

**C25**

Thirty miles east of Heavenly Fire City, a decrepit Mountain-God Temple stood abandoned. Now, it was occupied by dozens of menacing men in black.

Tied to an ancient tree beside the temple was a girl with an otherworldly air about her—Guu Linger. Guu Linyuan and Guu Moyu stood before her, their sneers cutting through the silence.

"Capturing her is as good as finding Guu Tianyi's Achilles' heel. With her as leverage, Guu Tianyi would walk to his death without a second thought," Guu Moyu declared, his eyes icy.

He should have been basking in the glory of joining the Three Sects after this year's Heavenly Fire Competition. But Guu Tianyi and Lo Chenfeng's emergence had dashed his dreams to pieces.

Lo Chenfeng was formidable, yet he wouldn't bow to Guu Tianyi. And why should Guu Tianyi, no longer the prodigy he once was, look down upon him again?

Consumed by jealousy and rage, Guu Moyu's Dao-heart was in ruins, his path to cultivation now veiled in darkness. The only way to mend his spirit was to personally end Guu Tianyi's life.

Guu Linyuan appraised Guu Linger with a newfound interest. "Brother Moyu, I never really noticed her before, but Guu Linger is quite beautiful, isn't she?"

He reached out to pinch her cheek, but Guu Linger, her teeth clenched and eyes resolute, quickly turned her head away to avoid his touch.

"You've got spirit. Let's have some fun before Guu Tianyi arrives," Guu Linyuan taunted with a cold laugh.

"What are you going to do? Stay back! Brother Tianyi will never forgive you!" Guu Linger cried out.

Her body shook as Guu Linyuan's predatory gaze locked onto her, and she recoiled as much as her bindings would allow.

Guu Moyu, watching the exchange, let out a sinister chuckle. "How entertaining. It's just a pity that Guu Tianyi is too late to witness this himself."

"Don't come any closer!" Guu Linger's eyes brimmed with fear and despair.

She was surrounded by Guu Linyuan's followers in the desolate wilderness. Her emotions were a whirlwind of contradiction; she longed for Guu Tianyi to come to her rescue, yet part of her prayed he wouldn't show up.

"You won't find any help out here."

"Don't!" Guu Linger cried out.

A single tear, glistening like a jewel, trailed down her cheek, hitting the ground and releasing a faint Cold Aura.

Guu Linyuan's hand paused just shy of touching Guu Linger's delicate face, his brow furrowing as he quickly withdrew it.

The sight before him made him inhale sharply.

A frigid blue aura cloaked Guu Linger. In a heartbeat, the ropes that bound her and the ancient tree at her back were sheathed in a thick crust of ice.

The grass beneath her feet shriveled rapidly, becoming a carpet of dead thatch.

Guu Linyuan spat disdainfully and stepped back, his expression one of revulsion. "I nearly forgot, she's cursed from birth. Such terrible omen!"

Just then, a figure clad in black approached, announcing, "Young Master, Guu Tianyi has arrived!"

Guu Linyuan and Guu Moyu's eyes sparked with anticipation. They gestured commandingly, and a host of black-garbed figures sprang into action.

Not far off, Guu Tianyi advanced like a surge of purple flame, heading straight for them.

More than a dozen men in black were already trailing him, encircling him tightly.

"Guu Tianyi, so you've come after all," Guu Linyuan and Guu Moyu emerged, flanked by their entourage.

With bloodshot eyes, Guu Tianyi demanded in a chilling tone, "Where's Linger?"

"On the brink of death, and you're still worried about someone else?" Guu Linyuan mocked. He gestured to his men and commanded, "What are you waiting for? Attack! Take down Guu Tianyi first!"

"Make a move, and I swear I'll take Guu Linyuan's life!" Guu Tianyi's presence intensified, the Purple Fire around him flaring.

At these words, Guu Linyuan let out a scornful laugh.

"Guu Tianyi, have you lost your mind? With your current power, how do you expect to get past these Desperadoes and kill me?"

Before he could finish his sentence, a pair of purple dragon claws materialized behind Guu Linyuan, swiftly seizing his head.

"The Star Shattering Claw has achieved Great Completion!" Guu Moyu exclaimed in shock.

Guu Tianyi had been battling Lo Chenfeng while Moyu had returned to the Guu Mansion, plotting harm against Guu Linger, so he was unaware of Tianyi's mastery of the Star Shattering Claw. Yet, he was well aware that a fully-realized Star Shattering Claw could effortlessly slay someone with far inferior combat strength.

On the martial arts platform, Tianyi had exhausted his reserve of the Power of Stars while countering Lo Chenfeng's Shattering the Universe. But even devoid of the Power of Stars, Tianyi could easily dispatch Guu Linyuan with the sheer might of the Star Shattering Claw.

With Linyuan in his grasp, the Desperado dared not make a move.

"Everyone, back off. Should anyone come within ten feet of me, I'll end Guu Linyuan's life. My word is my bond!"

His warning issued, Tianyi tightened the grip of the Star Shattering Claw, the razor-sharp Purple Fire Dragon Claw piercing Guu Linyuan's forehead and drawing bright red blood.

The Desperado hesitated, and Tianyi, looking up at the Mountain-God Temple, called out, "Old man, I know you're in there. If you don't want your grandson to die, make way!"

As expected, moments later, the Third Elder emerged from the temple, his face dark with fury.

"Step aside!"

At his command, the Desperado cleared a path for Tianyi. Guu Linger's frail form came into view.

"Brother Tianyi," she whispered, her voice barely audible. A chilling Cold Aura radiated from her, her complexion deathly pale, the ancient tree behind her now a sculpture of ice.

Her Cold Aura had manifested prematurely.

"Linger."

Tianyi's heart ached at the sight of her, remembering his vow to shield her from all harm.

But now, since she had taken up residence with him in the Purple Flame House, she had endured immense suffering and humiliation. The torment of the Cold Aura was so intense, she often wished for



death.

Yet, despite the agony, Guu Linger managed a strained smile upon seeing Guu Tianyi. At that very moment, a fierce glint flashed in Guu Moyu's eyes, and his Mighty Devil Flood Dragon Martial Soul burst forth menacingly.

"Guu Tianyi, how did you manage to perfect the Star Shattering Claw in mere days? Why should you receive all the glory? You've ruined everything for me, and now I will obliterate what you hold dearest!"

"Devil Heavy Armor, Star Shattering Claw!"

Black energy radiated from Guu Moyu's hands as they morphed into dark, star-speckled dragon claws. His movements were fluid and his speed, lightning-fast. His target, however, was not Guu Tianyi—it was Guu Linger.

"Linger!" Guu Tianyi's eyes narrowed, his face etched with determination.

"Star Shattering Claw!"

In the blink of an eye, the Star Shattering Claw hovering above Guu Linyuan clenched and hurled him towards Guu Moyu.

Simultaneously, Guu Tianyi channeled all the Genuine Qi within his dantian, transforming into a purple blur as he dashed to Guu Linger's aid.

Guu Moyu's Star Shattering Claw plunged into Guu Linyuan, the rampant Genuine Qi and Power of Stars causing chaos within him.

"Linyuan!" The Third Elder's eyes widened as the presence of a Martial Ancestor unfurled around him.

Fear filled Guu Moyu's eyes. His attempt to slay Guu Linger had inadvertently led to Guu Linyuan's demise.

But then, he witnessed a spectacle even more horrifying.

A surge of Purple Fire coalesced into a purple dragon claw, piercing through Guu Linyuan and seizing his head.

Guu Moyu then saw Guu Tianyi, with his right hand raised in a gesture mirroring the dragon claw, his gaze saturated with resolute intent to kill.

"Guu Moyu, you irredeemable lunatic!"

In his final moments, Guu Moyu surrendered to his fate, his eyes reflecting a glimmer of acceptance.

Snap!

In the instant the headless body hit the ground, the farcical life of Guu Moyu came to an abrupt end.

"Ah!"

"Guu Tianyi, for slaying my grandson, I vow to strip the flesh from your bones, piece by piece, to honor Linyuan!"

The Third Elder was incensed, his aged frame radiating a green luminescence as a colossal creature materialized before him.

The Third Elder and Guu Linyuan shared the same Martial Soul, both manifesting as Green Flame Jade Flood Dragons.

Yet, his was a behemoth spanning over sixty meters!

In that moment, Guu Tianyi was met with the faint weeping of Guu Linger. "Brother Tianyi, it's... my fault that calamity has befallen you. If... there is another life, I would do anything... to make it up to you."

"Silly girl..." A tender smile graced Guu Tianyi's eyes as he shredded the ropes with a swipe of his claw and pulled her into his embrace.

A piercing cold seeped into his very flesh, but his arms remained