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Jiang Ning left the cave and followed the rest back to the kitchen.

The others left after they placed their wicker baskets down, cursing as they made their way out.

“Who cares if they’re sect leaders? They’re all dogs waiting for the slaughter now.”

“They act all high and mighty all the time. They probably didn’t expect to end up like this.”

“It feels so good trampling on their pride like that. Hahahahaha!”

The misfortunes of their prisoners filled these disciples with glee. Their souls had become twisted with malice and from similar treatment that they had suffered at the hands of others. Their most glorious moments were when they subjected these sect leaders and elders to humiliation and mockery.

After all, they were merely Outer Court disciples, the lowliest of all disciples in Tianlian Sect.

“Who knows how long the poison is going to stay in their systems? We should be careful. We’re not their match without the poison in their bodies,” Jiang Ning said.

The fearful look on his face drove everyone into laughter.

“You’re such a coward. What are you afraid of?” One of the disciples said. “Elder Huang’s been

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drugging them with poison all this while. The poison's not leaving their systems any time soon. There's nothing to be afraid of. Go ahead and push them around. I'll teach you how to do it. Hahahahaha!"

The disciples jeered in unison.

Jiang Ning scratched his head and gazed at the other disciples with adoration in his eyes. "You'll have to teach me how!"

He silently remembered Elder Huang's name.

This was the man who had been drugging the sect leaders and elders with poison. He was the one holding onto the poison. Things would go more easily now that Jiang Ning knew who had the poison.

Jiang Ning followed the disciples and watched as they stooped in a corner and filled their time with chatter and bragging. They got up excitedly when time came for meals to be delivered again.

"Come on, time to have some fun!" A few of them laughed out loud. They got such joy from delivering meals to the prisoners. There was nothing more enjoyable.

This was a joy that even the principal disciples couldn't enjoy.

Jiang Ning followed them to the kitchen, where a delicious fragrance drifted out.

"Elder Huang!"

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Jiang Ning looked up when he heard the greeting. A man with a head full of white hair and a snow-white beard stood at the other end of the corridor. It was clear from his slow and unsteady footsteps that he was quite old.

He was probably someone whom Luo Qi trusted.

The elder with stooped shoulders said, "Wait here."

"Yes, sir," replied the disciples deferentially.

Elder Huang entered the kitchen, pulled out a bag of dust and poured it into every dish. Then, he turned around and walked out of the kitchen.

"You can take the dishes away. Make sure they eat it," instructed Elder Huang. "Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir. Don't worry, Elder Huang. They're starving. They'll eat anything!" The man in charge of the disciples said with a cheeky grin.

A dog would eat its own feces if sufficiently starved. These sect leaders and elders were the same. They might be men of extreme importance and influence in the past, but they were but mere prisoners now. They were no better than dogs.

"Alright then." Elder Huang nodded, then left.

"Come on, brothers! Let's have some fun with these sect leaders and elders! Hahahaha!" The disciples were filled with excitement. They entered the kitchen and started packing the

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dishes into their wicker baskets so that they could deliver these sorry sect leaders and elders their meals.

“Ouch! Ouch!” Jiang Ning hugged his stomach suddenly. His face was pale and beads of sweat rolled down his forehead profusely. “Sir, my stomach hurts. I need the bathroom!”

“What’s wrong with you now?”

“You’ll full of shit, that’s what. Hurry up, we’ll wait.”

Jiang Ning waved his arms wildly. “No, forget it. You should go ahead. I don’t know how long I’m going to take. Oh man, I don’t think I can keep it in any longer. I need to go now!”

His over-the-top performance had everyone bursting out in laughter and pinching their noses.



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“Come on, hurry up! Don’t dirty your pants. Hahahaha!”

They laughed out loud and decided not to bother Jiang Ning anymore. They seemed to be used to such antics. They couldn’t wait to inflict their daily dose of humiliation on their captives. There would be another opportunity to teach Jiang Ning a lesson.

The disciples carried the wicker baskets away. Jiang Ning emerged from the toilet then, without a trace of the ridiculous look he had had on his face earlier.

Like a streak of lightning, he raced towards the direction that Elder Huang had left in.

It didn’t take Jiang Ning long to spot Elder Huang. He dashed ahead, swiveled around then lowered his head and pretended that he was in a hurry as he marched right into Elder Huang.

“Ouch!”

Jiang Ning caught Elder Huang before he fell.

“I’m so sorry! Elder Huang, I didn’t see you!” Jiang Ning apologized profusely.

“Rascal!” The elder cursed. “Are you tired of living?”

He was an old man. Even the mere act of walking took effort. He might not have survived knocking into Jiang Ning if he had tripped and fallen.

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“Please don’t get upset, Elder Huang,” said Jiang Ning hastily. “I was in a hurry to deliver something to the chief. I...I’m not going to make it!”

Upon hearing that, Elder Huang huffed in annoyance. He dared not cause Jiang Ning further delay though. After yelling a few words of reprimand at Jiang Ning, he waved his arms in irritation. “Come on, be on your way. You won’t get let off that easily if you cause our chief any delay!”

“Yes, sir! Thank you, Elder Huang!” Jiang Ning said meekly and lowered his head in deference.

He raced off. Elder Huang snorted before slowly walking away.

Jiang Ning rounded the corner before stopping in his tracks. He uncurled his fingers. Within his palm was a small bag of powdered dust!

This was the poison.

Something flickered in his eyes. He surveyed the surrounding cautiously and made sure that no one had seen him before making his way back to the kitchen.

“Aren’t you supposed to deliver meals to the prisoners?” The bearded chef asked when he saw Jiang Ning. “Did you get an upset stomach again?”

Jiang Ning scratched his head and smiled sheepishly. “I’ve been suffering from diarrhea recently.”

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“You’re useless,” laughed the chef. “If I weren’t in charge of cooking the meals, I’d like to have some fun with the prisoners too.”

Jiang Ning smiled. “You can teach me how to cook. I can cook the meals and you can deliver them.”

The chef glanced at Jiang Ning briefly before rolling his eyes.

“In your dreams. Being a chef is one of the best jobs one could have. Why would I let you have it? Come on, help me throw out the trash,” he yelled.

In his opinion, being an Outer Court disciple couldn’t compare with being a chef at all. They might both occupy the lowest rungs of the ladder, but chefs didn’t have to deal with other laborious tasks. They enjoyed a more elevated status in the sect too.

Jiang Ning didn’t say anything. He did what he had been told and started to pack the trash.

“Take that out once you’re done, then clean up the place, alright?”

Having said that, the chef left Jiang Ning to his work and began preparing meals for members of the sect. This was a massive sect with many mouths to feed. The chefs had to start work early. In fact, they were constantly busy.

No one had the time to keep an eye on Jiang Ning.

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Jiang Ning started cleaning up diligently and didn't make any move even when he saw everyone else in the kitchen bustling around, busy with their own tasks.

"Be careful, guys. This is meant for the chief. Make sure the dishes are done nicely. A mistake might get you a reprimand or get you killed."

"Once the dishes are ready, deliver them to the chief, alright? Don't spill the soup, you clumsy idiots!"

The chefs cursed out loud. "They'll be sending someone over soon. Let's speed up!"

Jiang Ning's pupils contracted. He pretended to help the chefs with the dishes and while no one was noticing, slipped some of the powdered poison into the soup. Then, he covered the soup with a lid quickly.

"It's done," said Jiang Ning. "Is this the chief's favorite soup?"

"Of course! This is my best dish and the chief loves it. That's how I got admitted into Tianlian Sect. But what do you know?" The chef laughed. The next moment, the smile on his face was replaced by a stern look. "Alright, why are you asking so many questions? Get to work now!"



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Was this really the chief's favorite soup?

He had made the right move then.

Jiang Ning didn't say anything. Instead, he left the kitchen, grabbed a broom by the door and started sweeping. He watched as a few men carried dishes out of the kitchen and delivered them to Luo Qi.

"Hurry up! Don't spill the soup! Don't you have eyes? Watch out! Hurry, the chief wants his meal now!" Curses sounded in the air. The chef had quite a temper and began shouting when he realized how few men he had in the kitchen. "Everyone's out delivering meals to those prisoners. I don't have anyone left to help me out!"

He turned, caught Jiang Ning sweeping by the door and beckoned him over with great annoyance. "Why are you still sweeping the floors? Hurry up and help get these dishes delivered!"

Jiang Ning smiled. "But I'm not done with the floor yet."

"Don't bother with that. Deliver these dishes. We're running late!" yelled the chef.

Jiang Ning placed the broom down hastily and hurried into the kitchen. He lifted one of the plates and walked out carefully. The chef was pleased by his caution.

"Keep your hands steady, you hear me?"

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Jiang Ning followed the men ahead of him and carried the dish towards where Luo Qi was going to have his meal.

Tianlian Sect was a grand place. Luo Qi was someone who clearly knew how to enjoy the material luxuries that life had to offer. His residence resembled the royal palace.

His dining quarters spanned a hundred feet and was decorated with elegant, antique furnishings.

His round table was carved from solid wood and could seat twenty people. But Luo Qi was the only one who dined at the table. Nevertheless, every meal had the table filled with a few dozen dishes.

What an extravagance.

“Place them carefully.” The man who stood next to the table instructed the disciples on where to place the dishes. Each dish was placed according to Luo Qi’s dietary preferences.

Dishes that he enjoyed were placed nearer his seat so that he could see them. Those that he did not enjoy were placed further because he wouldn’t touch them anyway.

“Is that soup? Place it in the middle.”

Jiang Ning looked up and saw the poisoned soup sitting in the center of the table. It was right in front of Luo Qi’s seat. He would see it as soon as he looked at the dishes on the table.

Luo Qi must really love the soup.

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Jiang Ning sat the dish he was holding on the table, walked away and stood at one side with the others. He didn't stray too far from the table though.

Luo Qi arrived within moments.

Dressed in finery, he exuded an air of authority and power. He looked good. It was clear that things were going his way.

"Chief, your meal has been served," said the man standing next to the table in a deferential tone.

Luo Qi didn't say a word as he sat down and leaned back. He didn't lift his finger at all. With a single glance, he told the man what he wanted to eat. The man would pick up his chopsticks and placed food on Luo Qi's plate, then send said food right to his mouth.

Luo Qi took one bite and spat the food out. A terrible look darkened his face.

"Make sure this dish never appears on the table again."

"Yes, sir." The man appeared fearful as he nodded profusely. He threw a glance at one of the men standing along the side of the room who then took the dish away immediately and removed it from Luo Qi's sight.

"This one."

Luo Qi pointed at another dish. The man standing next to him served him immediately.

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Luo Qi chewed slowly, then nodded in approval. His eyes landed on the soup. The man immediately knew what Luo Qi wanted. He filled a bowl with soup and placed it before Luo Qi.

Luo Qi raised his hands this time, lifting the spoon and taking a sip. He smacked his lips, hummed in approval, then emptied the bowl.

Out of the many dishes on the table, the soup was his favorite.

Jiang Ning watched from afar as Luo Qi drank the soup, then waited patiently for the poison to take effect.

Luo Qi took his time, as if he were genuinely relishing the meal. He took a few bites from each dish and only tried seven or eight dishes out of the dozen before he was done.

“Take them away,” said the man in charge when he saw Luo Qi nod.

Jiang Ning and the other men rushed to the table and began to clear the table. Some of the dishes were completely untouched, to the delight of those men. What luck! Those dishes were going to end up in their stomachs.

“Hm?” Something flickered in Luo Qi’s eyes then.



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Luo Qi held onto the edge of the table with both his hands as he frowned.

“Chief, do you wish to return to your room?” asked the man.

Luo Qi didn't say anything. He simply eyed the dishes in front of him and watched as they were taken away. His fingers curled into fists suddenly.

“Don't move!” He yelled suddenly. “Don't touch the dishes that I've eaten. Put them down!”

The man was startled. He had no idea what had come over Luo Qi and why the latter had issued such an order. That didn't matter now though. He barked out an order immediately.

“Everyone, stop what you're doing. Put the dishes down. Hurry up!” He turned towards Luo Qi and asked cautiously. “What's wrong, Chief?”

“There's poison in the food.” Luo Qi clenched his jaw. Terror coursed through everyone when they heard what Luo Qi had said. Their faces drained of all blood.

“Poison?” Alarm flashed across the man's face. “How could that be possible? Chief, are you alright?”

“I should have thought of this. Why didn't I think of it?” Luo Qi felt his strength gradually drain from his body. This was obviously the Tranquilizing Dust. He was familiar with the poison. He began to yell, “Where's Elder Huang? Summon him immediately!”

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He didn't move and simply sat there. He couldn't let anyone know that he had been poisoned and that he had been poisoned with the Tranquilizing Dust.

The man hastily ordered someone to summon Elder Huang. He seemed a little flustered. He couldn't believe that someone had poisoned Luo Qi's food. Everyone was going to get killed if Luo Qi flew into a rage.

Everyone but Jiang Ning was jittering with anxiety and fear. He feigned terror as he tried to determine if Luo Qi had truly been poisoned and was not pretending that he had been.

One had to be extremely careful when dealing with conniving foxes like Luo Qi.

Elder Huang arrived within moments. When he saw Luo Qi sitting in the room, he said hastily, "Chief, is there anything wrong?"

"Do you have the Tranquilizing Dust?" asked Luo Qi.

Elder Huang reached into his robes and started rummaging through his pockets. "It's with me. I followed your orders and have been lacing their food with poison all this while. Look, it's..."

Alarm flashed across the elder's face. He pulled out his hand from his robes. There was nothing inside. Nothing at all!

"Where is it?" He blurted out. He yanked his belt loose, shrugged his clothes off and searched

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through them frantically. The Tranquilizing Dust was nowhere to be found. “I kept it on me. It never leaves my sight!”

There was a stormy look on Luo Qi’s face. If he weren’t paralyzed at the moment, he would have given Elder Huang a slap so hard that the blow would kill him on the spot.

“I handed you the Tranquilizing Dust for your safekeeping and yet you slipped it into my food,” spat Luo Qi. “Elder Huang, you’ve got quite some nerves.”

Elder Huang fell into his knees with a loud thud.

“Chief, I didn’t do it! I didn’t do anything!”

“Take him away!” thundered Luo Qi. A few men stepped forward immediately and dragged Elder Huang away despite all his protesting.

Luo Qi panted heavily and tried to stand up, but his feet were like jelly. He couldn’t stand at all.

His sharp eyes swept past everyone’s faces. He gritted his teeth.

“I didn’t expect that someone would slip past my defenses and slip poison into my food.” He lifted his chin slightly and glanced at the man who had been serving him. The latter fell to his knees in terror.

“Chief, it’s not me! I didn’t do it!”

Luo Qi scoffed.

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“I doubt you have the guts to do it.” He clenched his jaw. “Quick, bring me back to my study. Hurry up!”

“Yes, sir, of course!” The man climbed to his feet hurriedly, then pointed at Jiang Ning and a few other men. “Why are you still standing there? Help our chief back to his study. Hurry up! No one is to speak of what’s just happened. Anyone who does will be killed without any mercy!”

“Yes, sir!” Jiang Ning and the other men shouted in unison before approaching Luo Qi and lifting him up in their arms.

“Come on, hurry up!” The man led the way to the study. “Chief, we’ll arrive at the study shortly. I’ll bring you the antidote and treat the poison!”



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Luo Qi's face was slightly pale. His limbs felt weak and he couldn't move them at all. Jiang Ning and his men had to carry him back to his study.

"Hurry up!"

The men moved Luo Qi back to his study within moments.

"Get out!" The man shouted and chased Jiang Ning and the rest out of the room.

Luo Qi had been poisoned by the same poison that he had drugged the other sects. The antidote was a precious commodity that shouldn't be easily seen by others, especially lowly disciples of the sect.

"Yes, sir."

The disciples left the room. Jiang Ning followed them out without saying a word.

Luo Qi and the butler remained in the study.

"Chief, where is the antidote?" asked the butler. "We have to treat your poison immediately."

His face was lined with worry and anxiety.

Luo Qi leaned back and pointed at his cabinet.

"There's a secret compartment behind the cabinet. Open it."

The butler hurried over to the cabinet, stuck his

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hands inside and started searching for the switch. He found something protruding from the wall, grabbed it and twisted. A series of loud clanks rang out.

The cabinet slowly shifted and revealed a secret compartment.

“It’s inside. Take it out,” said Luo Qi with a nod and a note of exhaustion in his voice.

The butler was quick to reply. “Yes, sir. I’ll bring it over for you right this moment.”

He reached out and pulled the lid open. Suddenly —

SWOOSH!

A shadowy streak darted out. Before the butler could do anything, an intense sting of pain erupted in his neck. He howled in pain, reached out instinctively and yanked. It was a venomous snake.

“Chief...”

The butler’s face contorted in terror. A bout of dizziness came over him. The snake must be extremely poisonous!

Before he could say another word, his face took on the shade of a dark, toxic green. The blood in his body froze. With a loud thud, he fell to the ground and went still. The man was dead.

Luo Qi glanced at the body and scoffed lightly.

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“You think you can lie to me? You’re the only one who has the chance to slip poison into my food.”

He rose to his feet, walked right up to the butler’s corpse and gave it a slight kick. He had to make sure that the man was dead.

He was a cautious man who wasn’t easily deceived or tricked. He would have been dead a long time ago if he were one who paid little attention to what he put in his mouth.

The doors to the study slid open. To the shock of everyone, including Jiang Ning, Luo Qi appeared fine as he stood at the doorway. Jiang Ning couldn’t believe that Luo Qi wasn’t poisoned.

That wasn’t right. He must have been poisoned.

He had seen Luo Qi drink the soup with his own eyes. There was no way that he had escaped being poisoned. There was only one explanation. He had taken the antidote before he had drunk the soup, which meant that...he had the antidote on him.

“Take the body away,” said Luo Qi coolly.

“Yes, sir.”

Jiang Ning did not strike then. This wasn’t the right moment.

He couldn’t believe that Luo Qi had used himself as bait so that he could lure out all possible traitors and eliminate them.

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He felt sorry for the butler. The man had been nothing but loyal, but he had died because of Luo Qi's paranoia. The butler must have been filled with disbelief and bewilderment up to the final moment of his death. He couldn't have foreseen a death in this manner.

Jiang Ning entered the room and eyed the butler's corpse on the ground. His face was black. He had clearly died from a strong poison. Next to his body was the body of a snake ripped into two.

He shook his head. Luo Qi was heartless.

He showed no mercy to both his enemies and his own.

"Let's take him away."

A few men carried the butler's corpse out of the room. Jiang Ning took the chance to take a silent look around the study before following them out.

Luo Qi was a sly one and Mr Lang even more cunning than he was. Neither of them was an easy opponent.

He watched as they carried the butler's body away, then scoffed. The look on his face became increasingly colored with indifference as time passed.

So, they wanted to kill him and get the antidote? It wasn't going to be that easy.

He had been exercising the utmost caution. He wasn't going to let his guard down and let anyone

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have the chance to do anything to him.

“Summon the elders to the grand hall!” ordered Luo Qi.

Within moments, Luo Qi was seated on the chief’s seat in the grand hall and gazing down upon his elders.

“I’m reaching the limits of my patience,” Luo Qi said brusquely. “What are the other sects doing? Have they declared their submission to us?”



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“Not yet, Chief.” The few elders shook their heads. “They are demanding the release of their chief and elders.”

“In their dreams!” Luo Qi barked out a cruel laugh.

He had captured those fellows with the intention of forcing them to submit to him. Why would he release them?

“They don't seem to know pain at all.” A streak of murderous intent flashed across Luo Qi's eyes. “Tell them that I'm going to kill one person for every day of delay. I'll continue killing until every one of their elders and their chief are dead. It won't matter if the sect still refuses to submit to my rule then.”

He seemed a little crazed and unreasonable.

He didn't care for patience at all. He didn't want to wait anymore.

“Chief, that might...make the situation worse.” Luo Long hesitated for a moment.

He firmly supported Luo Qi in his endeavors but the method that he had voiced was a little excessive. They were already testing the limits of the sects by capturing their men and threatening them into submission.

Killing their prisoners would incur the true wrath of those sects.

Nothing good would come out of incurring the wrath of the masses.

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“Isn't it bad enough now?” Luo Qi stared at him. “Tianlian Sect has its eyes sight on a greater goal. We can't afford to show anyone mercy. No one knows what's going to happen to our world in the mountain. There's no more time. Don't you understand that?”

Luo Long nodded. “I do.”

“Stop wasting time then!” said Luo Qi. “Make my orders known to the rest and send the other sects a final warning. If they don't submit to us, we will simply have to destroy them all.”

Madness colored his eyes as he exuded an aura of absolute power and dominance.

The elders exchanged a look with one another silently before nodding profusely.

They could sense that Luo Qi had gone completely mad.

They had agreed to form an alliance with the other sects at first because it had been a great opportunity for Tianlian Sect.

But the idea of seizing control over the other sects had popped up in Luo Qi's head after that alliance had ended. He had poisoned the sect leaders and elders of the other sects and made them captives of Tianlian Sect. They had gone along with it and even thought that it had been a great idea.

But what Luo Qi was going to do now was too much. He was willing to resort to anything to

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achieve his goal.

“Elder Luo Long, won't you talk to the chief again? We've done the worst that we could by threatening the other sects. They'll fight us to the death if we kill their sect leaders. What would happen to Tianlian Sect then?”

“That's right. The other sects aren't pushovers. Without a bargaining chip, they'll join forces and attack us. When that happens, we'll...”

Luo Long frowned, then waved his hand silently and left.

One of his men approached him when he got back to his study.

“The butler is dead.”

“What did you just say?” Luo Long frowned. “What happened?”

“The chief suspected the butler of poisoning his food, so he killed him.”

Luo Long's pupils contracted. Had Luo Qi truly gone out of his mind?

He couldn't believe that the chief had killed the butler.

That was the man who had cared for him for decades. How could Luo Qi suspect him of anything untoward?

What about Luo Long? What might Luo Qi do to

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him?

“There’s another thing. Elder Huang seemed to have misplaced the Tranquilizing Dust and was punished by the chief. He’s not allowed to eat and is still kneeling in the ancestral hall right now.”


Elder Huang was the oldest elder in Tianlian Sect and could be considered as Luo Qi’s senior. How could he bear to punish the old man?


Luo Qing’s fingers curled into fists. Something wasn’t right. Luo Qi was behaving strangely. He wasn’t listening to anyone’s advice and had locked himself up in a world of his own. He did whatever he wanted.


“I have no grounds for protest if whatever he’s doing is for the sake of the sect, but it’s obvious that he’s not exactly himself.”

Emotions flickered across Luo Long’s eyes. He wasn’t sure what had come over Luo Qi but the series of actions that the latter had committed were worrying both Luo Long and the other elders.

“I’ll speak to the chief.” Luo Long rose to his feet and left.

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