up."

Xue Yang sniggered, "A mad dog."

At this point, two of the LanlingJin Sect's disciples dragged over a cultivator with hair all tangled.

Jin GuangYao, "Weren't you going to rebuild your fierce corpses? I've come just in time to bring you the materials."

The eyes of the cultivator were almost flickering with red, and as he struggled, those pupils that looked at Jin GuangYao were about to spew out fire. Xue Yang, "Who's this?"

Jin GuangYao's face didn't change a bit, "Those I bring to you are sinners, of course."

Hearing this, the cultivator lunged forth, somehow managing to spit out the cloth that gagged his mouth along with a mouthful of blood, "Jin GuangYao! You vile, treacherous scum—how dare you call me a sinner? What sins have I committed?!"

One syllable at a time, he spoke as though his words became nails that could potentially pierce through Jin GuangYao. Xue Yang laughed, "What's up with him?"

The cultivator was restrained by those behind him like they were pulling on a dog's leash. Jin GuangYao waved his hands, "Hush him up."

Xue Yang, "Why? Let me hear him out, won't you? How are you a vile, treacherous scum? He's barking like a dog. I can't understand what he's saying."

Jin GuangYao's tone was somewhat reproachful, "Young Master He Su is a respected cultivator, after all. How could you refer to him in such a disrespectful way?"

The cultivator laughed coldly, "I've already fallen in your hands. What are you keeping up the pretense for?"

Jin GuangYao responded with a kind expression, "You don't have to look at me like that. I also had no choice. To elect a chief cultivator is an irresistible trend. What was the use of stirring up

trouble and seeking argument everywhere? I've already warned you again and again, yet you were determined not to listen to me. Under these circumstances, things are already beyond redemption. From the bottom of my heart, I, too, feel utmost pain and regret."

He Su, "What was the irresistible trend? What was stirring up trouble? Jin GuangShan wanted to establish the position of chief cultivator only to imitate the QishanWen Sect in being the only ones at the top. Do you think all the world is ignorant? You frame me like this only because I spoke the truth!"

Jin GuangYao smiled, saying nothing. He Su continued, "When you really succeed, all of the world of cultivation would see the true face of the LanlingJin Sect. Do you think killing me alone would put you eternally at ease? How wrong you are! We, the TingshanHe Sect, teem with talent. From now on, we'll unite and never surrender to you Wen-dogs of another skin!"

Hearing this, Jin GuangYao squinted slightly, the corners of his lips curving up. It was the usual kind, gentle expression. Seeing this, He Su felt his heart skip a beat. At the same time, commotion sounded outside the corpse training ground, among it the cries of women and children.

He Su spun around, only to see a group of LanlingJin Sect cultivators drag inside sixty or seventy people all wearing the same uniform. There were men and women, old and young. Every one of them was a cross between shock and fear, while some were already crying. Both tied up, a girl and a boy kneeled on the ground as they wailed at He Su, "Brother!"

He Su was shocked speechless, his face instantly as white as paper, "Jin GuangYao! What are you doing?! It's enough if you kill me—why drag my entire sect along?!"

Jin GuangYao looked down and fixed his sleeves, still grinning, "Weren't you yourself the one who reminded me just now? Even if I killed you, I wouldn't be put eternally at ease. The TingshanHe Sect teems with talent, and from now on, you'd unite and never surrender—I was quite frightened. After much thought, this was the only thing I could come up with."

He Su felt as though a fist had been shoved down his throat. He couldn't manage a thing. A moment later, he raged, "To wipe out my entire sect without a reason—are you really not scared of being condemned by all?! Are you really not scared of what would happen if ChiFeng-Zun found out?!"

Hearing him mention Nie MingJue, Jin GuangYao raised his brows. Xue Yang laughed so hard he was about to flop over his chair. Jin GuangYao gave him a look before he turned around and replied calmly, "That's not the way to go about things, is it? The TingshanHe Sect rebelled and schemed to assassinate Sect Leader Jin with all its forces before it was caught red-handed. How could that be called without a reason?"

The ones over their cried, "Brother! He's lying! We didn't, we didn't!"

He Su, "Utterly nonsense! Open your eyes and fucking look! There are nine-year-old children here! Old men who can't even walk! How could they rebel against anything?! Why would they assassinate your dad out of nowhere?!"

Jin GuangYao, "Because you made a mistake and committed murder, Young Master He Su, while they refused to accept Koi Tower's conviction of you, of course."

He Su finally remembered the accusation for which he was transferred to such a creepy place, "It's all made up! I never killed a cultivator of the LanlingJin Sect! I've never even seen the person who died! I don't even know if he was really a cultivator from your sect! I... I..."

He stammered for a while before eventually caving in, "I... I don't even know what happened, I don't even know!"

Yet, at such a place, nobody would listen to his protests. Sitting before him were two villains who already treated him as though he were dead. What they enjoyed was precisely his dying struggle. Smiling, Jin GuangYao leaned back, waving his hand, "Hush him up, hush him up."

Knowing he'd undoubtedly die, He Su was brimming with dread. Clenching his teeth, he roared, "Jin GuangYao! You'll receive your retribution! Your dad is gonna die among prostitutes sooner or later, and you wouldn't meet a pleasant end either, you son of a

prostitute!!!”

Xue Yang was in the middle of enjoying the speech, giggling and laughing. Yet all of a sudden, a shadow flashed and a silver light flew past. He Su screeched, covering his mouth.

Blood splattered all over the ground. Over there, the members of He Su’s sect cried and cursed. It was utter chaos, but no matter how chaotic, it was firmly subdued. Standing before the collapsed He Su, Xue Yang tossed something bloody in his hand, snapping at two of the walking corpses beside him, “Shut him in the cage.”

Jin GuangYao, “You shut them in alive?”

Xue Yang turned around, curling his lips, “Wei WuXian never used live humans, but I wanna try.”

Under his command, the two corpses dragged the legs of He Su who was still screaming and threw them inside the steel cage in the middle of the corpse training ground. As they watched their elder brother bang his head madly against the bars, the boys and girls rushed over wailing. Their cries were so sharp that Jin GuangYao reached up and rubbed his temple, seeming as though he wanted to pick up the tea and have a few sips to steady his nerves. Yet, he looked down only to see the purplish, bloated object at the bottom of the cup. He then looked up at the tongue that Xue Yang was tossing around in his hand. After some thought, he finally realized, “This is what you make the tea out of?”

Xue Yang, “I have a whole jar. You want some?”

“...”

Jin GuangYao, “No thanks. Tidy things up a bit and come pick up someone with me. We can have tea elsewhere.”

As though he suddenly remembered something, he fixed his cap, accidentally touching the area of purple hidden at his forehead. Xue Yang gloated, “So what exactly is up with that forehead of yours?”

Jin GuangYao, “I’ve said already. It’s a long story.”

Jin GuangShan always threw his tasks whether big or small onto Jin GuangYao’s shoulders, while he indulged himself nights in a row, making Madam Jin throw her rage all around Koi Tower. When Jin ZiXuan was there, he could be the mediator between his parents, but right now it was already past the point of no turning back between the two. Every time Jin GuangShan went out and fooled around with women, he’d use Jin GuangYao to cover him and look for excuses. Madam Jin couldn’t catch him, so she vented on Jin GuangYao instead, shattering an incense burner today and spilling a cup of tea tomorrow. And so, in order for him to be able to live a few more safe days on Koi Tower, Jin GuangYao had to go to brothels himself and retrieve Jin GuangShan on time.

Having familiarized himself with doing such things, Jin GuangYao already knew where he could find Jin GuangShan the quickest. Arriving at an elegant pavilion, Jin GuangShan walked in with hands behind his back. The manager at the main hall welcomed him with a fawning smile, while Jin GuangYao raised a hand to gesture that it was unnecessary. Casually, Xue Yang swiped an apple from a customer’s table before following Jin GuangYao upstairs, only wiping it at his chest before munching down. Soon, the laughter of Jin GuangShan and quite a few women ventured down. The women chirped, “Sect Leader, don’t you think this painting of mine is marvelous? Doesn’t the flower look almost as if it were alive, painted on my body?” “What’s so clever about painting? Sect Leader, look at my calligraphy. What do you think?”

Jin GuangYao had long since gotten used to this. He knew when he should appear and when he should not. He gestured towards Xue Yang and stopped in his tracks. Xue Yang clicked his tongue, his expression quite impatient. Just as he was about to go downstairs and wait, he suddenly heard Jin GuangShan’s gruff voice, “Women—shouldn’t it be enough as long as they water their flowers, powder their faces, and make themselves look as pretty as possible? Calligraphy? What a disappointment.”

Those women all wanted to please Jin GuangShan originally. With these words, a flash of

awkwardness passed over the pavilion. Jin GuangYao's figure froze somewhat as well. Soon, someone giggled, "But I heard that back then in Yunmeng, there was a talented woman who charmed the entire world with her poems and songs—zither, chess, calligraphy, as well as painting!"

It was clear Jin GuangShan was dead drunk. The wine could even be heard from his stammering voice.

He mumbled, "That's—not how things work. Now I've realized. Women shouldn't play with those useless things. Women who've read some books always think they're a level higher than the other women. They're the most troublesome, with so many demands and unrealistic fancies."

Standing before a window, Xue Yang leaned back, his arms propped on the window as he ate his apple, looking sideways at the scenery outside. And Jin GuangYao's smile seemed to be locked on his face, his curved eyes motionless.

Up on the pavilion, the women agreed with laughter. As though he remembered something from the past, he murmured to himself, "If I bought her freedom and took her back to Lanling, who knows how much fuss she would've made. If she stayed where she was, she might be popular for a few more years and she wouldn't have to worry about her spendings for the rest of her life. Out of everything, just why did she have to bear a son, a son of a prostitute? What could she have hoped to..."

A woman asked, "Sect Leader Jin, who are you talking about? What son?"

Jin GuangShan's voice drifted, "Son? Oh, forget it."

"Okay, then we'll forget it!"

"If you don't like it when we write and paint, Sect Leader Jin, then we won't write and paint. How about we do something else?"

Jin GuangYao stood for thirty minutes by the stairs, while Xue Yang gazed at the scenery for thirty minutes as well. The laughter upstairs finally quieted.

A while later, Jin GuangYao turned around, his face calm, and began to slowly walk downstairs. Seeing this, Xue Yang casually tossed the apple core outside. He also followed down, wagging left and right.

The two walked for some time on the streets. All of a sudden, Xue Yang rudely burst out laughing.

He began, "Hahahahahaha fuck hahahahahaha..."

Jin GuangYao stopped, his voice cold, "What are you laughing at?"

Xue Yang was splitting his sides with laughter, "You should've gotten a mirror and looked at your face. That smile was nasty. It was so fucking fake I could throw up."

Jin GuangYao let out a snort, "What do you know, you little delinquent? One has to smile no matter how fake, how disgusting it is."

Xue Yang responded lazily, "You were asking for it. If anyone dared say I was raised by a whore, I'd find his mom first, fuck her a couple hundred times, then drag her out and throw her into a whorehouse for others to fuck a couple hundred times. Then we'll see which of us was really the one raised by a whore. Simple."

Jin GuangYao laughed as well, "I sure don't have such refined hobbies."

Xue Yang, "You don't, but I do. I don't mind doing it for you. Just hit me up, and I can go fuck them for you, hahahahahaha..."

Jin GuangYao, "No, thanks. Save your energy, Young Master Xue. Will you be free the next few days?"

Xue Yang, "Won't I have to do it no matter what?"

Jin GuangYao, "Go to Yunmeng for me and tidy up a place for me. Make it clean."

Xue Yang, "They say when Xue Yang attacks, he leaves behind not even the chicken or the dog. Do you have any other misunderstandings as to how clean my work is?"

Jin GuangYao, "I don't think I've ever heard this saying?"

Night had already fallen. It was quiet all around, with few passersby. The two talked as they walked, passing a street side stall. The vendor was in the middle of dejectedly tidying his tables. He looked up and suddenly screamed, jumping backwards.

His scream and his jump were both quite frightening. Even Jin GuangYao paused, his hand moving to Hensheng's handle at his waist. When he saw that it was only the average street vendor, he immediately ignored it. Yet Xue Yang didn't say a word before he went over and kicked over the booth again.

The vendor was both shocked and terrified, "It's you again?! Why?!"

Xue Yang grinned, "Haven't I told you? There's no why."

He was just about to kick again when a sharp pain suddenly came from the back of his hand. His pupils shrunk, and he immediately sprang back. He raised his hand only to see that many red marks had already appeared on his hand. He looked up. A black-robed cultivator retracted his horsetail whisk, looking at him coldly.

The cultivator had a slender physique, his features stern and cold. He held a horsetail whisk in his hand and carried a sword on his back, the tassel of which swished alongside the night wind. Killing intent flashed across Xue Yang's eyes as he struck with his palm. The cultivator brandished his whisk, wanting to fend off the strike, while Xue Yang's attacks were always bizarre and unpredictable. The direction changed, and he lunged for his heart.

The cultivator frowned slightly. He dodged to the side, yet his left arm was lightly brushed by the hand. His body wasn't injured, yet frost suddenly fell over his face. It was as though he found it extremely distasteful, almost unbearable.

The slight change in expression fell into Xue Yang's eyes. He laughed coldly. Before he continued, a snowy figure suddenly cut between the fight. Jin GuangYao had intervened, "For my sake, please let him be, Daozhang Song ZiChen."

The vendor had long since fled the scene. The black-robed cultivator spoke, "LianFang-Zun?"

Jin GuangYao, "Yes, that would be me."

Song ZiChen, "For what reason is LianFang-Zun defending such insolence?"

Jin GuangYao managed a smile, seeming quite helpless, "Daozhang Song, this is a guest cultivator of the LanlingJin Sect."

Song ZiChen, "Why would a guest cultivator do something so lowly?"

Jin GuangYao coughed, "Daozhang Song, you don't understand. He... has an odd personality, and he's still quite young. Please excuse him."

At this point, a clear, gentle voice drifted past, "He's still quite young indeed."

Like a sliver of moonlight amidst the night, a white-clothed cultivator soundlessly appeared beside the three, holding a whisk and carrying on his back a sword.

The cultivator had a lean build. His robes and his sword tassel swayed as he slowly strode forward, as if he was stepping on clouds. Jin GuangYao greeted, "Daozhang Xiao XingChen."

Xiao XingChen returned the salute, smiling, "We parted over a few months ago, but what a surprise that LianFang-Zun hasn't yet forgotten me."

Jin GuangYao, "Daozhang Xiao XingChen moved the entire world with his swordsmanship. It'd instead be strange if I didn't remember, wouldn't it?"

Xiao XingChen smiled, as though he knew Jin GuangYao's way of adding some flattery into everything he said. He replied, "You overpraise me, LianFang-Zun." Right after, he turned his gaze towards Xue Yang, "However, even if he's still at a young age, as he has taken a seat amongst Koi Tower's guest cultivators, it's still best if he learns restraint. After all, the LanlingJin Sect is one of the most prestigious sects. It needs to lead by example in many aspects."

His dark irises shone bright yet gentle, holding no blame when looking at Xue Yang. And thus, even though it was words of advice, he didn't sound the least displeasing. Immediately, Jin GuangYao followed calmly, "Of course."

Xue Yang snickered. Hearing his laugh, Xiao XingChen didn't lose his temper either. He

examined him for a while and spoke after some thought, "Moreover, I see that this young man's method of attack is quite..."

Song ZiChen's voice was icy, "Hostile."

Hearing this, Xue Yang laughed, "You say I'm still at a young age, but how much older are you? You say I attack with hostility, but who was the one that gave me a taste of his whisk first? It's absolutely ridiculous the way you two lecture others."

As he spoke, he raised the hand that was crisscrossed with blood and shook it. He was clearly the one who wrecked the stall first, yet right now he turned the tables around with utmost justification. Jin GuangYao didn't know what a face to make, turning to the two cultivators, "Daozhang, he..."

Xiao XingChen couldn't help but broke into a smile, "He's truly..."

Xue Yang squinted, "Truly what? Spit it out, won't you?"

Jin GuangYao's voice was warm, "ChengMei\*, please hold your tongue for now."

\*TN: This is Xue Yang's courtesy name. The name is originally taken from the phrase 'to help fulfil the wishes of others', but can also be interpreted to mean 'to become pretty'.

Hearing the name, Xue Yang's face immediately darkened. Jin GuangYao continued, "Daozhang, I'm really sorry for today. For my sake, please don't mind him."

Song ZiChen shook his head. Xiao XingChen patted his shoulder, "ZiChen, let's go."

Song ZiChen glanced at him and nodded. The two said goodbye to Jin GuangYao and left together.

Xue Yang glared at their leaving figures with insidious eyes, grinning through clenched teeth, "... Fucking damn cultivators."

Jin GuangYao mused, "They didn't really do much to you, so why the anger?"

Xue Yang spat, "I find these fake, conceited people the absolute most disgusting. That Xiao XingChen was clearly not even that much older than me, poking his nose into other people's business—annoying. And he started giving me a lecture. And that Song guy." He sneered, "I only brushed past his arm, so what was with that look he gave me? Sooner or later, I'll dig out his eyes and shatter his heart. Let's see what he'll do when that happens."

Jin GuangYao, "Now that's a misunderstanding. Daozhang Song is somewhat mysophobic. He doesn't like contact with others. It wasn't directed at you."

Xue Yang, "Who are these damn cultivators?"

Jin GuangYao, "After so much, you don't even know them? Right now, those two are in the midst of their popularity— 'Xiao XingChen, the bright moon, the gentle breeze; Song ZiChen, the distant snow, the cold frost.' Haven't heard that?"

Xue Yang, "No. I don't get it. The fuck is that?"

Jin GuangYao, "Never mind if you haven't heard it, never mind if you don't get it. In any case, they're gentlemen, so don't provoke them."

Xue Yang, "Why?"

Jin GuangYao, "They say one should choose offending a crook over offending a gentleman\*."

\*TN: the real saying goes the opposite way.

Xue Yang looked at him with much suspicion, "Does such a saying exist?"

Jin GuangYao, "Of course. When you offend a crook, you can outright kill them to spare later trouble, and the crowd would even cheer for you; when you offend a gentleman, things become more difficult. These people create the most hassle. They'd chase after you and never let go, and if you lay even a single finger on them, you'd be the target of all. Hence, it's best to keep them at arm's length. It was fortunate that today they only thought you were too arrogant due to your youth and that they didn't know what you did throughout the day. Or else, there'd be no end to it." Xue Yang mocked, "So many restrictions. I'm not scared of these people."

Jin GuangYao, "You're not, but I am. One thing less is better than one thing more. Let's go."

There weren't many steps to go anyways. Soon, the two arrived at a fork. To the right was Koi Tower; to the left was the corpse training ground. They exchanged a smile, and parted ways.

## GDC Chapter 119: Extra--Incense Burner —Part Two

The second morning, Wei WuXian somehow woke up earlier than Lan WangJi did. His legs were shaking throughout the entire day.

The tapir\* incense burner was seized and scrutinized by them for a long while. Wei WuXian took it apart and put it back together, but he still couldn't understand the mystery behind it.

\*TN: This refers to the mythical animal in the shape of which the incense burner was built. These creatures are often connected to dreams.

Sitting beside the desk, Wei WuXian pondered, "If it's not a problem with the incense, then it has to be a problem with the incense burner. What a thing. It feels so real even Empathy might not compare to it. Was it ever recorded in the Library Pavilion?"

Lan WangJi shook his head.

If he shook his head, that meant it was certain nobody had ever recorded it. Wei WuXian, "Oh, well. Its potency has already passed. We should store it properly for now so that other people don't come into contact with it by accident. If some master of spiritual tools ever visit us, we could take it out again and ask them."

They both thought that the incense burner's potency has passed already, yet what happened was beyond what they expected.

At night, after a round between the sheets, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi fell asleep side by side, lying within the Jingshi.

Soon after, he opened his eyes again only to discover that he was again lying below the magnolia tree outside the Library Pavilion. The sunlight spilled onto his face through the flowering branches. Wei WuXian squinted, covering it with his hand. He slowly got up.

This time, however, Lan WangJi wasn't beside him.

Wei WuXian cupped his right hand around his lips, shouting, "Lan Zhan!"

Nobody answered. Wei WuXian wondered, looks like the incense burner's potency hasn't passed yet. But where's Lan Zhan? Don't tell me I'm the only one affected by the incense burner's leftover powers?

Before the magnolia trees was a small path of white pebbles. A group of the GusuLan Sect's disciples, wearing white clothes and forehead ribbons, passed carrying a few books each, as though they were about to attend their morning lectures. None of them spared Wei WuXian a single glance, still unable to see him. Wei WuXian went up the Library Pavilion and stole a look. Lan WangJi wasn't inside, no matter the big one or the small one. And so, he got down again, beginning his aimless stroll throughout the Cloud Recesses.

Not long afterwards, he managed to make out the whispering voices of two boys. He walked closer, finding that one of their voices sounded quite familiar, "... Nobody had ever kept any within the bounds of the Cloud Recesses. To do such a thing is unheard of."

After a moment of silence, the other boy answered, somewhat dejected, "I know. But... I have already made my promise. I cannot go against my word."

Wei WuXian picked this up. He sneakily glanced over. As expected, conversing amidst a clearing of green grass was Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi.

It was a spring day vibrant with soft winds. The young brothers seemed to be two immaculate pieces of jade, reflected against each other. Both were dressed in snowy robes, their wide sleeves and forehead ribbons flapping in the wind, almost as if they were a painting. The Lan WangJi at this point in time was also just about sixteen. He frowned slightly, as though he was worried about something. What he held in his arm was a white rabbit, sniffing its pink nose, and beside his foot was another rabbit, its long ears perked up as it stood clinging to his boot, trying to climb up.

Lan XiChen, "How could the casual remarks between two boys be considered a serious promise? Is it really because of this?"

Lan WangJi looked at the ground and said nothing.

Lan XiChen smiled, "Fine. Then if by any chance Uncle asks of this, you must explain things to him properly. These days, you have been spending just a little too much time on them."

Lan WangJi nodded solemnly, "Thank you, Brother." With a pause, he added, "... They will not affect my studies."

Lan XiChen, "I know, WangJi. However, you must not tell Uncle who gave these to you. Or else, out of rage, he would make you send them away no matter what."

Hearing this, it seemed as though Lan WangJi hugged the rabbit in his arms even tighter. Lan XiChen smiled. He reached out and poked the rabbit's pink nose with his fingertip, before leisurely walking away.

After he left, Lan WangJi stood there for a while, thinking. The rabbit at times flicked its ears, resting within his arms in a comfortable manner. The one by his foot clung even more anxiously. Lan WangJi glanced at it before bending down and picking it up as well. He placed both rabbits inside his arms, stroking gently. The tenderness of his hands contrasted his expression.

Wei WuXian felt his heart itch from just the sight of the scene. He walked out from behind the tree, wanting to get even closer to the young Lan WangJi. Yet, the rabbits fell from Lan WangJi's hands, and the atmosphere changed at once. He spun around. After he saw whom it was, his piercing gaze immediately faltered, "... You?!"

He was shocked, yet Wei WuXian was even more shocked, "You can see me?"

This was definitely the strangest. Logically, those inside the dream shouldn't be able to see him. But right now, Lan WangJi looked straight at him, "Of course I can. You are... Wei Ying?"

The young man in front of him looked over twenty, definitely older than fifteen. And yet, he indeed had the same face as Wei WuXian. Lan WangJi couldn't figure out the identity of the intruder, maintaining sharp vigilance. If he were wearing his sword right now, he would've probably unsheathed Bichen already.

Wei WuXian reacted with extreme swiftness. He fixed his expression at once, "It's me!"

With such an answer, Lan WangJi's face seemed even more alarmed as he walked a few steps backward. Wei WuXian put on a wounded expression and tone, "Lan Zhan, I took such great pains to come back and find you—how could you treat me like this?

Lan WangJi, "Are you... truly Wei Ying?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course."

Lan WangJi, "Then why is your appearance different?"

Wei WuXian, "Now that'd be a long story. This is what happened: I'm Wei WuXian indeed, but I'm Wei WuXian from seven years in the future. Seven years later, I discovered a powerful tool that let me travel back in time into the past. I was just in the middle of examining it when I touched it accidentally—and here I am!"

The explanation was so absurd it couldn't even fool a child. Lan WangJi's voice was cold, "How can you prove it?"

Wei WuXian, "How do you want me to? I know absolutely everything about you. The rabbit you were hugging as well as the one by your feet—those were from me, weren't they? You seemed so reluctant when you accepted them, yet now you refuse to let them go even when your brother tells you not to. You've fallen in love?"

Hearing this, Lan WangJi's expression changed slightly. He seemed as if he wanted to say something, yet stopped in the middle, "I..."

Wei WuXian walked a few steps closer, opening his arms with a wide grin, "What's wrong? You embarrassed?"

Seeing just how peculiar his actions were, Lan WangJi looked as though he faced a formidable enemy, his face full of caution as he walked even more steps back. Wei WuXian hadn't seen Lan

WangJi face him with such an attitude in a long time. He laughed in secret as he feigned anger, “What do you mean by this? What are you avoiding me for? Good for you, Lan Zhan—for ten years you and I have been husband and wife, and now you’ve forgotten about me so easily?” With this, Lan WangJi’s handsome, icy features snapped instantaneously.

He began. “... For ten years? You... and I? ... have been husband and wife!?”

It was only eleven words, yet he only managed to spit them out after a handful of pauses. Wei WuXian seemed as though he finally realized something, “Oh, I forgot. You don’t know about this yet. Doing the maths, it seems like we’ve only just met each other? Did I just leave the Cloud Recesses? No worries. Let me tell you a secret—just a few years, and we’ll become partners in cultivation!”

Lan WangJi, “... Partners in cultivation?”

Wei WuXian gloated, “That’s right! The kind that practices dual cultivation everyday. It was a proper, orthodox marriage—we’ve even prostrated.”

Lan WangJi was so enraged that his chest heaved slightly. A moment later, a few words seeped from between his teeth, “... Utterly nonsense!”

Wei WuXian, “You’ll know if it’s nonsense or not if you keep listening for just a bit longer. When you sleep, you like to hug me tightly, and you have to be hugging me or else you won’t be able to sleep; every time you kiss me it’s always so long, and when it ends you like to bite me gently before you leave; oh, right, you like to bite me too when we’re doing that other thing, like on my body...”

Ever since the words ‘hug me tightly’, Lan WangJi’s expression had become twisted. The longer he listened, the greater his reaction was. It was as if he was about to cover his ears to block out the obscenity, lunging forward ready to strike, “Nonsense!”

Wei WuXian dodged to the side, “Nonsense again? At least change things up a bit! And how do you even know I’m talking nonsense? Is this not what you’re like?”

Lan WangJi spoke a word at a time, “I... have never kissed... so how could I know what I like... when I...!”

Wei WuXian thought for a bit, “You’re not wrong. You haven’t kissed anyone yet at this age, so of course you don’t know what you’re like when you kiss someone. Wanna try right now?”

“...” Lan WangJi was in such a rage he had even forgotten to summon the disciples and seize the suspicious intruder. He attacked strike after strike, aiming straight for his wrist\*. He was still young at this point, however. Wei WuXian was a lot more skilled, easily avoiding the attacks. Spotting an opening, he pinched somewhere on Lan WangJi’s arm, and Lan WangJi’s movements paused. With this opportunity, Wei WuXian landed a light peck on his cheek.

\*TN: At one’s wrist, where the veins are and where the pulse can be felt, is an acupoint that is supposedly deadly.

“...”

After the kiss, Wei WuXian let go of Lan WangJi’s arm and released the restraint.

But Lan WangJi was already a frozen statue, and for a long time he remained so, sent into a daze.

“Hahahahahahahahahahahaha...” Wei WuXian laughed himself awake from the dream. He laughed so hard he almost rolled off the bed. Fortunately, Lan WangJi’s arms were always wrapped around his waist. Along with the laughter, his entire body trembled the moment he woke up, making Lan WangJi wake up from his sleep as well. The two sat up together.

Lan WangJi looked down, massaging his temple with one hand, “Just now, I...”

Wei WuXian, “Just now, did you have a dream that you met a twenty-something-year-old me when you were fifteen?”

“...” Lan WangJi stared at him, “The incense burner.”

Wei WuXian nodded, “I thought I only entered the dream again because of the incense burner’s after effects, yet who knew you were the one who was influenced even more heavily.”

Tonight’s situation was different from last time’s. Just now, the young Lan Zhan in the dream

was Lan WangJi himself.

Those who were dreaming often didn't know that they were dreaming. And thus, Lan WangJi really thought he was only fifteen in his dream. It was a proper dream at first—morning lectures, strolls, taking care of rabbits. Yet, he ran right into Wei WuXian, who snuck into his dream and decided to make mischief there. After he was caught, what came was a good round of teasing.

Wei WuXian, "I can't anymore, Lan Zhan. How you looked hugging your rabbit and not letting go, scared out of your wits that your brother and your uncle might not let you have them—I love you so much. Hahahaha..."

Lan WangJi didn't know how to respond, "... It is late at night. Your laughter might disturb others."

Wei WuXian, "You think we're quiet everyday at night? Why did you wake up so early? Wake up a bit later, and I'd drag you to the far mountains of your sect and do bad things with you, letting the young Lan-Ergege have a first taste of the good stuff in life, hahahaha..."

Lan WangJi watched him roll around at the side. He never ended up finding the words. After sitting for a while, he suddenly reached out and pressed Wei WuXian down onto the bed.

The two thought that after the second night passed, the incense burner's powers should've dissipated already. Yet, the third night, Wei WuXian woke up in Lan WangJi's dream again.

Dressed in black, he sauntered through the white pebble paths of the Cloud Recesses, Chenqing's red tassel bobbing up and down with each stride of his. Soon, the sound of reciting textbook material floated by.

It was from the direction of the Lanshi. Wei WuXian strutted towards the room. As expected, a couple of the Lan Sect's disciples were doing their evening studies inside. Lan QiRen wasn't there. Lan WangJi was still the one who supervised.

The Lan WangJi of tonight's dream still appeared to be young, but he was more like the one Wei WuXian saw in the Cave of the Xuanwu, about seventeen or eighteen. His features held an elegance that already carried the air of a prominent cultivator, yet still bore the youthful green of a young man. He sat attentively before the room. When someone had a question and came forth to ask, he would take a swift glance before immediately coming up with an answer, his serious expression creating stark contrast against his adolescence.

Wei WuXian leaned against a pillar outside the Lanshi. Having watched for a while, he soundlessly swept up to the roof and placed Chenqing near his lips.

Within the Lanshi, Lan WangJi paused slightly. One of the boys asked, "Young Master, what is it?"

Lan WangJi, "Who is playing the flute at such a time?"

The boys looked at one another. Quickly, one of them replied, "I hear no flute?"

With this, Lan WangJi frowned somewhat. He stood up and went out the door, holding his sword, just in time for Wei WuXian to put his flute away and land nimbly on another roof with a leap.

Lan WangJi noticed the movement, ordering in a lowered voice, "Who is it!?"

Wei WuXian let out two crisp whistles slide out from below his tongue. The sound was already a couple dozen yards away. He laughed, "It's your husband!"

Hearing the voice, Lan WangJi's expression changed. He couldn't be sure, "Wei Ying?"

Wei WuXian didn't answer him. Lan WangJi unsheathed Bichen from his back and chased after him. With a few hops and leaps, Wei WuXian had already landed atop the tall walls of the Cloud Recesses. He stood up, stepping on a rooftop tile. Lan WangJi landed as well, standing a few feet away from him. Holding Bichen, his forehead ribbon, his sleeves, and the lower hem of his robes flapped in the night wind, almost heavenly.

Wei WuXian put his hands behind his back, grinning, "What a handsome man with what handsome moves. With such a scene, it'd be absolutely perfect if there were to be a handsome jar of Emperor's Smile."

Lan WangJi stared straight at him. A moment later, he spoke, "Wei Ying, what do you need, visiting the Cloud Recesses at night uninvited?"

Wei WuXian, "Guess?"

"..." Lan WangJi, "Ridiculous!"

Bichen's blade sliced past, yet Wei WuXian dodged it easily. The young adult Lan WangJi was already adept at the sword, yet in front of the current Wei WuXian, he couldn't really post much of a threat. Just a few exchanges, and he caught an opening, slapping a talisman onto Lan WangJi's chest. Lan WangJi's body froze, unable to move, while Wei WuXian grabbed him and sprinted towards the back mountains of the Cloud Recesses.

Wei WuXian found a thick bush of herb plants. Lan WangJi was placed here, leaning against a white rock, "What do you want?"

Wei WuXian pinched his cheek, his face serious, "Rape."

Lan WangJi couldn't tell if he was joking or not, face growing pale, "Wei Ying, you... must not act so recklessly."

Wei WuXian laughed, "You know me. I love acting recklessly." As he spoke, he reached under Lan WangJi's thick layers and took a squeeze at a critical region of his.

The squeeze was quite skillfully executed, between light and heavy. Instantly, Lan WangJi's expression grew funny.

The corners of his mouth twitched as he sealed his lips together, eventually managing to take control over his face and feign calmness. However, Wei WuXian went even further, untying his sashes and stripping his lower garments in just a few moves. He weighed in his hand the heavy thing that didn't at all match Lan WangJi's delicate features, praising from the bottom of his heart, "You've truly been talented since a young age, HanGuang-Jun."

After he spoke, he even gave the shaft a light flick. With the such a private part of his body being played with like this, Lan WangJi already looked as if he was about to die from rage. He didn't have the spare energy to think about whom HanGuang-Jun was either, his voice harsh, "Wei Ying!!!"

Wei WuXian snickered, "Shout all you want. Nobody would come to save you even if you shout your throat hoarse."

Lan WangJi was about to speak again as he watched Wei WuXian finish laughing and, brushing a strand of hair behind his ear, sink down to swallow the length down below.

Shock exploded in Lan WangJi's eyes. He couldn't even believe what was happening, his entire body stiff.

The seventeen-year-old Lan WangJi was still surrounded by youthful immaturity, yet the size of that erection was definitely not to be reckoned with. Wei WuXian slowly took the length into his mouth. Even before he could swallow everything, he felt its slippery tip knock against the wall of his throat. The body of the erection was thick and searing. The inside of his mouth could even feel the strong pulse of its veins. His cheeks also puffed from stuffing the foreign object inside. Despite the difficulty, he still patiently sent the remaining bit deeper into his throat.

Wei WuXian was indeed quite experienced with dealing with that member of Lan WangJi's. He gave it all that he had, sucking and licking with much noise, almost as though he was tasting some sort of delicacy with devotion. Even with Lan WangJi's ever-so-fair complexion that refused to let out a single tint of red, he was still blushing at his neck and ears, breaths shallow. Wei WuXian spent so long time sucking and swallowing that even his cheeks began to hurt, yet still there was no release. He was quite puzzled as to what was going on—it was impossible he wasn't even skilled enough to handle the seventeen-year-old Lan WangJi. He glanced up, however, only to find that Lan WangJi's face was full of endurance. The rod was clearly already as hard as iron, yet he persisted stubbornly, refusing to release almost as if he was trying to protect some last line of defense.

He found it to be quite amusing, his desire to make mischief rising up again. The moist tip of the tongue licked again and again the slit atop the thick glans. With a few deep throats, Lan

WangJi finally couldn't hold it any longer and let it out.

The ejaculate was rather thick, its musky smell pouring into his throat. Wei WuXian straightened up, coughing lightly as he wiped the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand. Like before, he swallowed everything. On the other hand, after the release, Lan WangJi stared fixedly at Wei WuXian with red eyes, speechless, whether as his body's response to the orgasm or simply out of rage and embarrassment.

Wei WuXian felt his heart melt, seeing such a humiliated face. He lay a gentle peck on his cheek, "Alright. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have bullied you."

As he spoke, he wiped his fingers on the length that had just ejaculated and drew his hands back, untying his sash to take off his lower garments.

Wei WuXian had slender legs, his thighs white as jade, lined by smooth muscles. The pair of buttocks was round and full, creating quite an enjoyable scene. On the other hand, leaning against the rock, Lan WangJi was most certainly able to see all that and more that was going on beneath Wei WuXian's body.

Kneeling among the grass, Wei WuXian turned around and lay prone onto the ground, facing Lan WangJi with his back. He moved the fingers smeared with white towards his lower body. The entrance hid amidst the deep crevice. Wei WuXian only revealed the spot of pink after he parted the cheeks slightly. The slit was soft and rather yielding. It was closed properly at first, yet as Wei WuXian gently massaged Lan WangJi's semen around the entrance with his two long fingers, it began to open, almost shyly swallowing the fingertip. Wei WuXian sent his finger slowly and firmly all the way inside before starting to move it in and out. A while later, he began to speed up somewhat, and he was growing erect at the front as well.

When watery squelches began to come from behind, Wei WuXian inserted a third finger. He let out a soft breath, as though it was becoming too much for him. He was well aware of his capabilities, and his fingers slowed down again.

Amid the night, these details shouldn't come across as obvious, but Lan WangJi's senses were sharp, especially his sight. He could do nothing but watch as the titillating scene carried on in front of his eyes, somehow unable to even look away.

In bed, Wei WuXian liked to reach the peak alongside Lan WangJi. In case he released too early, thus, he avoided the key region within his body during the fingering process. However, Lan WangJi had always taken quite good care of his sensitive spot. Right now, unable to be satisfied, his inner wall tightened more than usual, contracting time after time as though it was discontent. When the fingers at time didn't touch the spot, his hips would sink uncontrollably, sending the spot towards his fingers. With a few of these near brushes, Wei WuXian felt his thighs tremble weakly, almost unable to keep kneeling any longer. He immediately withdrew his fingers, taking a moment to calm down. Turning back, he caught Lan WangJi off guard with the sudden eye contact. Lan WangJi shut his eyes closed at once.

Wei WuXian smirked, "Hey, Lan Zhan, what are you doing? Reciting the Lan Sect's sect rules in your heart?"

With the correct guess, Lan WangJi's eyelashes flickered. He seemed like he wanted to open his eyes, yet in the end he still held it back.

Wei WuXian continued lazily, "Look at me, won't you? What are you scared of? It's not like I'd do anything bad to you."

His voice was pleasant to start with. When he said those words, his tone was so languid and frivolous that it almost seemed like a little hook. Yet, it was as if Lan WangJi was determined to not look, not listen, not speak, and definitely not pay him any regard, refusing to be affected. Wei WuXian, "Are you really gonna be so heartless as to not even give me a look?"

With a few more teasing words, as he saw that Lan WangJi wouldn't open his eyes no matter what, Wei WuXian raised a brow, "Well, if this is the case, I'll be borrowing your Bichen for a bit. You won't mind that, will you?"

As he spoke, he indeed picked up the fallen Bichen.

Lan WangJi's eyes sprang open, his voice harsh, "What are you going to do?!"

Wei WuXian, "What do you think I'm going to do?"

Lan WangJi, "... I do not know!"

Wei WuXian, "If you don't know what I'm going to do, why are you being so anxious?"

Lan WangJi, "I! I..."

Wei WuXian stared at him with a grin. He waved Bichen in his hand before he looked down, planting a soft kiss on Bichen's hilt. Right after, he stuck out the scarlet tip of his tongue and began to lick the hilt.

Bichen's blade was rather transparent, as if made of ice and snow, yet its hilt was forged from pure, refined silver. It was quite heavy in terms of weight, its carvings ancient and elegant. The scene before him was truly erotic. Lan WangJi seemed as though he was extremely upset, "Let go of Bichen!"

Wei WuXian, "Why?"

Lan WangJi, "It is my sword! You cannot use it to... to..."

Wei WuXian mused, "I know it's your sword. I'm just really fond of it and wanted to play with it for a bit. What did you think I was gonna do with it?"

"..." Lan WangJi didn't know what to say.

Wei WuXian laughed, "Hahahahahahaha, what are you thinking about, Lan Zhan?! Aren't you a bit too indecent?"

As he saw how Wei WuXian not only denied it, but even instead returned the attack, Lan WangJi's expression was a spectacle. Having teased him for a while, Wei WuXian was much satisfied as he continued, "If you want me to not touch your sword, you can exchange it with yourself. How about that? Yes or no?"

Lan WangJi could neither say 'yes' nor simply let him play with himself using Lan WangJi's own sword. He didn't know how to answer the question. Wei WuXian kneeled on the ground with his back straight as he crawled towards him on his knees, coaxing, "If you just say 'yes', I'll give you back your sword and do fun things with you. Yes or no?"

A while later, a word squeezed through Lan WangJi's clenched teeth, "... No!"

Wei WuXian raised his brows, "Hm. Mark your word." He backed off from Lan WangJi's body and sat down before him, grinning as he parted his legs, "Then you can watch me play with Bichen."

With such a shameless position of having his legs be spread so widely, Lan WangJi had a more than clear view of the sight at his private regions.

Two fair buttocks parted slightly because of the wide motion, revealing the pink spot in between. With the fingering from before, the entrance was already somewhat swollen, yet with moisture, it seemed even more delicate. Wei WuXian turned Bichen's blade around and pointed the hilt towards the entrance. He drew in a light breath. Pressing slightly, the thin folds were immediately smoothed, sucking on the tip of Bichen's hilt. A short length was instantly shoved in.

Bichen's hilt felt almost as cold as ice or steel, sending a shiver down Wei WuXian's spine. Suffering the cold, the tunnel squeezed even more, letting out a small portion of the hilt. At once, Wei WuXian clenched Bichen and forced it inside his body with greater strength, starting to push and pull.

The inner walls were sucking tight to begin with, and the hilt was covered with the bumps and dents of ancient carvings. The feeling of it rubbing inside was enough to drive one mad. As it kneaded at a particular spot, Wei WuXian let out a low moan, drawing his legs slightly closer as he felt his head spin and his scalp tingle. He was once again aroused at the front, already erect. From Lan WangJi's perspective, it was truly a scene so impossibly obscene. Wei WuXian lay in front of Lan WangJi, opening his legs out of his own will as he held Lan WangJi's sword Bichen down below. The hilt was hard and cold, making the soft entrance swollen in an almost pitiful way. Even so, Wei WuXian still tried hard as he pushed and pulled it inside his body, his

motions quickening as the thrusts became easier and easier. He breathed lightly as he gazed at Lan WangJi with glazed eyes, calling, "Lan Zhan..."

"Lan Zhan..." The calls were tinged with a slightly nasal tone. It seemed like he was begging him, or perhaps like unconscious murmurs that came from the pleasure. Either way, it was enough to muddle one's mind. Lan WangJi seemed as if he couldn't even shut his eyes again or even avert his gaze, staring with fervor at his face, at how he struggled under Bichen, at how he shuddered as he touched himself. Lan WangJi's knuckles cracked.

On the other hand, Wei WuXian had no idea what was happening here. With Bichen's torment, he unconsciously drew his legs even nearer, all the way until he squeezed his thighs and buttocks together. The entrance also sucked even tighter on the sword hilt. Wei WuXian let out a breath. Feeling both his arms and his legs drain of strength, he lay sideways on the ground. Just as he wanted to rest for a bit, his knees were suddenly seized by a pair of iron-like hands, and his legs were forced open.

Wei WuXian opened his eyes, only to crash into Lan WangJi's almost frighteningly red ones, ignited by a strange flame. He grabbed Bichen, pulled it out, and tossed it far away. The moment the hilt left his body, Wei WuXian let out a moan, as if he was dissatisfied.

Lan WangJi raged, "Shameless!!!"

He pressed Wei WuXian onto the ground, shoving the purplish and swollen member inside. The moment he plunged in, he began to thrust with an unstoppable force.

As soon as Lan WangJi entered, Wei WuXian's legs obediently wrapped around Lan WangJi's waist as he hugged Lan WangJi's neck with compliance, in quite a welcoming way. Yet, after just a few thrusts, he felt that it was a bit too much. Lan WangJi's motions were too rough. Every time it seemed as if he was going to crash backwards from the force, his backside along with his tailbone hurting slightly.

Wei WuXian called, "Gentler! Er-Gege, go a bit gentler..."

Whether unfortunate or not, Wei WuXian forgot that right now he was older than the Lan WangJi inside the dream. Having accidentally blurted out 'Er-Gege', he not only didn't cause Lan WangJi to hold back at all, but instead Lan WangJi thrusted even harder, almost as if he wanted to break Wei WuXian's buttocks as punishment.

Wei WuXian arched back his neck, drawing in a difficult breath amidst the storm-like rhythm, "It's... so hot!"

Bichen's entire body effused cold air. Its shaft having been held within Wei WuXian, it made his insides grow softer, yet somewhat cool to the touch. Meanwhile, Lan WangJi's manhood was both thicker and warmer than Bichen's shaft. And thus, every time Lan WangJi sank inside, it felt as if a ball of fire had burned through his stomach, so hot that Wei WuXian wanted to roll all over the ground. Yet, after having touched himself for so long and along with Lan WangJi's rough motions, his body had long since gone limp, only able to shiver under Lan WangJi's attacks. Right now, in spite of his level of cultivation being much higher than Lan WangJi's he was still unable to resist. When he really couldn't take it any longer, he could only dodge to the side, twisting his waist in desire to escape, yet Lan WangJi pinned him down. With a few deeper thrusts, he couldn't even make a sound anymore.

Lan WangJi's harsh yet low voice sounded beside his ear, "Who is the husband?"

At first, Wei WuXian was still dazed and unable to react. Lan WangJi asked again, with a plunge so deep he almost perished from pleasure. He hurried, "You! You! You are, you're the husband..."

It was all karma for him.

For a while, Wei WuXian clenched his teeth and obediently endured the fucking. The cold inner walls were rubbed warm from the friction, and it finally felt a little better. The top of the shaft was roughly lined, driving into his body, while the tunnel itself was moist and soft, sucking and contracting sporadically. The curvature of the erection within him kneaded over that spot within him again and again. Wei WuXian felt so good that he might go mad, yet he just had to

pretend to be feeble and overwhelmed. As he shifted up and down from Lan WangJi's steady rhythm, he clung to Lan WangJi's arms and begged, "... Er-Gege... Lan Zhan... Go a bit gentler, won't you? It hurts... I think I'm bleeding..."

It was indeed quite moist where the two were connected, and the wet squelches also grew louder in volume. Hearing this, Lan WangJi immediately looked down, and was at once frozen. Wei WuXian whined, "Is it bleeding?"

Lan WangJi let out a heavy breath, "No?"

Wei WuXian, "No? Then what is it?"

Lan WangJi's deep voice sounded, "You are wet."

No matter for how long, the insides of Wei WuXian's thighs had already become covered in some sort of fluid, while on Lan WangJi's dark erection was the same moist reflection. It could only be from within Wei WuXian's body.

Wei WuXian pretend as if he didn't believe it, "Really? Really?" He asked as he grabbed Lan WangJi's hand and led him towards where they were joined. The rod was thick and lined with veins, stretching the small entrance to the maximum. Lan WangJi felt a handful of the viscous fluid, along with the two tightly connected bodies. As if he were stabbed by a needle, he immediately drew his hand away and looked. The fluid was transparent. It was, as expected, not blood.

Wei WuXian's and Lan WangJi's bodies were quite compatible with each other's. At the peak of arousal, of course the body would react on its own. Right now, however, Wei WuXian was intent on teasing him. Seeing his curved lips, Lan WangJi knew that he'd been fooled, once again burying himself inside. Wei WuXian's breath was shattered into pieces from the thrusts. He hurried, "... Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, let me get up, let me be on top, alright?"

Lan WangJi seemed as though he didn't understand what Wei WuXian meant by 'on top', hesitating slightly. Wei WuXian hugged him and struggled hard to flip the two, switching their positions.

At the moment, Lan WangJi lay flat on the ground while Wei WuXian sat on top of him, the two of them connected hips to buttocks. In the process of the position switch, the thick, scorching erection remained deep within Wei WuXian. It never left for a single moment, only subtly stirring around his insides. Wei WuXian squinted from the pleasure, feeling his head begin to spin again.

He looked down. Whether an illusion or not, he kept on feeling that his flat abdomen swelled slightly from Lan WangJi's member being inside. He couldn't help but reached down and touched his stomach. Soon, Lan WangJi lifted his buttocks and forced him to start moving.

Wei WuXian rose and fell from his hands. As he rose, he'd go so high up that only the stiff tip was inside his body; as he fell, he'd take the object below his hips all the way into the deepest parts of his body, so deep that he couldn't help but frown. On top of that, the pace was so fast it almost didn't allow any room to breathe. In the past, every time the two made love, such a position had to be involved, as it went the deepest and Wei WuXian enjoyed it the most. Yet right now, he suffered rather greatly from the unbearable depth. The seventeen-year-old Lan WangJi of the dream had gone mad from the teasing, unable to control his force at all. And yet Wei WuXian was fucked so hard that his legs shivered. He couldn't even stand, much less have the strength to struggle out. With such an unfortunate situation, he could only prop his hands on Lan WangJi's firm abdomen, gasping slightly.

Wei WuXian was born with a thin waist and thin hips, but there was quite a lot of flesh on his backside. Lan WangJi's fingers sank deep into the meat, squeezing and rubbing. Soon, there was a noticeable area of bruising. Wei WuXian felt his entire body itch from the inside out, his buttocks aching from the rubbing. He couldn't help but push away one of Lan WangJi's hands. Yet, Lan WangJi seemed to be extremely dissatisfied by such a gesture. Frowning, his face darkened, and Wei WuXian's butt cheek was afflicted with a loud, hard slap. The sound echoed crisply.

Wei WuXian was shocked speechless by the slap.

In his whole life, not many people had hit him in such a place. Even when he misbehaved when he was young, Madam Yu had only whipped him on his back or his palms, much less Jiang FengMian and Jiang YanLi who cared for him too much to hit him at all. When he watched children from other families be stripped of their trousers and beaten on the backside, he felt that it was shameful in every way, gloating that he'd never been beaten like that before. Yet right now, Lan WangJi had broken this streak of his, and not to mention... it was the seventeen-year-old Lan WangJi as well.

Immediately, Wei WuXian's face flashed between red and white. This was the first time the uncontrollable sense of shame arose within him in bed.

The more he thought about it, the more he couldn't keep going. Even half his backside was still stinging. He quickly shouted, "I'm not doing it anymore!" And rolled to the side, off of Lan WangJi's body.

Dragging two limp legs, he struggled to crawl away, searching for his trousers. Lan WangJi was in the middle of arousal. Besides, he'd been squeezed and pinched and flicked and kissed and touched and threatened by Wei WuXian for such a long time. He was filled to the brim by an unspeakable rage. Having suddenly discovered that Wei WuXian was especially scared of others hitting him on the buttocks, how could he let go of him so easily? He waved his hand, and the trousers that Wei WuXian had just pulled up to his knees immediately tore into pieces. Lan WangJi flipped his whole person over, locked his wrists behind his back, and landed another heavy hit on the snowy flesh.

Alongside the crisp sound, Wei WuXian's entire body trembled. He wailed, "It hurts!" It didn't actually hurt. It was only just so unbearably embarrassing. In bed, Wei WuXian never tried to suppress his sounds, and thus every time his voice would go somewhat hoarse in the middle. It didn't really sound like a cry of pain, but rather more like a tempting moan. Hearing this, Lan WangJi paused, his gaze lowering.

Below his palms were the two round halves. Because of the two slaps, a light tint of pink shone through the fair skin, crisscrossed with rough fingerprints. Having been forcefully separated and fucked for so long, the crevice parted slightly, revealing the timidly contracting entrance, which seemed even softer now that it was swollen, almost making one doubt how it was able to swallow the hilt of Bichen and that horrifyingly-sized member of Lan WangJi's. Near his buttocks and his inner thighs was lined with thin streaks of liquid.

Lan WangJi's eyes darkened.

On the other hand, having been seized by him, Wei WuXian was scared he'd hit him again. He hurried to squeeze his entrance behind, trying hard to avert Lan WangJi's attention by making the slit open and close, hoping that he'd pay attention to the real deal and stop being so fixated on these two pieces of his flesh. As expected, he could hear Lan WangJi's breaths grow heavier from behind. He flipped his body around and sunk in again. The entry was more than smooth. Feeling his body be filled up again, Wei WuXian finally let out a breath of relief.

However, before he could even let out his breath completely, Lan WangJi landed another slap at his backside. Wei WuXian shivered from the strike, tightening uncontrollably. As the tip kneaded across his sensitive spot, he grew more erect as well, secreting drops of white.

And then, every time Lan WangJi thrusted, he'd strike his butt cheeks, which meant every time Wei WuXian's insides would tighten to the most when the front of Lan WangJi's erection dug into that vital spot as he grew harder at the front. It was three layers of stimulation layering on top of one another. He felt almost as if he was in the midst of a terrifying tempest, whimpering softly, "Don't be like this... Lan Zhan... Stop... Stop it... Wake up! Wake up, Lan Zhan..."

He knew Lan WangJi had always been aggressive in bed, and he'd always loved his aggression. Yet, this was the first time he was forced into such a corner.

With dozens of slaps, Wei WuXian's butt cheeks were both red and warm, slightly swollen. It felt stinging to the touch, and his body grew more sensitive as well. When Lan WangJi plunged

into the depths again, he lowered his head and kissed Wei WuXian's lips. Wei WuXian weakly hugged his shoulder, melting into the kiss. Exhausted, he finally released.

The milky fluid splattered between their abdomens. Following him, Lan WangJi also released to his content inside Wei WuXian's body.

After staying obediently for a while within the embrace, Wei WuXian spoke, his voice hoarse, "... It hurts..."

After having released the second time, it seemed as if Lan WangJi finally returned to his senses. Lying top of him, he somewhat helplessly asked, "... Where?"

Wei WuXian, "..."

Of course, he couldn't say his ass hurt. He only whispered, "Lan Zhan, kiss me some more, hurry up..."

Seeing how he looked down, behaving so oddly proper, pink crawled upon Lan WangJi's white earlobes. He did as he was told and hugged Wei WuXian tightly, putting his lips around Wei WuXian's as he initiated the tender kiss.

When their lips parted, Lan WangJi indeed placed a light bite over Wei WuXian's lower lip. And then both of them awakened.

Lying atop the wooden bed of the Jingshi, the two looked across at each other for a few moments. Lan WangJi pulled Wei WuXian into his arms again.

In the embrace, Wei WuXian was kissed for a long while. Satisfied, he shut his eyes, "Lan Zhan... Let me ask you a question. By coming inside of me every time, is it that you want me to bear a little Young Master Lan for you?"

In the dream he teased Lan WangJi and ended up digging his own grave, so when he woke up and saw Lan WangJi again, he couldn't help but to spout out nonsense again. But Lan WangJi wasn't as easily flustered as before either. He only asked, "How could you?"

Wei WuXian shifted his sore arms, using them as a pillow for his head, "Ugh, if I could, with how much you fuck me all the time, there would've long since been a den of little ones running on the ground."

Lan WangJi could never bear listening to such indecent words, "... Stop it."

Wei WuXian propped up one leg, grinning, "Embarrassed again? I..." Before he even finished, he suddenly felt Lan WangJi lay a light pat on his buttocks. Wei WuXian almost fell off the bed, "What are you doing?!"

Lan WangJi, "Let me see."

Wei WuXian crawled up at once, ignoring his shaky legs, "No thanks, Lan Zhan, I certainly remember what wonderful things you did in your dream. Nobody had ever treated me like this!!! In the future you're not allowed to this either. Really, if you wanna fuck me then do it, I'll open my legs and let you do whatever you want—just don't hit me!!"

Lan WangJi pulled him back onto the bed, "I will not."

Having acquired his promise, Wei WuXian was relieved, "HanGuang-Jun, mark your words."

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

With three nights of toil, he felt the fatigue slowly rise. Wei WuXian couldn't keep going either. He snuggled into Lan WangJi's arms again and mumbled, "Nobody had ever treated me like this..."

Lan WangJi stroked his hair and landed a kiss on his forehead. Shaking his head, he smiled.

# GDC Chapter 120: Special Extra—From Dawn to Dusk

It was already long past nine, yet Wei WuXian still hadn't returned yet. The paper lamp on the desk was still lit. Lan WangJi stared at its blurry aura, his eyes unblinking. A moment later, he stood up, walked to the entrance of the Jingshi, and opened the wooden door.

Having stayed still for a second, he seemed as if he was finally going to step outside when an odd thump suddenly came from behind him.

Lan WangJi spun around only to see that the window had some time ago opened without him noticing, its flaps still swaying amidst the night wind. A large bulge rose from within the thin blanket on the bed. It seemed as if something had broken in through the window, rolled inside, and was currently curled up within, shifting and shuffling.

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi shut the door gently. He went back inside the room, on his way blowing the lamp out, closed the window, and got onto the bed. He lay beside the considerable bulge. Quietly pulling over the other blanket, he shut his eyes.

Soon, something big and cold suddenly snuck inside his sheets. The thing snuggled onto his body, right against his chest, and giddily exclaimed, "Lan Zhan, I'm back! You should welcome me."

Lan WangJi wrapped his arms around the other, "Why are you so cold?"

Wei WuXian, "I was outside in the wind for more than half the day! Let me borrow your heat." So that was why he was covered in grass and dust. He must have again taken the juniors of the Cloud Recesses to disturb the beasts and monsters of remote mountains.

Wei WuXian rolled around his bed and his sheets in such filthy clothes, yet Lan WangJi didn't seem bothered at all, despite his usual preference for cleanliness. He tightened his arms slightly, hugging Wei WuXian even closer.

After a while of warming the other with his body, Lan WangJi spoke, "Take your shoes off at least."

Wei WuXian replied, "Sure." And he kicked off his boots against each of his legs before sneaking into the blanket again to freeze Lan WangJi.

Lan WangJi spoke, his voice thin, "Do not mess around."

Wei WuXian, "I'm in your bed already, and you're telling me not to mess around?"

Lan WangJi, "Uncle has returned."

Lan QiRen's residence was not far away from Lan WangJi's Jingshi. He never liked Wei WuXian in the first place. If they happened to elicit some inappropriate sounds, the very next day he would probably stomp his feet angrily, throwing another fit at Wei WuXian.

Yet Wei WuXian shoved his knee between Lan WangJi's legs, rubbing it against him with both arousal and mischief to straightforwardly express his attitude using action.

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi flipped him around with force and pushed Wei WuXian down under him.

The motion was so wide and force so strong that the two made a loud knock against the wooden bed.

"Slow down, slow down, slow down... Slow... down!"

Lan WangJi pinned Wei WuXian on the bed, entering with irresistible vigor as he thrust inside, all the way until his abdomen was tight against Wei WuXian's naked buttocks. Only when he couldn't dive any deeper did he stop.

Wei WuXian drew in a few breaths, shaking his head. Feeling a bit scared to move, he rolled his eyes and wriggled in discomfort, wanting to move it out a bit, yet Lan WangJi noticed what he was trying to do and clenched his waist to plunge back in again.

Wei WuXian responded with an "ah", exclaiming, "HanGuang-Jun!"

Lan WangJi spoke after a while of endurance, "You asked for it." With a pause, he began to thrust.

Wei WuXian was firmly restrained underneath Lan WangJi with his legs curled up, hair disheveled and cheeks red. With every movement, his body would bob upward. Each time Lan WangJi drove inside, Wei WuXian would let out a moan with much obedience. After a while of toil, Lan WangJi finally couldn't let him continue like this any longer. He forced back the heavy breaths that were about to escape his chest, keeping his voice low, "Be... Be quieter."

Wei WuXian reached out and touched his face. He found it quite strange—Lan Zhan's thin face was clearly so warm to the touch, yet it didn't show the slightest hint of red, still so snowy and handsome that he almost couldn't control his racing heart. It was only the earlobes that were tinted with a light pink. He breathed, "Er-Gege, you don't want to hear me moan?"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Seeing how he looked, too ashamed to speak the truth yet too upright to lie, Wei WuXian could feel his entire body fill with unspeakable pleasure, so much that he could swallow Lan WangJi whole right then. He continued, "Scared my moans would be heard by someone? Easy—just silence me."

Lan WangJi's chest heaved up and down, his eyes slightly bloodshot. Wei WuXian urged, "Come on! Silence me and fuck me however you want to. I won't be able to make a sound even if you fuck me to death..."

Before he finished, Lan WangJi bent down and covered his lips.

After his mouth was muffled, all four of Wei WuXian's limbs slithered up. The two rolled around on the bed in a tight embrace. The blankets had long since been thrown onto the ground. In bed, Lan WangJi never usually changed positions frequently. After having endured it for almost an hour, Wei WuXian was already numb all the way from his back to his legs, suspicious that he might be fucked like this for the entire night. Seeing Lan WangJi's fervor that showed no sign of stopping, he felt that it might really happen. And thus, Wei WuXian took the initiative to flip around and sit atop Lan WangJi's body. He wrapped his arms around Lan WangJi's neck, riding as he bit Lan WangJi's earlobe, "Is it deep?"

The low whisper was warm and wet. Lan WangJi reached out and pressed his shoulder down hard.

It was a deep plunge indeed. Wei WuXian exclaimed. Hugging him back, Lan WangJi rubbed the back of his waist, "Is it deep?"

Wei WuXian still hadn't returned from the surprise. His lips quivered for a bit. Before he could answer, he suddenly cried again, face wrinkled, "Ah! Wait! N-N-Nine shallow's and a deep\*!"

\*TN: The phrase 'nine shallow's and a deep' refers to a technique in bed that I assume is quite easy to understand. The phrase itself is very commonly known in China, nowadays more often used as a gag/joke than being taken as serious sex advice.

In vain, he covered his abdomen with one hand as he dug the other into the firm yet not too bulky muscles of Lan WangJi's shoulder. He shouted with the force of everything he had, "Lan Zhan! Don't you understand what nine shallow's and a deep is?! You, don't, have, to, always, be, so, so..."

The last sentence was broken into fragments from the thrust. Lan WangJi, "I do not!"

Although at first he cried and wailed, saying anything possible to beg for mercy, yet in the second half of the night, after two rounds had finished, Wei WuXian still had his legs locked firmly around Lan WangJi's waist, refusing to let him go.

Lan WangJi's body covered Wei WuXian's, careful not to let the weight of his body fall onto Wei WuXian. Where the two connected was still wet and slippery. Lan WangJi seemed as if he was going to rise, yet with just a slight movement, Wei WuXian drew his legs back in, and the small segment that had just parted was stuffed smoothly back inside.

Wei WuXian spoke lazily, "Don't move. The wind's gonna come in. Let's rest for a bit."

Lan WangJi listened and stopped moving. A while later, he turned to Wei WuXian, "Do you not

feel uncomfortable?"

Wei WuXian made an unfortunate face, "I do. I feel like I'm filled to the brim. Couldn't you hear how miserable my moans were?"

"..." Lan WangJi, "I will come out."

Wei WuXian immediately switched to another expression, his words frank, "I just love it when I'm filled by you like this. It's quite great, really."

As he spoke, he tightened suddenly. Lan WangJi's face changed—even his breaths paused for a moment. After holding it back for a long while, he finally replied in a hoarse voice, "... Shameless!"

Seeing how he was almost driven mad, Wei WuXian laughed loudly and planted a kiss on his lips, "Er-Gege, what haven't we done so far? What's the use of shame now?"

Lan WangJi couldn't help but shake his head. He spoke in a low voice, "Let me out. You need to bathe."

Wei WuXian was already a bit tired. He responded through the haze, "Not gonna bathe. I'll do it tomorrow. I'm so tired today."

Lan WangJi kissed his forehead, "Bathe, or you might fall ill."

Wei WuXian was so tired that he couldn't restrain Lan WangJi any longer. Finally, he let his soft limbs fall. Lan WangJi got off the bed and first picked up the blankets that had been thrown onto the ground, covering Wei WuXian's naked body tightly. Then, he hung the disordered clothes tossed all about the room onto the screen. He put on his clothes, quickly making sure that everything was neat, and went out to bring water for the bath.

Fifteen minutes later, Wei WuXian who had almost fallen asleep was picked up and put into the wooden tub. The tub was placed right beside Lan WangJi's desk. After having soaked for a while, Wei WuXian felt energized again, patting the edge of the tub, "Not gonna join me, HanGuang-Jun?"

Lan WangJi, "Later."

Wei WuXian, "Why later? Come in now!"

Lan WangJi glanced at him, as if thinking about something. A moment later, he spoke, "We have been back for four days, and four of the Jingshi's bathtubs have fallen apart."

That glance made Wei WuXian feel like he had to protest for himself, "It wasn't my fault the one from last time broke."

Lan WangJi put the box holding the soap somewhere Wei WuXian was able to reach, his voice calm, "It was mine."

Wei WuXian splattered a handful of water onto his neck, making the string of red kiss marks even brighter, "Yeah. The one from that time before wasn't my fault either. Actually, let's be honest here—you broke them every single time. You haven't gotten over this habit ever since our first time."

Lan WangJi got up. When he returned, he rested a jar of Emperor's Smile by Wei WuXian's hand before sitting down at the desk, "Yes."

If Wei WuXian extended his arm just a bit longer, he'd be able to scratch Lan WangJi's chin. And indeed, that was what he did. Lan WangJi took up a few pieces of paper, all covered in words, and began to read them as he wrote down lines that resembled simple comments. Immersed in water, Wei WuXian opened the jar and took a gulp before asking, "What are you looking at?"

Lan WangJi, "Night-hunt notes."

Wei WuXian, "By the children? You're not the one responsible for making notes, are you? I thought it was supposed to be your uncle."

Lan WangJi, "When Uncle is busy, I occasionally mark them."

Perhaps because Lan QiRen was busy with other, more important jobs, this task had temporarily be delegated to Lan WangJi. Wei WuXian grabbed a few pages and flipped through, "Back then, your uncle would comment hundreds of characters after just a couple of

lines before doing summaries at the end that were almost a thousand characters long. I don't even know where he got the time to write those comments. Well, your comments are quite short, aren't they?"

Lan WangJi, "And is that not good?"

Wei WuXian, "It is! Short and sweet."

It definitely wasn't out of cutting corners that Lan WangJi's comments were short. He wouldn't slack off in the slightest way, no matter how simple the task was. Rather, it was his habit to be as concise as possible, no matter in words or writing. Wei WuXian buried his head in the water and didn't come up again after a long while, his hair wet. With one hand, he grabbed the soap and rubbed it on his hair, while with the other, he took one of the notes from atop the desk. After a look, he suddenly burst out laughing, "Who wrote this? There are so many mistakes—hahahahahahaha, I just knew it was JingYi. You gave him a Yi\*."

\*TN: Refresher: Jia is A, Yi is B, Bing is C, and Ding is You Don't Deserve to Be A Cultivator.

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "There are so many notes and he's the only Yi I've seen. Poor kid."

Lan WangJi, "His are verbose and prone to errors."

Wei WuXian, "What happens when you get a Yi?"

Lan WangJi, "Nothing. Rewrite."

Wei WuXian, "He should be thankful. It's better than punishment by standing upside-down, after all."

Quietly, Lan WangJi collected the papers that he messed with and put them straight before laying them in a neat stack at the side. Watching his movements, Wei WuXian felt his lips naturally curl into a smile. He asked again, "What did you give SiZhui?"

Lan WangJi pulled out two of the notes and passed them to him, "Jia."

Wei WuXian accepted it and scanned, "His handwriting is quite neat."

Lan WangJi, "His are logically organized and substantially apropos."

Having flipped through the stack in his hands, he looked across at the one on the desk that hadn't been marked yet, "You have to look through all of these? Want me to help you with a few?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "I'll just mark any mistakes I see and comment on them, right?"

He reached out and grabbed the larger half. Lan WangJi was about to take it back when Wei WuXian retracted his hand, "What are you doing?"

Lan WangJi, "Those are too much. You should bathe."

Wei WuXian grabbed the Emperor's Smile again and took a sip, taking up a brush pen, "I'm bathing. It's not like I have anything else to do. It's quite fun reading these notes and essays written by the children."

Lan WangJi, "You have to rest after you bathe."

Wei WuXian flaunted, "You think I look like I could fall asleep now? I think I'd have no problem with two more rounds, even."

As he watched Wei WuXian cling to the edge of the tub, reading the notes carefully and at times propping an elbow on the desk to write, the candlelight reflected against Lan WangJi's eyes seemed to flicker with warmth.

Although his words were rather bold, claiming he could go two more rounds and such, it was difficult for him to not feel the fatigue, having run amok in the mountains with the boys for the whole day, messed around in bed for half the night, and marked a stack of notes. After he forced himself to meticulously mark his portion, he tossed it onto the desk before sliding into the water. Quickly yet gently, Lan WangJi picked him up, wiped him dry, and transferred him onto the bed.

After Lan WangJi took a quick bath and got in bed as well, hugging Wei WuXian in his arms, Wei WuXian continued to be awake for a short while, hazily whispering by his collarbone, "The

kids in your sect are quite good at writing essays. They're just missing that tiny bit when it comes to night-hunting."

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "But that's no problem... I'll make them cram hard while I'm at the Cloud Recesses. Tomorrow... I'll take them to wreck the mountain demon nests again."

The single-legged mountain demon was powerful and covered in black fur. It ate people like munching on vegetables. If it were someone else, from the way he said it, they would've thought he was taking a group of runny-nosed toddlers to the rooftop to steal bird eggs.

The corners of Lan WangJi's lips moved slightly, as if he was about to smile, "Today was mountain demons again?"

Wei WuXian, "Yeah. That's why I said they've got more work to do. After all, mountain demons only have one leg. They almost couldn't escape from single-legged ones, so if later on they meet four-legged lizards, eight-legged spiders, or hundred-legged centipedes, wouldn't they have to wait for their deaths... Oh, right. HanGuang-Jun, I'm out of money. Give me a bit more, won't you?"

Lan WangJi, "Simply take the jade token to withdraw the money."

Wei WuXian let out a muffled laugh, "Apart from letting me in and out of the barrier, that jade token you gave me... can also let me draw money?"

"Yes." Lan WangJi, "Did you ruin the stall or residence of a passersby?"

Wei WuXian, "No... Of course, not... I spent all the money because after the night-hunt, I took them to that Hunan cuisine at Caiyi Town... The exact one you never agreed to go no matter how much I tried to persuade you... I'm so tired... Stop talking to me, Lan Zhan..."

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "... I told you to stop talking... Even if you say just one word, I won't be able to hold myself from responding... Okay, Lan Zhan, let's sleep. I... can't anymore... I really have to sleep... See you tomorrow, Lan Zhan..."

He kissed Lan Zhan's neck, and indeed soon fell heavily asleep.

It was all darkness and silence amidst the Jingshi.

A moment later, Lan WangJi planted a gentle kiss in the center of Wei WuXian's forehead.

He whispered, "Wei Ying, see you tomorrow."

## GDC Chapter 120.5: Extra—Intrusion —Part One

The story began the night three days ago.

That evening, Young Master Qin returned from a social full of alcohol and fatigue. Just as he was about to retreat, he suddenly heard the sound of someone hitting a door.

Again, and again, a person was slamming on the main doors of the Qin estate.

The servant watching over the courtyard mumbled in response, crawling up as he went to examine the situation with a lantern. Just as he was about to ask whom it was, the one knocking on the door seemed to have suddenly gone mad, madly banging on the door.

And it was truly banging. The bolt creaked. It seemed as if ten claws of iron were scratching the planks unstoppably.

The commotion was too loud. Soon, the courtyard was filled with roused servants. Holding lamps, lanterns, and clubs, the crowd of people stared at one another. Finally, robed only in an outer coat and gripping a sword in his hand, the owner of the estate finally arrived.

Young Master Qin unsheathed his sword with a sharp ‘clang’ as he shouted, “Who is it?!”

At once, the scratching outside the door became louder.

One of the servants was curled up in a corner, leaning against a broom. Young Master Qin pointed to him, “Climb up and look outside.”

The servant didn’t dare disobey. Dark faced, he slowly inched up as he turned his head around with much difficulty to look at Young Master Qin, only in exchange for impatient urging.

In the end, he put two trembling hands on the roof tiles and peeked. With only one glance, he plummeted head-first onto the ground.

Young Master Qin, “He said that the one knocking the door was a monster in burial robes. Messy-haired and covered in blood. It wasn’t a living person.”

At this point, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi exchanged a look with each other.

While Lan SiZhui asked, “Young Master Qin, is there no description with greater detail?”

Young Master Qin was not of the cultivation world. He only found the right people by chance. He knew that these were cultivators, but not their identities and names. Nonetheless, Lan WangJi had an ethereal demeanor, Wei WuXian seemed nothing short of confident, and despite still being young, Lan SiZhui was quite graceful around the corners. Thus, he didn’t dare treat them badly, “No. That servant’s a coward. He passed out with just one glance, and I only managed to wake him up after pinching his central acupoint\* for ages. You think you can expect him to see it clearly?”

\*TN: The central acupoint is on one’s face, at the portion between the end of the nose and the tip of the mouth. In traditional Chinese medicine, it’s often stimulated in emergencies (such as when a person falls into a coma).

Wei WuXian, “Could I ask something?”

Young Master Qin, “Go ahead.”

Wei WuXian, “Young Master Qin, did you only order your servant to look and not look outside yourself?”

“That’s right.”

“What a pity.”

“What’s there to pity?”

Wei WuXian, “According to your words, the one who paid a visit to your door was a fierce corpse. When fierce corpses drop by, they’re usually there for a particular person. If you looked, perhaps you’d find that it was an old friend of yours.”

Young Master Qin, “And perhaps I’m the rare case. Besides, even if it came from someone, it wouldn’t necessarily be me, would it?”

Wei WuXian nodded with a smile, “You’re right.”

Young Master Qin continued, “That thing went on until daybreak. When I went out to look in

the morning, the doors were already in shambles.”

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi strolled before the main doors.

Lan SiZhui followed them, probing with care. The doors of the Qin estate was covered in hundreds of savage scratch marks, five a group, as long as a few feet and as short as a few inches. Indeed, it was in shambles.

Although it was undoubtedly the marks of human hands, it didn’t seem like something the fingernails of a live person could make no matter what.

Young Master Qin, “In any case, as you are of the cultivational world, Young Masters, do you have a way to exorcise this being?”

Wei WuXian, however, responded, “There’s no need.”

Lan SiZhui was surprised, but he didn’t say anything. Young Master Qin also found it strange, asking, “There’s no need?”

Wei WuXian stated, “There’s no need. The so-called ‘house’ adopts the task of shelter the moment it’s built, the moment it’s owned by someone. The doors to a house form a natural barrier. They not only obstruct the human, but also the inhuman. Because you’re the owner of this house, as long as you don’t say or do anything to invite creatures of darkness inside, there would be no way for them to invade. According to the remaining evil energy on the doors, it’s not some rare, bloodthirsty creature either. A door’s enough to fend it off.”

Young Master Qin was still doubtful, “It’s really so easy?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian stepped on the threshold, “Really. And in reality, the threshold is a barrier as well. The living dead are lifeless in both blood and breath. They can only move by means of hopping. Unless the walking corpse had shocking leg muscles and could jump a meter high, or else, even if the doors are wide open, it wouldn’t be able to hop in.”

Young Master Qin was still worried, “Isn’t there anything else I’d need to purchase? Like talismans for defense or swords for exorcism? I’d be more than happy to offer great reward. Money isn’t an issue.”

Lan WangJi, “Invest in a new door bolt.”

“...”

Seeing Young Master Qin’s face of disbelief, implying that he thought the whole suggestion was to shoo him away, Wei WuXian responded, “It’s your choice. You can decide for yourself, Young Master Qin. If anything, else happens, you’re welcome to come to us again.”

After leaving the Qin estate, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked side by side for a while, wandering around as they conversed casually.

Right now, the two were already half retired. If there was nothing important, they’d roam around aimlessly, from only a few days to almost an entire month. When Wei WuXian heard of Lan WangJi’s reputation for being wherever the chaos was, he didn’t think it’d be too hard, but right now as he tried it in person alongside Lan WangJi, he discovered that it was truly a test of one’s resolution. It wasn’t difficult. In fact, it was too easy. When he went on night-hunts in the past, he always liked to choose strange, adventurous locations, so naturally his trips were full of thrill and surprise. However, Lan WangJi wasn’t picky. He did anything he deemed that he ought to do, and so he’d often come across some night-hunt targets that were unchallenging to Wei WuXian. This case of the fierce corpse, for example, was really not too interesting compared to the things Wei WuXian had hunted in the past. Most others would likely also deem it unworthy for him.

However, because he was together with Lan WangJi, even if the incident itself wasn’t so engaging, having each other as company made it quite a relaxing process.

Lan SiZhui followed them in silence, holding Lil’ Apple’s rein. After some thought, he still couldn’t help but asked, “HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei, is it really alright to leave Young Master Qin’s house like that?”

Lan WangJi, “It is.”

Wei WuXian grinned, “Do you really think I was spouting nonsense and making up lies, SiZhui?”

Lan SiZhui hurried, “Of course not! Ahem, that was not what I meant. What I wanted to say was that even though house doors do carry the power to fend things off, those doors were almost about to break. Would it really be fine, without giving him even a single talisman?”

Wei WuXian, “Naturally so.”

Lan SiZhui, “Oh...”

Wei WuXian, “Of course it wouldn’t be fine.”

Lan SiZhui, “Huh? Then why?”

Wei WuXian, “Because Young Master Qin was lying.”

Lan WangJi nodded lightly. Lan SiZhui, however, seemed somewhat surprised, “How could you tell, Senior Wei?”

Wei WuXian, “I only met Young Master Qin once, so I can’t say for sure, but his personality is...”

Lan WangJi, “Stubborn and cold.”

Wei WuXian agreed, “Pretty much. Anyhow, he’s definitely not easily-scared. That night’s situation was strange, but it wasn’t so strange that it could scare someone out of their wits, according to his description. Would it be so difficult for him to climb up to the roof and look outside?”

Lan SiZhui realized, “But he insisted that he did not take a single look...”

Wei WuXian, “Right? If someone comes slamming on your door at night, everyone has some curiousness in them and you’ve also got some guts, so what’d be normal is to take a sneak peek. Wouldn’t it be strange if you insisted that you didn’t look?”

Lan WangJi, “Agreed, entirely.”

Wei WuXian, “Great minds think alike!”

After he finished, he grinned before touching his chin, “And even though the scratch marks left by the corpse on the doors looked quite frightening, they weren’t at all heavy with evil energy. It definitely didn’t come to kill for revenge—this I know for sure. We’d have to wait and see to find out what’s really the case.”

Lan SiZhui, “If so, Senior Wei, why not summon the corpse and ask it directly?”

“I refuse.”

“Huh?”

Wei WuXian responded without hesitation, “You know how much blood it takes to draw a Spirit-Attraction Flag? I have a weak constitution.”

Lan SiZhui really thought he was too lazy to let out blood, “Senior Wei, you can use my blood.” Yet, Wei WuXian burst out with a laugh. He spoke, “SiZhui, to be honest, this isn’t the problem. This time, we came here for you to gain more experience, didn’t we?”

Lan SiZhui paused in surprise. Wei WuXian continued, “Of course I can summon the corpse and directly make it leave. But, can you?”

Hearing this, Lan SiZhui immediately understood.

After having been through a series of events, both he and the other juniors of the GusuLan Sect had begun to rely on Wei WuXian a bit too much. Summoning spirits and controlling corpses were indeed the quickest way, but not everyone was able to use such a means, and it wasn’t as if he cultivated the ghostly path. And thus, to him, it wasn’t the best to study too much of these skills. If this time again, Wei WuXian did whatever he was good at and solved the mystery in just a few tries, how could it be gaining experience?

This time, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi were here to take him through the ordinary path, to see how this matter could be dealt with through the usual means.

Lan SiZhui, “So HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei, what you intended was that since Young Master Qin refused to tell us the truth, we can ignore him for now and give him a good scare?”

Wei WuXian, “Exactly. Just watch for now. That door bolt could at most hold up for two more

days. HanGuang-Jun kindly gave him such a practical advice, telling him to get a new one, but it seems like Young Master Qin didn't take it to heart. No matter what, if he really hid something important, it'd be no use even if he gets ten new door bolts. It'll come back sooner or later."

Yet, that door bolt couldn't even last a single night. The second day, with a dark face, Young Master Qin went to visit Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi again.

Prominent sects all had multiple external establishments. After the three came, they settled down at a small, elegant building of the GusuLan Sect's, named Bamboo Cottage. Young Master Qin called on them rather early, coincidentally bumping into Lan SiZhui tugging at the donkey's rein. Poor Lan SiZhui was trying hard to drag Lil' Apple outside as the latter gnawed at bamboo shoots. The moment he turned around, he saw Young Master Qin's lips twitch. Blushing slightly, he let go of the rein and invited Young Master Qin inside.

Carefully, he went to knock the bedchamber of the two seniors to report. When he saw the already-dressed Lan WangJi open the door soundlessly and shake his head, he knew that Senior Wei wouldn't be able to wake up anytime soon. Lan SiZhui felt quite cornered. In the end, he still toughened up and violated the sect rule of 'lying is prohibited', telling Young Master Qin that his senior was still resting due to having fallen ill. Or else, he couldn't openly say the big truth of 'Senior Wei is sleeping, and HanGuang-Jun told you to wait on your own', could he...?

Wei WuXian slept all the way until the sun was high up in the end. Only after much hugging and caressing from Lan WangJi did he finally manage to crawl up. As he proceeded through his morning routine with closed eyes, he even put on Lan WangJi's inner-wear by accident. A few inches of white sleeves extended from below his outer robe, rolled up many times. It was quite unbefitting, really. Fortunately, Young Master Qin wasn't in a state of mind good enough to mind whether or not Wei WuXian was dressed properly. At once, he hauled the three away.

The doors to the Qin estate were tight shut. Young Master Qin went up to knock the door, making no small talk, "After the advice yesterday, I relaxed somewhat, but I still couldn't sleep. I was in the hall reading, minding any noise outside."

Soon, a servant opened the doors and welcomed the three into the courtyard. The moment they walked down the steps, Wei WuXian paused slightly.

Crimson footprints were scattered all over the courtyard. It was a fearsome sight.

Young Master Qin continued gloomily, "Last night, that thing came again. It scratched and banged the door for almost an hour. Just as I felt annoyed by the commotion, I suddenly heard a creak, and the door bolt was snapped in half."

The instant he heard the door bolt break, Young Master Qin felt all the hair on his back rise. He sprinted to the door and peered outside from the wooden door of the main hall.

The moon was dark. He could see from afar the two opened door flaps. A figure stood before the entrance of the Qin estate, hopping like a piece of wood with a spring underneath it.

It hopped for a while and still couldn't get in. Young Master Qin let out a breath of relief. He thought that, as expected, it was the same as how Wei WuXian described it to be in the day, its body rigid and its legs unable to bend. It definitely wouldn't be able to jump over the tall threshold of his house.

Yet, before he could even fully let the breath out, he saw the figure hopping at the door suddenly leap high up into the air—just like that, it jumped through the doorway!

Young Master Qin spun around, slamming his back into the door.

The creature passed the main entrance and entered the courtyard, hopping straight forward. Thump. Thump. Just a few jumps, and it ran into the door to the main hall.

Young Master Qin felt a shudder come from the wooden door behind him. Realizing that there was but a single door between the creature and him, he scrambled to run away.

Young Master Qin, "Under the moonlight, that creature's shadow reflected onto the paper windows. It couldn't come in, so it circled around the hall. It left all of these footprints inside

the yard! Young Masters, it's not that I don't believe what you say, but you really said that it couldn't jump inside."

Wei WuXian stepped the threshold, "Young Master Qin, most of the time, rigid corpses indeed can't jump in. No blood flows in the dead, so of course they can't bend their legs. Feel free to ask any cultivational sects anywhere in the world. They'll all tell you the same thing."

Young Master Qin spread his palms, as if to show him the courtyard filled with red footprints, "Then how would you explain this?"

Wei WuXian, "I can only say that the thing that came through your doors isn't too ordinary. Young Master Qin, think for a second—did you notice anything wrong with the corpse when you peered at it last night?"

Young Master Qin thought about it for a long while, his expression unsightly, before he finally answered, "Speaking of it, that thing jumped in quite a strange pose."

Wei WuXian, "How so?"

Young Master Qin, "Almost as if it was..."

Over on the other side, Lan WangJi had already walked once around the courtyard. He walked back to Wei WuXian's side, his voice calm, "Limping."

Young Master Qin exclaimed, "That's right!"

Immediately, he asked, "And how do you know, Young Master?"

Lan SiZhui was wondering the same thing. But because as he understood it there was nothing that HanGuang-Jun didn't know, he was only curious, not confused, calmly waiting for the answer.

Lan WangJi, "The prints on the ground."

Wei WuXian bent down, and Lan SiZhui squatted as well, carefully examining the footprints. Wei WuXian looked up again after just a few glances, turning to Lan WangJi, "A single-legged corpse?"

Lan WangJi nodded. Wei WuXian stood up, "So that's why it could jump over. All these footprints are half heavy and half-light. One of the corpse's legs are broken."

He thought about it some more, "Do you think it broke it before or after death?"

Lan WangJi, "Before."

Wei WuXian, "Yes. If it were after he died, it wouldn't be affected by anything no matter which part of it broke."

Just like that, they began to converse without any hindrance. However, Lan SiZhui was unable to follow it. He had to stop them, "Wait, HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei, let me sort this out—you are saying that this corpse has a broken leg and walks with a limp. But because of this, it is rather easier for it than two legged... uh, able-bodied corpses, to jump over the tall threshold?"

Clearly, Young Master Qin was thinking about the same question, "Did I hear wrong?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

Young Master Qin seemed to find it absurd, "Do you mean to say that someone with one leg would run faster than someone with two?"

On the other side, the two were quite engaged in discussion. Wei WuXian spared a moment to grin at him, "You understood wrong, but perhaps you'd get it if I explain it this way. Some people are blind in one eye, and so they take better care of their remaining one. Thus, even though they are half blind, their eyesight may not be worse than those with two eyes. In the same sense, if a person's left arm is broken and can only use their right arm, after a long time, maybe their right arm would be abnormally strong, even twice as powerful as someone with both arms..."

Lan SiZhui understood, "And because the corpse was limp in one leg before death, it often jumped around on one leg after death, and so it would be able to jump higher than corpses with both legs?"

Wei WuXian gladly replied, "Precisely."

Lan SiZhui found this intriguing and made sure to remember it. Young Master Qin seemed

irritated, "It's my bad. I argued with my wife yesterday and tended to household matters late into the evening, so I didn't have the time to reinstall the front door. I'll fix it right now—I'll make sure the door's as sturdy as a bucket made of steel!"

However, Lan WangJi shook his head, "It would be futile. 'No precedent shall be set'."

Young Master Qin jolted, feeling that the statement wouldn't be anything reassuring, "And what does 'no precedent shall be set' mean?"

Wei WuXian, "What he said is a jargon of ours. It means that when dealing with dark creatures, some defensive tactics can only be once. They'd be useless the second time around. If you reinstalled it yesterday, it would've been able to hold up a while longer, but now that it once managed to enter the door, it'd be able to travel in and out freely from now on."

Young Master Qin was both shocked and regretful, "Then! What should I do?"

Lan WangJi, "Sit and wait."

Wei WuXian, "There's no need for panicking. It can go through the main entrance, but it can't cross the second door. Think of your estate like a city. As of right now, only the outermost walls have been breached—two more remain."

"Two more? Which two?"

Lan WangJi, "The door of company. The door of privacy."

Wei WuXian, "Your living room and your bedroom."

During the conversation, the group had already passed through the courtyard and taken seats at the main hall. Surprisingly, nobody brought tea for a long time, with all the servants having disappeared. After Young Master Qin's yells, someone finally came up to them before being kicked away quickly after. Now that he vented his anger, Young Master Qin's expression calmed slightly, still unwilling to settle, "Could you really not give me some talismans to suppress it? Please don't worry, young masters. Payment really isn't an issue."

Yet he didn't know that these people never expected any payment to come from the night-hunt either. Wei WuXian, "That depends on the way you want to suppress it."

"How so?"

And Wei WuXian began.

He spoke, "Suppression mends the symptoms but not the root of the issue. If you only want to prevent it from entering your doors, that'd be relatively easy—switch up the talisman every two weeks. It'd still be able to wreck your door, though. At that time, I say your door would need to be changed more often than the talisman. If you want it to back off, you'd need to switch it up every seven days, and these talismans are often quite complex to make and expensive in pricing. On top of that, the longer you suppress it, the stronger its resentful energy would grow to be..."

Quietly, Lan WangJi sat and listened to Wei WuXian's nonsense, saying nothing.

It was true that suppression wasn't a good strategy, but the construction and usage of talismans weren't as difficult or complex as how Wei WuXian made them to be. But in terms of this, nobody's mouth was more clever than Wei WuXian's. Even Lan SiZhui, with his excellent grades, was befuddled by the explanation, almost believing it. Young Master Qin found it quite a hassle, as if he'd encounter countless repercussions if he chose to suppress it. He couldn't help but began to doubt, repeatedly glancing at Lan WangJi who was sipping tea. But because there was never a single flash of 'he's exaggerating' written on his face, he couldn't do anything but to believe it, "Isn't there something that deals with it once and for all?!"

Wei WuXian's tone of voice turned, "Whether there is or isn't would be a decision up to you, Young Master Qin."

Young Master Qin, "How come it's up to me?"

Wei WuXian, "I can make a talisman specially for you, but that'd depend on if you're willing to answer my question honestly."

"What question?" Wei WuXian, "Did you know the corpse before its death?" After a moment of silence, Young Master Qin finally replied, "Yes."

## GDC Chapter 121: Extra—Intrusion —Part Two

Hearing this, the two exchanged a glance. Lan SiZhi perked up.

Wei WuXian, “I’m all ears to your story.”

After some thought, Young Master Qin began slowly, “It’s not really much of a story. I’m not too familiar with him either. When I was young, I grew up at my grandmother’s house in a rural village. He was one of the servants of my grandmother’s household. As we were of similar age, we grew up playing with each other.”

Wei WuXian, “That’s called a childhood friend—how come you say you’re not familiar with him?”

Young Master Qin, “Because as we grew up, we drifted apart.”

Wei WuXian, “Take some time to think. Have you ever offended this servant in any way?”

Young Master Qin, “There has been one instance, though I’m not too sure how serious it was either.”

Lan WangJi, “Go on.”

Young Master Qin, “The servant has always served my grandmother by her side. Because he was quick while working and was about the same age as me, my grandmother took quite a liking to him, often praising him for being clever. As a result of this, he also grew somewhat proud, always following the juniors of our clan with no regard to the difference between master and servant. Later, my grandmother even let him go to school with us.

“One day, the teacher left us a difficult problem. Amid the discussion, someone came up with a first answer. Just as the class was expressing their approval, the servant suddenly spoke up and said that it was wrong.”

Young Master Qin, “At that time, that servant had only been going to school for a few months, yet we’ve been schooling for a couple of years. It was needless to say who was right. Immediately, someone proved him wrong. Yet he was extremely stubborn, insisting that the previous person answered wrong to show us his way of solving it. In the end, the entire class felt annoyed by him, and together chased him away.”

At this point, Lan SiZhi couldn’t help but speak, “Young Master Qin, even if he annoyed you, he never did anything too extreme... Why drive him out?”

Wei WuXian, “Young Master Qin, from this it sounds like your whole gang of juniors offended him. Do you hold a unique position in this? Or else he wouldn’t have only sought after you, but rather visit everyone part of the group.”

Young Master Qin, “Back then, I was the first to tell him to leave. It was only a casual remark at first, yet who knew everyone had long since been fed up with him, and the situation broke out. Surprisingly, he had quite a temper. He went back, telling my grandmother that he wouldn’t come again, and he really never came back.”

Wei WuXian, “I’ll ask you two more questions. You must answer in truth, Young Master Qin.”

Young Master Qin, “Go ahead.”

“My first question.” Wei WuXian’s eyes shone brightly, “You said that ‘someone came up with a first answer’. Does this ‘someone’ happen to be you?”

After a pause, Young Master Qin replied, “Is this important?”

Wei WuXian, “Then, my second question—regarding the solution to that problem, in the end, who was right and who was wrong?”

Young Master Qin had on an unpleasant expression. He flipped his sleeves, his voice cold, “The incident happened years before now. Please excuse my inability to recall every single detail. But in all honesty, who has never acted on impulse when they were young, doing inexplicable things, meeting inexplicable people. Please don’t tangle yourselves in such an incident. Right now, all I want is to deal with this matter as soon as possible.”

Wei WuXian grinned, “Yes. I understand, I understand.”

Lan WangJi, "When was his passing?"

Young Master Qin, "About two years ago, I think."

Wei WuXian, "Two years? That's not too bad, not an old corpse but not fresh either. How did he die? Suicide?"

"No. I heard he ran around drunken in the middle of the night before accidentally falling to his death."

"If it's not suicide, the situation isn't so bad after all. Young Master Qin, is there anything else?"

"No."

"Then please go back for now. Later, talismans will be taken to your residence. If you happen to recall anything else, please notify us as soon as possible."

After they returned to the cottage, Lan SiZhui shut the door and let out a breath of relief, "Young Master Qin... He is truly... truly..."

Lan WangJi suddenly spoke up, "Two years."

Wei WuXian, "Yes. Two years is a bit strange."

Lan SiZhui, "Strange?"

Wei WuXian pulled a blank talisman from his sleeve, "If a creature full of hatred is seeking revenge, it'd usually begin its haunting the night of the seventh day after its death. Those that take a little longer sometimes begin within a year. Since it had already turned into a fierce corpse, why would it take two years to visit?"

Lan SiZhui guessed, "Could it be that he could not find Young Master Qin's new address within the two years?"

He imagined the corpse knocking door after door at night, peeking inside to see if Young Master Qin was inside. Coldness slithered up his back.

Wei WuXian, however, dismissed the guess, "No. The corpse used to be friends with Young Master Qin. It wouldn't be hard to find him through his scent. And if it were like you said, it would've very likely made a few mistakes on its journey, so there shouldn't be only a single incident of a fierce corpse slamming on somebody's door. Lan Zhan, you've read more files than I have and you remember things better. In the two years, have you seen similar accounts?" He entered the study as Lan WangJi answered, "I have not."

Wei WuXian, "Exactly... I can't find the cinnabar, Lan Zhan." He took out a brush, "I used it just last night! Did either of you see the cinnabar?"

Lan WangJi went inside as well and found the cinnabar for him. Wei WuXian dipped the tip of his brush inside the dainty little cup before he poured himself some tea and sat down at the desk. With tea in his left hand and the brush in his right, he scrawled across the talisman paper without even looking, talking to Lan WangJi, "If you don't remember, it definitely didn't happen. And so, there should be another reason as to why it didn't do anything to Young Master Qin in the two years. Alright, I'm finished."

He peeled off the talisman still wet with cinnabar from the desk and gave it to Lan SiZhui, "Go bring this to him."

Lan SiZhui accepted it and scrutinized every angle, despite not being able to understand a single thing. Having never seen on any book such wild, unrestrained runes, he couldn't help but asked, "Senior Wei... This... Is not just a random scribble, is it?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course it is."

"..."

"I never use my eyes when I'm drawing talismans."

"..."

Wei WuXian grinned, "Don't worry. It'll definitely work. Speaking of it, SiZhui, you don't like Young Master Qin all that much, do you?"

Lan SiZhui thought about it, "I do not know either." He responded with honesty, "He never did anything truly evil, but perhaps I find it difficult to deal with people of such character. I do not particularly like the tone with which he mentioned the word 'servant'..."

He paused at this point. Wei WuXian was oblivious to it, “Typical, typical. Most of the people in this world looks down upon servants. Servants sometimes even look down upon themselves... Why are you two looking at me like that?”

Halfway through, he interrupted, not knowing whether to laugh or frown, “Stop—is there a misunderstanding here? How could I compare? Lotus Pier isn’t the usual household, after all. I’ve beaten Jiang Cheng up way more times than he’s ever beaten me!”

Lan WangJi didn’t say anything, but instead gave him a silent hug. Wei WuXian couldn’t help but smiled. He hugged back, stroking Lan WangJi’s back a couple of times. Lan SiZhui coughed. Seeing how confident Wei WuXian looked, not at all sensitive to the word ‘servant’, he was finally at ease.

Wei WuXian continued, “But it’s likely that he’ll come again.”

Lan SiZhui paused, “Can it still not be solved, even today?”

Lan WangJi, “He has not said everything.”

Wei WuXian, “Yes. It’s not the first time anyways. You can’t cope with these people in any other way—you gotta squeeze their words out bit by bit. Let’s see if after tonight, whether he’d say everything tomorrow.”

As expected, the next day, when Lan SiZhui was practicing his sword outside of Bamboo Cottage, Young Master Qin came again.

The moment he came, he made it clear, “I don’t care!”

Lan SiZhui hurried, “Please wait, Young Master Qin! My two seniors are still sl... still cultivating! They are at a crucial point and cannot be disturbed!”

Hearing this, Young Master Qin didn’t barge right through the courtyard, but still he bombarded Lan SiZhui with his puffed-up resentment, “I don’t want to hear about mending the symptom but not the root! I want this thing to never find me again!!!”

The second night, Young Master Qin was still unable to sleep, reading at night in the main hall. Soon, the fierce corpse—the servant—came once more.

It still couldn’t enter the house, jumping here and there right outside and slamming the door at times. Somehow, the windows of wood and paper weren’t torn apart by it. Quickly afterwards, the noise retreated far into the distance. Young Master Qin, who’d never had any proper shut-eye in quite a few days, finally couldn’t manage any longer. Losing his focus, fatigue arose, and he fell into a deep sleep just like that.

Not knowing how long had passed, amid the haze, he suddenly heard three clear knocks come from the door. Body tightening and bones straightening, he was awake at once.

A woman from outside the door called out, “Husband.”

Young Master Qin had just woken from his sleep, still in a state of confusion. The moment he heard Madam Qin’s voice, he got up and went to open the door. Quickly, he remembered that in the past few days, Madam Qin kept on crying and complaining that she couldn’t live like this any longer. Only yesterday did she pack up her things and leave for her parents’ home. If she came back because she was scared, how could she have had the courage to come back alone in the middle of the night?

A woman’s curved figure reflected against the paper window. It looked like his wife’s figure indeed. But Young Master Qin didn’t dare make any hasty conclusions. He unsheathed his sword in silence, asking, “My dear, why have you come back? Aren’t you mad anymore?”

The woman outside the door spoke with a flat tone, “I’ve come back. I’m not mad. Open the door for me.” Young Master Qin couldn’t open the door yet, pointing his sword at the door, “My dear, it’d be safer for you if you’re with your parents. What if it hasn’t left yet, still walking around this house?”

Silence came from outside the door. Young Master Qin felt sweat come from the palm holding the sword. Out of the blue, the woman screeched with soaring volume, “Open the door right now! The ghost is coming! Let me inside!”

Madam Qin, whether real or not, clung to the paper window and screamed. Young Master Qin’s

scalp tingled. Gripping Wei WuXian's talisman, he suddenly felt blood surge through his body. Holding his sword, he barged outside...

Young Master Qin, "And then a pile of something crashed into my face, making me pass out." Wei WuXian, "What made you pass out?"

Young Master Qin pointed at the desk. Wei WuXian looked before he began to laugh uncontrollably, "Why fruits?"

Young Master Qin fumed, "How would I know?!"

Wei WuXian, "Of course you'd know. Nobody would know except for you. These creatures all tend to hold grudges. Have you also thrown fruits at him before?"

Young Master Qin said nothing, still dark-faced. From his expression, Wei WuXian was certain that the guess wasn't too far off, but of course he wouldn't admit it himself. Thus, he continued to ask no longer. When Young Master Qin spoke up again, the topic had changed as expected, "This morning, I got someone to ask my in-laws. Last night, my wife didn't leave their house at all."

Wei WuXian, "It's something used especially to break the protection barriers of houses, sometimes seen in the ancient books and notebooks. It isn't a harmful being on its own, but as it can imitate the sound and shape of those close to the owner of the house, it often paired up with beings that can't go through the door, helping it fool the owner into opening the door on their own. What a helper that fierce corpse found."

Young Master Qin, "No matter what it is, it's useless for me to know. Young Master, the second door has already broken. It's already come into my main hall. If I may, are you going to tell me that I don't have to do anything a second time?"

"Young Master Qin," Wei WuXian replied, "Let's reason things out here. This second door was opened by you yourself. If not for that talisman of mine, I dare not say what shape you'd be in right now."

Defeated, Young Master Qin lashed out, "If this continues, the next time I wake up, won't I see that thing standing right next to my bed?!"

Wei WuXian, "If you really want a good night's sleep, Young Master Qin, you should work on recalling if there's anything else you forgot to say. Please don't guard any more information this time. You have to know that tonight, hahaha, I'm not trying to scare you, but it'll most definitely be in front of your bedroom door."

With no other choice, Young Master Qin could only tell them one more thing.

"The last time I saw him was two years ago, when I returned to my home village to commemorate my parents and ancestors. Back then, while paying my respects, I wore a jade pendant." Young Master Qin, "He recognized that it belonged to my grandmother and asked to borrow it from me. I thought that he was missing my grandmother, so I gave it to him. Yet soon after he got it, he said he lost the pendant."

Wei WuXian, "And what does 'lost' refer to? Did he lose it by accident or did he sell it?"

Young Master Qin hesitated, "I don't know. At first, I thought he sold it and came back with the lie that he lost it. But..." He didn't continue. Wei WuXian pressed with patience, "But what?"

Lan WangJi was cold-faced throughout, "There is no harm in honesty."

Young Master Qin, "But, now that I think about it, he shouldn't have gone as far as to sell something of my grandmother's. "Later, I heard he was a drunkard. Perhaps he lost it at night drinking, or maybe he had it stolen. In any case, I was infuriated at the time, so I berated him for it." Wei WuXian, "Wait. Young Master Qin, something that pertains to one's life and death should not be blurred with ambiguous diction. The word 'berate' could either be light or serious, with a significant difference in between. So, through what means did you 'berate' him?"

Young Master Qin's brow twitched, adding, "If I remember correctly, I gave him somewhat of a beating."

Wei WuXian blinked, "Well... You don't happen to be the one who broke that lame leg of his, do you?"

## GDC Chapter 122: Extra—Intrusion —Part Three

“...” Young Master Qin pretended like nothing was wrong, “I’m not too sure about that. I don’t know how rough the servant who punished him went, but after all he used to be one of our servants too, so I never really intended to do anything to him. If he held hatred for me behind his back but didn’t dare say it out loud, I can’t do anything about it either.”

Listening to the conversation on the side, Lan SiZui couldn’t hold it any longer, “Young Master Qin, this... this is just a bit too far... from your original explanation. When my two seniors asked you to explain things, why did you hide so much from them?”

Young Master Qin, “I thought swords and talismans would be enough to maintain the peace of my household. How could I have known that I needed to tell such an old, meaningless story?”

Wei WuXian spoke with a tone of dramatic emphasis, “No, no, no—it’s not an old, meaningless story. The situation is rather severe, Young Master Qin! Think about it. You scolded him and beat him up before he died, perhaps even breaking his legs. If he really didn’t sell the jade pendant, it would’ve been a wrongful death. Whom would he find if not you?”

Young Master Qin immediately replied, “Well I wasn’t the one who killed him! It wasn’t a suicide either! Why would he find me?”

Wei WuXian, “Hm? How do you know it wasn’t a suicide? Maybe he really took his own life by impulse, but it was perceived as an accident by everyone else. That’d be a worse case.”

Young Master Qin, “How could a grown-up man commit suicide simply because of something so insignificant?”

Wei WuXian, “Young Master Qin, assumptions are the most dangerous in our line of work. Each individual has different levels of tolerance and sensitivity. It’s hard to say whether a grown-up man would commit suicide because of ‘something so insignificant’. You have to know—the reason behind a corpse rising could be the hatred of a wife taken or a son killed, but it could also be a small matter like Person A refusing to play with Person B when they were young.”

Young Master Qin was still reluctant, “It definitely wasn’t suicide! If a person wants suicide, they can either hang themselves or take poison, but who would choose to fall off a mountain? You wouldn’t even know if you’d die successfully. It definitely wasn’t suicide.”

Wei WuXian, “You do make sense. But have you ever thought, Young Master Qin, about the possibility that he only fell from the mountain because you broke his leg and he couldn’t walk well? If this were the case, round it up, and wouldn’t it mean you killed him. Wouldn’t it be worse?”

Young Master Qin fumed, “What do you mean round it up and I killed him? If this were the case, it’d be called an accident!”

Wei WuXian, “Are you sure you want to persuade someone who died in such a way that their death was an ‘accident’? The fact that he’s back means that somebody has to be responsible for this ‘accident’, doesn’t it?”

The moment Young Master Qin said one thing, he followed up with another, his refutations making sweat seep from Young Master Qin’s darkened face. Wei WuXian spoke again, “But there’s no need for despair. I’ll tell you one last way of protection. You can do this for now.”

Young Master Qin, “Do what?!”

With just one glance at Wei WuXian, Lan WangJi knew that he was going to start blathering again. He shook his head.

Wei WuXian, “Listen carefully. You have to keep the two doors that have already been broken free of obstruction. You’ll no longer keep that thing out with closed doors, anyways.”

Young Master Qin, “Yes!”

Wei WuXian, “Keep out the remaining individuals of your household, so that the irrelevant is not harmed.”

Young Master Qin, "Most of them have already gone anyways!"

Wei WuXian, "Good. Then find a virgin boy of profuse yang energy to guard your bedroom on a long bench at midnight. He'll deal with whatever that comes."

"That's it?"

Wei WuXian, "That's it. The virgin's here already. As for anything else, you can ignore them all, Young Master Qin, and sleep until the break of dawn."

The one he pointed to was Lan SiZhui. The moment Young Master Qin heard the last sentence, his lips twitched uncontrollably as he glanced at the gentle-looking boy, "If he's guarding the door, what about you two?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course we'll be behind the door and accompanying you, Young Master Qin. If the door fails and the corpse barges inside, we'll do something about it."

Young Master Qin couldn't hold it any longer, "Can't this Young Master here directly help me guard the door?"

The one he pointed to was Lan WangJi.

And thus, Wei WuXian was flabbergasted, "Who do you mean? Him?"

He laughed so hard he almost fell over, "Hahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

Only with Lan WangJi wrapping an arm around his shoulder did Wei WuXian succeed in holding himself up, "No."

Young Master Qin felt quite displeased by the curt refusal, "Why not?"

Wei WuXian's face was solemn, "Did you forget what I said? It has to be a virgin."

"..." Young Master Qin didn't buy it, "What, he isn't?"

Long after Lan SiZhui accompanied Young Master Qin out of Bamboo Cottage, Wei WuXian was still splitting his sides with laughter.

Lan WangJi glanced at him before suddenly hauling Wei WuXian over, onto his legs. His voice was calm, "Have you had enough?"

Wei WuXian, "No!"

Seated on Lan WangJi's lap, he continued, "HanGuang-Jun, what a deceitful face you have. Everyone says you're pure and chaste and ascetic. I feel extremely wronged."

Lan WangJi lifted him a bit so that Wei WuXian sat higher and the two were closer, "Wronged?"

Wei WuXian, "It's absolute nonsense. You see, you're clearly not a virgin anymore, yet when people see your face, they say you are one no matter what. In my previous life, I've never touched a girl's hand except when I'm trying to save someone, but not a single person believed that I was a virgin." He began to count, "Night-hunting while at school! Everyone gossiped about me playing around with girls. Up on Burial Mound! Everyone gossiped about me being a satyr of anarchy. How bitter is the silence in which I'm doomed to suffer."

In silence, Lan WangJi put his hand over Wei WuXian's, an unnoticeable smile rippling through the depths of his eyes.

Wei WuXian, "And you're smiling. You're such a cold, heartless man. After all, I rank fourth on the list of young masters, yet in that one life I've only kissed someone once. I've always thought that it was a pretty maiden who had a crush on me, thinking that I, Wei Ying, lived a life not wasted. But who knew it was actually you..."

At this point, Lan WangJi finally couldn't sit any longer.

He spun around and pressed Wei WuXian onto the bed, "Do you not want it to be me?"

"What are you so anxious for? Hahahahahahahaha..."

When the time came, Lan SiZhui had been waiting for quite a while, standing in the courtyard with Lil' Apple reined, when Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi finally sauntered out of the house.

He wanted to tell him, Senior Wei, you accidentally wore HanGuang-Jun's clothes again. But after some thought, he still swallowed the sentence.

After all, Wei WuXian wore the wrong clothes every couple of days. If he reminded Wei WuXian every single time, wouldn't he die of fatigue?

And every time Senior Wei would wear it anyways because he thought it was too much trouble to change. Feeling that there was no point in reminding him anyways, Lan SiZhui decided he'd much rather pretend he saw nothing.

Wei WuXian mounted Lil' Apple and fished out an apple from the girdle pouch, taking a crisp bite. Lan SiZhui stared at the apple, finding it familiar. He spoke after some hesitation, "Senior Wei, is that one of the fruits Young Master Qin brought over?"

Wei WuXian, "That's right."

Lan SiZhui, "... A fruit brought over by a fierce corpse?"

Wei WuXian, "Exactly."

Lan SiZhui, "Is it really alright to eat it?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course. It just fell on the ground, after all. You can eat it after some washing."

Lan SiZhui, "Would the apple of a fierce corpse be poisonous..."

Wei WuXian, "I can answer this question for you—no."

Lan SiZhui, "How do you know, Senior?"

Wei WuXian, "Because I've already fed half a dozen to Lil' Apple... Stop, Lil' Apple! Don't kick!! Help me, Lan Zhan!!!"

Lan WangJi grabbed the rein of the mad donkey with one hand and with the other took away the apple next to Wei WuXian's mouth, "Leave it be. We can buy some tomorrow."

Wei WuXian held his shoulder, finally managing to steady himself, "Well I'm trying to save some money for HanGuang-Jun, am I not?"

Lan WangJi, "That will never be necessary."

Wei WuXian scratched his chin, grinning. Suddenly, it seemed as if he remembered something. He asked casually, "Oh, right, SiZhui, are you a virgin?"

He asked as naturally as ever, yet Lan SiZhui burst with a 'pfft'.

The act was truly not very 'Lan'. Having noticed that Lan WangJi glanced at him, Lan SiZhui fixed his composure at once. Wei WuXian added, "Don't be so nervous. I made up everything I told Young Master Qin. Some spells and such do need to be carried out by virgins, but since you're cutting a fierce corpse with a sword, there's really not much different whether you're a virgin or not. But if you aren't, I'll be quite surprised..."

Before he even finished, Lan SiZhui already began to stammer, face flushed, "O-O-O-Of course I am!!!"

In the middle of the night, the empty Qin residence was wide-open as expected. Young Master Qin had long since been waiting for them.

Lan SiZhui stood before Young Master Qin's door, appearing quite reliable despite the lack of any armor. Seeing his spirit of youthful fearlessness, Young Master Qin stopped frowning so grimly, but still, he didn't ease up. After he entered his bedroom, he shut the door and turned around, "Is it really alright to let the young master guard the door? What if the exorcism fails and on top of that another life is lost in my house..."

The other two had already sat down at the table. Wei WuXian replied, "No lives will be lost. Young Master Qin, think about just how long the corpse has been haunting—has a single life been lost in your household?"

Young Master Qin sat down as well. Wei WuXian put one of the corpse's pears on the table, "Have some fruit to calm your nerves."

Under the days of pressure, Young Master Qin was already in somewhat of a haze. He picked it up and took his to his mouth. Just as he was about to speak, he suddenly heard a series of 'thump thump', 'thump thump'.

At once, it seemed as though a cold gust of air swept inside the room. The candlelight on the table flickered.

The pear in Young Master Qin's hand dropped to the ground, rolling to the side. Once again, he put his right hand to the sword hilt by his waist.

'Thump', 'thump', 'thump'.

The noise grew louder, closer. Each time it sounded, the flame trembled as though it felt fear. The sharp swish of a sword being unsheathed came from beyond the door. A faint shadow glid past the paper window. The noise disappeared immediately, and what replaced it was the sounds of sleeves flapping as well as the crash of wooden furniture being broken.

Young Master Qin's complexion darkened, "What's happening outside?!"

Wei WuXian, "They've only started fighting. Don't mind them."

Lan WangJi listened for a moment, "Excessive."

Wei WuXian understood what he meant. From the sounds of the sword and the footsteps, he could tell that Lan SiZhui's swordplay was swift and fierce, lacking in firmness. It wasn't that it was inadequate, but rather that it wasn't consistent with the GusuLan Sect's sword way. If his vigor wasn't in harmony or if he used many different methods, he might reach a dead end once he cultivated to a higher level.

He replied, "He's pretty good already. SiZhui is still young. He can't control his attacks. He'll know after he grows up and gains more experience dueling others."

Lan WangJi shook his head. He listened some more before suddenly turning to Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian was also somewhat surprised. He heard it to. Just now, a few of Lan SiZhui's attacks weren't of the GusuLan Sect, but instead of the YunmengJiang Sect.

But he'd never taught any of that to the GusuLan Sect's juniors. He speculated, "SiZhui and the rest of them regularly go on night-hunts with Jin Ling. He probably retained them unconsciously while dueling him."

Lan WangJi, "It is inappropriate."

Wei WuXian, "Then are you going to punish him once you get back?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Young Master Qin, "What are you talking about?"

Wei WuXian picked the pear up from the ground and laid it beside his hand once again, "Nothing. Eat something to calm your nerves. Don't be so nervous." Right after, he smirked at Lan WangJi, "On the other hand, HanGuang-Jun, you're absolutely incredible. It's no wonder that I can tell it's Yunmeng's swordplay, but how could you tell?"

As though after a short pause, Lan WangJi finally replied, "I learned them after dueling you so many times."

Wei WuXian, "That's why I said you were incredible. The couple of times from over a decade ago were the only instances when I fought you with the YunmengJiang Sect's swordplay, weren't they? Recalling them after listening for such a short while—isn't that incredible?"

As he spoke, he pushed the candle toward Lan WangJi, wanting to see if his earlobes were red. Lan WangJi, however, saw through his malicious intentions. He put his fingers steadily over the hand with which Wei WuXian held the candle. With the wavering flame, the light was a cup of wine reflecting Wei WuXian's grinning eyes and curved lips. The knot of Lan WangJi's throat quivered slightly.

At this point, both of the two paused. Wei WuXian exclaimed with a 'huh'. Young Master Qin seemed as though he faced a great peril, "What's happening? Is there anything wrong with the candle?"

After some speechlessness, Wei WuXian replied, "It's nothing. The candle's great. It'd be better if it were brighter."

He turned to Lan WangJi, "These moves are probably a few of SiZhui's best ones. But they sound like neither your sect's nor mine."

A while later, Lan WangJi replied, brows slightly knitted, "Perhaps they are of the Wen Sect."

Wei WuXian understood, "Wen Ning was probably the one who taught him. Fair enough."

As they spoke, booming crashes kept on thundering outside, slowly growing louder. Young Master Qin's face grew darker as well. Wei WuXian was also beginning to feel that something wasn't right, calling outside, "SiZhui, we've exchanged a dozen sentences by now. It should be about time you're finished, even if you're trying to tear the house down, huh?"

Lan SiZhui answered, "Senior Wei, the corpse dodges really quickly, and it keeps on avoiding me!"

Wei WuXian, "Is it scared of you?"

Lan SiZhui, "No. It can fight. But it seems like it does not want to fight me!"

Wei WuXian mused, "It doesn't want to hurt anyone irrelevant?"

He turned to Lan WangJi, "Now this is interesting. I haven't seen a fierce corpse so reasonable in a long time."

On the other hand, Young Master Qin seemed irritated, "Will he be alright? Why hasn't he finished it yet?"

Wei WuXian didn't even open his mouth when Lan SiZhui spoke again, "HanGuang-Jun, Senior Wei, the corpse's hand is clawed on the left and clenched on the right. It looks like it is holding something in its hand!"

Hearing this, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi exchanged a glance inside the room. Wei WuXian nodded faintly. Lan WangJi ordered, "SiZhui, sheath your sword."

Lan SiZhui gaped, "HanGuang-Jun? I have not yet gotten a hold of..."

Wei WuXian rose, "It's fine! Sheath your sword. There's no need to fight anymore"

Young Master Qin, "No need to fight anymore?"

From outside the door, Lan SiZhui answered, "Yes!" With a 'clang', he sheathed his sword and leaped out of the way. Inside, Young Master Qin ranted, "What's this supposed to mean? That thing is still outside!"

Wei WuXian got up, "There's no need to fight anymore, by which I mean the matter's mostly finished. Only one step is left."

Young Master Qin, "Which step?"

With force, Wei WuXian kicked the door open, "This final step of mine!"

The two wooden flaps sprang open with a 'bang'. A dark shadow stood rigid before the door, hair disheveled and face grimy. Its white eyes shone in a grotesque manner.

Seeing the face, Young Master Qin's expression changed at once. He unsheathed his sword as he backed away rapidly, yet the fierce corpse swept inside like a black storm, throttling his neck with its left hand.

Lan SiZhui had just stepped inside. Seeing the situation, just as he tried to go help him, he was stopped by Wei WuXian. Lan SiZhui deliberated that even though Young Master Qin had a hard, unlikeable character, he wasn't so immoral that he deserved death. His two seniors definitely wouldn't stand and watch the corpse kill him. With this, he calmed somewhat.

The dead servant had fingers like iron clamps. Young Master Qin's face flushed purple, his forehead lined with vein. His sword had already made countless holes in the corpse's body, but it was as futile as stabbing a piece of blank paper.

The corpse slowly raised his right fist and inched it toward Young Master Qin's face, as though he was going to smash his brains out with the one punch. All of the other three inside the room had their eyes glued to the scene, especially Lan SiZhui, who almost couldn't hold back his sword-gripping hand.

Just as he thought he was certain that Young Master Qin's head would fly into pieces in the next moment, he saw the corpse's fingers loosen. A flat, circular object slid out from between his fingers.

The object was connected at the ends by a black string. The corpse proceeded to wrap it around Young Master Qin's neck.

Young Master Qin, "..."

Lan SiZhui, "..."

Only after it tried three times did it manage to lay it over Young Master Qin's head. The difficult actions seemed so stiff and awkward that it was... truly the opposite of threatening.

Seeing that it was neither going to attack nor use the string to choke Young Master Qin, the two let out a breath of relief in unison.

Yet, before they could even let out the full breath, the corpse let out a punch with the force of lightning. Young Master Qin shrieked and collapsed on the ground, spewing blood from his nose and mouth.

After the corpse finished, it turned around and seemed as though it was going to leave. Lan SiZhui watched the scene unfold, mouth-gaping. Seeing this, he put his hand on his sword once again, but he felt that the situation was so absurd that it'd be even more absurd if he were to treat it seriously. He didn't know whether to attack or not. Wei WuXian, on the other hand, was already half-dead with laughter, waving his hands at Lan SiZhui, "Don't worry. Let it be."

The fierce corpse turned around and looked at him. With a nod of its head, it dragged its broken leg and hobbled outside the door.

Watching its fleeing figure, Lan SiZhui only managed to speak up a while later, "Senior Wei, is it... alright to let it go just like this?"

Lan WangJi bent down to examine Young Master Qin's bloodied face, "Yes."

Lan SiZhui's gaze turned back to Young Master Qin. He finally had the spare of mind to notice that what hung around his neck was a jade pendant.

The red string that tied the pendent seemed as though it'd been rolling in the soil for quite a few years. It was so dirty that it looked black, although the jade itself was till a warm white.

"This is..."

Wei WuXian, "Returned to its rightful owner."

After Lan WangJi made sure that Young Master Qin was only unconscious and not dying, the two left the Qin residence along with Lan SiZhui.

Before they went, Wei WuXian kindly shut all three doors for Young Master Qin.

Lan SiZhui, "It is not easy, is it?"

Wei WuXian mounted Lil' Apple, "What? You mean Young Master Qin? To be able to end the matter with just a single punch from the fierce corpse—it's just the easiest thing ever!"

Lan SiZhui, "I did not mean Young Master Qin; I meant the fierce corpse. Of those that I have read, most of the recorded vengeance hauntings begin with taking kindness for granted in life and end with murder in death, with an especially feral sense of madness. And yet, this corpse..."

Standing before the doors scratched to pieces, Lan SiZhui turned around and took one last look, "It spent two years after it was revived in the mountains searching for a jade pendant it lost before it died. This is the first time I have seen a fierce corpse rise in order to do such a thing instead of to kill someone in vengeance."

Wei WuXian fished out another apple, "Now that's why I said I haven't seen a fierce corpse so reasonable in a long time. With someone else the slightest bit more prone to hatred, it could sever one of Young Master Qin's legs or even murder his entire house, and it wouldn't be anything special."

Lan SiZhui thought about it, "Senior, I still have an unanswered question. In the end, was its leg broken because of Young Master Qin or not? Was this the reason behind its death?"

Wei WuXian, "No matter what, it didn't see Young Master Qin as the one accountable for this, anyways."

Lan SiZhui, "Okay. Then, is it really satisfied with just a single punch?"

Lan WangJi, "From what it appears, yes."

Wei WuXian crunched down on the apple, "Right? They say that everyone is fighting for a single breath. When one dies with resentment, it's all because that breath is still stuck at their chest. It threw all those fruits, returned the jade pendant, and gave Young Master Qin a good beating. After he let out that breath, it wouldn't be clogged up anymore."

Lan SiZhui, "How nice would it be if every spirit is so reasonable."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian grinned, "What are you talking about, youngster? Even humans lose their reason when dealing with hatred, and you'd expect spirits to maintain any reason? You have to know—most of the people in this world feel that they themselves are very piteous."

Lan WangJi gently tugged Lil' Apple's rein, his voice calm, "He was fortunate."

Wei WuXian agreed, "Indeed. Young Master Qin has got quite the luck."

After some time, Lan SiZhui finally couldn't hold his words back any longer. Sincerely, he spoke, "But I still feel that only one punch might be a bit insufficient..."

"Hahahahahahaha..."

Whether still under the shock of the corpse's punch or finally having given up on Wei WuXian, in the next few days, Young Master Qin hadn't visited him again.

However, seven days later, news of him circling around the city found their way over here.

It was rumored that one morning, a young corpse wearing tattered burial robes was found in the middle of the streets. It was already half-rotten, emitting a strong stench. As the crowd discussed if they should wrap it in a mat and bury it in a ditch somewhere, the one and only Young Master Qin generously provided the funds to collect the corpse and bury it properly. For a while, he received the praise of all.

When Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian left the city and passed the Qin estate, it had long since reinstalled a gleaming new set of doors. People scurried in and out, leaving no trace of the previous chaos and desolation. It was a bustling scene indeed.

# GDC Chapter 123: Extra—Iron Hook —Part One

The Bai\* residence was so well-known around the area largely due to the White Room.

\*TN: The character bai means white.

It was called the White Room, first of all, of course because it was white. When it was built, white paint was spread all over its walls before the owner prepared for decorations. Everything went smoothly in all the other parts of the residence. Only when it came to the room at the western courtyard did strange things begin to occur. The process could only be set aside for the time. Up until today, the White Room still created stark contrast against the rich ornamentation of the rest of the Bai residence, so white that it seemed ghastly.

“The one room is closed off by three locks and three door bolts. No matter how hot the summer is, cold air always surrounds it, almost as if it were made entirely of ice. According to the owner of the Bai residence, when his father was playing with a ball once, the ball rolled before it finally stopped at the entrance to the room. When he went to pick it up, he couldn’t control his curiosity, and took a single peek through the door slit.”

Straight-faced, Jin Ling continued, until he saw Wei WuXian over at the side stick his hand into the coffin, as though he was opening the corpse’s eyelids. He immediately choked.

Hearing his pause, Wei WuXian turned around, “And took a single peek through the door slit?” The group of Lan juniors behind him also turned their eyes toward him in unison. Jin Ling hesitated before he went on, “... and took a single peek through the door slit, before he froze there like he was struck dumb, unable to walk away even after a long while. When his family found out, they dragged him away and he passed out with a high fever that left almost no memories behind. After this, he never dared approach the place again.

“Past midnight, nobody is allowed to leave their room and walk around, especially not near the White Room. This is a firm rule of the house. However, a few hours after midnight, even though nobody is inside, people can still hear the old, wooden floor creak with footsteps. There’s also this.”

Jin Ling lightly clenched his fists and made a gesture full of killing intent.

“A noise that sounds like a hemp rope slowly being tightened, to strangle something.”

A few days ago, one of the Bai residence’s servants passed the White Room on his morning cleaning duty. He discovered that a hole the size of a fingertip was poked through the thin, paper windows on the White Room’s wooden door. And on the ground before the door lay a man.

It was a stranger that none of the Bai residence had seen before. He was around forty, his face dark and lined with veins. Fingers digging into his chest, he had long since gone.

The servants were scared to death. The owner was also scared to death. After some struggle, the local officers came to a conclusion—this was an unfortunate thief who just so happened to have barged into the Bai residence’s forbidden area. He saw something that triggered a heart disease, and was literally scared to death right then and right there. As for what exactly that ‘something’ was, they tore down all of the seals and locks on the White Room, yet remained confused about it even after extensive searching.

But now that a life had been lost, the head of the Bai clan knew that he couldn’t keep making do, pretending as though nothing at all was inside of the White Room.

If this matter persisted, there would be endless repercussions. Clenching his teeth, he bravened up and climbed Koi Tower, pleading the LanlingJin Sect to conduct a night-hunt.

This was the backstory.

Holding the coffin lid, Lan JingYi complained in despair, “Senior Wei, are you ready yet... He has been dead for so many days already... Even the smell of a walking corpse would not be so...”

Lan SiZhui helped him hold it up, unsure if he should laugh, “The coffin is made of crude wood, and the coffin home is prone to erosion with nobody caring for it. It is only a matter of course,

with how long it has been here. Hold out for just a little longer. We still have to take notes.” Jin Ling snorted, “The presence of a coffin is more than good enough for a thief who steals from others. If not, should they worship him like a Buddha, then?”

After having poked at the corpse for a long while, Wei WuXian finally lifted his face from inside the coffin, taking his gloves off and tossing them to the side, “Has everyone finished looking?” “Yes, we have!”

Wei WuXian asked, “Good. Now that you’ve finished, start talking about what the next step should be.”

Lan JingYi, “Summoning!”

Jin Ling scoffed, “No duh. I already tried that.”

Wei WuXian, “How was it?”

Jin Ling, “His desires weren’t strong, his soul was too weak, and on top of that he was scared to death. It’s already been past the first seven days of his death. His soul has dissipated entirely and there’s no way to summon him.”

Lan JingYi, “So there is not much difference between you trying it and you not trying it, is there...”

Lan SiZhi hurried, “Then let us check out the White Room, come on. Young Master Jin, we would really appreciate it if you could lead the way.” As he spoke, he pushed Lan JingYi out the door, successfully ending a new round of meaningless conversation before it even began. The boys walked across the threshold. Quite a couple of them leaped over, their footwork nimble. Even though Jin Ling was leading the way, he ended up behind the group.

Lan SiZhi asked Jin Ling, “Has there been any unnatural deaths or unsolved incidents in the Bai residence?”

Jin Ling, “Their head swore that there definitely wasn’t any. The elderly ones who passed away here all died from old age, and there isn’t any conflicts amongst the members of the household either.”

Lan JingYi, “Oh no. I have a bad feeling about this. Usually, the more they say this, the more likely that there are indeed conflicts, except that they are trying their hardest to hide them.”

Jin Ling, “In any case, I’ve confirmed quite a few times and couldn’t get anything out of them. I didn’t find anything unusual either. You guys can try again.”

Because he did all of the preparatory research he could beforehand and inspected the White Room a couple of times as well, he didn’t go in the Bai residence this time and instead sat down at a nearby tea shop. Soon, a dark shadow swept inside.

Wei WuXian sat down in front of him, “Jin Ling.”

With two such delicate figures sitting in the small tea shop, it was a striking scene indeed. Many of the waitresses turned their heads to look.

After their parting at Guanyin Temple, this was the first time Wei WuXian met Jin Ling, not to mention that only now did he get the chance to talk to Jin Ling alone. Jin Ling paused for a second, his expression unreadable, “What is it?”

Wei WuXian, “How are you doing at Koi Tower right now?”

Jin Ling, “Just the usual.”

Speaking of it, it was quite a rough journey that the head of the Bai Clan made to Koi Tower. If this were a few years ago, when the LanlingJin Sect was nothing short of the sun in the sky, it wouldn’t be guaranteed that he’d successfully invite a clan member of the LanlingJin Sect’s, even if he multiplied the reward tenfold. In truth, let alone pleading for a night-hunt, an ordinary merchant clan like the Bai clan, with neither money nor power, could never even think about visiting. But right now, the cultivation world wasn’t the same as it used to be. Even though the common folk didn’t know about any details, they were able to catch a few earfuls of hearsay. This was the reason why the head of the Bai clan went for a try, with the spirit of ‘what if?’

Nervously, he approached the main gate and presented a name card, introducing his

intentions. The guard accepted his bribe and unwillingly went to report his arrival, yet when he came back, his attitude changed completely, stating that the sect leader declined the invitation as he got ready to chase him away. The head of the Bai clan never expected to successfully invite them in the first place, but he was irritated that the guard had such an attitude even after he accepted the bribe, and thus he asked for the money back. A few sentences into the argument, a young, handsome man dressed in the robe of Sparks Amidst Snow walked through the vermilion doors carrying an arrow in his arm. Seeing the situation, he immediately frowned and asked for the details.

This time, the guard lost most of his previous arrogance. Noticing that even though the young man was still somewhat of a child, his status was likely the opposite of low, the head of the Bai Clan immediately explained the situation. Yet, when the young man heard it, he was immediately enraged, scolding, "The sect leader told you to chase him away? How come I don't know?!"

At once, he spun toward him, "You're from the Bai Clan six miles west of the city? I'll bear it in mind. Go back as of the moment. You'll be visited in just a few days!"

The head of the Bai Clan went home just like that, somewhat befuddled. A few days later, a group of cultivators visited him indeed, although he didn't know that one of those who came was the leader of the LanlingJin Sect.

Of course, he even more so wouldn't know that right now, the LanlingJin Sect was in a state of absolute pandemonium.

The guard didn't report to the real sect leader at all, but instead to another senior of the LanlingJin Sect's. When the senior heard, he was infuriated by the fact that such an ordinary merchant would dare step on the golden stairs of the LanlingJin Sect's, ordering him to chase the visitor out. Yet, it was interrupted by Jin Ling, who was just about to head to the hunting grounds.

Jin Ling knew that these seniors of the sect were all quite full of pride, believing that they were a sect hundreds of years old. No matter what, they definitely couldn't lower their prestige, refusing to welcome anyone who wasn't of eminent personage. First of all, he'd always abhorred such a way of doing things; second of all, he was mad that the guard reported to somebody else directly, ignoring him completely; and third of all, he remembered that when Jin GuangYao was still here, no disciples of even guest cultivators dared to take bribery so easily. The more he thought about it, the more irritated he became. Conveniently, he arranged to night-hunt with Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the rest of them this month, which was why they paid a visit to the Bai residence.

In all honesty, he couldn't say that he didn't at all expect Wei WuXian to come along as well. Even though Jin Ling wouldn't tell anyone else his struggles, there were countless eyes staring at Koi Tower and countless mouths restless. The rumors had long since reached Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi. Wei WuXian knew that he wouldn't be willing to display any sign of weakness, "If there's anything you're having trouble with, ask your uncle about it."

Jin Ling replied coldly, "It's not like his surname is Jin."

Hearing this, Wei WuXian stopped before he understood what the other meant. Not knowing whether to laugh or frown at his behavior, he raised his hand to land a solid slap on the back of his side, "Watch your words!"

With a yelp, Jin Ling's forced, rigid expression finally cracked.

Although the slap didn't hurt at all, it was as if Jin Ling was subjected to some great shame, especially when he heard the sweet giggles of the waitresses nearby. He covered his head and roared, "Why did you hit me?!"

Wei WuXian, "I hit you so that you can think about your uncle. He's not someone who likes to poke his nose into other people's business. For your sake, he went around flaunting his strength in front of all those other sects, receiving so many jabbing remarks. And now you're saying his surname isn't Jin. If he heard this, wouldn't he feel disappointed?"

Jin Ling paused in surprise before he fumed, "That's not what I meant! I..."

Wei WuXian asked instead, "Then what did you mean?"

Jin Ling, "I! I..."

The first 'I' was full of confidence, while the second 'I' began to lose air. Wei WuXian, "I, I, I—I'll say it for you. This is what you mean. Even though Jiang Cheng is your uncle, after all, he's still an outsider to the LanlingJin Sect. In the past, he's already helped you a couple of times, but if he messed about too much with someone else's domain, it'd be hard for him not to be a target of attack in the future, for you not to bring him any trouble, am I right?"

Jin Ling raged, "What do you think?! So, you understand, don't you?! Then why did you hit me?!"

Wei WuXian landed another slap, "That was exactly what I meant to do! Can't you say anything properly? Such wholesome words, and out of your mouth they sound especially gross!"

Jin Ling yelled, covering his head, "You can't hit me like this just because Lan WangJi isn't here!"

Wei WuXian, "If he were here, he'd help me beat you up with just a single word of mine, you believe me?"

Jin Ling didn't believe him, "But I'm a sect leader!!!"

Wei WuXian smirked, "I've beaten up well over eighty sect leaders, possibly even a hundred."

Jin Ling leaped up, ready to rush outside the tea shop, "If you hit me again, I'll leave!"

"Come back!" Wei WuXian grabbed the back of his collar and pulled him back as if he was holding a small chick, slamming him flat on the stool, "I won't hit you anymore. Sit properly."

Jin Ling was still on guard. Seeing that Wei WuXian really didn't seem like he was going to do anything else, Jin Ling finally managed to stay seated. When one of the waitresses saw that the chaos here finally ended, she came to add more water with a smile on her face. Wei WuXian took up the cup and took a sip, before he suddenly called, "A-Ling."

Jin Ling had on a haughty tone, "What?"

Wei WuXian, however, only grinned, "This time, you seem to have grown up quite a bit."

Jin Ling stopped.

Wei WuXian felt his own chin, "Right now, you appear to be, hm, a lot more reliable. I'm really happy, but I'm also a bit... How should I say it? Honestly, how much of an idiot you used to be was quite adorable as well."

Jin Ling, again, found it hard to stay seated.

Out of the blue, Wei WuXian reached out and gave his shoulders a tight hug, ruffling his hair, "But no matter what, I'm more than happy that I get to see you little brat again, haha!"

Ignoring the mess that his hair was in, Jin Ling hopped up from the bench and rushed outside. Wei WuXian dragged him back with another strike, "Where are you going?"

Even Jin Ling's neck had reddened. He spoke in a rough voice, "I'm going to check out the White Room!"

Wei WuXian, "Haven't you already checked it out?"

Jin Ling, "I'll! Go! Check! It! Out! Once! More!"

Wei WuXian, "Since you've already checked it out a couple of times, I doubt you'd make any new progress with a few more times. Why not help me investigate something else instead?"

Jin Ling was absolutely terrified that he'd continue to spout those things that made him cringe. He'd rather be slapped on the face than be bombarded with nice words accompanied by physical touch. Recalling that this person right here could go as far as to yell in front of a crowd that he wanted to sleep with HanGuang-Jun, Jin Ling realized that he was truly unable to expect what other things would come out of his mouth. He hurried, "Sure! What do you want to investigate?"

Wei WuXian, "See if such an odd figure exists around the area. Their face was sliced apart with a dozen-or-so knife incisions, and both their eyelids and lips were cut off."

Jin Ling felt that he didn't seem like he was feigning, "Of course I can, but why would you want

me to investigate such a..."

All of a sudden, the waitress who was adding water for their tea replied, "You're talking about the Hook Hand, aren't you?"

Wei WuXian turned around, "The Hook Hand?"

"Yeah." Likely because she'd been eavesdropping for fun, she interjected at the first possible opportunity, "Without lips or eyelids, he's the only one, isn't he? You don't sound like you're from around here, Young Master. How come you know such a person?"

Jin Ling, "I'm from around here. I haven't heard of this person either."

The waitress, "Now, you're young, aren't you? It's not strange that you've never heard of him. But this person used to be quite famous."

Wei WuXian, "Famous? What kind of famous?"

The waitress, "Not the good kind. I heard the story when I was young from my great aunt's mom, which really shows what a long time ago it happened. Now onto the Hook Hand... I don't know what he was called, but he was a young blacksmith. He was poor, but he had both the looks and the skills, as well as quite a diligent personality. He had a wife who was just the prettiest person ever. He was very kind to his wife, but his wife to him not so much. She found another man outside and didn't want her husband anymore, so she... killed him!"

Clearly, the waitress had been scared to death by the legend while she was growing up, which was why she also did a fine job scaring others, both her tone and expression to the point. Jin Ling was quite hooked to the story, thinking to himself, the scariest is the woman's heart! But Wei WuXian, on the other hand, had long since begun to deal with spirits and corpses. He'd heard so many of these stories that everything seemed cliche. Right now, he listened with a hand on his chin, expressionless. The waitress continued, "Worried that someone would recognize it was her husband's corpse, she slit his eyelids off and made dozens of cuts on his face. And because she was scared he'd tell on her to the Judge\* of the Underworld, when she saw an iron hook that had just been forged lying on the counter, she used it to pull his tongue out..."

\*TN: The Judge is a deity of Chinese folk mythology who resides in the Underworld, in charge of a register that controls the lives and deaths of mortals.

Suddenly, someone spoke up, "How could his wife be like this? How could she hurt her own husband in such a cruel way?!"

Jin Ling was right in the middle of the story when he felt tingles explode on his scalp due to the startle. When he turned around, he finally realized that Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the rest had already left the Bai residence. They were all huddled up behind him, listening with all ears. The previous question came from Lan SiZhui as an exclamation. The waitress continued, "Ugh, the tales of men and women all have the same root, don't they? Whether they want money or a change of taste—others can't possibly fathom. In any case, the blacksmith turned into that monster of a human, only half-alive, and the cruel woman secretly tossed him to the mass graves west of the city. Crows love to eat dead people and rotten meat, yet upon seeing his face, even they didn't dare take a single piece of flesh from him..."

Lan JingYi was the type of person who easily became absorbed in a story—the perfect audience. He ranted, "... That is unacceptable... That is unacceptable! Did the person who killed him not receive any sort of retribution?"

Waitress, "She did! Of course, she did. Even though such a thing happened to the blacksmith, he somehow survived, and that night he crawled out from the graves, went home, and he slit the throat of his wife who was pretending that nothing had happened," she made a gesture, "Using the iron hook."

The juniors all had on complicated expressions, both frightened and wanting to let out a breath of relief. However, the waitress continued, "After he killed his wife, he cut his face too and pulled his tongue out, but his resentful energy didn't perish. From then on, he killed every beautiful woman he saw!"

Lan JingYi was shocked speechless, "Now that is not right. Revenge would be fine, but what had the other women ever done to him?"

The waitress, "That's right. But he didn't care about that. With how he face looked, he thought of his wife whenever he saw a beautiful woman. What could he do? Anyways, a long time afterwards, young girls wouldn't dare walk alone the moment the sky darkened the slightest bit. Even if they didn't go outside, they wouldn't dare sleep without their fathers, brothers, or husbands staying at home with them. Because once in a while, a female corpse without a tongue would be tossed out onto the streets..."

Jin Ling, "Can't anyone catch him?"

The waitress, "They can't, though. The blacksmith also disappeared after he killed his wife, leaving his original house. He also came and went with so much prowess that it almost seemed as if he was possessed by a ghost. How could an ordinary person catch him? Well, I heard that he wasn't stopped until a couple of years later, anyways. Only after the matter was completely suppressed were the folks finally able to have some good nights' sleep! Amitabha\*, bless the Heavens."

\*TN: Amitabha is the principle buddha of the East Asian practice of Buddhism. The phrase 'Amitabha' has turned into a mantra that many people say as a prayer, similar to the phrase 'Hallelujah'.

After they left the tea shop and returned to the coffin home, Lan SiZhui asked, "Senior Wei, the Hook Hand you suddenly wanted to investigate is related to the spirit of the Bai residence, is it not?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course it is."

Jin Ling had also somewhat guessed it, but he still had to ask, "How are the two related?"

Wei WuXian opened the coffin lid again, "On the body of the thief's corpse."

The group covered their noses again. Jin Ling, "I've looked at the thief's corpse a bunch of times."

Wei WuXian grabbed him and pulled him over, "But you didn't look carefully enough."

He patted Jin Ling's shoulder and suddenly pressed it down. At once, Jin Ling was face to face with the dark-faced, wide-eyed corpse. The stench effused. Wei WuXian spoke, "Look at his eyes."

Squinting, Jin Ling scrutinized the corpse's lifeless eyes. With only one glance, his body was cold from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. Lan SiZhui knew that something was wrong. Immediately, he went over and bent down.

He saw that the figure reflected against the corpse's black pupils wasn't his own.

It was an unfamiliar face that took up almost the entire pupil, with uneven skin that was covered in scars and no eyelids or lips.

In the back, Lan JingYi hopped a couple of times, appearing as though he wanted to look but didn't have the guts to do so, "SiZhui, what... what did you see?"

Lan SiZhui waved his hand without turning around, "You should not come near."

Lan JingYi hurried, "Oh!" And immediately took a few large steps back.

Lan SiZhui looked up, "Speaking of it, I have indeed heard of these folklore. Sometimes, the eye would 'record' what the person sees before they die. What a surprise that it is true."

Wei WuXian, "This is only the rare case. Because the thief was scared to death, no matter what he saw, it must've made quite an irremovable impression on him, which is why this works. In another situation, most likely nothing would be recorded, and in a few days, when the corpse deteriorates completely, we'd likely never see this again."

Jin Ling still had some doubt, "If it's folklore, let alone how unreliable it is, should we really trust it?"

Wei WuXian, "Whether we trust it or not, let's first investigate further and try things out. It's better than doing nothing, after all."

No matter what, they finally made progress. Lan SiZhui decided to go search in the graves of

city west, while Wei WuXian said that he was going to accompany him. The rest of the people went to investigate the Hook Hand. After all, they couldn't base anything on hearsay. The more information they had, the better.

First of all, Jin Ling had some mild spurn for Lan JingYi, and second of all, he felt that where Wei WuXian was going had to be better for the purpose of gaining experience. However, he remembered that the others weren't familiar with the Lanling area, which meant they might encounter some difficulties without him leading. And thus, he agreed without further complaint, and the group arranged to gather at the Bai residence. After some investigation, the information they obtained was not much different from what was described by the waitress in the day, likely because the versions floating around were mostly the same. And thus, Jin Ling and the rest went ahead and returned to the Bai residence.

At close to dawn, Jin Ling had already walked a few circles in the Bai residence's main hall and argued a few times with Lan JingYi, but Wei WuXian and Lan SiZhui still hadn't come back yet. Just as they prepared to search for them west of the city, somebody suddenly crashed through the door with a bang.

The one who barged in first was Lan SiZhui. He seemed as if he was holding some smoldering object in his hand. The moment he came in, it fell out of his hand and onto the ground.

The object was the size of a palm, covered in layers and layers of yellow talisman paper and oozing something wet and red. The talismans were smeared with blood. Following him, Wei WuXian sauntered across the threshold. Seeing how everyone had crowded beside it like a pool of water, he immediately drove them away, "Shoo, shoo! Watch out!"

And so, everyone parted again like a pool of water. Perhaps because it was corrosive, the layer of talisman melted away to reveal what was inside.

It was a rusting iron hook!

It was not only rusting, but the vibrancy of the blood also made it seem as if it had just been extracted from human flesh. Jin Ling asked, "The hook of the Hook Hand?"

Burnt marks and blood can be seen on Lan SiZhui's uniform. He was panting slightly, his cheeks vaguely pink, "Yes! Something has possessed it. You must not touch it with your hands!" Suddenly, the iron hook began to tremble fiercely. Lan SiZhui, "Shut the door! Do not let it get out! I might not be able to catch it again if it gets away once more!"

Lan JingYi hurried to be the first one there. With a bam, he slammed the door shut, pressing his back tightly against the door as he yelled, "Talismans! Use your talismans on it, everyone!"

At once, hundreds of talismans crashed down on it. If not because everyone of the Bai residence had already been notified by Jin Ling and hidden at the eastern courtyard, they would've been truly shocked by the shooting lights and thundering sounds. Soon, the talismans were used up. Before anyone could even let out a breath, blood seeped from the hook again.

They couldn't stop even for a single moment!

Lan SiZhui couldn't find any more talismans on him. Suddenly, he heard Lan JingYi yell, "The kitchen! Go to the kitchen! Salt salt salt! Get the salt!"

With his reminder, the boys dashed into the kitchen and grabbed the jar of salt. With a flick of the hand, snowy white crumbs of salt sprinkled onto the hook. This was a bold move. Almost as if it were being simmered in a pot of oil. Steam and white foam dripped from the rusting iron.

An odor that smelled like rotting flesh being charred wafted through the main hall, while the blood on the hook was slowly being absorbed by the white salt. One of the boys cried, "The salt is also about to be gone! What should we do now?"

Seeing that the hook was about to bleed again, Lan JingYi knew that this couldn't go on, "If all else fails, we can just melt it!"

Jin Ling, "You can't melt it!"

Lan SiZhui, "Yes, we will melt it!"

Immediately, he took off his outer robe and flung it over the hook. Wrapping the item, he dashed to the kitchen before hurling it into the hearth. Watching the scene unfold, Jin Ling

seethed with flaming eyes, "Lan SiZhui! It's no surprise that Lan JingYi is such an idiot, but why are you being idiot too!? You want to melt it with just this much fire?"

Lan JingYi raged, "Who are you calling an idiot?? What do you mean it is no surprise that I am an idiot!?"

Lan SiZhui, "If the fire is too small, we can lend it some help!"

He quickly made a hand sign, and the flame immediately burst with a whirlwind of hot air!

The others understood at once, imitating him one by one. Jin Ling and Lan JingYi couldn't keep on arguing either, focusing on the maintenance of the hand sign. The flame at the bottom of the hearth grew so rapid that it lit the room a fierce scarlet, reflecting the red onto their cheeks as well.

For a long time, they waited, prepared for anything. Finally, the iron hook disappeared into the burning firelight. With not a single incident having happened, Lan JingYi spoke nervously, "Is it finished? Is it finished?"

Lan SiZhui let out a breath. A moment later, he went forth to examine the situation before turning around, "The hook is gone."

If the hook was gone, then, naturally, the resentful energy should be gone as well.

Everyone was relieved, especially Lan JingYi, who turned out to be the happiest, "I knew you could melt it! It clearly worked, hahahaha..."

He was happy, while on the other hand, Jin Ling was quite miserable. Somehow, he wasn't of much help throughout this night-hunt, let alone gained any experience. He quietly regretted his decision. During the day, he should've insisted on searching for the iron hook along with Wei WuXian and the others. He definitely wouldn't do any of the backstage work again, next time.

Yet, Wei WuXian spoke up, "Your resolution is the absolute opposite of cautious. How can anything be determined at this point in time? Won't you have to validate things?"

Hearing this, Jin Ling perked up, "How should we go about it?"

Wei WuXian, "Spend a night inside, someone."

"..."

Wei WuXian, "Only after you spend a night inside and find that nothing bad happens, can you truly say with confidence that everything's finished, right?"

Lan JingYi, "Who would do such a thing, though..."

Jin Ling immediately volunteered, "I'll go!"

Wei WuXian knew what he was thinking even without looking at him. He patted his head and smiled, "Put up a good show, if you happen to come across the opportunity."

Jin Ling complained, "Don't touch my head. You can't touch a man's head, don't you know?"

Wei WuXian, "It's definitely your uncle who said it anyways, so there's no point in knowing."

"Hey!" Jin Ling was shocked, "Who was the one that told me to ask him if I'm having trouble with anything?"

The Bai residence had arranged for everyone's accommodations, and thus that night the group settled down at the eastern courtyard. Jin Ling went to the western courtyard alone.

As usual, the GusuLan Sect strictly obeyed their schedule, waking up early next morning. Before he went out, Lan SiZhui was reminded by Lan WangJi to make sure he dragged Wei WuXian up in time for breakfast. For this, he spent almost an hour and did everything he could before he finally hauled Wei WuXian downstairs. When he arrived at the main hall, Lan JingYi was in the middle of helping the Bai residence's servants distribute the congee. Lan SiZhui was just about to go and help when he saw Jin Ling walk over with heavy eye bags.

The entire circle of people stared at him in silence. Jin Ling sat down at the left-hand side of Wei WuXian, who greeted, "Morning."

Jin Ling forced calmness onto his face, nodding, "Morning."

The others nodded as well, "Morning."

Soon, seeing that Jin Ling didn't seem like he was going to say anything, Wei WuXian pointed to his own eyes, "Those are..."

After having made sure that he looked just barely unruffled, Jin Ling finally opened his mouth. He began, “As expected, it wasn’t cleaned up properly.”

The crowd grew nervous.

Last night, after Jin Ling went in the white room, he looked around his surroundings.

The furnishing of the room was extremely simple. There was almost no furniture, with only a single bed. The bed was next to the wall, covered in dust.

After only one stroke was Jin Ling unable to take it any longer. No servants dared to approach this place, and he himself definitely couldn’t lie on top of such a thing either. Left without a choice, he could only fetch the water himself and clean the place up. Finally, he was able to sleep.

With his face to the wall, his back to the room.

And a mirror hidden in his palm.

Turning the mirror, he could have a rough view of the room.

Jin Ling waited for more than half the night, yet all that appeared in the mirror was a dark gloom, which was why he began to turn the mirror around in his hand. Just as he was about to feel some fun from performing the act, a harsh white suddenly swept across the mirror’s surface.

Immediately, icy water doused his heart. Composing himself, he slowly turned the mirror around.

Something finally appeared in the mirror’s reflection.

At this point of the story, Lan JingYi spoke up with a trembling voice, “What did the mirror reflect—the hook hand...?”

Jin Ling, “No. It was a chair.”

Lan JingYi was just about to ease up when, thinking about it some more, he felt his hair rise. Why on Earth would he ease up? Jin Ling clearly said that the room was ‘extremely simple. There was almost no furniture, with only a single bed.’ If this was the case... Then where did the chair come from!?

## GDC Chapter 124: Extra—Iron Hook —Part Two

Jin Ling: “The chair was placed right next to my bed. At first nobody was there, but a while later, a person in black suddenly appeared on it.”

Jin Ling wanted to see the face clearly, but the person sat with their head hanging low. Long, disheveled hair covered their face. Only a pair of snowy hands could be seen on the armrests. He adjusted the position of the mirror secretly. The moment his wrist moved, however, as though she suddenly noticed something, the woman slowly lifted her head. Her face was covered in dozens of bleeding cut marks.

Wei WuXian wasn’t surprised, while all of the juniors were shocked speechless.

“Wait a second?” Lan JingYi placed a bowl of congee in front of Jin Ling, “A female ghost? How could it be a female ghost? Were you scared so dumb you saw wrong...”

Jin Ling replied with a smack, “Anyone can call me dumb except for you. Even though there’s blood and hair everywhere so I couldn’t really see what she looked like, both her hair and clothing were in styles commonly worn by young women. It’s definitely right. We were just searching in the wrong direction.” He continued, “Although there was indeed resentful energy left on the iron hook, the one haunting the White Room is probably not the Hook Hand.”

Lan JingYi, “Did you not spend any more time to examine her face or something... Maybe we could use her facial features, like beauty marks or birthmarks, to find out her identity.”

Jin Ling snorted, “You think I didn’t want to? I wanted to, but the ghost noticed the moonlight reflected in the mirror and immediately looked this way. The mirror then reflected her eyes, and I accidentally had eye contact with her.”

If one were to be discovered while spying on a spirit, one shouldn’t keep looking any longer. He had to put down the mirror at once and close his eyes, pretending to be fast asleep. Otherwise, he might’ve stimulated the creature’s blood thirst, heightening its killing intent. Lan JingYi, “What a close call, what a close call...”

Comments flew back and forth across the table, “But the thief did not see a woman in his eyes.”

“Just because he did not see one does not mean there was not one. Maybe the thief saw in the wrong direction...”

“No, the female ghost—why would she be a female ghost? Who is she!?”

Lan SiZhui, “The woman’s face was marked with dozens of cuts, so it is likely that she was one of the Hook Hand’s many victims. What Jin Ling saw must have been a shadow of her resentful energy.”

The shadow of resentful energy referred to the endless playback of a situation in which a spirit gathered heavy resentful energy. It was usually the moment before it died or an incident it loathed.

Jin Ling, “Yeah. As shown in the mirror last night, the White Room had completely different furniture than what it has now. It seemed to be an inn. Before the Bai resident was established, there was probably an inn here. That inn was where the woman killed.”

Lan JingYi, “Oh, oh. Speaking of it, from the information we collected, someone did mention that the Hook Hand could easily break the locks of inns. He often snuck inside in the middle of the night, picking on women who were out alone!”

Lan SiZhui, “And the room in which this maiden, or madam, was killed, just so happened to be in the same location as the White Room of the Bai residence!”

No wonder the head of the Bai clan insisted that no unsolved cases or accidental deaths happened in the Bai residence. They didn’t equivocate on purpose, but instead, they were truly innocent—this really had nothing to do with them!

Jin Ling picked up the congee and took a sip, pretending to be calm, “I knew things wouldn’t be so simple. Oh, well. We’d have to deal with this, sooner or later.”

Wei WuXian, “Jin Ling, go take a nap later. We’re gonna have to do more work tonight.”

Lan JingYi glanced at his bowl, "You have unfinished food, Senior Wei. Wasting food is bad."

Wei WuXian, "I'm finished. Have some more, JingYi. You'll be on the front line tonight."

Shocked, Lan JingYi almost dropped his bowl, "Huh? Me?? W-What front line?!"

Wei WuXian, "Jin Ling couldn't finish his observations yesterday, right? Today we'll finish observing it together to get to the bottom of things. You'll lead."

Lan JingYi turned pale, "Senior Wei, did you make a mistake? How could it be me?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course not. Gaining experience, right? Everyone has a turn, everyone has an opportunity, everyone has to go. Both SiZhui and Jin Ling have gone. I've decided that the next one will be you."

"Why did you decide that the next one would be me..."

Of course, Wei WuXian wouldn't directly say that out of the group, Lan JingYi's name was the only one he could remember, apart from Lan SiZhui and Jin Ling. He only patted his shoulder, encouraging him, "It's a good thing! Look at everyone else. They all want to go, don't they?"

"Everyone else? They have long since run away from the conversation!"

No matter how much Lan JingYi protested, at midnight, he was still pushed to the front of the White Room.

A few long benches were spread across the front of the White Room, filled with rows of people. Each person poked a hole through the paper of the window. Instantly, the windows were packed with tiny holes, creating an appalling scene.

Making his own window hole, Lan SiZhui thought, I still feel that... this does not even count as 'spying' anymore. With so many holes, we might as well tear down the entire window..."

As expected, Lan JingYi was hauled to the foremost position by Wei WuXian. From here, he could see the most things, with the most clarity. If this were a show, he'd be sitting at the best seat that even wealth might not guarantee. However, Lan JingYi didn't want this 'best' at all.

Squeezed between Jin Ling and Lan SiZhui, he shivered, "Can I sit somewhere else..."

Wei WuXian was pacing back and forth at the side, "No."

Everyone who heard it felt that Wei WuXian's curtness displayed quite a mastery over Lan WangJi's ways. Some even snickered a little. Wei WuXian, "What a nice, relaxed mentality. Well done, well done."

Lan SiZhui, who just a second ago couldn't hold himself back, immediately steadied himself. Wei WuXian turned to Lan JingYi again, "Look, I don't even have a seat. Don't be so ungrateful."

Lan JingYi, "Senior, can I give my seat to you..."

Wei WuXian, "No."

Lan JingYi, "Then what can I do?"

Wei WuXian, "You can ask questions."

With no other choice, Lan JingYi could only turn to Lan SiZhui, "SiZhui, if I pass out later, you have to let me copy your notes."

Lan SiZhui didn't know whether or not to laugh, "All right."

Lan JingYi let out a breath of relief, "Then I can stop worrying."

Lan SiZhui cheered him on, "Do not worry, JingYi, you can definitely hold out."

The moment Lan JingYi showed an expression of gratitude, Jin Ling patted his shoulder and spoke in a reliable manner, "Yeah, don't worry. If you pass out, I'll definitely wake you up at once."

Lan JingYi, alarmed, slapped his hand away, "Shoo, shoo. Who knows what you would do to wake me up."

Between the whispers, a soft, scarlet light bled from the paper window, as if someone lit a red lamp inside the dark room.

The crowd quieted at once, holding their breaths.

The light seeped from the small holes as well, making the pairs of spying eyes look bloodshot.

Lan JingYi held up a trembling hand, "Senior... Wh-Why does the room look so red? I-I have

never seen red shadows like this before. Was there a red lamp inside the room when it happened?"

Lan SiZhui whispered, "It was not a red lamp. It was because the person..."

Jin Ling, "It was because the person had blood in her eyes."

Amid the red light, something new suddenly appeared within the room.

A chair. And a 'person' sitting atop the chair.

Wei WuXian, "Jin Ling, this was what you saw yesterday?"

Jin Ling nodded, "But I didn't see it clearly enough last night. She's not sitting on the chair... She's tied to the chair."

Just like he said, the hands that the woman lay over the armrests were tightly tied up by ropes.

Just as the juniors prepared to examine further, a dark shadow flashed across the room. Another figure appeared.

Surprisingly, there was another 'person'.

And this other person had both his eyelids and lips cut off. He could neither blink nor close his mouth, revealing his bloodshot eyeballs and bright red gums. He was a thousand times more frightening than as described in the legends!

Lan JingYi exclaimed, "The Hook Hand!"

"What happened? Was the hook not melted already? Why would the Hook Hand still be here?"

"So, there are two spirits inside this room??"

At this point, Wei WuXian asked, "Two? In reality, is there one or two spirits inside this room? Can anyone explain?"

Lan SiZhui, "One."

Jin Ling followed, "One. The Hook Hand inside the White Room isn't the real spirit, but instead a shadow emulating the scene of her death that the woman used her resentful energy to bring back."

Lan JingYi, "It is a shadow and all, but it is not at all less frightening!!"

As they spoke, the face slowly approached the wooden door. The face grew closer, clearer, and more gruesome as well. Even though everyone knew that it was only a shadow, that the iron hook in which the Hook Hand's resentful energy was truly stored had already been melted, that the shadow would never actually pass through the door, there was only one hair-rising thought stuck in their minds:

He saw them!

If that unfortunate thief just so happened to see this scene when he was spying on the White Room at night, no wonder he was scared so badly that he got a heart attack.

The face approached until it was no less than a single feet away from the window, paused for a moment, then turned around and strode toward the chair.

In unison, the juniors finally began to breathe again.

Inside, the Hook Hand walked back and forth the room, the old wooden boards creaking under his feet. Outside, however, Jin Ling felt that something was off.

He spoke, "There's something that's been on my mind since a while ago."

Lan SiZhui, "What is it?"

Jin Ling, "The shadow is the scene before the woman's death for sure. But when most people are facing a serial killer, would they be so calm and make not a single sound? In other words—"

He continued, "The woman was clearly conscious. Why didn't she scream for help?"

Lan JingYi, "Was she scared dumb?"

Jin Ling, "It wouldn't have been to the point that she didn't make a single noise, not even knowing how to cry. When most women are frightened to the extreme, wouldn't they start crying?"

Lan SiZhui, "Is her tongue still there?"

Jin Ling, "There's no blood at her mouth, so it should be. And even if she lost her tongue and couldn't say anything, she should still be able to make sounds."

Squashed between the two of them, Lan JingYi seemed as though he was about to die right there, “Can you two not use such calm tones to talk about such a scary thing, right beside my ears...”

One of the boys spoke up, “Could it have been because the inn was deserted or because no other people were present, she knew that it was no use screaming, so she decided not to do anything?”

Lan JingYi, who saw the scene clearest, finally had something to say, “I do not think so. Look at the shadow. No dust was on the furniture, which meant that they were definitely often used. It was impossible that nobody was present, or else she would not have chosen to rest here.”

Jin Ling, “Looks like you’re not a hopeless idiot yet. Besides, whether or not anyone is present is one matter, and whether or not you’d scream is another. For example, if someone’s chasing after you in the middle of nowhere, even though you know nobody can help you, you’d still be screaming for help, wouldn’t you?”

Wei WuXian clapped lightly, whispering, “Wow. You’d expect no less from Sect Leader Jin.”

Jin Ling blushed, hissing, “What are you doing? Don’t distract me, alright?!”

Wei WuXian, “If something like this distracts you, it means you still need to work on your concentration. Look, look—the Hook Hand is about to do it!”

At once, everyone turned around to look. The Hook Hand took out a rope and wrapped it around the woman’s neck, pulling it slowly.

The sound of a rope being tightened!

So, this was the root of the strange noise that the head of the Bai clan said to come from the White Room every night.

Under pressure, the dozens of wounds on the woman’s face bled profusely, but she still didn’t make a single sound. The group felt their hearts gripped by the scene. Someone couldn’t help but urged, whispering, “Scream, scream for help!”

But opposite to their hopes, the victim didn’t move, while the assailant did. The rope instantly loosened. The Hook Hand pulled out an iron hook, bright from sharpening, from behind his back.

Outside, the boys were both scared and anxious, desperate to jump inside and scream for the woman so loud that the entire city was woken up. The back of the Hook Hand blocked their line of sight. A hand reached forward. From where they were, they could only see the back of a hand on the armrest. Suddenly, veins popped on the hand.

Even at this point, the woman still didn’t make a sound!

Jin Ling couldn’t help but began to doubt, “Is she mentally abnormal?”

“What do you mean by mentally abnormal?”

“As in... retarded.”

“...”

Even though calling someone retarded sounded quite ruthless, from such a situation, this was the most possible likelihood. Or else, if she was a normal person, how could she still give no response, even when things were like this?

Feeling his head hurt from watching, Lan JingYi turned his face to the side. Wei WuXian, however, whispered, “Watch carefully.”

Unwillingness was all over Lan JingYi’s face, “Senior, I... I really cannot watch anymore.”

Wei WuXian, “There are things hundreds and thousands of times worse than this. If you can’t even face them directly, you shouldn’t hope to do anything else.”

Hearing this, Lan JingYi steadied himself before he clenched his teeth and turned back around, continuing to watch the scene unfold with a miserable expression. Yet, just this moment, something happened—

Opening her mouth, the woman bit down on the iron hook!

It was such a surprising turn of events that the rows of boys all sprang up from the shock.

And inside the room, the Hook Hand also seemed to be astounded. He retracted his arm, but

for some reason he couldn't pull the hook from between the woman's teeth. Instead, the woman—along with the chair—pounced on him. The iron hook that he wanted to take someone else's tongue with had somehow sliced open his own stomach!

The boys shouted in chaos. They were almost all clinging to the door, as though they wanted to stuff their eyeballs into the White Room to see everything clearly. From the wound, the Hook Hand stopped in pain. As if he remembered something, he lunged for the woman's chest with his right hand out, ready to dig her heart out. The woman rolled on the ground with the chair, dodging the attack. With a loud rip, however, the fabric at her chest was torn apart.

In this situation, the boys didn't even have time to decide whether or not to look. What astonished them the most was that the 'woman's' chest was as flat as a field. How was this a 'woman'? This was a man in a woman's clothes!

The Hook Hand leaped forward, grasping his opponent's neck with his bare hands, yet he'd forgotten that his hook was still in the other's mouth. The person spun to the side, the iron hook cutting into the Hook Hand's wrist. One going for suffocation and the other going for blood loss—as of the moment, the two were in a deadlock...

Only when the rooster crowed and the red light disappeared did the shadow finally melt away. And the boys around the White Room's entrance were already shocked speechless.

Only when a long while had passed did Lan JingYi finally stammer, "Th-Th-Th-These two..." Everyone had the same thought in their head: These two would most probably both end up dead, right... What a surprise. The spirit that had tormented the Bai residence for decades was not the Hook Hand, but rather the hero who killed him.

The discussion was aflame.

"Who could have known? So, this was how the Hook Hand was brought down..."

"Thinking about it, this was the only way, was it not? After all, the Hook Hand was quite mysterious. Nobody knew where he was. If he did not pretend to be a woman and lure him out, he could never have caught him."

"But it was so dangerous!"

"It was dangerous indeed. Look, the hero himself fell for his trap and got tied up, right? As a result, he was at a disadvantage to begin with. Or else, if the two dueled face-to-face, how could he have been at such a loss?!"

"Yeah, and he could not shout for help. The Hook Hand had killed so many people. Even if an ordinary person heard him, they would probably be killed..."

"Which was why he did not make a sound no matter what!"

"He chose to die along with him..."

"How could there not be this hero's story in the legends!? How absurd."

"It is the norm. Compared to knights and heroes, people much more prefer the legends of serial killers."

Jin Ling analyzed, "When the dead refuse to move onto their next lives, it's usually because they have unfinished matters or unfulfilled wishes; when those without complete bodies refuse to move on, it's usually because they never found the parts of their bodies that they lost. The reason behind his hauntings lie here."

Even if it were a hindrance, it'd be hard to part with something one had been carrying for decades, much less a piece of flesh within one's mouth.

Listening to the story, Lan JingYi had long since developed respect, "Then let us hurry up and find his tongue as soon as possible, so that we can burn it for him and let him move onto his next life!"

Everyone itched to get to work, leaping up, "Yes, how can we let such a hero die without a complete corpse?!"

"We should get searching. From the graves west of the city, to the entire Bai residence, to the old house in which the Hook Hand lived—we will not miss a single place."

Full of motivation, the boys gushed out the door. Before they went, Jin Ling turned around and

looked at Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian, "What is it?"

Back while the juniors were discussing, Wei WuXian didn't make a single comment confirming or contradicting their guesses, somehow making Jin Ling feel anxious, suspicious that they might've gone wrong somewhere. But after some thought, he felt that they didn't miss anything, and so he replied, "Nothing."

Wei WuXian grinned, "Then get searching. Be patient."

And thus, Jin Ling marched out the door.

Only a few days later did he realize what Wei WuXian meant when he told him to 'be patient'.

Before this, they found the iron hook only with Wei WuXian leading Lan SiZhui, taking only an hour. Yet, this time, Wei WuXian didn't help in looking for the tongue, letting them deal with it at their own pace. They searched for an entire five days.

When Lan SiZhui jumped up, holding something in the air, the rest of the group was about to die of fatigue.

However, even though they were a mess from hopping around the graves, clothes covered in both grime and stench, the group was almost ecstatic. It was because after Wei WuXian heard about it, he told them the truth with sincerity: with no outside help, it was already a feat that they found it in five days—for one, countless cultivators would give up after seeing no results in ten days or half a month.

The group was wild, bouncing around the severed tongue. It was said that those tainted with dark energy would turn dark in color. Let alone dark, the item was almost black, hard to the touch and effusing energy. It was almost impossible to tell that it used to be a piece of human flesh. If not because of this, it would've long since rotted away.

After some exorcism, they burned the tongue. It seemed as though the matter had finally come to an end.

With so much having happened, things should end no matter what. And thus, toward this night-hunt, Jin Ling was more-or-less satisfied. Yet before that satisfaction had the chance to last a couple of days, the head of the Bai clan went to Koi Tower once more.

This was what happened. After they burned the hero's tongue, peace did ensue for a couple of days. However, it was a couple of days indeed. The third night, strange noise again erupted from within the White Room, even growing wilder day by day. When the fifth night came, it had made the entire Bai residence sleepless.

This time, it broke out with fury, scarier than ever before. The noise was neither the sound of rope being tightened nor that of flesh being cut—instead, it was the sound of a person! According to the description given by the head of the Bai clan, the voice was extremely hoarse, as if someone was using a stiff tongue that hadn't been used for years. Nobody could tell what the words were, but it was undoubtedly a man who was screaming.

After he screamed, he also cried with utmost misery. At first he seemed feeble, yet gradually he grew louder and louder. In the end, he was almost wailing his throat out. It was absolutely piteous, while at the same time absolutely blood-chilling. Much less the Bai residence, people could hear it even three blocks away. Even passersby felt chills sent down their spines.

Jin Ling was also fretting. It was close to the end of the year, so he was buried in work and didn't have time to deal with the matter himself. As a result, he sent a few disciples to go examine the situation. Upon returning, they reported that apart from the screaming being extremely terrifying indeed, there weren't many other detriments.

Aside from disturbing the neighbors.

When they handed in the night-hunting notes, Lan SiZhui spoke about this to Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian. After Wei WuXian heard him, he took a pastry from Lan WangJi's desk and ate it, "Oh. That's nothing to worry about."

Lan SiZhui, "It is nothing to worry about... even with so much screaming? In theory, after its wish was fulfilled, the soul should have passed on."

Wei WuXian, “A soul can pass on after its wish is fulfilled, that’s true. But have you ever thought that perhaps the hero’s true wish wasn’t to find its tongue so that he could reincarnate?”

This time, Lan JingYi finally received a rating of Jia. Just the thought that he wouldn’t have to copy anything again made him so happy he could cry, over at the side. Right now, however, he couldn’t help but blurted, “Then what is it? That every night he can howl so much that nobody else is able to fall asleep?”

Surprisingly enough, Wei WuXian really nodded, “Exactly so.”

Lan SiZhui was astonished, “Senior Wei, why would this be?”

Wei WuXian, “Before, didn’t you infer that the hero didn’t want to hurt any innocent lives, which was why he held back with everything he could while he was being tortured by the Hook Hand and refused to make a single sound?”

Lan SiZhui sat upright, “Yes. Is something wrong?”

Wei WuXian, “It’s not that anything’s wrong. But let me ask you a question—if a serial killer is holding a knife and waving it in your face, letting out your blood, slicing apart your face, strangling your throat, pulling your tongue out, how scary would that be? Would you be scared? Would you want to cry?”

Lan JingYi thought about it for a moment before responding with a pale complexion, “Help!”

Lan SiZhui, however, held a serious expression, “It is stated in the sect rules that when one comes across danger...” Wei WuXian, “Don’t avert the question, SiZhui. I asked if you’d be scared or not. Just say it, won’t you?” Lan SiZhui blushed, his back even straighter, “I—”

Wei WuXian, “You?” Lan SiZhui answered in all honesty, “I cannot say that I am not scared. Ahem.” After he responded, he cast an anxious glance at Lan WangJi.

Wei WuXian rolled with laughter, “What are you so embarrassed for? When humans feel pain or fear, they’d be scared, they’d want someone to help them, they’d want to scream and shout and cry—isn’t that what makes us human? Tell me, yes or no. HanGuang-Jun, look at SiZhui—he’s scared you’ll punish him and he’s peeking at you. Say yes, quick. If you say ‘yes’, it means you also agree with my point of view, which then means you won’t punish him.”

With his elbow, he poked lightly at the stomach of Lan WangJi, who was currently marking the notes, his back straight. Without any change in expression, Lan WangJi replied, “Yes.”

After he spoke, he wrapped an arm around Wei WuXian’s waist, locking him in place so that he didn’t mess around, and continued to mark the notes that’d been handed in.

Lan SiZhui’s cheeks grew even redder.

Wei WuXian struggled a bit, but as he still couldn’t get out, he decided to maintain this position as he continued to lecture Lan SiZhui, “And so, holding his screams back did make him a hero, but in truth, it also went against human nature.”

Lan SiZhui tried hard to ignore his position. After some thought, he felt a little sympathetic toward the man. Wei WuXian, “Is Jin Ling still distressed by this?”

Lan JingYi, “Yeah, Young Mis... uh, Young Master Jin did not know which part went wrong either.” Lan SiZhui, “Then, if this is the case, how should we deal with such a spirit?”

Wei WuXian, “Let him scream.”

“...”

Lan SiZhui, “Just, let him scream?”

Wei WuXian, “Yes. After he has had enough, he’ll go on his own.”

Immediately, half of Lan SiZhui’s sympathy was given to the people of the Bai residence. Fortunately, even though the hero had so many grievances, he had no intent to harm others. The strange noises of the White Room gradually came to a stop after a couple of months. Presumably, now that the hero was dead, he finally screamed what he couldn’t before he died, and went to his new life with satisfaction.

It was only a pity for the people of the Bai residence. For a long time, they tossed and turned in pain, unable to sleep at night. The White Room had also once again risen to fame.

# GDC Chapter 125: Extra—Lotus Seed Pod

Lotus Pier, Yunmeng.

Outside the dueling hall, the cicadas sang to the summer; inside, quite a distasteful array of human bodies covered the ground.

A dozen boys, all topless, lay atop the wooden floor boards of the hall. They flipped themselves over once in a while, like a dozen sizzling pancakes, letting out dying groans.

“It’s...”

“So hot...”

Eyes closed, Wei WuXian thought hazily, if only it were as cool as the Cloud Recesses.

The temperature of the piece of wood underneath him was assimilated by his body temperature again, and so he flipped over. Coincidentally, Jiang Cheng turned as well. The two brushed against each other, arm over leg. Wei WuXian immediately called out, “Jiang Cheng, move your arm. You’re like a piece of coal.”

Jiang Cheng, “Move your leg.”

Wei WuXian, “An arm’s lighter than a leg. It’s harder for me to move my leg, so you should move your arm instead.”

Jiang Cheng hissed, “I’m warning you, Wei WuXian, don’t overdo it. Shut up and don’t say anything. It gets hotter the more you talk!”

The sixth shidi joined in, “Stop arguing, alright? I feel hot just listening to you two argue. I’m even sweating faster.”

Over there, arms and legs were already flying in the air, “Fuck off!” “You too!” “No, no, no—please go ahead!” “No, thanks—you can fuck off first!”

The shidi all complained, “Fight outside if you have to!” “Please fuck off together, won’t you? We’re begging you!”

Wei WuXian, “You heard it? They’re telling you to leave. Let... go of my leg—it’s gonna break, Sir!”

Veins popped on Jiang Cheng’s forehead, “They’re clearly telling you to leave... You let go of my arm first!”

Suddenly, from the wooden hallway outside came the swishes of a long dress brushing against the ground. Like lightning, the two snapped apart. Immediately, the bamboo curtains were lifted, and Jiang YanLi peeked inside, “Oh, so this is where everyone is hiding.”

Everyone greeted her, “Shijie!” “Hello, Shijie.” Some of the shier ones couldn’t help but snuck into the corners, covering their chests with their arms.

Jiang YanLi, “No sword practice today? Slacking off, aren’t you?”

Wei WuXian protested, “It’s scorching hot today—the training ground’s on fire. We’ll shed a whole layer of skin if we go practice. Don’t tell anyone, Shijie.”

Carefully, Jiang YanLi looked at Jiang Cheng and him from top to bottom, “Were you two fighting again?”

Wei WuXian, “Nope!”

The rest of Jiang YanLi’s body also came in. She was holding a plate of something, “Then who made the footprint on A-Cheng’s chest?”

Hearing that he left evidence, Wei WuXian spun around to check. It was there, indeed, but nobody cared if they’d been fighting any longer. Held in Jiang YanLi’s hands was a large plate of watermelon pieces already cut. The boys buzzed over, distributing the pieces in just a few seconds, and sat on the ground, munching on the watermelon. Soon, peel piled into a small mountain on the plate.

Whatever they did, Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng had to compete against each other, even when it came to eating watermelon. With both force and guile, they fought so hard that others

scurried away, quickly clearing out a whole area for them. At first, Wei WuXian was quite engaged in the act of eating watermelon, but a while later, he suddenly let out a laugh.

Jiang Cheng was at once alarmed, "What are you gonna do, this time?"

Wei WuXian grabbed another piece, "Nothing! Don't misunderstand. I'm not gonna do anything. I just thought of someone."

Jiang Cheng, "Who?"

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan."

Jiang Cheng, "Why would you think of him for no reason? Reminiscing what it felt like to copy sect rules?"

Wei WuXian spat out a seed, "It's fun to think of him. You don't even know—he's just too amusing. I told him, 'Your sect's food is disgusting. I'd rather eat stir-fried watermelon peel than eat your food. If you have time, come have fun with us at Lotus Pier...'"

Before he even finished, Jiang Cheng slapped his watermelon off, "Are you mad? Inviting him to Lotus Pier—are you trying to torture yourself?"

Wei WuXian, "Why are you so upset? My watermelon almost flew away! I was just being polite. Of course, he wouldn't come. Have you ever heard of him go anywhere by himself to have fun?"

Jiang Cheng had on a stern expression, "Let's make this clear. I don't want him to come, anyhow. Don't invite him."

Wei WuXian, "I never knew you hated him so much?"

Jiang Cheng, "I've got nothing against Lan WangJi, but if he really came, my mom might have something to say, comparing me against someone else's kid, and you wouldn't have it nice either."

Wei WuXian, "Don't worry. There's nothing to be scared of even if he comes. If he does come, you can tell Uncle Jiang to have him sleep with me. I'll definitely drive him mad in less than a month."

Jiang Cheng snorted, "You want to sleep with him for an entire month? I say you'd be stabbed to death within a week."

Wei WuXian wasn't concerned, "Am I scared of him? If we really start fighting, he might not even win against me."

The others immediately cheered him. Jiang Cheng mocked his thick skin on the surface, but he knew that Wei WuXian wasn't boasting with his words. Jiang YanLi sat down between the two, "Who are you talking about? A friend you made in Gusu?"

Wei WuXian responded happily, "Yeah!"

Jiang Cheng, "What a shameless 'friend' you are. Go ask Lan WangJi and see if he wants you as one."

Wei WuXian, "Fuck off. If he doesn't want me, I'll bother him to the point that he does." He turned to Jiang YanLi, "Shijie, do you know Lan WangJi?"

Jiang YanLi, "I do. He's that Second Young Master Lan whom everyone describes as handsome and talented, isn't he? Is he really that handsome?"

Wei WuXian, "He is!"

Jiang YanLi, "Compared to you?"

Wei WuXian thought about it for a moment, "Maybe just a bit more handsome than me."

He formed a quite a tiny length of space between two fingers. Taking the plate away, Jiang YanLi smiled, "He must be truly very handsome, then. It's a good thing you made a new friend. In the future, you two can visit each other in your free time."

Hearing this, Jiang Cheng spat out his watermelon. Wei WuXian waved his hands, "Forget it, forget it. All that's at his place is bad food and a whole lot of rules. I'm not going again."

Jiang YanLi, "Then you can take him here. This is a good opportunity. Why not invite your friend to come stay at Lotus Pier for some time?"

Jiang Cheng, "Don't listen to his nonsense, Sis. He's super annoying at Gusu. Lan WangJi would never want to come home with him."

Wei WuXian, "What do you mean!? He would."

Jiang Cheng, "Wake up. Lan WangJi told you to get lost, didn't you hear? You still remember that?"

Wei WuXian, "What do you know!? Even though he told me to get lost on the surface, I know for sure that he secretly wants to come play with me in Yunmeng—in fact, he would love to."

Jiang Cheng, "I think of the same question every single day—just where do you find so much confidence?"

Wei WuXian, "Stop thinking about it. If I thought about a question for so many years and couldn't find an answer, I would've given up long ago."

Jiang Cheng shook his head. Just as he was about to throw his watermelon onto the ground, he suddenly heard a violent string of footsteps approaching. The stern voice of a woman drifted over from afar, "I was wondering where everyone went. As expected..."

The expressions on the boys' faces changed at once. They dashed out the curtains just in time to see Madam Yu turn around at the other end of the hall, her purple robe flapping with rigor. On her face was a chilling demeanor. As she saw the boys' unsightly nudity, Madam Yu's expression twisted, her eyebrows raised high in the air.

The boys all thought, Oh no! With terror, they spun around and ran. Seeing this, Madam Yu finally realized, enraged, "Jiang Cheng! Go get some clothes on! You look no different than a barbarian! What would people think of me if they saw you?!"

Jiang Cheng's top was tied at his waist. Hearing his mother's chastise, he hastily put it over his head. Madam Yu scolded again, "And you boys! Can't you see that A-Li's here? Who taught you brats to dress like this in front of a girl?!"

Of course, it was needless to think who led the group. Thus, Madam Yu's next sentence, as usual, was "Wei Ying! Do you want to die?!"

Wei WuXian yelled, "Sorry! I didn't know Shijie would come! I'll go look for my clothes right now!"

Madam Yu was even angrier, "How dare you run! Come back right now and kneel!" As she spoke, she let loose her whip with a flip of her wrist. Wei WuXian felt a searing pain slash across his back. He loudly exclaimed, "Ow!" And almost tripped on the ground. Yet, all of a sudden, someone's quiet voice drifted by Madam Yu's ear, "Mom, do you want to eat some watermelon..."

Madam Yu was startled by Jiang YanLi, who seemingly appeared out of nowhere. With the delay, all of the boys had vanished into thin air. She was so infuriated that she turned to Jiang YanLi and pinched her cheek, "Eat, eat, eat—all you do is eat!"

Jiang YanLi almost cried from her mother's pinching, mumbling, "Mom, A-Xian and the others were hiding here to relieve the heat and I came here on my own. Don't blame them... Do... Do you want some watermelon... I don't know who gave them to us, but it's really sweet. Eating watermelon in the summer is great for cooling down and quenching thirst. I'll cut them for you..."

The more Madam Yu thought about it, the angrier she became, and with the summer heat on top of all that, she really began to crave watermelon. With all that... she grew even angrier.

On the other hand, the group finally broke out of Lotus Pier and rushed through the docks, hopping onto a boat. With nobody chasing after them, even after a while, Wei WuXian finally relaxed. Exerting force, he rowed the boat a couple of times. He could still feel some pain in his back, so he tossed the paddles to someone else, sat down, and felt the stinging piece of flesh, "How unfair. Nobody else was wearing anything, but why was I the only one who got scolded and beaten up?"

Jiang Cheng, "Because you hurt the eye the most with no clothes on, for sure."

Wei WuXian gave him a look. Suddenly, he took a leap and dove into the water. As though signaled, the others all entered the water as well. In mere seconds, Jiang Cheng was the only one left on the boat.

Jiang Cheng noticed that something was off, “What the hell are you doing!?”

Wei WuXian glide to the side of the boat and struck hard. The boat flopped right over, bobbing heavily in the water with its belly facing up. Wei WuXian laughed, jumping onto the boat and crisscrossing his legs, “Do your eyes still hurt, Jiang Cheng? Say something, hey, hey!”

Even after a few shouts, nothing came except for a string of bubbles. Wei WuXian wiped his face, confused, “Why is he taking so long?”

Their sixth shidi swam over as well, exclaiming, “Did he drown!?”

Wei WuXian, “That’s impossible!” Just as he was about to go down and help Jiang Cheng out, he suddenly heard a loud shout come from behind him. With a yelp, he was pushed into the water. Once again, the boat flopped over, dripping with water. After he’d been dunked underwater, Jiang Cheng had swum around and ended up behind Wei WuXian.

Having both succeeded once with their sneak attacks, the two of them began to circle the boat with vigilance, while the others splashed around underwater, scattered around the lake to watch the drama. Wei WuXian flaunted across the boat, “What’s with the weapon? Put down the paddle, and we can fight with our bare hands.”

Jiang Cheng sneered, “You think I’m an idiot? You’ll take it the moment I let go of it!” Brandishing the paddle, he forced Wei WuXian to dodge and hide. The shidi all cheered him on. Ducking left and right, Wei WuXian finally found the spare time to protest, “How could I be so shameless!?”

Boos came from all around him, “Da-Shixiong, I can’t believe you have the face to say this!”

Soon, the crowd sank into a chaotic water-fight, from the Jab of Justice to the Plant of Poison to the Bolt of Brutality—Wei WuXian gave Jiang Cheng a kick before he finally managed to climb onto the boat. Spitting out a mouthful of the lake water, he waved his hand, “Let’s stop, let’s stop—I call a truce!”

Everyone wore green water-weeds atop their heads, not yet ready to stop. They hurried, “Why are we stopping? Let’s continue! Let’s continue! Are you begging for mercy just because you’re at a disadvantage?”

Wei WuXian, “Who said I was begging for mercy? We can fight later. I’m just too hungry to keep going. Let’s get some food first.”

The sixth shidi, “Then should we go back? We can have a few more watermelons before dinner starts.”

Jiang Cheng, “If you go back now, you’ll get nothing but whips.”

Yet, Wei WuXian had an idea. He announced, “We won’t go back. We’ll go pick lotus seed pods!”

Jiang Cheng mocked, “You mean ‘steal’, don’t you?”

Wei WuXian, “It’s not like we don’t repay the money every single time!”

The YunmengJiang Sect often cared for the households of the area, exorcising water ghouls without asking for any compensation. Within over a mile, let alone a few seed pods, the people were willing to even part out an entire lake to plant lotus for them. Every time the sect’s boys went out and ate someone’s watermelon, caught someone’s hen, or spiked someone’s dog food\*, Jiang FengMian would send people to make up for everything. As for why they always insisted on stealing, it wasn’t because of arrogance or vulgarity—the boys were simply in love with the fun of being scolded and laughed at and chased around

\*TN: In rural China, dogs are often used to guard households against thieves. In order to sneak into someone’s house, the boys make sure that the dog is unconscious (but not dead).

The group boarded the boat. After paddling for a while, they arrived at a lotus lake.

It was quite a large body of water, covered in green. The leaves, as small as plates and as big as umbrellas, layered endlessly over one another. The ones on the outside were lower and sparser, forming a flat layer that floated atop the water’s surface; the ones on the inside were taller and more cramped, enough to cover up boats along with the people inside. But at first sight of the lotus leaves’ ruffles, one could tell somebody was hiding within.

The little boat from Lotus Pier glid into the verdant world. All around it were plump seed pods, hanging low. One person was paddling the boat, while the others got to work. The ample pods dangled from the slender stems, on which grew small, harmless thorns. With just a bit of force, the stems would snap in half. They all broke the pods off along with a long chunk of stem, so that they could get a few bottles when they got back and grow them in the water. Some said that this way, the pods would taste fresh for a few days longer. Wei WuXian only heard this from other people. He didn't know if it was true or not, either, but he nevertheless told this to others with confidence.

He broke off a few and peeled one open, tossing the round seeds into his mouth. The juice burst on his tongue. He ate as he absentmindedly hummed something along the lines of, "I'll treat you to lotus pods, so what will you treat me to?" Jiang Cheng happened to hear this, "Who are you treating?"

Wei WuXian, "Haha, not you, for sure!" Just as he was about to smash Jiang Cheng in the face with another seed pod, he suddenly made a 'hush' sound, "We're dead. The old man's here today!"

The old man referred to the farmer who planted the lotus pods in this particular region. Wei WuXian didn't know exactly how old he was, either. Anyway, in his opinion, Jiang FengMian was an uncle, so anyone older than Jiang FengMian could be called an old man. He'd been at this lake for as long as Wei WuXian could remember. When he came here to steal seed pods in the summer, he'd be beaten up if he was caught. Wei WuXian often doubted that the old man was a reincarnated spirit of the lotus seed pod, as he knew the number of pods missing from his lake like the back of his hand—the same as the number of smacks Wei WuXian received. When rowing in lotus ponds, the bamboo poles were better than paddles, each blow loud and stinging the flesh.

The other boys' had experienced the beatings before as well. Immediately, they shushed, "Let's run, let's run!" They grabbed the paddle in a hurry and fled. Scrambling, they rowed out of the lake and snuck a guilty look behind them. The old man's boat had already pulled out of the layers of leaf, drifting atop the wide waters. Tilting his head, Wei WuXian looked for a while before exclaiming, "How strange!"

Jiang Cheng stood up as well, "Why is the boat going so fast?"

Everyone looked. The old man, standing with his back to them, was counting the seed pods on the boat one by one, his bamboo pole lying motionlessly on the side. Yet, the boat travelled with both stability and speed. It was even faster than the juniors' boat.

As the two boats grew nearer, everyone was finally able to see that underneath the old man's boat was a vague white shadow, swimming underwater!

Wei WuXian turned around, his index finger pressing his lips, reminding the others to be careful not to alert the old man or the water ghoul beneath. Jiang Cheng nodded. His rowing let out only a few soundless ripples, their motions close to none. When the two boats were ten feet apart, an ashen hand rose out of the water, dripping wet, and snatched one of lotus seed pods piled up within the old man's boat before sinking quietly underwater.

Moments later, the shells of two lotus seeds floated to the water's surface.

The boys were shocked speechless, "Wow, so even water ghouls steal lotus pods!"

The old man finally realized people had snuck up to him from behind, spinning around with a big seed pod in one hand and his bamboo pole in the other. The motion alarmed the water ghoul. With a splash, the white shadow was gone. The boys called, "Come back here!"

Wei WuXian crashed into the water and dove underneath. Soon, he slinked up with something in his hand, "I caught it!"

From his hand hung a small water ghoul, its skin pale. It looked as though it were a child no more than thirteen years old. With fright, it almost curled into a ball under the boys' eyes.

Suddenly, the old man's pole swished around as he cursed, "Messing around again!"

Wei WuXian had just received a whip on his back, and now here came another blow. With a

yelp, he almost loosened his hands. Jiang Cheng raged, “Talk nicely—why would you hit him all of a sudden? How ungrateful!”

Wei WuXian hurried, “I’m fine, I’m fine, Old... Sir, look carefully. We’re not ghouls. This one is the ghoul.”

The old man, “Nonsense. I’m only old, not blind. Hurry up and let it go!”

Wei WuXian was startled. The water ghoul caught by him clasped its hands together in salutation, its dark eyes glistening in quite a piteous way. It was still gripping the plump lotus pod it stole, reluctant to let go. The pod had been broken already. It seemed as though it had just a couple of bites before Wei WuXian pulled it out.

Jiang Cheng thought to himself that the old man was absolutely insane. He turned to Wei WuXian, “Don’t let it go. Let’s take it back.”

Hearing this, the old man held up his bamboo pole again. Wei WuXian immediately called, “Don’t, don’t! I’ll let it go, that’s all.”

Jiang Cheng, “Don’t! What if it kills someone?!”

Wei WuXian, “There’s no scent of blood on it. It’s too young to swim out of this area, while there hasn’t been a word of any deaths in this area. It’s probably never killed anyone.”

Jiang Cheng, “Just because it hasn’t killed anyone, doesn’t mean that in the future...”

Before he even finished, the bamboo pole swung towards him. Having taken a blow, Jiang Cheng was furious, “Are you out of your mind, old man?! You know it’s a ghoul—aren’t you scared it might kill you?!”

The old man was also quite assured, “Why would a man who’s halfway across the threshold be scared of a ghoul?”

Knowing it wouldn’t swim far, Wei WuXian interrupted, “Stop fighting, stop fighting. I’m letting go!”

Indeed, he let go. With a splash, the water ghoul slipped behind the old man’s boat, as if it was scared to come out.

Soaked in water, Wei WuXian climbed onto the boat. The old man grabbed a seed pod from the boat and tossed it into the water. The water ghoul paid it no attention. The old man chose a bigger one and tossed it inside again. The pod bounced a couple of times on the water’s surface before half a white forehead snuck out and, like a big, white fish, carried the two green pods underwater in its mouth. Soon, some more white floated above the water. Revealing its shoulders and hands, the water ghoul hid behind the boat as it crunched down.

Watching it savor the pods, the boys were all quite bewildered.

The old man tossed another pod into the water. Wei WuXian felt his chin, unsure of how to feel, “Sir, why is it that when it steals your lotus pods, you let it steal them and even gives it to them, but when we do it, you always beat us?”

The old man, “It helps me with the boat, so what’s with giving it a couple of pods? And you lot, on the other hand? How many did you steal today?”

The boys were embarrassed. Wei WuXian glanced with the corner of his eye. Noticing the many dozens of pods hidden in the boat’s stomach, he knew it wouldn’t go well, quickly calling, “Let’s go!”

At once, the boys went for the paddle. Wielding the bamboo pole, the old man came at them like a typhoon. They could feel their scalps tingle as they thought that the pole would hit them any minute, paddling madly. The two boats chased around the lotus lake for a couple of circles. As the two came closer and closer, Wei WuXian had already received a few blows, and on top of that he realized that the pole was directed at nobody but him. He covered his head and yelled, “It’s not fair! Why do you only hit me! Why is it only me again!”

The shidi, “Keep it up, Shixiong! It’s all up to you!”

Jiang Cheng added, “Yeah, keep it up.”

Wei WuXian spat, “No! I’m not taking it anymore!” He grabbed a lotus seed pod from the boat and hurled it out, “Catch!”

It was quite a big pod, making a loud splash as it hit the water. As expected, the old man's boat paused. The water ghoul swam over giddily, collecting the pod.

Using the opportunity, the boat from Lotus Pier finally had the chance to run away.

When they returned, one of the shidi asked, "Da-Shixiong, do ghouls taste anything?"

Wei WuXian, "Usually not, I think. But I say that this little one, probably... probably... Ah-... Ah-choo!"

The sun had set and the wind had come. It felt quite cold in the breeze. Wei WuXian sneezed and rubbed his face, continuing, "Probably couldn't get any lotus pods before it died, and drowned in the lake when it snuck inside to steal some. And so... Ah-... Ah-..."

Jiang Cheng, "And so it ate lotus pods because that was its wish. It gets a sense of fulfilment from it."

Wei WuXian, "Uh-huh, that's right."

He felt his back, covered in scars both old and new, and still couldn't hold back the question he'd be thinking about, "How awfully unfair. Why is it that I'm the only one who gets beaten up, whenever something happens?"

One of the shidi replied, "You're the most handsome."

Another one, "You have the highest level of cultivation."

And another, "You look the best with no clothes on."

Everyone nodded. Wei WuXian, "Thanks for the praise, you guys. I'm even starting to feel some goose bumps."

The shidi, "You're welcome, Da-Shixiong. You protect us every single time. You deserve even more!"

Wei WuXian, with surprise, "Oh? There are more? Let me hear them."

Jiang Cheng couldn't listen any longer, "Shut up! If you guys still won't talk properly, I'll stab the boat through and we can all die together."

As he spoke, they passed through an area of water with farmland on either side. In the farms were a few petite-figured farmer women, working in the fields. As they saw their boat pass, they ran to the shore and greeted them from afar, "Hey—!"

The boys responded in the same way, before all nudging at Wei WuXian, "Shixiong, they're calling you! They're calling you!"

Wei WuXian looked carefully. Indeed, the women had encountered them before while he was leading the group. His mood immediately lifted and he stood up to wave, grinning, "What's up!?"

The boat drifted alongside the water's currents. The women followed it on the shore, chatting, You boys went to steal lotus seed pods again, didn't you!?"

"Tell us how many hits you got!"

"Or did you spike someone's dog food this time?"

Listening, Jiang Cheng almost wanted to kick him off the boat, filled with distaste, "Your reputation sure loses face for our sect."

Wei WuXian protested, "They said 'you boys'. We're in the same boat, alright? Even if I'm losing face, we're all losing face together."

As the two argued, another one of the women called out, "Was it good?"

Wei WuXian managed to reply, "What?"

The woman, "The watermelon we gave you. Was it good?"

Wei WuXian realized, "So you were the ones who gave us the watermelon. It was delicious! Why didn't you come in and sit? We could've poured you some tea!"

The woman smiled, "You lot weren't there when we visited, so we left without going in. I'm glad to hear it tasted good!"

Wei WuXian, "Thank you!" He fished out a couple of big seed pods from the bottom of the boat, "Here are some lotus seed pods. Next time you visit, come me and watch me train!"

Jiang Cheng snorted, "Would anyone want to watch you train?"

Wei WuXian threw the seed pods toward the shore. It was a far distance, but they landed lightly in the women's hands. He grabbed a few more and stuffed them into Jiang Cheng's arms, shoving, "What are you doing, just standing there? Hurry up."

After a few shoves, Jiang Cheng could only accept them, "Hurry up and do what?"

Wei WuXian, "You ate the watermelon too, so you also have to return the gift, don't you? Here, here, don't be embarrassed. Start throwing, start throwing."

Jiang Cheng snorted again, "You must be joking. What's there to be embarrassed about?" Whatever he said, however, even after all of the shidi began to throw seed pods, he still didn't start to move. Wei WuXian urged, "Then throw some! If you throw some this time, next time you can ask them if the seed pods tasted good, and you'll be able to make conversation again!" The shidi were in awe, "So that's why! What a lesson. You have so much experience with these things, Shixiong!"

"You can tell he does this on a regular basis!"

"Oh, shucks, hahahaha..."

Jiang Cheng was just about to throw one when he realized how shameless it was the moment he heard it. He peeled a seed pod and ate it by himself.

As the boat floated in the water, the maiden chased it in small steps on the shore, catching the green lotus seed pods that the boys in the boat were tossing toward them, laughing as they ran. Wei WuXian put his right hand above his brows, taking in the scenery. Amid the laughter, he let out a sigh. The others asked, "What's wrong, Da-Shixiong?" "You're sighing even when girls are chasing after you?"

Wei WuXian swung the paddle onto his shoulder, grinning, "It's nothing. I was just thinking that I invited Lan Zhan in all sincerity to come visit Yunmeng, yet he still dared to decline the offer."

The boys all put up their thumbs, "Wow, that's Lan WangJi, for sure!"

Wei WuXian stated in high spirits, "Shut up! Someday, I'll drag him here and kick him off the boat. I'll fool him into stealing lotus seed pods and let the old man beat him up with the bamboo pole and he'll be chasing after me from behind, hahahaha..."

After a while of laughter, he turned around and looked at Jiang Cheng, who was sitting at the front of the boat eating seed pods with a long face. His smile gradually disappeared as he sighed, "Well, what an unteachable child."

Jiang Cheng fumed, "So what if I want to eat alone?"

Wei WuXian, "Look at you, Jiang Cheng. Never mind. You're hopeless. Just wait to eat alone your whole life!"

Anyhow, the boat that departed to steal lotus seed pods had once again returned with riches.

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### The Cloud Recesses.

Outside the mountains was the sizzling June summer. Inside the mountains, however, was a world of coolness and quietude.

Before the Lanshi, two white figures stood by the hall. As a breeze swept by, their robes fluttered gently, yet they remained motionless.

Lan XiChen and Lan WangJi were standing.

Upside-down.

Neither of the two said a thing, as though they were already in a state of meditation. The only sounds that could be heard were the murmurs of water and the trills of birds. In contrast, their surroundings seemed even quieter.

A while later, Lan WangJi suddenly spoke up, "Brother."

Lan XiChen calmly withdrew from his state of meditation, his eyes unwavering, "Yes?"

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi asked, "Have you picked lotus seed pods before?"

Lan XiChen looked at him, "... No."

If a disciple of the GusuLan Sect wanted to eat lotus seeds, of course they didn't have to pick seed pods by themselves.

Lan WangJi tilted his head downward, "Brother, did you know?"

Lan XiChen, "Know what?"

Lan WangJi, "Lotus seed pods with their stems attached taste better than those without."

Lan XiChen, "Oh? Now that would be something I have never heard of. Why do you ask, all of a sudden?"

Lan WangJi, "It is nothing. The time is up. The other hand."

The two changed the hand with which they propped themselves up from the right to the left. The motion was extremely uniform, steady and soundless.

Lan XiChen was about to ask again when his eyes focused on something and he smiled, "WangJi, you have guests."

At the edge of the wooden hallway, a white, furry rabbit slowly crept over. It clung to Lan WangJi's left hand, its pink nose sniffing.

Lan XiChen, "How did it find its way here?"

Lan WangJi spoke to it, "Go back."

And yet the rabbit didn't listen. It nipped an end of Lan WangJi's forehead ribbon and pulled with force, as though it wanted to drag Lan WangJi away just like that.

Lan XiChen commented calmly, "Perhaps it wants you as company."

The rabbit, unable to move him, hopped around the two in a fury. Lan XiChen was quite amused, "Is this the boisterous one?"

Lan WangJi, "Too much so."

Lan XiChen, "There is no harm in being boisterous. It is lovely, after all. If I recall correctly, there should be two of them. The two are often together, are they not? Why has only one of them come? Does the other one prefer quietude as opposed to playing outside?"

Lan WangJi, "It will come."

Just as expected, soon later, another snowy white head hovered above the edge of the wooden hall. The other rabbit had also come, in search for its companion.

The two snowballs chased each other for a while. In the end, they found a spot, which was beside Lan WangJi's left hand, to cuddle together.

The rabbits snuggled against each other, forming quite an adorable scene even when seen upside-down. Lan XiChen, "What are their names?"

Lan WangJi shook his head, either to say they had no names or simply refusing to say them out loud.

Lan XiChen, however, added, "I heard you call them by their names last time."

"..."

Sincerely, Lan XiChen commented, "They have lovely names."

Lan WangJi switched his hand. Lan XiChen, "The time is not up yet."

In silence, Lan WangJi switched his hand back.

Thirty minutes later, their time was up and the training ended. The two returned to the Yashi, sitting quietly.

A servant presented them iced fruits to relieve the heat. The watermelon had been peeled. The pulp was cut into neat pieces and spread out in the jade plate, their translucent red appealing to the eyes. The two brothers sat kneeling on the mats. After they exchanged a few quiet words, discussing what they learnt after yesterday's lessons, they finally began to eat.

Lan XiChen took a piece of watermelon. However, as he saw Lan WangJi stare at the plate without clear intention, he instinctively stopped.

With no surprise, Lan WangJi spoke up. He called, "Brother."

Lan XiChen, "What is it?"

Lan WangJi, "Have you had watermelon peel before?"

"..." Lan XiChen, "Is watermelon peel edible?"

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "I heard it can be stir-fried."

Lan XiChen, "Perhaps it can."

Lan WangJi, "I heard it tastes quite good."

"I have never tried it."

"Neither have I."

"Hm..." Lan XiChen, "Do you want someone to try to stir-fry some for you?"

After some thought, Lan WangJi shook his head, his expression solemn.

Lan XiChen let out a sigh of relief.

For some reason, he felt he didn't need to ask the question 'from whom did you hear this'...

The second day, Lan WangJi went down the mountain alone.

It wasn't that he rarely went down the mountain, but instead that he rarely went to the cramped marketplace alone.

People came and went everywhere. No matter within the sects or in mountainous hunting grounds, there wouldn't be so many people. Even during the crowded discussion conferences, there were a lot of people only in an organized way, rather than this kind of congested. It seemed as if there'd be no surprise if one stepped on another's foot or bumped into another's carriage. Lan WangJi never liked to have body contact with others. Seeing this situation, he hesitated slightly, yet didn't stop entirely. Instead, he decided to ask someone the way. Even after a while, however, he couldn't find anyone to ask.

Only now did Lan WangJi realize that not only did he not want to approach others, others didn't want to approach him either.

He was truly too different, too pristine, as compared to the hustle of the marketplace. He was even carrying a sword on his back. The vendors, farmers, and passersby rarely saw young masters such as him, all of them hurrying to avoid him. They either feared that he was an arrogant heir, scared they'd accidentally offend him, or feared his cold expression. After all, even Lan XiChen had once joked that no life could remain unfrozen within six feet of Lan WangJi. Only the women, when passing Lan WangJi, wanted to look at him but didn't dare look too much. Pretending that they were busy, they faced down while peeking up. When he passed, they'd gather up and giggle behind his back.

Lan WangJi had been walking for a long time when he finally saw an old woman sweeping the ground before her house. He asked, "Excuse me. Where is the closest lotus lake from here?"

The woman didn't have excellent eyesight, and on top of that the dust blurred her eyes. She panted, unable to see him clearly, "Go two or three miles this way. One house has planted over an acre of lotus."

Lan WangJi nodded, "Thank you."

The old woman, "Young Master, the lake doesn't let anyone inside at night. If you want to go, you should hurry up and get there before dusk."

Lan WangJi repeated, "Thank you."

Just as he was about to leave, he saw the woman hold her thin bamboo pole high up in the air, unable to knock down a branch stuck under the roof. With a point of his finger, his sword energy struck the branch off, and he turned around to leave.

Two or three miles wouldn't take long at his speed. Lan WangJi followed the direction that the woman showed him and didn't stop.

In half a mile, he'd left the market; just a bit further, the buildings grew sparser; after more than a mile, all that was beside him had already turned into fields of green and crisscrossed paths. Only once in a while would he encounter a small, crooked cottage, emitting crooked wafts of smoke from its chimney. A few grimy toddlers wearing high braids were squatting in the field, throwing mud at one another as they giggled. It was such an interesting scene that Lan WangJi paused to look, although he was discovered soon later. The toddlers were all young and shy, scrambling away in just a blink of the eye. He finally took a step forward and continued to walk. When he was just a bit over halfway there, Lan WangJi felt something cool

on his cheek. It was a strand of rain, sent over by the breeze. He looked at the sky. Sure enough, the gray, rolling clouds seemed as though they'd fall from the sky. He immediately walked faster, yet the rain came faster than him.

Suddenly, he saw half a dozen people standing by the field ahead of him. The strands of rain had already turned into droplets. Yet, the people neither held umbrellas nor sought for shelter. They seemed as if they formed a circle around something, without no time to pay attention to anything else. Lan WangJi went over. He saw a farmer lying on the ground, moaning in pain.

After listening to just a few words, Lan WangJi understood what had happened. When the farmer was in the fields, an ox ran into him. Right now, he was unable to get up, having hurt either his back or his leg. The ox that committed the crime was chased to the far end of the field, swinging its tail and too afraid to approach. The owner of the ox ran to find a doctor, while the rest of the farmers didn't dare move the wounded carelessly in fear that they'd dislocate his bones. This was the only way they could take care of him. Unfortunately, it had begun to rain. It was just a bearable drizzle at first, but soon it became a storm.

As the rain grew heavier and heavier, one of the farmers dashed home in quest for an umbrella. His home was far, however, and he couldn't come back just yet. The rest of the group was anxious despite not being able to do a thing, blocking as much rain for the wounded farmer as possible. But nothing would come out of this, if this went on. Even if the umbrella arrived, there'd only be one. They couldn't simply cover up a few and leave out the others, could they?" One of them cursed under their breath, "Damn it, it's only been a minute and the rain is crashing down."

At this point, another one of the farmers spoke up, "Let's prop up the shed over there. It'd hold up at least for a while."

Not too far away, there was an old, abandoned shed, propped up by four pieces of wood. One of them was slanted, while another one had rotten after years of weathering.

One farmer hesitated, "Aren't we not supposed to move him?"

"A... A few steps should be fine."

Everyone lending a hand, the farmers carefully carried the wounded man over. Two of them went to hold up the shed, yet even two farmers couldn't lift the roof. As the others urged them, they used all their strength, their faces flushed red, yet it still didn't budge an inch. Two more people came, but it still wouldn't move!

The roof of the shed was had a wooden frame and was covered in tiles, hay, and layers of dirt. It wasn't light, but it definitely wasn't so heavy that even four farmers who worked in the fields all year long couldn't lift.

Even before he approached, Lan WangJi knew what was going on. He walked to the shed, bent down, raised a corner of the roof, and lifted it up with a single hand.

The farmers were shocked speechless.

The young man single-handedly lifted the roof even four farmers couldn't!

A few moments later, one of the farmers whispered something to the others. With only some hesitation, they proceeded to carry the wounded man over. When they went inside the shed, all of them glanced at Lan WangJi. Lan WangJi looked straight ahead.

After they let the person down, two people came over, "Y-... Young Master, let go of it. We can do it."

Lan WangJi shook his head. The two farmers insisted, "You're too young. You won't hold out." As they spoke, they raised their hands, wanting to help him with the roof. Lan WangJi only glanced at him. He didn't say anything, only retracting some of the strength he exerted. At once, the farmers' expressions changed.

Lan WangJi turned back around, letting his strength flow back. Embarrassed, the farmers went back to squatting.

The wooden roof had proven to be heavier than they imagined. If the boy let go, they wouldn't

be able to hold it up at all.

Someone shivered, "How strange. Why is it colder now that we're inside?"

None of them could see that right now, hanging in the middle of the shed was a ragged figure, hair tangled and tongue stretched out.

As wind and rain hit the shed from outside, the figure swung back and forth under the shed, carrying forth an eerie gust of wind.

It was this spirit that made the roof abnormally heavy, unable to be lifted by ordinary people no matter what.

Lan WangJi didn't bring the tools used to liberate spirits. Since the creature had no intent to harm others, of course he couldn't beat its soul apart without a care. As of the moment, it looked like he wouldn't be able to persuade it to let down its hanging corpse, either, so he could only prop up the roof for now. He'd report it afterward and sent people to deal with it.

The spirit swished back and forth behind Lan WangJi, blown here and there by the wind. It complained, "It's so cold..."

"..."

It looked around and found a farmer to lean on, likely in search for some warmth. The farmer suddenly shivered. Lan WangJi tilted his head slightly, giving it quite a stern, sideways look.

The spirit shivered as well, returning in misery. Still, it extended its tongue and complained, "Th-Th rain is so heavy. And it's wide open like this... It's really so cold..."

"..."

Even until the doctor arrived, the farmers never gathered up the courage to talk to Lan WangJi. When the rain stopped, the moved the wounded out of the shed. Lan WangJi laid the roof down and went away without saying anything.

When he arrived at the lake, it was already past dawn. He was just about to enter when a small boat came from the other side, a middle-aged woman on the boat, "Hey, hey, hey! What are you doing here?"

Lan WangJi, "To pick lotus seed pods."

The woman, "It's after dawn. We don't let anyone in when it's dark. Today is not gonna work. Come here some other time!"

Lan WangJi, "I will not stay for long. I only need a while."

The woman, "No means no. That's the rule. I don't make the rules here. You can go ask our owner."

Lan WangJi, "Where is the owner of the lake?"

The woman, "He went home long ago, so it's no use asking me. If I let you in, the owner of the lake wouldn't go easy on me, either. Don't make this so difficult for me."

At this point, Lan WangJi didn't force her any longer. He nodded, "Apologies for the disturbance."

Even though his expression was calm, everything about it gave off a sense of disappointment. Seeing that even though his clothes were white, half was soaked by the rain and his boots were covered in mud as well, the woman softened her tone, "You came too late today. Come earlier tomorrow. Where are you from? The rain was so heavy earlier. You child, you didn't run over here in the rain, did you? Why didn't you take an umbrella? How far is your home from here?"

Lan WangJi replied honestly, "Ten and a half miles."

The woman choked as she heard it, "So far?! You took a long time getting here, didn't you? If you really want to eat lotus seed, you should go buy some in the streets. There are plenty."

Lan WangJi was just about to turn around when he heard this and stopped, "The lotus seed pods sold on the streets do not have stems on them."

The woman was amused, "Do they have to have stems on them? It's not like they taste any different."

Lan WangJi, "They do."

"They don't!"

Lan WangJi insisted, "They do. Somebody told me they do." The woman broke into laughter, "Who in the world told you? What a stubborn young master you are. You must've been possessed by something\*!"

\*TN: By love.

Lan WangJi didn't say anything. Head hanging low, he turned around and began to walk back. The woman called again, "Is your home really that far?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

The woman, "What if...What if you don't go home today? Settle down somewhere nearby and come tomorrow?"

Lan WangJi, "There is a curfew. I have lessons tomorrow."

The woman scratched her head, as though she thought about it with quite some hesitation. In the end, she spoke, "... Fine, I'll let you in. Just a bit, just a little bit, alright? Hurry up if you're gonna pick lotus pods, in case someone sees you and tells on me to the owner. It'd be embarrassing to get scolded at my age."

In the Cloud Recesses, after the rain...

The magnolia was especially fresh and delicate. Lan XiChen felt a bout of affection. He spread paper on his desk and painted by the window.

Through the window's hollowed-out carvings, he could see a white figure approach slowly. Lan XiChen didn't put down his brush, "WangJi."

Lan WangJi walked over and called across the window, "Brother."

Lan XiChen, "I heard you mention lotus seed pods yesterday. Uncle happened to have them be brought up the mountain today. Do you want some?"

Lan WangJi, outside the window, "I have, already."

Lan XiChen was somewhat confused, "You have, already?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

The brothers exchanged a few more words, and Lan WangJi returned to the Jingshi.

After he finished, Lan XiChen gazed at the painting for a while before he put it away and forgot about it. He took out Liebing and went to the location where he usually practiced Sound of Lucidity.

Before the small cottage sprouted bushes of soft, violet gentians, their petals adorned dew like stars. Lan XiChen entered through the path. He looked up and paused.

On the wooden hallway before the cottage's doors was a vase of white jade. Inside the vase were lotus seed pods of varying heights.

The jade vase was slender and the pod stems were slender as well. It was quite a beautiful scene.

Lan XiChen put Liebing away and sat down before the vase. Tilting his head, he looked at it for a while, hesitating.

In the end, with much reservation, he chose not to take one secretly and peel it open to determine just what tasted different about lotus seed pods with their stems attached.

If WangJi looked so happy, they must be quite a delicacy indeed.

## GDC Chapter 126: Extra—Dream Come True (END)

When Lan WangJi came back, Wei WuXian had already counted to about one thousand and three hundred.

“One thousand three hundred sixty-nine, one thousand three hundred seventy, one thousand three hundred seventy-one...”

He lifted his leg, again and again, the colorful shuttlecock bouncing around his foot. It flew high up in the air, dropped firmly, before shooting even higher and diving down again. It seemed as though a formless thread was connected to it, eternally preventing it from leaving a part of Wei WuXian’s body.

At the same time, a formless thread was fixed to the gazes of the children at the side.

And then he heard Wei WuXian count, “One thousand three hundred seventy-two, one thousand three hundred eighty-one...”

Lan WangJi, “...”

Under the shower of the children’s admiration, Wei WuXian cheated just like that. On the other hand, the enormous number had already stripped the sniffling children of their judgment, so much that not a single one of them noticed what was wrong. Lan WangJi watched with his own eyes as Wei WuXian kicked his way from seventy-two to eighty-one, then from eighty-one to ninety. Just as he was about to make another leap, Wei WuXian just so happened to catch sight of Lan WangJi. His eyes brightened as if he was about to call his name. With a blunder in his force, the bright-feathered shuttlecock flew past his head and plunged behind Wei WuXian’s back.

Seeing that he was about to miss, he hastened to make a backward kick, saving it with the heel of his foot. The last kick went the highest, accompanied by a reverberating, “One thousand six hundred!” The children all exclaimed with astonishment, clapping with all their might.

The outcome was clear. A little girl screamed, “One thousand six hundred! He won, you lost!”

In high spirits, Wei WuXian accepted the victory without a sliver of doubt. Lan WangJi lifted his hands as well, letting out a few claps.

However, one of the boys furrowed his brows, biting his finger, “I feel like... something’s not right.”

Wei WuXian, “What’s not right?”

The boy, “Why would it be another hundred right after ninety? Something’s definitely wrong.”

It seemed that the children had already split into two factions. One of them was clearly already under Wei WuXian’s influence, nagging, “That’s impossible. You’re just unwilling to accept your defeat.”

Wei WuXian also theorized, “Why wouldn’t it be another hundred after ninety? Count it out yourself. What’s after nine?”

With much difficulty, the boy fumbled with his fingers for a while, “... Seven, eight, nine, ten...”

Immediately, Wei WuXian interrupted, “Look, ten comes after nine, so a hundred must come after ninety.”

The boy was still unsure, “... Really? I don’t think so??”

Wei WuXian, “How come? If you don’t believe me, let’s ask someone on the streets.”

He looked around for a moment before slapping his leg, “Oh hey, I found one. You, Young Master, who looks extremely reliable. Please wait a moment!”

“...”

And thus, Lan WangJi waited, “What is it?”

Wei WuXian, “Could I, please ask you a question?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian asked, “Excuse me, but what comes after ninety?”

Lan WangJi, “A hundred.”

Wei WuXian saluted him, "Thank you."

Lan WangJi nodded, "You are welcome."

Grinning, Wei WuXian nodded as well, turning around to face the boy, "You see?"

The boy didn't really trust the snickering Wei WuXian, but looking at Lan WangJi, he felt a deep sense of awe toward such a young master, whose clothes were white as snow, the sword was adorned with jade, and features were so handsome that he almost looked like a deity. His wavering heart was immediately persuaded, mumbling, "So that's how you count..."

The children chirped, "One thousand six hundred to three hundred—you lost!"

The boy was stubborn, "It's my loss, then." As he spoke, he handed the stick of sugared haws to Wei WuXian, his voice loud, "You won! Here, for you!"

After the children had left, Wei WuXian spoke up, holding the stick of haws in his mouth, "HanGuang-Jun, you really saved me some face."

Lan WangJi finally walked to his side, "Apologies for the wait."

Wei WuXian shook his head, "Not at all, not at all. You've been gone for just a while. I'd only kicked the shuttlecock for a bit more than three hundred times."

Lan WangJi, "One thousand six hundred."

Wei WuXian laughed out loud, biting off one of the haws. Lan WangJi was about to speak again when something cold touched his lips, leaving a sweet taste on his tongue. Wei WuXian had stuffed the remaining stick of haws into his mouth.

Noticing his unusual expression, Wei WuXian asked, "Do you eat sweet things?"

Holding the haws in his mouth, Lan WangJi neither ate it nor spat it out, unable to say anything. Wei WuXian, "If you don't, I'll have it." He grabbed the thin stick of the haws, wanting to take it back, but he couldn't pull it out even after a few tries. It seemed that Lan WangJi had bit into it with his teeth. Wei WuXian grinned, "So are you going to eat it or not?"

Lan WangJi bit off a haw as well, "I am."

Wei WuXian, "That's more like it. Just say it if you want some. You've really been like this ever since you were young, holding everything in and never saying what you want."

After he laughed for a while, the two sauntered into the town.

Wei WuXian had always been mischievous and greedy while he was out on the streets. He ran quickly and wanted everything. When he saw something interesting, he had to give it a few squeezes, or when he sniffed the mouth-watering smoke that wafted by, he had to get some and try it out. Under his encouragement, Lan WangJi also tried some snacks he would never even have touched. When he finished them, Wei WuXian would always ask, "How was it? How was it?" Sometimes, Lan WangJi replied 'fine,' while other times he replied 'excellent,' yet more often than not, he replied 'strange.' Every time this happened, Wei WuXian would laugh and take it, not letting him have any more.

They originally intended to find somewhere for lunch, but Wei WuXian ate all the way from the West to the East, filling his stomach. In the end, he was lazy even in walking, and the two found a decent soup shop and sat down to have some soup.

Wei WuXian played with the sliced radish as he ate, waiting for the pork ribs and lotus root soup that he ordered. As he saw Lan WangJi stand up, he asked in surprise, "What are you doing?"

Lan WangJi, "I will be back soon." And as he said, he came back just a bit after he left. The soup happened to arrive, as well. Wei WuXian took a sip. After the waiter went, he whispered to Lan WangJi, "It's not good."

Lan WangJi tried a spoonful, having only a slight taste, "How so?"

Wei WuXian stirred his spoon in his bowl, "The lotus can't be too hard. It'd be better if it were pinker. The place is a bit shy with the seasoning. It hadn't been boiled long enough, and the flavors hadn't been soaked in properly. Anyhow, it's not as good as my shijie's."

He was only making casual remarks, thinking that Lan WangJi would at most listen and respond with a few mn's. Yet, he not only listened keenly but even asked, "How should the

seasoning be? How can the flavors be soaked in?"

Wei WuXian finally noticed something, amused, "HanGuang-Jun, you're not thinking of making me lotus soup, are you? Just now, did you go to watch the process?"

Before Lan WangJi even answered, he already began to laugh at him, "Haha, HanGuang-Jun, I'm really not trying to look down on you, but nobody in your sect ever does any work in the kitchen, and on top of that your tastebuds grew up with that kind of food. I doubt anything you make can even make it past the eyes."

Lan WangJi had another sip of his soup, neither confirming nor denying it. Wei WuXian was still waiting for him to respond, yet he was as firm as a mountain. He finally couldn't wait any longer.

With a thick face, he asked again, "Lan Zhan, did you really mean that you want to cook for me?"

Surprisingly, Lan WangJi was quite calm. He said neither 'yes' nor 'no.'

Wei WuXian was beginning to grow desperate. He sprang up, his hands propped up on the corners of the table, "Say something, won't you?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "So is that a yes or a no? Lan Zhan, my dear, I said that all to tease you. If you're really gonna cook for me, even if you burn a hole in the bottom of the pan, I'd eat the pan right in front of your face."

"..."

Lan WangJi, "That would not be necessary."

Wei WuXian was about to jump onto his lap and beg, "So are you gonna cook or not? Cook, please, HanGuang-Jun, I'll eat it!"

Without a change in his expression, Lan WangJi steadied Wei WuXian's back, "Posture."

Wei WuXian warned, "Er-Gege, you can't treat me like this."

Finally, under all the pestering, Lan WangJi couldn't keep his cool any longer. He held his hand, "I have already."

"Huh?" Wei WuXian was surprised, "You've cooked for me already? When? What did you make? How come I don't remember?"

Lan WangJi, "The sect banquet."

"..." Wei WuXian, "That night, the dishes I thought you bought from the Hunan place at Caiyi Town, you made them with your own hands?"

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian was aghast.

He asked, "You were the one who made them? Such a thing as the kitchen exists in the Cloud Recesses?"

"... Of course."

"You washed and cut the vegetables? You poured the oil into the pan? You added the seasoning?"

"Mn."

"You... You..."

Wei WuXian was absolutely speechless. In the end, one hand grabbing Lan WangJi's collar and another hugging his neck, he gave him a fierce kiss.

Luckily, the two always chose the most obscure places to sit, right next to the wall. Holding him, Lan WangJi turned around, making it so that others could only see his back as well as the arm Wei WuXian wrapped around his neck.

Seeing how unflustered he was, Wei WuXian reached out and touched, feeling the warmth as expected. Lan WangJi caught his mischievous hand, warning him, "Wei Ying."

Wei WuXian, "I'm right here on your lap, am I not? What are you calling my name for?"

"..."

Wei WuXian responded, his expression serious this time, "I'm sorry. I was just too happy. Lan

Zhan, how come you're so good at everything? You're amazing even when it comes to cooking!" His praise was of utmost sincerity. Lan WangJi had heard countless compliments from when he was a child, but not a single one of them were able to make it so hard to stop the corners of his lips from blooming into a smile. He only pretended to be calm, "It was no difficult task."

Wei WuXian, "No. It is. You don't know how many times I've been chased out of the kitchen."

"..." Lan WangJi, "Have you burnt a hole in the bottom of the pan?"

Wei WuXian, "Just once. I forgot to add water, but who would've known the pan would start burning? Don't look at me like that. It was just once, really."

Lan WangJi, "What did you put inside the pan?"

Wei WuXian thought about it for a moment, smiling, "How could I remember something from so long ago so clearly? Forget about it."

Lan WangJi didn't comment, but he seemed to have slightly lifted his brow. Wei WuXian pretended as though he didn't notice the minuscule expression. Suddenly recalling something, he threw his hands up in regret, "But back then why didn't you tell me you were the one who made them? I was an idiot. I didn't even eat all that much."

Lan WangJi, "Do not worry. I can make more when we return."

After so long, this was the only thing Wei WuXian had been waiting for. He immediately started beaming, not even finding fault in his soup any longer.

They left the restaurant, and the two strolled for a while. Clamor came from ahead of them. Many people surrounded an area covered in small objects, tossing small hoops onto the ground one after another.

Wei WuXian, "This one's nice." He grabbed Lan WangJi and took three hoops from the vendor, "Lan Zhan, have you played this before?"

Lan WangJi shook his head. Wei WuXian, "You haven't even played this before? Let me explain. It's really simple. Take this hoop, walk a bit backward, and toss it onto the things on the ground. Whatever it lands on is yours."

Lan WangJi repeated, "Whatever it lands on is mine."

Wei WuXian, "That's it. Which one do you want? I'll get you whichever one you want."

Lan WangJi, "Any."

Wei WuXian propped his elbow on his shoulder, tugging the tail of his forehead ribbon, "It's a bit embarrassing for you to treat me so casually, isn't it?"

Lan WangJi replied sincerely, "I want whichever one you get."

Wei WuXian paused, astonished, "Look at you. What are you doing in front of all these people?"

Lan WangJi, "What?"

Wei WuXian, "You're flirting with me."

Lan WangJi's expression was calm, "I am not."

Wei WuXian, "You are! Fine, then I'll get you... that one, how about that one?"

He was pointing at a big, white turtle made of porcelain placed far away. As he spoke, he took a few steps back, all the way until he was four yards away. The vendor yelled, gesturing, "You're good, you're good!"

However, Wei WuXian replied, "Not yet, not yet."

The vendor shouted, "Young Master, you're standing too far. This way you won't be able to get any. Don't blame it on me for milking your money, then!"

Wei WuXian, "If I don't stand for, you just might lose yours!"

The crowd laughed, "What a confident young master he is!"

The trick seemed simple on the surface, but there was, in reality, some distance between every item. The control over the exerted force that was required wasn't easy for ordinary people. However, to cultivators, it didn't pose a challenge at all. If he didn't back away further, what would be the fun in it? Wei WuXian went quite far back, even going as far as to turn around with his back facing the vendor. The crowd laughed even more. Yet, the next second, Wei

Wei WuXian weighed the hoop and made a backhanded toss. The hoop landed right on the porcelain turtle's shell, landing around its head.

Both the vendor and the others were left speechless. Wei WuXian turned around with a grin, gesturing Lan WangJi toward the remaining two hoops in his hand, "You want to try?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

He walked beside Wei WuXian, "Which one do you want?"

Nothing of high quality would be sold at the small, street-side businesses. They were mostly filled with little objects that were adequately put together and looked decent from afar. The porcelain turtle that Wei WuXian got was already the best looking one out of the bunch. Wei WuXian looked around the scene. The more he looked, the more he felt that every one of them was ugly and that he didn't want any of them, finding the decision difficult. Suddenly, he saw a stuffed donkey that was extremely ugly, so ugly that one wouldn't even be able to ignore it when glancing across. He beamed, "That one's good. It looks like Lil' Apple. There, there—get that one."

Lan WangJi nodded. He stood four yards further than Wei WuXian and turned around as well. The hoop landed on it perfectly.

The crowd cheered and clapped. Lan WangJi turned around to look at Wei WuXian who leaped inside with laughter and seized the donkey, carrying it under his armpit as he clapped the loudest, "Again, again!"

There was another hoop in Lan WangJi's hand. Holding it, he weighed it gently yet firmly. This time, he only tossed it backward a moment later, and he immediately turned around to check. After he tossed, exclamations came from all around him. The hoop was so off that it didn't even touch the edge of the area. Despite this, it landed without fault on and around Wei WuXian's body.

Wei WuXian was first surprised before he broke into laughter. Although everyone felt that it was too much a pity, they nevertheless reassured them, "Not bad!" "Yeah, you got quite a few." "You're already amazing!"

Relieved, the vendor rolled his eyes and sighed, jumping up with his thumb sticking out, "Yeah, you're absolutely spectacular. You definitely weren't lying, Young Master. A few more, and I'd really start losing money!"

Wei WuXian laughed, "Enough, I know you wouldn't dare let us play any longer. We've also had enough, right? Lan Zhan, let's go, let's go."

The vendor replied gladly, "Take care!"

Even as the two disappeared into the bustling crowd, shoulder-to-shoulder, did he finally remember, "The third hoop! They never gave it back to me!!"

After walking for a while, with the turtle in his left arm and donkey under his right, Wei WuXian asked, "Lan Zhan, how come I never realized you're so creative?"

Lan WangJi took the heavy porcelain turtle from his hand. Wei WuXian removed the hoop from his neck and put it over his head, "Don't pretend like you don't know what I'm talking about. I know you did it on purpose."

Lan WangJi held the turtle in one hand, "Where will we place this when we return?"

Wei WuXian really didn't know the answer to this one.

The turtle was big and heavy, its craftsmanship far from good. With a bulky head, it could just barely be described as adorably silly. But with a closer look, Wei WuXian realized that its creator was truly careless. It looked as if it was cross-eyed, its pupils beady. In any case, no matter how he looked at it, it was just too incompatible with the Cloud Recesses. Where they could put, it was a real problem indeed.

Wei WuXian thought about it for a moment, "The Jingshi?"

Just as he finished, he shook his head, rejecting his own idea, "The Jingshi is only suitable for playing the guqin and burning incense. Such a peaceful place filled with the scent of sandalwood would look awful with the big turtle."

When Lan WangJi heard him say that the Jingshi was ‘a peaceful place only suitable for playing the guqin and burning incense,’ he glanced at him, as though he wanted to say something but didn’t.

Wei WuXian continued, “But if we don’t put it in the Jingshi and choose anywhere else in the Cloud Recesses, it’d probably be thrown out immediately.”

Lan WangJi nodded in silence.

Wei WuXian hesitated for a long while. In the end, he wasn’t so shameless as to say ‘let’s put it into your uncle’s room, but not tell him we did it.’ Smacking his leg, he had an idea, “I’ve got it. Let’s put it in the Lanshi.”

Lan WangJi thought for a bit before asking, “Why the Lanshi?”

Wei WuXian, “Now you don’t get it, do you? Put it in the Lanshi, and when you’re teaching SiZhui, JingYi, and the others, if they ask you about it, you can tell them that the turtle was created by the hands of a mysterious craftsman in memory of you killing the Xuanwu of slaughter. It holds a deep meaning, aiming to motivate the GusuLan Sect’s disciples in admiring their senior’s feat and striving forward. Even though the Black Tortoise\* of Slaughter is gone, there’ll definitely be the Vermillion Bird of Carnage, the White Tiger of Brutality, the Azure Dragon of Bloodlust, and so on, waiting for them. They must perform great things that surpass their predecessors and amaze the world.”

TN: The Xuanwu, or the Black Tortoise, is one of the Four Symbols in Chinese constellations, also known as the Four Guardians or the Four Gods. The other three include the Vermillion Bird, the White Tiger, and the Azure Dragon.

“...”

“So how about it?”

A moment later, Lan WangJi replied, “Excellent.”

And so, a few days later, when Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the others were in HanGuang-Jun’s class, they saw a rough, dull-eyed turtle made of porcelain lying on the desk behind Lan WangJi, every time they looked up.

But because of some unknown astonishment, not a single person dared to ask why it was there. That, however, would be another story...

After storing the loot into the qiankun sleeves, the two retreated victoriously.

Before they came, Wei WuXian praised the beauty of the characteristic lotus leaves that stretched as far as the eye could see for quite a long time, so of course he’d drag Lan WangJi on a tour of the lakes. He wanted to find a luxuriously-decorated touring boat for some occasional extravagance, but even after searching for a while, he could only find a small, wooden boat, hanging by the lake. Floating on the water, it seemed so weak that it’d sink with just a soft kick. It seemed a bit too difficult to stuff two full-grown men inside, but they weren’t left with a second choice.

Wei WuXian, “You sit on this end, and I’ll sit on the other. Be still and don’t move around. If we’re not careful, the boat’s gonna tip.”

Lan WangJi, “Do not worry. I can save you if you fall.”

Wei WuXian, “The way you said it, it sounded almost as if I didn’t know how to swim.”

The boat drifted past, brushing against the voluptuous lotus blossoms, each petal pink and full. Wei WuXian lies within the boat, using his arm as a pillow. Because the boat was truly tiny, his legs were almost resting on Lan WangJi’s body. Toward such a brazen, ill-mannered posture, Lan WangJi didn’t say anything either.

The gentle breeze swept over the tranquil waves. Wei WuXian, “It’s blooming season right now. Too bad the seed pods aren’t ready yet, or else I could take you to pick lotus seed pods.”

Lan WangJi, “We can come again.”

Wei WuXian, “Yes! We can come again.”

Casually rowing the boat, Wei WuXian stared into the distance for a while, “There used to be an old man who planted lotus seed pods around the area. He seems to be gone now.”

Lan WangJi, "Mn."

Wei WuXian, "He was already quite old when I was young, and it's already been over a dozen years. Even if he hasn't passed away yet, he'd probably be too old to walk or row a boat."

He turned around to face Lan WangJi, "Back then, in the Cloud Recesses, when I urged you to visit me at Lotus Pier, I especially wanted you to come to steal lotus seed pods at his place. Do you know why?"

Toward Wei WuXian, Lan WangJi always answered every question, heeded every request. In all earnestly, he responded, "I do not. Why?"

Wei WuXian winked his left eye at him, grinning, "Because the old man was incredible at hitting people with his wooden pole. When it hit, it felt way worse than the punishment rulers of your sect. Back then I thought that I had to trick Lan Zhan over and have him take a few blows as well."

Hearing this, Lan WangJi smiled. All of the moon's cold, reflected luster melted in his eyes. In an instant, Wei WuXian felt his head whirl dizzily. Involuntarily, the smile rippled onto his face as well. He began, "Fine, I'll admit it..." With a loud crash, everything went upside-down, sending up splashes a couple of feet high. The boat had tipped over. Wei WuXian broke through the water, wiping his face, "I just told you to sit still and not move around, so that the boat didn't tip by accident!" Lan WangJi swam over. Seeing how calm he was even now that he had fallen into the water, Wei WuXian laughed so hard he almost choked on water, "So which of us was the first to lean over? Look at the mess!" Lan WangJi, "I do not know. Perhaps it was me." Wei WuXian, "Fine, it might also have been me!" With laughter, the two caught each other underwater, sealing the tight embrace with a kiss. After the lips parted, Wei WuXian raised his hand, continuing what he hadn't finished, "I'll admit it. All that was nonsense. Back then, I really just wanted to play with you."

Lan WangJi lifted him from behind his back, and Wei WuXian was sitting on the boat once more. He turned around to give him a hand, "And so, Lan Zhan, you're gonna have to be honest too." Lan WangJi also went back on the boat. He handed him a red ribbon, "Be honest about what?"

Wei WuXian held the ribbon in between his lips, using both of his hands to retie the hair that had come loose underwater, "Be honest about whether or not you thought about me in the same way." In a solemn tone, he spoke, "Rejecting me like that so coldly every single time—it really made me lose face, don't you know?"

Lan WangJi, "You can try, now, to see if I would reject you over anything."

The sentence so suddenly struck his heart. Wei WuXian choked, yet Lan WangJi was still as calm as ever, as though he didn't at all realize what he just said. Wei WuXian put his hand to his forehead, "You... HanGuang-Jun, let's make a deal. Please warn me before you say something so romantic, or else I won't be able to take it."

Lan WangJi nodded, "Okay."

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan—what a person you are!"

Tens of thousands of words were left unspoken, in exchange for endless laughter and hugs.

#### Special Note:

The title of this chapter uses the Chinese characters of Yunmeng, which consists of 'cloud' and 'dream.' The author explains the wordplay at the end.

"This is my original idea of the chapter 'Yunmeng': after WWX stirs up trouble in the Cloud Recesses and is sent back to Lotus Pier, Second Young Master Lan has a dream where he and WWX have fun in Yunmeng together, with WWX treating him to lotus seed pods and other snacks. Of course, at the time, he doesn't actually go, but in the future, he ends up going anyways.

And thus, the meaning of this title is actually, 'a particular dream held in the Cloud Recesses becomes a dream come true.'"

## Endnotes From the author:

When it comes to this book, I can't even summarize all of the stories surrounding it in seven entire days. Even its publication process was filled with twists and turns, taking more than half a year to finish. Right now, the first volume is finally born, and it just so happened to coincide with its third anniversary. With this opportunity, I put pen to paper and wrote this special little note for it, for the sake of commemoration.

For an author, when you want to look back on your journey, the work itself is more meaningful than the diary. I was still studying when I planned out this novel and started writing when I graduated. Even now, I sometimes reminisce about the early days when it had just begun to serialize. I didn't earn much, but the writing process was easy and relaxed, indeed an excellent condition for creativity.

Speaking of it, that was also the first time I consciously planned out my characters. Full of enthusiasm, I wrote over a thousand words of I-don't-know-what for each of the two main characters, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, though I don't know where they went. Now that I think about it, it was quite a pity, really.

The greater pity was the first version of its outline, almost ten thousand words. I had a habit of deleting the outline as I went, just like checking off every task from a to-do list. It gave me a refreshing sense of satisfaction, and thus, I didn't back it up.

I've said before that I originally wanted to write a story of cold-blooded revenge and triumphing over the scum, but for some reason, the outline became more and more miserable. I think that perhaps it was because nobody likes to be hurt, but I have a thing for people with scars.

—”Stories only scars can tell.”

Back when I was young, I especially loved those who are full of scars and stories, and I thought I could be like them—I'd keep going even as knives cut into my skin, never turning back and never looking down. And when I grew a little older, I was even more in love with them. It was because I discovered that they were even firmer and stronger than I had imagined.

I traveled by words, covered in the dust of the journey. Too many things have happened. Too many people have come and gone. No matter the misconceptions, the accusations, or even the impossibly-wounding pain, I've encountered them all along the way. But let me borrow a quote from Mr. Wei WuXian, “It's only another life experience. It'd be a conversation starter when you grow older.”

Perhaps when I'm older, I'd fall in love with writing about young, carefree characters. But when the time comes, I hope that it's not because I miss my past youth, but rather because no matter how many years have passed, no matter when, no matter where I'll always be young at heart!

Without care for anything at all, I shall give the entirety of my soul to the pen and the paper. I no longer like to tell my readers, 'I love you.' These words are too light, and yet these words are too heavy.

I hope each of you who enjoys this book  
can be like Lan WangJi in virtue and Wei WuXian in character.

P.S. I received the help of many in the publication process.

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Mo Xiang Tong Xiu

2018.10.31

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