

Chapter 131 - The Places of Darkness

Zhou Wenbin explained, and only then did Li Qingshan understand that he did not have it easy as a district magistrate. In order to maintain a sufficient 'approval rating' so that the citizens of Jiaping city would be grateful to him, the person who watched over them all, he had to reduce taxes and costs, begin construction projects both on land and over water, and establish public facilities. Moreover, he had to ensure high salaries to maintain honesty among his subordinates, maintaining a group of aides to help him handle governance. As a result, he often struggled to make ends meet.

Zhou Wenbin spread his hands and smiled bitterly. "It's pitiful for a government official like me. Not only am I working without a salary, but I even have to find ways to raise money."

Li Qingshan found this rather funny. In this day and age, although the disparity in wealth was enormous, this was not necessarily a bad thing to the common people.

In the Great Xia empire, regardless of rank or status, not a single official was paid a salary, but they did not have to hand up any taxes or money either. Even when they found gold or silver mines, the local government would control it.

This was impossible in any empire or kingdom that Li Qingshan knew about, but this was the reality. The items that interested cultivators were different from ordinary people in the first place. If Zhou Wenbin wanted to, he could squeeze millions of silver taels out from Jiaping yearly, but there was no point to that at all.

However, there was one type of mine that the empire would own, namely spiritual stone mines. The salary that government officials like Zhou Wenbin and Zhuo Zhibo collected were spiritual stones.

As a result, Li Qingshan took out the several hundred thousand taels of silver he found from the procuress and handed it to Zhou Wenbin.

Zhou Wenbin said, "Aren't you going to ask just how many Qi Gathering pills you'll get?"

Li Qingshan said, "I've never been a stingy person, but of course, I do hope that others can be more generous with me as well."

Zhou Wenbin took out a small bottle with a total of twelve Qi Gathering pills. He handed it to Li Qingshan and said, "Since this is your first time, I'll give you a special price. If you find more silver, you are welcome to exchange it with me. However, it'll be a hundred thousand taels for a pill."

Li Qingshan said, "That's very fair." When he thought about the astronomical price of a single, tiny Qi Gathering pill, he could not help but be rather amazed. However, if it were the jianghu instead, there were plenty of people willing to pay a hundred thousand taels of silver for a single Qi Gathering pill.

Li Qingshan then took out the accounts he had found from the procuress and handed them to Zhou Wenbin. "I'm wondering if there's any evidence against the Parlour of Clouds and Rain on there."

Li Qingshan did not want to raise suspicion with his actions, so he did not take it out immediately. However, he thought about how there were still many girls trapped in the underground palace beneath the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. As such, he needed to find a way to get Zhou Wenbin to search through

the parlour again so that the girls could be openly rescued. Otherwise, they would basically starve to death down there if nothing happened.

Zhou Wenbin did not even glance at it. He clapped his hands and a servant immediately came over and retrieved the accounts, taking it to the government office. Those aides who were skilled in this area would look through it.

Before long, a person who seemed like an advisor walked over. At first, he glanced at Li Qingshan in surprise. The Hawkwolf Guard was impressive, but there were no ordinary Black Wolf guards who could sit at the same level as the official that he served. Afterwards, he bowed at Li Qingshan slightly before reporting to Zhou Wenbin, "Sir, there are many issues with it..."

Li Qingshan looked at the pond as he wondered how he would put it. Only after Zhou Wenbin and the advisor were done talking did he say, "Sir, is this enough evidence to take down the Parlour of Clouds and Rain?"

Zhou Wenbin said, "Do you really think that we can take down the Parlour of Clouds and Rain with a single set of accounts? You're underestimating the strength of the Sect of Clouds and Rain far too much. The person I sent to Fishes' Gully has already returned. Qing Xiu's entire family is already dead. They've handled this matter very cleanly."

Li Qingshan was furious. "Those bastards! Sir, you serve the government, so how can you fear a sect?"

Zhou Wenbin said, "I'm not afraid of them. I'm just helpless. These cultivation sects all have their own foundations and legacies. Some larger sects have been around for longer than the empire itself. Even when the founding emperor was around, he could only pacify them at most, making them promise to peacefully coexist as long as it did not get in the way of their interests. Afterwards, the Academy of the Hundred Schools was established, raising talents to contend against them."

In short, they would not purposefully come and make trouble for Zhou Wenbin, but Zhou Wenbin did not want to make things difficult for them either. He had come here to cultivate, not to actually serve as an upright official and speak for the people. However, no one could blame him for anything.

Li Qingshan thought, Fortunately, I crushed Zhao Liangqing, or I would have never been able to achieve anything through the law!

"As a result, you have to prepare against plots from the Sect of Clouds and Rain as well. Sometimes, they might even be more terrifying than Zhuo Zhibo. Zhuo Zhibo is a part of the Hawkwolf Guard, which is why he fears you backing. However, they might not have so many qualms. Most of the losses of the Hawkwolf Guard arise from conflicts with these sects, killed off silently and soundlessly. There have even been hawk commanders like Zhuo Zhibo or district magistrates like me who have been killed off mysteriously."

Li Qingshan was not too surprised. He had witnessed an example of this already. Despite Gu Yanying's identity, she still failed to kill that White Lotus Mother. Although she forced the latter into hiding, she still lost many subordinates.

The White Wolf guards under her command were powerful cultivators who had undergone a heavenly tribulation and reached Foundation Establishment at the very least. They were figures who could run

amok through Jiaping city or even the Clear River prefecture. The Soaring Dragon Elder of the Sword Collection palace did not fear the authority of the Hawkwolf Guard at all. He was even bold enough to kill the Dark Queen's beloved pet right in front of Gu Yanying or even fight with her. And that was with the Hawk God standing behind Gu Yanying. This only demonstrated the fearlessness of these cultivation sects.

He could not help but sigh in amazement. "Regardless of the day or age, it's all about strength. Stuff like status will never be as convenient as strength."

Zhou Wenbin said, "You should have a mental map of the Green province, right? If you don't mind, let's take a look."

Li Qingshan unfurled the mental map of the Green province.

Zhou Wenbin stroked the map gently. "What a nice thing." Countless specks of light lit up on there like the twinkling stars of the night sky.

"The places that light up all have people with status in the government. Even fifth layer Qi Practitioners would not be bold enough to kill a first layer Qi Practitioner Hawkwolf guard like you publicly. However, there's nothing like that beyond the specks of light. There is only strength. You must remember this. As long as they have absolute confidence, people will be bold enough to attack you over the contents of your hundred treasures pouch. Not only will your wolf hide fail to protect you at times, it can even draw in hostility."

Li Qingshan looked at the mental map he had gone through many times already and gained a new understanding. The stars were bright and clustered, but they would never surpass the immensity and darkness of the night sky. These remote mountains and marshes were lawless lands. They were the place where daemons and demons danced, a battlefield for cultivators.

A revelation like that brought him far more help than a few additional Qi Gathering pills. It gave him a completely new understanding with respect to his identity and position. However, not only did he feel no fear, but he even felt enlightened instead.

As it turned out, he was still worrying about how he could finish off Zhuo Zhibo without raising too much suspicion if Zhuo Zhibo decided to turn against him, but now, these areas of darkness beyond the light brought him convenience. He could openly slaughter everyone and anyone before pushing all of the blame onto an unknown, powerful cultivator or some terrifying daemon passing by.

Zhou Wenbin failed to see any fear on Li Qingshan's face at all. That was an emotion that every single cultivator of orthodox origins would reveal when they heard something like this for the first time. Even Zhou Wenbin himself had not been an exception, which was why he decided to remain in the light for his entire life, protecting himself and distancing himself from that world of darkness.

He could not help but admit that there really was something different about this teenager. He seemed to have a deep interest in battle, slaughter, chaos, and disorder, but he was not like a brainless madman who lived to fight. Instead, he was courageous but not reckless.

Perhaps he was more suited to joining some large sect instead of walking down the path of the Hawkwolf Guard or the Academy of the Hundred Schools. Basically every large sect preferred disciples

like this. Whether it be for purging demons or for purging the orthodoxy, they all required people who could fight.

In the eyes of ordinary people, cultivators seemed to have detached from the mortal world, avoiding all contact with the bloodshed and affairs of mortals, only needing to meditate and chant everyday, dwelling in the wilderness. They would be able to elongate their lives or even achieve eternal life.

If it were based on their true intentions, who would be bold enough to take risks and fight with people? Who didn't want to walk the path of longevity peacefully, devoting all their time to making spiritual artifacts and talismans, refining pills, and ingesting medicines, spending all their time cultivation and seeking enlightenment instead of learning techniques? However, this path was riddled with far too many hardships, and it was just far too crowded.

Everyone required pills and medicines, but there was a limit to spiritual herbs. Everyone required blessed lands to cultivate in, but there was a limit to nice dwellings. They could choose to stand aside and watch others enjoy the pills, medicines, blessed lands, and rapid cultivation. Meanwhile, they themselves would gradually decline before turning into a pile of bones in a grave, or they could contend with others and see who was better.

Not only did they have to contend with the heavens for their fate, but they had to contend with humans for victory.

Even if peace was brought to the world, and there was harmony among all people, wouldn't the daemons, demons, ghosts, and monsters hidden in the darkness want to regain the upper hand and rule over the nine provinces? In this wilderness without order, who knows how many sects had been established and destroyed. They could only follow the most primitive principle—survival of the fittest. Only the strongest would be respected.

Between the Sword Collection palace and the Umbral Yin sect, one wielded swords, while the other controlled ghosts. Perhaps they were not the sects that were the best at cultivation, but they each possessed their advantages. They had followed this principle and survived and thrived under it.

Li Qingshan stowed the mental map of the Green province away. He said, "Since I've already offended them, I might as well offend them a little more. I have this identity, so if I don't use it, it'll be a pity."

Zhou Wenbin knew that it was impossible for him to have any chances at reaching a compromise or reconciling after killing the people of the Sect of Clouds and Rain in public. Thinking about his youthful mentality and his lingering anger, he said, "Fine then. I'll give around another dozen guards to you. Although this set of accounts can't take them down, it's enough to press them and make them spit out some silver."

At this moment, a caretaker came over and reported, "Sir, there's a fatty at the door wishing to see you. He said he's the district magistrate of Qingyang city. These are his documents."

Zhou Wenbin smiled. "Looks like your old boss is here."

Li Qingshan smiled as well. "Maintaining peace in the city is the job of the vice magistrates in the first place. Wouldn't sending sir Ye instead of me be more appropriate?"

Zhou Wenbin waved his hand. "You go tell him that. I'm going to start cultivating, so let him know to see me tomorrow." Clearly, he did not take an ordinary person like Ye Dachuan seriously. All he needed to do was pay him a little more silver for the sake of the prefect.

Li Qingshan arrived at the front of the government office. He saw Ye Dachuan pointing around with the advisor. "Look, now this is a big city. Big cities are just different. Although it's a little worse compared to Clear River city, it's way better than that sh*tty place of Qingyang." The advisor was delighted as well as he stood beside him. Finally, he felt like he had achieved some success after following this fatty.

"Sir Ye, it has been quite a few days. How have you been?"

Ye Dachuan turned around and saw Li Qingshan in his Black Wolf uniform. Although he knew Li Qingshan had actually become one, he still could not help himself. "Y- you've really..."

Li Qingshan smiled. "I have great riches and honour to give you! Do you want it or not?"

Chapter 132 - The Clouds Disperse and the Rain Scatters

Why would Ye Dachuan decline? He agreed to it in a hurry as he grabbed Li Qingshan by the hands. "You truly are my bringer of good fortune, no, nobleman!" He remembered how Li Qingshan's current status was already completely different from before.

Li Qingshan asked, "Where are protector Yan and the others?"

Ye Dachuan said, "They've returned to the Iron Fist school to tidy up. The Iron Fist school of Jiaping city said they wanted to visit you later at night, but I never thought I would see you first."

Over a dozen guards arrived behind Li Qingshan. "Sir Li!"

Li Qingshan smiled. "This would be your sir Ye!"

"Sir Ye!"

Standing in front of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, Ye Dachuan was excited. Would he be visiting the largest, most luxurious brothel on his first day in Jiaping?"

Li Qingshan said, "Sir Ye, don't forget that we've come here today to make trouble."

Ye Dachuan replied, "I haven't forgotten, I haven't forgotten. Squeezing money out of them is our priority." Afterwards, he ordered righteously, "Charge in and sweep through this whorehouse!"

"Yes, sir!" The guards charged in like wolves and tigers, startling all the women in there. The guards came out, but when they saw the bringer of disaster, Li Qingshan, none of them were bold enough to stop them.

Ye Dachuan borrowed Li Qingshan's might. "Where's your boss? Where is he?"

A lady said fearfully, "We don't know either."

Ye Dachuan said, "Search!"

Li Qingshan stood aside and watched on as the group of guards from the government searched through the entire parlour. He quietly reminded Ye Dachuan. "Looks like they've already fled. There might be a treasury or something here, just like the Black Wind stronghold."

Ye Dachuan's eyes immediately lit up when he heard the word treasury. "Search the cellar!" With his sharp instincts towards money, he found the mechanism in just a while even without any further hints from Li Qingshan, opening up the door to the underground palace.

Ye Dachuan looked at the murky door and became slightly afraid, but his desire for treasure still triumphed. He ordered the group of government guards to enter first before pulling Li Qingshan along with him.

As expected, they found the imprisoned girls very soon, proving the guilt of the Parlour of Clouds and Rains. As for Zhao Liangqing and Furong's disappearance, they were obviously explained to have fled from justice.

Ye Dachuan was not disappointed either. Although Li Qingshan had taken away their hundred treasures pouches, the underground palace still contained much gold and silverware, as well as general treasure. It amounted to quite a fortune.

"Congratulations, sir Ye. You've done a great service as soon as you've arrived in Jiaping city." Li Qingshan smiled as he raised his head and looked at the paintings of dancing and floating women. He casually drew his Wind-entwining blade and tossed it out, brushing past the tip of a parlour guard's nose and slamming into the wall near the entrance.

"If you don't explain what we found today, no one is allowed to leave. You'll be executed without mercy." Zhao Liangqing would have never personally carried out the abductions. These guards and hired thugs would definitely be involved in the matter.

"What! Zhao Liangqing has vanished?" Zhuo Zhibo leapt up as he looked at Ge Jian who reported to him.

Ge Jian said, "Yes. Today, Li Qingshan took out a few accounts from the parlour and requested for a warrant from Zhou Wenbin to search the parlour again. In the end, not only were Zhao Liangqing and Furong absent, but they even found the abducted girls in the underground palace. They've already been taken back to the district government office. After being questioned by Zhou Wenbin, he has already judged Zhao Liangqing to be guilty and ordered for his capture. He has also confiscated all of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain's property."

Zhuo Zhibo sat down slowly. There was something off about all of this. As long as Zhao Liangqing remained here, there would be a time when he made a return. No one would be able to convict him. Had he returned to the sect to report this matter and come up with a countermeasure against this, which was why Li Qingshan managed to get the opportunity to do all this?

He struggled to understand this affair. For a second, he even suspected Zhao Liangqing was dead, but he dismissed this thought immediately. Who was able to kill Zhao Liangqing? He had already reached the peak of the fifth layer, only a step away from becoming a sixth layer Qi Practitioner. In all of Jiaping city, the only people who could kill him were Zhuo Zhibo himself and Zhou Wenbin. However, Zhou Wenbin would never take such a risk and become enemies with the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

Only a bastard like Li Qingshan would be bold enough to be so reckless, but it had already been mentioned more than enough times that Li Qingshan was just a first layer Qi Practitioner. He was not Zhao Liangqing's opponent.

Qian Rongzhi seemed to be in thought. Li Qingshan was basically a bringer of misfortune. Just last night, Zhuo Zhibo had set down a trap in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, yet today, the parlour had been destroyed.

Zhou Wenbin had never expected such an outcome after just sending a few people to harass them a little either. The Parlour of Clouds and Rain was reduced to an empty shell. The girls all explained what they went through tearfully, exposing the many acts of violence the Parlour of Clouds and Rain had committed and identifying many servants and guards involved. Meanwhile, Zhao Liangqing and Furong were the two people behind it all.

He did not even need to report this to Clear River city. Zhou Wenbin's authority in Jiaping was basically unmatched, so with an order, over a dozen heads struck the ground, beheaded cleanly. Several dozen people were also thrown into jail. Afterwards, he ordered for Zhao Liangqing and Furong's arrest, and only then did he write a report to Clear River city for the prefect to question the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Your disciples have committed such crimes, so you need to explain yourselves at the very least.

Since they were under the reign of the Great Xia empire, they were forced to accept and abide by its laws. At a time like this, even the Sect of Clouds and Rain would be forced to expel Zhao Liangqing and the others to distance themselves from the matter.

With Zhou Wenbin's prompt action, it only took him an afternoon to utterly amaze Li Qingshan. "Very impressive of you, sir."

Zhou Wenbin paced around as he asked softly, "Tell me honestly. Were you behind this or not?"

Li Qingshan said, "Only if I had the strength."

Zhou Wenbin stared at him for a while and saw nothing from Li Qingshan's expression. This was just an idea he came up with on the spot as well, feeling that Li Qingshan would be involved somehow. He patted Li Qingshan on the shoulder. "Alright then. You have pretty good luck."

At this moment, Qian Rongzhi and Diao Fei arrived at the government office as well to report to Zhou Wenbin.

Qian Rongzhi recovered her friendly manner. "How imposing of you last night, Qingshan. You really shouldn't have done all of that without me. We joined together, so how could you not call me along?"

However, Diao Fei finally began to understand Li Qingshan's dispute with Zhuo Zhibo. He was not bold enough to offend Li Qingshan, nor did he want to be on good terms with him, so he made do with a quick greeting.

Li Qingshan smiled at them and could not be bothered to answer. He bid farewell to Zhou Wenbin. After which, Ye Dachuan pulled him away to go find Yan Song for a celebration.

Diao Fei called out from behind, "Qingshan, hold on."

Li Qingshan looked back. "What's the matter?"

Diao Fei actually felt his heart skip a beat. This teenager who was more than just a few years younger than him actually made him feel fear. However, he had weathered many trials in the past after all. As such, after taking in a deep breath, he immediately composed himself. He was not a piece of trash inexperienced with battle like the procuress. He refused to believe he was not Li Qingshan's opponent if they really did end up fighting with his strength at the third layer.

"From tomorrow onwards, we have to carry out a trial mission together. Shouldn't we discuss it tonight?"

Li Qingshan frowned. "Together? A trial mission?" He had no interest in being stuck with the two of them.

Zhou Wenbin explained, "This has always been a rule of the Hawkwolf Guard. After joining the Hawkwolf Guard, you need to go through a few trial missions before you're actually accepted. Afterwards, you'll have to go to Clear River city and meet the two commanders. Normally, there are very few people who fail the trial missions. Most of the time, it's just a formality. However, if you don't accept it, it'll give Zhuo Zhibo a reason to expel you."

Li Qingshan understood that there were rules within the system. He said while standing there, "Alright, we can discuss it." He was very curious about just what mission Zhuo Zhibo would give them.

They stated their backgrounds for the sake of formality. "Qian family of the Ancient Wind city." A clan as tiny as that obviously did not raise Zhou Wenbin's attention, but when he asked about Diao Fei's background, the reply he received left him slightly surprised. "Green Vine mountain? Your master's the Green Vine Elder?"

"Yes!"

"Did your master agree to you joining the Hawkwolf Guard?" The reason why Zhou Wenbin asked that was because clans were different from sects. Clans were all established in cities. They were under the reign of the empire and were willing for their clansmen to become a part of the empire. However, most sects were located in mountains or the wilderness, so they had their own rules that they followed. Most of them were reluctant for their disciples to become the hawk and wolves of the empire.

Diao Fei's face sank, reaching an even darker skin tone, and his slanted eyes directly slanted upwards.

Zhou Wenbin did not ask any further. He put down his brush. "You can go now."

After leaving the government office, Ye Dachuan said, "You must both be the young talents of the Hawkwolf Guard as well. I am Ye Dachuan, a vice magistrate of this district. Seeing how we've run into each other, would you like to go drinking with us?"

Qian Rongzhi and Diao Fei both looked at Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan said, "Let's go." Both of them agreed to it.

The four of them walked along the main street. Although it was near dusk, people still bustled about. However, they would see their Black Wolf uniforms and avoid them from a distance away. Even carriages would temporarily stop, afraid of getting in their way.

Only then did Li Qingshan realise that the Black Wolf uniform was actually so mighty. He arrived at the restaurant that Ye Dachuan had agreed on with Yan Song and the others, entering a private room upstairs. Yan Song and Li Long had already been waiting there. When they saw Li Qingshan, they stood up in a hurry. "Qingshan, you travelled so quickly."

Li Qingshan casually introduced his two colleagues, and Yan Song said, "So you both come from great backgrounds. Nice to meet you." However, he felt slightly taken aback inside. Out of the three of them, Li Qingshan had the weakest cultivation and background, yet they seemed to follow him as their leader without any objections at all.

Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi greeted them out of courtesy as well. With their cultivation and identities, there was no need for them to take Yan Song too seriously.

After a few cups of alcohol, Yan Song asked Li Qingshan about his cultivation of the Innate Method of Practising Qi.

Li Qingshan said, "I've just reached the third layer. I probably need some more time before I can reach the fourth."

Yan Song was surprised. The Innate Method of Practising Qi would increase with difficulty. He was not very surprised by how Li Qingshan could understand the first layer so quickly and reach the second layer, but after just a few days, he had actually broken through to the third layer already. This speed was truly rather surprising. "It has only been seven or eight days. I originally thought your talent for cultivation was only so-so, Qingshan, but I never thought I had actually underestimated you."

"What! Seven or eight days?" Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi were both stunned. Only then did they learn that it had not even been ten days since Li Qingshan formally began practising qi, yet he had already reached the third layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi. He was basically a cultivation genius mentioned in the legends.

Li Qingshan smiled and did not provide any explanations. Who knew how many Qi Gathering pills he had eaten, and he had the sumeru ring of a Golden Core master to refine his true qi. If he failed to achieve something like this, his talent would just be far too mediocre.

Chapter 133 - Pushing for the Second Layer

When Yan Song heard about Li Qingshan's actions during the past two days, he became so shocked that his mouth hung agape. The Sect of Clouds and Rain was powerful. Even with the entire Clear River prefecture in perspective, it was one of the stronger sects, an existence that far surpassed the Green Vine mountain and the Qian family. Even the Iron Fist school came nowhere close to it.

The main Parlour of Clouds and Rain was established in Clear River city. It was a place where the powerful and affluent visited, and they had acquaintances far and wide. Even the vice commander Hua of the Hawkwolf Guard would frequently visit there. It was said that he was the closest with the sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain.

Li Qingshan had actually offended them, no, destroyed the Parlour of Clouds and Rain as soon as he had arrived in Jiaping city. He was utterly audacious.

Li Qingshan said, "I was only seeking justice." He subconsciously pressed the sheath of his Wind-entwining blade. He already knew where justice lay.

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It was a moonless night. All was silent. In the pitch-black residence, Li Qingshan sat with crossed legs and closed eyes.

True qi constantly circulated through his body. He followed the method provided by the third layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi, circulating it along his meridians. Even with the assistance of the Qi Gathering pills, it grew at an extremely gradual rate now.

He wore the sumeru ring on his finger. It did not stand out in the darkness, nor did it react when Li Qingshan channeled in his pure true qi.

It was like he was guarding a great treasure room, but he could not go in and take a look. He could only pace around the entrance, guessing at its contents.

He could resist the temptation of the wealth a Golden Core master had accumulated over many years, but he was unable to resist what the black ox had mentioned before it had left. "I've left something in there for you."

The black ox could give such a terrifying ability of the demonic path like the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty to Xiao An, so since he had told him about this in such a solemn matter, just what treasure would it be?

Would it be a legendary weapon? A tremendous, supreme ability? Or a miraculous pill or medicine that could allow him to ascend and reach beyond the Nine Heavens upon ingesting it?

He was afraid of thinking about it normally. The more he thought about it, the more restless he would become. He sighed inside, Brother ox, oh brother ox. Just what did you leave for me? Couldn't you have given it to me directly? Must you make things difficult for me? I'm even forced to open the sumeru ring through the methods of humans. Back then, it was you who wanted to turn me into a daemon, so I turned into a daemon.

Although that was how he lamented, he felt like the black ox definitely had his reasons for this. The black ox must have expected him to return to human society as a human, which was why he gave him a trial like this. Did he want him to accomplish something with human cultivation?

He was unable to understand why, so he just stopped thinking about it. He needed this identity as a human. In just the past two days he had spent in Jiaping city, he had obtained over a hundred Qi Gathering pills. The stronger he grew, the easier it would be for him to obtain pills and the safer he would be.

At the end of the day, he still could not depend on transforming in public. Most of the time, he would still have to rely on his path of practising qi, but the first layer of Qi Practitioner was just too weak.

He suddenly stopped cultivating. The essential ideas behind the fourth layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi floated through his head slowly, word for word. All of it was extremely clear.

He was attempting to open the Yang Heel meridian of the eight extraordinary meridians so that he could break through to the second layer of Qi Practitioner. This would be the first meridian he had to open, and it would also mean that he would formally set foot in the path of practising qi. It could be said that the significance behind this was utterly different from the first three layers of the Innate Method of Practising Qi.

Under the control of his mind, his true qi flowed into his left leg like water, sinking to his ankle, to the Shenmai acupoint. This was the beginning of the Yang Heel meridian. If he wanted to open the Yang Heel meridian, this was where the door for opening it lied.

He no longer sat on his bed with his legs crossed. Instead, he maintained a strange posture, where he leaned forward on his arms and legs with his left leg extended. It looked like some sort of yoga pose.

Xiao An had originally been crouching beside the bed, directing all his focus to the pile of buddhist scriptures and classics that Li Qingshan had brought back for him, but now, he had placed down his books and was watching Li Qingshan carefully.

What Li Qingshan wanted to do was knock on the door!

True qi rushed towards the Shenmai acupoint wave after wave, but the door remained firmly shut, without any intention of opening up. Let alone opening the acupoint, he could not even shake it up.

He knew his accumulation of true qi was still not enough. He had yet to reach the peak of the first layer with his quantity of true qi. The ordinary method would be to continue accumulating true qi over time, and in just a few months' time, the true qi in his body would become like a great river, easily smashing through the obstructing dam.

What he was trying to do right now was to smash through the dam as a tiny stream, so it was truly difficult. However, just like how he would eventually succeed but all he could do was control the present, he had to give it a try and make an attempt. Only then would he be satisfied. He chewed up another Qi Gathering pill to replenish his true qi.

After several attempts, he failed to benefit at all, so he finally stopped. However, he did not give up. Instead, he concentrated on controlling his true qi; he constantly concentrated it further, turning it from a stream into ice, into a long spear. It became a hundred times smaller, but also a hundred times tougher.

Afterwards, when he could not condense it any further, the ice spear rushed towards the great dam in an unstoppable manner.

There was a sudden sting of pain from the bottom of his foot, but Li Qingshan completely ignored it. Instead, he was joyfully surprised. This time, the true qi had not been blocked. It stabbed into the Shenmai acupoint, and under his control, it inched deeper with great difficulty.

A gentle sound seemed to ring through his body. A hole formed in the dam that blocked the stream as true qi rapidly surged through the Yang Heel meridian.

A speck of light suddenly lit up inside him, like the first star in the endless cosmos.

Before Li Qingshan could even celebrate, the true qi slapped into another obstacle, the Pushen meridian, also located near his ankle.

The true qi shattered upon collision and did not condense together again. Under the invisible pressure of the Yang Heel meridian, it was forced back out.

He failed in opening his meridian!

Even the Shenmai acupoint he opened closed up once more.

Li Qingshan breathed in heavily. Who knows how many times Yan Song had called him a cultivation prodigy, but he could not even open his first meridian today, even struggling to reach the second layer of Qi Practitioner. Only then did he understand that the path of practising qi would not be simple.

In comparison, daemon cultivation was much more mindless. All they had to do was inhale and exhale spiritual qi of the world or ingest spiritual medicines and pills so that their daemon qi would constantly grow. Once they reached a certain level, they would condense a daemon core automatically. The cultivation that came after that would be the same as before, constantly gathering daemon qi in the daemon core. Upon reaching another certain level, there would be a crackle of heavenly lightning. If they survived, they would become Daemon Generals. If they failed, they would be burnt to a crisp. It was as simple as that.

Most daemons began as wild beasts or even plants, cultivating based on their instincts. If the entire process required even just a tiny bit of intelligence and thought, there would be no daemons in this world.

However, while it was simple, it took time. Let alone plants, even if an ordinary wild beast in nature wanted to become a Daemon General, it would take them a century at the very least. Moreover, they would have to eat a spiritual medicine at least on par with the spiritual ginseng to have a chance. There were plenty of daemons who took several centuries.

Opening meridians was both a gift from the heavens to humans, as well as a shortcut that humans had discovered. However, no matter how great of a shortcut it was, he still had to take one step at a time.

In the eyes of other Qi Practitioners, a person like Li Qingshan was utterly out of his mind. He had only practised qi for a few days and already wanted to open his meridians, even sighing about how difficult it was to practise qi after failing.

However, Li Qingshan did not become discouraged. He grabbed a Qi Gathering pill and shoved it in his mouth first, but he did not eat it. He tried to break through again.

With his experience from the first time, it was much easier for him to rush through the Shenmai acupoint, but after that, he dared not lose his concentration. Chomping down, he crushed the Qi Gathering pill. As he replenished his true qi, he focused on the next obstacle.

Four hours passed. He had eaten a total of twenty-five Qi Gathering pills and had attempted to break through thirteen times already. The greatest attempt so far was rushing through three acupoints in the leg, the Shenmai acupoint, Pushen acupoint, and Fuyang acupoint. The true qi flowed through his left leg like an unstoppable stream, but it was blocked again once it reached the Jūliáo acupoint in his hip.

Once he was blocked, it would be like working against the flow, making it recede. The true qi would be directly pushed out, and the connected acupoints would close up again. There were a total of twelve acupoints within the Yang Heel meridian. Regular Qi Practitioners probably would choose to give up now.

But not Li Qingshan. The effects of the pill he could not absorb in time would all go to the daemon core anyway. The daemon core never cared about what went its way. If there was anything, it would absorb it, so he had no need to worry about being wasteful, much less about any potential issues due to an accumulation of unabsorbed medicinal effects. As a result, Li Qingshan became more and more fearless with his experiments. Succeeding was good, but failing was not necessarily bad either.

He could feel that the acupoints he had opened would become slightly easier to open the next time he tried, even if they had closed up again. Through this process, Li Qingshan had built up quite a lot of experience. He had also gained an even deeper understanding of the Innate Method of Practising Qi.

After some consideration, Li Qingshan took out a pill. It seemed like the clear dew on flower petals at dawn. It was not a Qi Gathering pill, but the Pearl Dew pill he had received from Diao Fei. This was the pill that Diao Fei had been saving up for his push to the fourth layer. It was rather wasteful for pushing to the second layer of Qi Practitioner, but it was perfect for Li Qingshan, who had not taken his time with accumulating true qi.

However, if he failed this time, it would be a waste of a good pill.

Li Qingshan did not hesitate much. He decided to gamble on it.

When the Pear Dew pill slid down his throat, Li Qingshan even clearly felt the coolness and fullness of the pill, but once it reached his belly, it turned into a raging flood.

The flood fused into his true qi, immediately turning the tiny stream into a turbulent river. It surged through the Shenmai, Pushen, and Fuyang acupoints with basically no resistance at all. Next, it made a twist and gushed through the Jūliào acupoint, arriving at the Naoshu acupoint behind his shoulder. Only then was there a slight resistance.

However, Li Qingshan had already concentrated all his attention on this, so how could he just stop there? He rushed through the Naoshu, Jianyu, and Jugu acupoints near his shoulder one after another.

At this moment, the true qi began to show signs of weakening, but he had already been prepared for this. He ate Qi Gathering pills one after another without stopping, urging on the true qi to extend through the Dicang, Jūliào, Chengqi, and Jingming acupoints.

The true qi was extremely close to the brain now, which required great caution. Many Qi Practitioners would momentarily lose control and have the true qi rush into their brains, mentally incapacitating them. Obviously, Li Qingshan did not want to experience a fate like that.

Despite how scary it was, no harm was caused in the end. He rushed through the four acupoints, and in his body, eleven specks of light lit up, like stars in the dark cosmos. They were joined by a faint trajectory of light, like a star map.

He finally saw the final point on the star map. It was the Fengchi acupoint located at the back of his head. As long as he linked up this acupoint, he would have opened the Yang Heel meridian, forging a

highway for true qi through his body. He would have reached the second layer of Qi Practitioner, as it was known among humans, as well.

However, his true qi had already run out. The replenishing effects of the Qi Gathering pill were unable to reach so far. It was just like an army that had its supply chain cut off. They could collapse at any time.

All he felt was exhaustion, as if he had just gone through an extremely tough journey during that time. He could clearly see the end, but he was unable to take a step further. The moment when his true qi collided with the Fengchi acupoint would be the moment when all of his efforts would go to waste, but he was unable to stop his true qi.

Did he fail?

Chapter 134 - The Second Layer of Qi Practitioner

With a Diamond Sutra cast aside on the ground, Xiao An leapt behind Li Qingshan and placed a bone finger on the Fengchi acupoint on the back of the latter's head.

He seemed to hear the chiming of bells.

True qi rushed towards its final target, that great untraversable dam. Afterwards, it easily seeped through as if there was not an impenetrable wall blocking its way, but a soft sponge instead.

The final speck of light lit up, expanding in all directions like river water returning to the ocean. True qi flowed through the Yang Heel meridian constantly with no more obstruction anymore.

Li Qingshan had finally opened his first meridian, reaching the second layer of Qi Practitioner.

The Yang Heel meridian was like a highway, stretched from his head to his foot through his body, forming a passageway through his entire body. The acupoints were no longer closed. Instead, as every single one of them lit up, his whole body experienced change.

Li Qingshan opened his eyes. His surroundings became clearer and brighter than before, as if a layer of dust had been wiped away. The chirps of the summer insects outside his window were clear and layered. He even felt like he could count just how many insects were chirping. From time to time, a leaf would be blown off a tree, landing on the tiles of the roof. It would be as clear as a clap of thunder.

His sense of smell had increased by the least, but he could smell the fragrance of each flower outside the window, and the grass outside gave off a grassy smell from being baked by the hot, humid, summer night. As for his sense of taste, he knew it had become much stronger even without testing.

This was the strengthening of his five senses that came with the opening of the Dicang, Jùliào, Chengqi, and Qingming acupoints.

When he got up off his bed and stepped on the ground, there seemed to be a layer of air cushioning his feet. His body had become extremely light. He felt like as long as he used a little bit of force, he could fly through the sky. These were the changes brought on by the Shenmai, Pushen, and Fuyang acupoints on the bottom of his foot.

He casually raised his arm, and the Naoshu, Jianyu, and Jugu acupoints lit up. True qi flowed through his arm naturally to his hand, bursting out from his palm and striking the wall from afar. It left behind a hand print.

Every single movement seemed so smooth and natural. He personally felt like the meridian had connected his whole body together. Who knows how much faster he could circulate his true qi now.

It was like when emperor Yang of Sui completed the Grand Canal, connecting north and south, allowing people to move and transport goods freely. His efforts prompted economic exchange across the entire country. These acupoints were all like important hubs for transport.

However, none of these hubs seemed as important as the Fengchi acupoint, as the qi of the body was not all it was connected to.

Fengchi, or Wind Pool, was where wind evil accumulated. As mentioned in the Fundamentals of Nature: Acupoints along skeletal indentations, wind is the primary cause of all diseases. Once wind evil entered the brain, it would cause all types of diseases. As a result, it was an extremely important acupoint within the human body.

The moment he opened the Fengchi acupoint, some qi seemed to surge out as if he had opened a new cavity apart from his mouth and nose, allowing him to breathe. However, he was not breathing air, but the qi of the world.

Of course, this was not exactly connecting with the spiritual qi of the world, but it was the first time he had sensed the existence of the spiritual qi of the world. It was just like wind, a qi that constantly flowed around.

When he used the mental cultivation method that came with the fourth layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi, a gust of 'wind' would enter his body from the back of his head from time to time, reaching all the way to his feet. He could not help but shudder before feeling pleasure spread through his body.

On the back of the heads of wild beasts was a horizontal bone, the Henggu. Once they refined it, they would awaken their intelligence. As for humans, they had a Fengchi on the back of their heads. Opening the Fengchi allowed them to connect with the world.

Li Qingshan exhaled gently. The art of practising qi that humans created was extremely impressive. And, he could feel that practising qi provided assistance to daemon cultivators as well, just like how his physical strength would increase naturally once his daemon body became larger.

The two supplemented one another in a positive feedback loop.

Did brother ox leave the thing for me in the sumeru ring and encourage me to practise qi because he wanted me to merge these two different cultivation methods so that I can find my own path? Li Qingshan guessed. However, no matter what path he took, he was still a tiny shrimp who had just set off. He was nowhere close to achieving that.

There was a saying that the rocks from other mountains were tough enough to shape jade. He would be sitting between two of these mountains and having them rub and collide with one another. Just what kind of sparks could he produce?

Note: Rocks from other mountains are tough enough to shape jade is basically saying that the advice of others can benefit you. In other words, it's referring to other people or things (or cultivation methods in this case) that can improve you.

Li Qingshan suppressed his eagerness and delight as he said to Xiao An, "Did you help me out earlier?" It was definitely not a coincidence for him to be able to open his Fengchi meridian so easily.

The blood flames in Xiao An's eyes were rather dim. His finger from earlier had drained him substantially.

While Li Qingshan was cultivating with his eyes closed, he watched slowly and gradually, his gaze managed to pierce Li Qingshan's skin and muscles, akin to what modern radiography could achieve, looking through Li Qingshan's body clearly. However, it was also clearer and more vivid than anything radiographic imaging could produce.

He saw the existence of the meridian and saw how Li Qingshan's true qi constantly climbed upwards. Eventually, it climbed to the very top and rushed towards the Fengchi meridian at the back of his head. However, it clearly did not have the power to open it.

As a result, at that critical moment, he poked the Fengchi meridian.

By the human body, one really was just referring to a combination of bone and flesh. Even the wondrous meridians and profound acupoints were based on flesh. The Path of White Bone and Great Beauty could control both flesh and bone.

Xiao An's current cultivation was still too weak. He had yet to even reach the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. If he did, just a single finger of his would be enough to shatter bone and peel off flesh. Although he still did not have that kind of strength, he was able to lend Li Qingshan a helping hand at his time of need.

He needed to be extremely careful with the finger. The back of the head was already a weak point of the human body. If he messed up, it was very likely for him to kill Li Qingshan. If it were not for the toughness of Li Qingshan's body, Xiao An would have never been bold enough to attempt such an action. It had also drained away all of his mental energy, making him even more tired than after a fight against a terrifying daemonic beast.

Xiao An held a wolf-hair brush and finished writing. Only then did Li Qingshan learn the whole story. He could not help but become speechless. "Isn't the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty a little far too powerful? If I had your help, wouldn't it be much easier for me to practise qi?"

Xiao An shook his head. He dipped his brush in ink and wrote four words. "Haste is not speed."

Li Qingshan said, "Really? I want to finish the Innate Method of Practising Qi sooner, and then switch to a new cultivation method."

Xiao An asked Li Qingshan a few questions regarding the Innate Method of Practising Qi through the paper.

Li Qingshan actually did not know how to answer them. Only then did he discover that he had yet to understand the Innate Method of Practising Qi completely. Afterwards, he asked in surprise, “You’ve practised the Innate Method of Practising Qi before as well?”

Xiao An shook his head before nodding. Afterwards, he wrote away.

As it turned out, Xiao An had been listening along silently when Yan Song passed the Innate Method of Practising Qi to Li Qingshan, which he found to be rather familiar. Now that he had witnessed Li Qingshan break through to the second layer of Qi Practitioner tonight, this sense of familiarity grew stronger. He naturally understood many important aspects that came with practising the Innate Method of Practising Qi, comprehending its essentials. Afterwards, he found that Li Qingshan’s method of practising seemed to deviate from it slightly, so he could not help but ask him a few questions.

Originally, Li Qingshan did not find the Innate Method of Practising Qi to be very profound or complicated, but after seeing the points that Xiao An mentioned, he felt like he had suddenly been enlightened. He was like a primary school student who had just started going to school with regards to the path of practising qi, practising addition keenly, but suddenly, the times tables descended upon him.

He rubbed Xiao An’s head and smiled bitterly. “Looks like my talent for comprehension really is horrid!”

Actually, Li Qingshan’s comprehension was not that bad. Instead, the problem was that he had never received guidance from anybody on the path of practising qi.

The path of cultivation was about four words—wealth, companionship, method, and environment. Companionship ranked second, which mostly referred to master-disciple relationships. Every single person required the guidance of a senior so that they could stand on the shoulder of giants. It would always take much less effort compared to fumbling around by themselves.

Xiao An was not using his natural talent for comprehension, but much of the knowledge hidden deep within his memories.

Xiao An was immediately left at a loss as for how to comfort him. Li Qingshan smiled. “I’ll have to rely on your guidance in the future then. Though, I must say, it’s far too inconvenient, but it’ll be fine once you reconstruct your body. Don’t worry, it won’t be too long.”

Li Qingshan continued to meditate, following Xiao An’s guidance and going through the first to the fourth layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi again, stabilising his current cultivation bit by bit.

A few Qi Gathering pills were obviously eaten during the process. Afterwards, he discovered that he had less than thirty Qi Gathering pills on him now, immediately dropping from being well-off to just being able to make ends meet. This was the price that came with walking two paths. He probably would not have much income in the foreseeable future, so he had to carefully calculate and budget his remaining Qi Gathering pills.

The sky lit up. There was knocking on the door, and Li Qingshan went downstairs, opening up. All he saw was Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi standing at the entrance. He asked, “What’s the matter?”

Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi were about to speak, but they ended up forgetting what they were going to say. They stared at Li Qingshan in shock as they said in disbelief, “Y- you’ve broken through to the second layer?” Just the night before, they had been amazed by Li Qingshan’s cultivation speed, yet

today, he had taken them by surprise again. It was just like how Li Qingshan sighed to Xiao An about his horrible talent for comprehension. Jealousy was the only thing Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi could feel right now.

Li Qingshan nodded in an unconcerned manner. "Yeah, I spent some time cultivating. If there isn't anything else, I'm going back to cultivating." With that, he was about to close the door.

"Hold on, didn't we discuss this last night? The trial mission!"

Li Qingshan remembered it. "Oh, I almost forgot."

The two of them congratulated Li Qingshan reluctantly. Afterwards, Li Qingshan tidied himself up slightly, bringing along Xiao An before going with the two of them to receive the mission.

The Black Wolf guards they came across along the way were all surprised when they saw Li Qingshan, all congratulating him with various expressions. After all, there was no matter more joyous than a breakthrough to cultivators. No matter how they thought of him, they could not lack common courtesy.

At the same time, there was respect towards strength. Second layer Qi Practitioners formed the very bottom of the Hawkwolf Guard, but Li Qingshan was a tough figure who managed to easily defeat a second layer Qi Practitioner and even frighten third layer Qi Practitioners while he was at the first layer. Now that he had broken through again, he had basically become one of the stronger people in the Hawkwolf Guard of Jiaping city.

Arriving in the main office of the Hawkwolf Guard, Zhuo Zhibo waited for them there in person. It was a tradition for the commander to personally give the first trial mission to newcomers. When he saw Li Qingshan, he was surprised at first before smiling. "You've broken through again. You really are young and promising. Your future prospects are immeasurable."

Li Qingshan cut to the chase and said, "I was just lucky. Commander Zhuo, may I ask what our trial mission is?"

Zhuo Zhibo waved his hand, and an envoy in black passed a document to him. Li Qingshan unfurled it, and even with his mental fortitude, he could not help but be stunned.

Chapter 135 - A Thousand Qi Gathering Pills

If Zhuo Zhibo was plotting to murder him and wanted to send Li Qingshan to a dangerous place, he would not have been so surprised.

However, it was clearly written in crimson ink on the top of the document—the Qian family of Ancient Wind city!

Diao Fei and Li Qingshan looked at Qian Rongzhi at the same time. Qian Rongzhi was not surprised at all. She continued to smile like before.

Zhuo Zhibo said, "You don't need to wonder anymore. Rongzhi has placed the greater good over her family. She has reported the various misdeeds and crimes that the Qian family have committed against the law of Great Xia. All of it is written there."

Diao Fei also looked at the document in Li Qingshan's hand, which listed the many crimes of the Qian family. Some tenant farmers had caused trouble because the rent for the farm was too high, so the Qian family killed off all their families overnight. A woman caught the eye of Qian Yannian on the streets. He knew that she was already married, so after the family rejected his demands for her, he directly ordered the execution of the husband and her abduction, forcing her into becoming a concubine of his. As a matter of fact, a district magistrate had even been killed because he refused to serve as a puppet. Several dozen crimes were listed in a neat manner. All of them were horrible crimes punishable with death.

Diao Fei came from a sect, so he had never had so many people around him all the time. Although the sect also resided in the darkness, its deeds were never so disgusting. He could not help but ask, "Is this true?"

However, Li Qingshan did not doubt the veracity of these crimes. The Qian family dominated Ancient Wind city. There were no organisations that could keep them at bay. With absolute power came absolute corruption, so it would not be strange no matter what they did. He just found it strange that Qian Rongzhi would do this.

He mumbled, "Putting the greater good over family?" Was Qian Rongzhi trying to lure him to the territory of the Qian family, and then plot to kill him? That would be the most logical conclusion. However, doing so would drag her own family into trouble. Just what was Qian Rongzhi planning? Could there be any fate apart from destruction awaiting the Qian family after making it onto the list of the Hawkwolf Guard?

Li Qingshan continued to look through the document. Below listed the cultivation of the various people of the Qian family. The first on the list was the patriarch of the Qian family, Qian Yannian. He was a fifth layer Qi Practitioner. There were no fourth layer Qi Practitioners, but there were two at the third layer, five at the second layer, and thirteen at the first layer.

Li Qingshan raised his head. "Commander Zhuo, isn't this a little too difficult for our first trial mission?" At the very least, he could tell from the surface that the three of them were not a force that could shake up the Qian family.

"Really?" Zhuo Zhibo looked at Li Qingshan as if he wanted to see any traces related to Zhao Liangqing's death from his face. However, the result only disappointed him. "We can't just listen to everything we hear. As a result, the mission this time is not to kill, but to investigate. If Rongzhi was right, then report back, and I will personally clean them up. Qian Yannian's birthday is in a few days' time. You will be going under the guise of attending the birthday, and with Rongzhi coordinating with you from the outside, this cannot be any simpler."

Li Qingshan said, "I'm just worried it won't be that simple."

Zhuo Zhibo continued to chuckle. "All of the missions from the Hawkwolf Guard have their risks. However, with greater risks comes greater rewards. Why don't you have a look at the second page?"

Li Qingshan turned to the second page of the document. It was actually an analysis of property, detailing the expected pills, spiritual artifacts, and various other benefits that would come from destroying the Qian family. In particular, there was a special note that the benefits might become even greater after

the birthday. It was impossible for them to learn so much detail if they did not have someone from the Qian family on their side.

Zhuo Zhibo explained patiently, "If you find out that it's all true, I obviously do hope that you could directly settle this matter. It'll save me some trouble. Although Qian Yannian is a fifth layer Qi Practitioner, he is already extremely advanced in age, so he's nowhere close to his prime. According to the rules, everything you gain from a mission belongs to you. Originally, trial missions don't offer contribution, but if you really do succeed this time, I will give you five hundred points of contribution each."

Li Qingshan said, "This seems like something I can't decline. Fine then, I'll accept the mission. When do we set off?" Declining was pointless anyway. Since Zhuo Zhibo was still maintaining his calm on the surface, he would let him continue doing so. No matter how many schemes there would be, he would confront them head on and break through them with force. He wanted to see just what traps could handle a daemon like him.

"Right now!"

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On the raging waters of Clear river, a two-storeyed sailboat pierced through the waves. The sails depicted a tiercel with its wings unfolded. This was a boat exclusive to the Hawkwolf Guard. Its design was ingenious, and it was put together with great precision. The internal decor was extravagant, and its performance was even more extraordinary. It could sail against the flow and still move much faster than the great ship that Li Qingshan had previously taken. As it travelled through the water, all other boats would avoid it, and even those great ships were no exception.

A teenager sat on the railing of the ship as he seemed to admire the scenery of the shores. From time to time, waves would sweep up and drench his clothes. He played around with a few spiritual stones in his hand; he seemed distracted.

Li Qingshan was thinking over the plan with this mission, but he clearly was not someone wise. He was unable to devise strategies, only react to changing circumstances. However, there was one thing he was certain about. It was no longer appropriate for him to revert to his daemon form, or even if he managed to hide it from the public, he would still raise suspicion. However, he believed his own strength was more than enough to handle most situations.

"Sirs, the two other sirs have invited you to the cabin!" A boatman made his way over and said politely.

Li Qingshan returned to the cabin and Diao Fei said politely, "Qingshan, let's discuss our plan."

Li Qingshan said, "You'd better just ask her. Qian Rongzhi, just what are you planning? Do you want to lure me into Ancient Wind city to kill me? To avenge your unlucky elder brother?"

Qian Rongzhi smiled obsequiously. "Are you that easy to kill? You've finally admitted that you killed Qian Rongming! Originally, I thought it was Diao Fei, but turns out it was you. However, he's not my elder brother."

Li Qingshan said, "So what if I did? If he's not your elder brother, is he supposed to be your younger brother?"

Qian Rongzhi replied, "He's not anything to me. Actually, we don't have any connection by blood at all. It's just because I had the talent to practise qi that Qian Yannian adopted me, which barely makes us siblings. However, now that he's dead, he's dead. I have no plans to avenge him. As a result, you don't need to be wary of me. The three of us arrived on the same boat and are now leaving on the same boat as well, so you can call that fate. There's even more reason for us to watch out for one another's backs now."

Li Qingshan was surprised. "So you weren't actual siblings. Would you still call that a clan?"

Qian Rongzhi sneered. "What clan? At most, they'll just harass some ordinary people. I've heard that true clans can refine pills such that untalented children can also become Qi Practitioners. As for the Qian family, they're a clan who can't even protect their own bloodline, so they're just subpar fakes at most."

Only then did Li Qingshan find out that clans could be divided like that. After hearing her tone, he asked out of curiosity, "Do you really plan on turning against the Qian family this time? Hasn't the Qian family shown you great kindness?" Allowing an ordinary person to become a Qi Practitioner was basically a life-changing kindness, yet Qian Rongzhi's attitude on this was very strange.

Qian Rongzhi rubbed her cheek as she chuckled. "Yeah, they showed great kindness. Aren't I returning this great kindness right now?"

Her expression was so ghastly that even Li Qingshan and Diao Fei, people who frequently witnessed death, shivered inside.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Don't look at me like that. I've put on an act and put up with it for long enough now. As long as you help me out this time, I don't care what you do to me."

Not only was Li Qingshan completely uninterested in this suggestion, but even Diao Fei felt the same. As long as their minds were mature enough, it was impossible for lust to blind them to the point where they would stop caring for their own lives, unless they were up against someone like Furong who knew the arts of charm.

Diao Fei said cautiously, "I don't want to become an enemy of a fifth layer Qi Practitioner. Our mission is only to investigate. You come from the Qian family, so you must know where the pill room is. There's no need for us to confront Qian Yannian."

Qian Rongzhi cursed, "You coward. As soon as the pills are refined, they're immediately delivered to Qian Yannian, stored in his personal hundred treasures pouch. You haven't even seen him, yet you already frightened by his identity as a fifth layer Qi Practitioner?"

"You..." Diao Fei stood up angrily, but Li Qingshan extended his arm and stopped him. He said to Qian Rongzhi, "I have no interest in becoming enemies with a Qi Practitioner three layers stronger than me either. If that's your plan, you better forget it. We'll be leaving after we've completed our investigation. Would Qian Yannian be bold enough to pick a fight against the Hawkwolf Guard?"

Qian Rongzhi finally grew serious. "Do you know why the Qian family has no fourth layer Qi Practitioners? It's because that old coot has become so senile that he does not even have the confidence to subdue fourth layer Qi Practitioners. He's afraid that someone will replace him as the

patriarch, so he has cut off the supply of pills to every single person who's about to break through to the fourth layer."

Li Qingshan and Diao Fei were surprised. He was even willing to sacrifice the development of the clan to maintain his own declining authority; this patriarch was simply terrifying.

Qian Rongzhi said, "When the time comes, I'll secretly move against him first so that we can kill him in a single stroke. The remaining ones aren't even enough for you to take them seriously, right?"

Li Qingshan and Diao Fei looked at one another. Not only did Li Qingshan take third layer Qi Practitioners lightly, but even Diao Fei was confident that his actual battle experience had exceeded those pieces of trash that a clan had groomed and had not gone through any life-threatening battles.

In the end, Qian Rongzhi played her trump card against them. "There are at least three hundred Qi Gathering pills in Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch, as well as a few other extremely precious pills that are no worse than Pearl Dew pills. Although his spiritual artifacts aren't as great as the ones from the Hawkwolf Guard, he should still have a few, which would still be worth a few hundred Qi Gathering pills. If you include what the other Qi Practitioners possess, the total wealth might very well reach a thousand Qi Gathering pills."

This figure stunned both Li Qingshan and Diao Fei. The Qian family really was just like what its name meant—money. They were a living treasury of a clan. Although they were a subpar clan, they were still a clan after all, having existed for over a century. As such, they must have built up quite a lot of wealth over time. Just like how wealth could tempt people, Qi Practitioners were no less greedy than ordinary people when it came to pills and spiritual artifacts; in fact, their greed might even be greater.

Qian Rongzhi extended her hand. Diao Fei hesitated before placing his hand on there. Afterwards, Li Qingshan extended his hand over as well. Their hands were placed on one another.

As a result, for their common goal, these three people who disliked one another or were even hostile to one another temporarily reached a truce, advancing towards Ancient Wind city.

After docking, they switched to horses. They travelled during the day and rested at night. Five days later, the three of them arrived before Ancient Wind city.

Immediately, someone recognised Qian Rongzhi. They called out, "The young miss has returned! Report it to the patriarch!"

Li Qingshan discovered that Qian Rongzhi's expression had changed unknowingly, becoming just like when he had first met her. There was some reservedness within her arrogance, as if she constantly took pride in her identity and clan. No one could have imagined the terrifying hatred within her.

Chapter 136 - Two-faced

Ancient Wind city was a mountain city, located on a slope of the Boundless mountains. The entire city was built on the side of the mountain. All of the streets and alleyways in the city were sloped.

Passing through the deep, quiet city gates, a main road slanted upwards before them. At the end of it was a palace-like estate, lording over the entire city. It was even more imposing than the Hawkwolf Guard in Jiaping city.

Lanterns and streamers decorated every single household on the sides of the street, as if they were welcoming a grand celebration. However, there was no joy at all on the faces of the passersby.

The news of Qian Rongzhi's return as a Hawkwolf guard quickly reached the grand estate, which seemed to trigger some kind of mechanism. Over a hundred burly men flooded out and chased away everyone on the sides. They stood ten steps apart from one another on the side of the main road as they remained focused.

When the three of them rode past, the men called out loudly, "Welcome back to the clan, young miss!" However, the clip-clopping sounds of the horses still reached the estate.

Qian Rongzhi raised her head and traveled at the very front, while Li Qingshan and Diao Fei remained half a horse behind, staying to her left and right. They were like her personal guards.

They had all agreed on this in the past few days. Only by showing respect to Qian Rongzhi could they make the people of the Qian family lower their guards. For the sake of a thousand Qi Gathering pills, something as insignificant as this was obviously not a problem. However, Li Qingshan felt like Qian Rongzhi was not simply acting right now. She did have some complacency and pride after returning home with success.

The gate of the estate stood several meters tall, and there were even several dozen steps before it, making them seem rich and influential. A pair of stone lions gazed down in an imposing manner, but Li Qingshan only found them to be rather fiendish.

The crimson gates opened loudly, and a skinny old man in extravagant clothing emerged from the gate. He was the patriarch of the Qian family, Qian Yannian. He had personally come to receive the three of them.

"Patriarch, Rongzhi was fortunate enough to complete the task and join the Hawkwolf Guard." Qian Rongzhi dismounted from her horse and bowed gracefully. Before she could even bow completely, a pair of skinny hands grabbed her arms. "Haven't I said it before? Just call me grandfather. You are now a person of the government, so how can you bow to an old man like me?"

Li Qingshan and Diao Fei looked at one another. Qian Yannian's movements were startlingly quick. They were not slow like an old man's at all. Although his tone was gentle, he gave off a pressing aura. This was the pressure that weaker Qi Practitioners naturally experienced before more powerful Qi Practitioners.

Qian Yannian said, "The two of you must be Zhi'er's colleagues!"

Diao Fei clasped his hands. "We are. Under sir Zhuo's orders, we've accompanied Rongzhi on her visit to home and to congratulate old master Qian on your one hundred and thirty second birthday."

Li Qingshan clasped his hands as well as he smiled. All he did was study the main target of the mission this time. Qian Yannian had thin, grey hair, and his face was covered in faint, age spots. His nose was all soft, like dangling rubber that was close to melting, and his skinny body held up his luxurious clothes, making him seem like an old monkey in human clothes. It was rather funny, but also rather sickening.

If it were not for his shining eyes and swift movements earlier, Li Qingshan would have doubted whether this old man who was close to death was actually their greatest opponent or not in the mission this time.

First-rate masters who had practised internal martial arts only had a lifespan of around a century, provided that they had not suffered any internal injuries. A fifth layer Qi Practitioner could only have a few decades more than that. At Qian Yannian's age, his cultivation had already begun to decline. Qian Rongzhi had been right about this piece of information.

Li Qingshan glanced at Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch as he wondered whether there really were several hundred Qi Gathering pills in there or not. His gaze had already passed over Qian Yannian's shoulder. Currently, he was looking at the people behind the gate, or more accurately, the group of Qi Practitioners behind the gate. There were males and females, old and young, scholars and monks. They were not people of the Qian family, but people who had come to celebrate the birthday. Their gazes back at Li Qingshan were not as enthusiastic. As a matter of fact there was even disdain and coldness.

Li Qingshan remembered what Zhou Wenbin had said before. As hawks and wolves of the government, they were extremely repulsed in the entire cultivation world, particularly with people from sects. Every single person liked to be free, without any restraints or under anyone's control, yet the Hawkwolf Guard just happened to watch over the entire world as representatives of legalism who protected the law.

Qian Yannian waved his hand. "Please!"

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In a quiet room, Qian Yannian no longer seemed as bold as he was before everyone. Instead, he looked at Qian Rongzhi with reddened eyes. "Where's Qian Rongming?"

Qian Rongzhi said sorrowfully, "Rongming- Rongming was killed by someone."

"What!" Qian Yannian grabbed Qian Rongzhi's shoulders firmly. "Who? Who did it? Why are you fine?" Qian Rongming was not an outsider he had adopted, but a direct descendant of his Qian family, a descendant with enough talent out of over a hundred of his grandsons that had come out of taking wives and concubines without restraint.

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's Li Qingshan. It's the kid who was with me today. He's the one responsible for Rongming's death." She actually told him the entire story in detail.

Qian Yannian could only accept the truth. He said viciously, "If he weren't a Hawkwolf guard, I would definitely tear him to pieces." Afterwards, he used his shrivelled hand to rub Qian Rongzhi's tender cheek. "But fortunately, I still have you." Indecency flashed through his eyes.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Grandfather, you might be willing to spare him, but he isn't willing to spare you!"

"What did you say?" Qian Yannian was surprised.

"We've come this time under a secret mission from the Hawkwolf Guard. We've come to investigate the Qian family!"

"How can that be possible? I've managed to run Ancient Wind city as tightly as a steel bucket. It's not like we're stingy when it comes to areas we have to cough up for. Why would the Hawkwolf Guard

direct their attention towards me?” The lecherous light in Qian Yannian’s eyes vanished, replaced by fright. Small clans like his were afraid of the Hawkwolf Guard the most. Once they attracted the attention of these hawks and wolves, they would get hunted down and torn apart.

Qian Rongzhi said, “It’s Li Qingshan again. He took brother Rongming’s hundred treasures pouch and became greedy, and he’s also envious and hateful of me, so he spoke ill about the Qian family to our commander Zhuo.”

Qian Yannian said, “Why didn’t you dispute that for the Qian family? What’s the point of having you around then? Slut, are you trying to betray the Qian family?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “How didn’t I dispute it? However, Li Qingshan even had backing from Clear River city. He joined the Hawkwolf Guard without even competing against the others. Zhuo Zhibo is afraid of offending him, so he ordered us to come and investigate. The only reason why Rongzhi is here today is all due to the great kindness the Qian family has shown. If it were not for the Qian family, if it were not for grandfather, the Rongzhi of right now would not exist. How can I betray the clan?” As she said that, she began to tear up, as if she wanted to prove her innocence with death.

Qian Yannian thought about how she had also been so obedient, so he eased up slightly. “Then what do we do now? Why don’t we give him some bribes, and then you can make a small sacrifice for the Qian family?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “Grandfather, he’s a hungry wolf, as greedy as they come. All he wants to do is devour the Qian family whole. He’s not someone that can be satisfied by casting a bone his way. If you don’t believe me, just pay close attention to their reactions.”

Qian Yannian said, “Then what am I supposed to do? If I hadn’t listened to you and sent the two of you off to become Hawkwolf guards, this problem would have never happened.”

Qian Rongzhi became vicious. “You can’t let them, in particular, Li Qingshan, leave Ancient Wind city alive.”

Qian Yannian said, “You want me to plot against Hawkwolf guards!?”

“If Li Qingshan remains, the Qian family will never have peace. I will shift the blame of their deaths to other people. Grandfather, this is all for the sake of the Qian family.”

Quite a while later, Qian Rongzhi emerged from the quiet room. The resplendent sunlight seemed to purge the darkness in her heart. As soon as she made her way into the courtyard, a middle-aged man stopped her.

“Big brother!” Qian Rongzhi bowed politely.

The middle-aged man extended his hand towards her cheek, but Qian Rongzhi avoided it. “Don’t be like that, big brother!”

This was Qian Yannian’s eldest grandson, Qian Xingwei. Although he lacked the talent to practise qi, he still practised internal martial arts. He was the head caretaker of the entire Qian family.

Qian Xingwei was furious. He grabbed Qian Rongzhi by the chin. “Quit acting around. Do you really think you can be all high and mighty just because you’ve joined the Hawkwolf Guard? As long as you’re still a

part of the Qian family, you have to listen to me. Don't forget about the great kindness the Qian family has shown to you."

Qian Rongzhi said, "Yes, big brother. Rongzhi would never dare to." Suddenly, a few people walked over from afar. Only then did Qian Xingwei release her. He ordered, "Come to my room tonight." He watched Qian Rongzhi walk away as he spat and said, "So what if you're a Qi Practitioner!?"

What he could not see was the sinister smile on Qian Rongzhi's face.

Everyone would pay.

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Night had fallen, and the lanterns had been lit.

There was a merry hubbub in the hall; all the important guests had come to wish Qian Yannian well. Although the birthday party was the next day, most of them had arrived a day early in order to show respect. Out of them, the most valuable guests were obviously the dozen or so Qi Practitioners. Li Qingshan and Diao Fei used their identities as Hawkwolf guards to get some of the best seats.

Qian Yannian introduced everyone one by one. When he reached Li Qingshan, he said, "This is a young hero of the Hawkwolf Guard, sir Li Qingshan!"

No matter what everyone was thinking, they all said words of courtesy like 'Pleased to meet you' or 'Admirable'.

"Your name's Li Qingshan?" A sharp voice rang out. Li Qingshan looked over, and all he saw was a scholar sitting on the ground with his legs stretched out. His hair was in a mess, and he seemed like a rather unruly person. He was also a third layer Qi Practitioner; he looked over with hostility.

Li Qingshan said, "That's me. And who are you, sir?"

"That's Gong Liangbai, known as the Wild Scholar by the people of the jianghu. He comes from the Humble Maple academy." Qian Yannian introduced the two of them first. Afterwards, he asked Gong Liangbai, "What's wrong? Do you know sir Li?"

In a world where even a district magistrate was a powerful cultivator, an academy was not just a place for studying. Instead, it was similar to buddhist and daoist temples. Practising martial arts and practising qi were all a part of it too.

Gong Liangbai did not even glance at Qian Yannian. He only stared at Li Qingshan. "Do you know Wei Dandong?"

Li Qingshan said, "I don't."

Gong Liangbai said, "But he knows you. If I've guessed correctly, you should be from Qingyang city, right? A few months ago, this junior brother of mine paid a visit there. Since young, he has always been rather sickly. Originally, he went there in search of a cure, but he never returned."

Li Qingshan suddenly remembered the sickly scholar who had come for the spiritual ginseng back in Qingyang city. He was the first first-rate master to die to his hands in the snowy landscape in front of the

mountain god temple. The other first-rate masters were all middle-aged, but only he was in his twenties, so Li Qingshan had some impression of him.

“I think I’ve seen him around.”

Gong Liangbai subconsciously straightened up. “And then?”

Li Qingshan said, “I killed him.”

Chapter 137 - It’s the Thought that Counts

Gong Liangbai leapt to his feet, pointing at Li Qingshan with widened eyes. He was left temporarily speechless as if he had never expected him to admit it so easily.

Li Qingshan drank his wine in a composed manner as he said indifferently, “So much for being an academy. You study the teachings of scholarly sages, yet you produce criminals who kill and rob. You even need me to clean up after your academy for you! You’d better return and think over that properly!”

Li Qingshan had never thought that he would come across an enemy here, but thinking about it, this place was not too far from Qingyang city either. He had come across Qian Rongzhi as soon as he had left home, while the news of the spiritual ginseng had drawn in many masters of the surrounding region as well. There were not exactly a lot of Qi Practitioners within several hundred kilometers of this place, so even if they gathered together, they would only form a small group. It was nothing surprising for them to appear in Ancient Wind city right now.

However, if I killed a bandit of a scholar, then I killed him. What are you going to do about it?

The guests all discussed, “To think there was a grievance like this!” “The Hawkwolf Guard’s just far too arrogant. Even after killing someone, they still have the audacity to say that they were cleaning up after them. “ “Yeah, since when were second layer Qi Practitioners bold enough to speak to third layer Qi Practitioners like that?” “Be quiet, don’t cause trouble.”

Although they did not know the entire story, most of them stood on the Humble Maple academy’s side instinctively. The schools of Confucianism and Legalism were technically both a part of the hundred schools of thought and a part of the Great Xia empire, but to most Qi Practitioners, scholars were always more pleasing to the eye than the police.

Qian Rongzhi and Diao Fei were instead rather accustomed to Li Qingshan’s behaviour. As long as reason was on his side, he would act like no one was of importance. He was the same when he faced Zhao Liangqing and Zhuo Zhibo, let alone a scholar.

Invisible true qi surged out and made Gong Liangbai’s robes ruffle. Simultaneously, he pushed over the thick, long table in front of him, causing a clatter.

“That junior brother of mine was only a step away from the innate realm. Originally, he should have been able to reach the second layer of Qi Practitioner very soon. It’s all because of you!”

Li Qingshan remained seated. “Fortunately, I had acted soon enough. He was already bold enough to act in such an unruly manner when he was just a first-rate master. If he made it to the innate realm, that would be the end of the world.”

There was a flash of white light, and Gong Liangbai drew his sword from his waist. He pointed it at Li Qingshan from afar. "Others might be afraid of the draconian laws of your Hawkwolf Guard, but the disciples of our school of Confucianism aren't!"

"It's not a matter of being afraid or not, but a matter of right or wrong. If I were wrong, I wouldn't even mind kneeling. However, to think that as a scholar, you won't even listen to reason, acting purely on your emotions. Where did all of the things you learned from studying those books go? Did a dog eat them?"

"I'm going to lose my mind at you!" Gong Liangbai was unable to retort his words. He took a step forward and swung down with his sword right over Li Qingshan's head.

Diao Fei pressed down on his Wind-entwining blade as he entered a half-kneeling posture.

Li Qingshan remained unfazed. He did not move, continuing to drink his wine with a lowered head. He said indifferently, "If you even touch a hair on me, let's see if there will still be a place in the world that can shelter you. Will the Humble Maple academy protect you?"

The sword stopped above Li Qingshan's head and trembled slightly, but it did not fall all the way down. Gong Liangbai's expression changed as he gazed at Li Qingshan below his sword. This teenager did not give off any sense of might the entire time, but there was a certain kind of courage that could not be overlooked when he went about his matters.

Despite being the host, Qian Yannian simply allowed the matters to unfold. He did not try to interfere, exactly because of what he had heard from Qian Rongzhi. He wanted Li Qingshan to suffer heavily at the hands of others, but he never imagined the end result would be like this. He could not help but reevaluate Li Qingshan. This teenager who had killed Qian Rongming was really a piece of work.

If he continued to stand aside, it would be far too inappropriate of him. "Both of you are my guests. I really do hope that you can put aside any irreconcilable grievances and avoid any conflict. Just do it for my sake."

Li Qingshan placed down his cup and raised his head. "Have you thought it through now? If you have, piss off. Stop embarrassing yourself here."

With a swish, the sword swung down and cut off the corner of the table. Gong Liangbai looked around. He felt like everyone was looking at him and mocking how he was afraid of even touching a hair on Li Qingshan. He rushed out of the hall.

Qian Yannian ordered people to chase him. His eyes swiveled, and he had already come up with a plan. He glanced at Li Qingshan. Kid, you won't be able to remain arrogant for much longer.

The banquet continued, and this time, the centrepiece actually became Qian Rongzhi. As the young miss who had brought glory to the Qian family, the atmosphere gradually eased up and warmed as she spoke and smiled as if nothing had happened at all.

Many young Qi Practitioners had their eyes glued to her. They were very attracted to her.

Qian Rongzhi used a toast to shoot glances at Li Qingshan and Diao Fei, indicating to them that the plan was successful. Afterwards, when she looked back at Qian Yannian, her gaze seemed to change again.

Li Qingshan only smiled, tilting his head back and drinking all of his wine.

Under the beams of moonlight, Li Qingshan and Diao Fei returned to their residences, reeking with the smell of alcohol.

Diao Fei said, "Originally, I thought I was pretty arrogant, but you're ten times as arrogant as me."

Li Qingshan said, "That's not called being arrogant, but being honest. What's wrong with being honest?"

Diao Fei replied, "Yeah, yeah. The Hawkwolf Guard is not something they can just trifle with." As he thought about the tremendous sum of wealth that was about to enter his hands, he seemed to become even drunker.

Li Qingshan said, "There are some things I want to discuss with you."

Suddenly, Diao Fei discovered that Li Qingshan's pupils were even clearer than the moon, and they gave off a faint, murderous aura as if they were shining red.

He said discuss, but after Li Qingshan was done talking, he returned to his room to rest, leaving Diao Fei dazed on the spot.

That was not the plan!

Someone was deviating from the plan, and someone was coming up with a new one as well.

"I've managed to convince Gong Liangbai to stay for a few more days. I'll introduce you to him. There are a lot of prying eyes right now, so let's do it after the birthday party and cover it up as you throwing your life away at him to drag him down. As long as this succeeds, you will have done great for the Qian family," Qian Yannian said to Qian Rongzhi.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Rongzhi is willing to put herself through thick and thin for the sake of the Qian family."

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In the still of night, Xiao An fiddled around with the Qi Gathering pills in the centre of Li Qingshan's hand. He raised his head as if he was asking. "Is this all that's left?"

Li Qingshan rubbed Xiao An's head. "Yep, and that's with me holding back! But don't worry, there will be a lot very soon. There'll be a thousand of them!" He casually tossed a Qi Gathering pill into his mouth and began cultivating. He needed some time to consolidate his current cultivation.

The brilliant moon set in the horizon before rising once more, illuminating the mountain city. Lanterns that gave off a red glow filled the Qian estate, making it seem like it was on fire.

Numerous guests had gathered. Every single one of them had come to celebrate Qian Yannian's birthday. The banquet extended out of the hall, all the way down the hill. There was a great hubbub of noise. It all seemed like a noisy, fiery river.

The entire Ancient Wind city was involved!

However, there were only around a dozen tables within the main hall of the Qian estate, reserved for special guests. The eldest grandson, Qian Xingwei, held a list of gifts as he personally received the guests outside. He declared loudly, "The Xuanzheng Master of the Skyriver sect gifts a pair of blood crystals."

"Gong Liangbai of the Humble Maple academy gifts ten jade fragrance fruit."

Most of these were rare treasures Li Qingshan had never even heard about. When Diao Fei and he arrived before Qian Xingwei, Li Qingshan thought about it before fishing out his final Qi Gathering pill, placing it in his hand.

Qian Xingwei was stunned. Was he gifting a single Qi Gathering pill?"

Li Qingshan said, "You should declare it."

"S- sir Li Qingshan and Diao Fei of the Hawkwolf Guard g- gifts one Qi Gathering pill."

The guests were surprised. They wanted to see just who was so stingy, but all they saw was Li Qingshan completely composed, while Diao Fei had buried his head deeply. The bystanders all felt embarrassed for him, but they were unable to see the mixed emotions of his face, the sweat dripping from his forehead, or hear his mumbles.

"Just like travelling thousands of kilometers to gift the feathers of a goose, it's the thought that counts!" A grizzled old man in grey clothes came up with a smile as he mediated the situation. The aura he radiated belonged to the third layer of Qi Practitioner.

Li Qingshan said, "You must be that, that someone of the two elders of the Qian family? I've been looking forward to meeting you!" The only two third layer Qi Practitioners of the Qian family were known as the two elders of the Qian family. They were Qian Yannian's foster sons, and they had come to receive guests for Qian Yannian.

The corner of the old man's eye twitched. He repressed his fury. "That's me. Please come this way, sir." Last night, Qian Yannian had gathered the core members of the Qian family in a hurry to discuss his plan against Li Qingshan. He already knew about Qian Yannian's plan. Once tonight passed, Li Qingshan was a dead man. There was obviously no reason for him to get angry over a corpse.

Li Qingshan said, "May I ask where the other elder is?" Afterwards, he saw another old man when he followed the old man in grey's gaze. He said to Diao Fei indifferently, "Brother Diao, why don't you go over there and get to know him?"

The old man in grey found this rather strange. Li Qingshan was actually ordering a third layer Qi Practitioner Hawkwolf guard around, and what was the purpose behind getting to know him? However, before he could think too much about it, Li Qingshan had grabbed his hand and walked towards the banquet. He asked, "Is it here?"

He threw behind Diao Fei, who stood within the flow of people. He looked around in uncertainty with his slanted eyes like a lost child. Then he looked at Li Qingshan again before finally moving his feet and making his way over to the other old man.

His mumbling became slightly louder. A female attendant walked past him and strangely heard from the mouth of this sir from the Hawkwolf Guard. "He's far too arrogant!"

Qian Rongzhi stood beside Qian Yannian. She felt that something was off before suddenly realising something. Her expression suddenly changed.

The old man in grey accompanied Li Qingshan to his seat, but he discovered that Li Qingshan had suddenly stopped talking and was now looking at him with his deep, pitch-black eyes. He asked, "Are you all trying to kill me?"

"You sure know how to joke!" The old man laughed, but he could not laugh for much longer. He felt like Li Qingshan's hand had turned into an iron clamp around his wrist, and it was gradually tightening, which suddenly made his expression change.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

There were three explosions that rang through the great hall, resounding through the entire estate.

Air rushed outwards as the crowd pulled away in fright. All they saw was a pitch-black person pointing at Diao Fei with difficulty in the centre of the empty area. He wanted to say something, but he was unable to say it. He gave off a charred smell.

Qian Yannian roared out furiously and in surprise, "What did you do?!"

Diao Fei had only used the time when they were talking to stick three Scarlet Fire talismans on the other elder of the Qian family. Subsequently, he ignored everyone else, including the infuriated Qian Yannian, and looked past the crowd at Li Qingshan nearby.

Originally, Diao Fei had thought about how even he would be in danger if he were within ten steps of Li Qingshan.

And just how far away was this old man in grey from him? Half a step?

And back then, Li Qingshan had only been a first layer Qi Practitioner. He had reached the second layer now.

Among the cries, Li Qingshan grabbed the old man by the throat with a single hand, lifting him up. A crazy, murderous smile filled his face.

With a crack, Li Qingshan snapped the old man's neck and tossed him towards Qian Yannian.

"Here's a gift of a pair of corpses as well. It's the thought that counts after all. I hope you can kindly accept it!"

Chapter 138 - Striking First

Neither of the two elders of the Qian family, third layer Qi Practitioners, were easy targets. It was impossible for Diao Fei to kill either of them so easily in a direct confrontation.

However, they never thought that someone would actually attack them at this banquet while in the eyes of the public. They died on the spot without even being able to put up a struggle.

From now onwards, the Qian family no longer had any third layer Qi Practitioners.

The masters of the Qian family were among the guests as well. Under the encirclement of several dozen Qi Practitioners, Diao Fei approached Li Qingshan nervously. This was the first time he had discovered that being close to a certain person would offer a sense of safety.

The night before, Li Qingshan had only told him three things. "Don't tell Qian Rongzhi. We'll do it during the banquet tomorrow. Leave Qian Yannian to me!"

Those three things left Diao Fei conflicted for an entire day and night. Finally, he made up his mind to throw his life on the line.

Li Qingshan completely ignored the several dozen Qi Practitioners. Instead, he took out the document from the Hawkwolf Guard and read it aloud, "Due to reports from Qian Rongzhi, the Qian family has broken many rules as listed below. One, killing the innocent. Two, plotting to murder government officials..."

His voice that had been imbued with true qi was even louder than the explosions from earlier. It even reached the foot of the mountain. Everyone stopped eating, raising their heads to listen.

"Qian Rongzhi!? That's impossible!" Qian Yannian was about to attack him, but when he heard Qian Rongzhi's name, he was stunned. Out of all the children, how could the smartest and most well-behaved girl who brought him great joy betray him? However, when he looked back in surprise, Qian Rongzhi had already stopped standing beside him at a certain time.

Li Qingshan continued reading without interruption. "...Under the orders of the Black Hawk commander of Jiaping city, Zhuo Zhibo, we have come to investigate, and after verifying this matter, we will be executing Qian Yannian and his accomplices on the spot!"

Qian Yannian searched through the crowd for Qian Rongzhi. She had already crossed through the crowd and arrived beside Li Qingshan and Diao Fei. She looked at Li Qingshan with a sunken face. He had completely destroyed her plans.

The three words, 'on the spot', reverberated through the surroundings. All schemes, all plots, were rendered useless before Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan placed down the document and said, "Those unrelated to this, please leave immediately, just in case you get drawn in. If you get in the way of the administration of justice, you will be executed without mercy!"

Qian Yannian's eyes widened. "Was it really you? You slut!"

Gong Liangbai said, "Miss Qian, is this all true?"

Qian Rongzhi bit her lip. "This is all true. You are welcome to ask any citizen of Ancient Wind city. They all know about it! Our commander Zhuo is on the way right now, so everyone please leave quickly!" Although she utterly hated Li Qingshan, she was forced to stand on his side at a time like this, or the furious Qian Yannian would destroy her.

Every single person near Jiaping city had heard about Zhuo Zhibo before. Who would actually be willing to get in the way of the Hawkwolf Guard over the heinous Qian family? The Qi Practitioners all looked at

one another. Someone moved first, causing them to all scurry outside. However, they looked at the trio like they were dead people.

They did not plan on staying behind and helping out the Qian family. A very important reason to that was because the Qian family did not require their assistance at all. A third layer Qi Practitioner and two second layer Qi Practitioners would be instantly destroyed before Qian Yannian's wrath.

That was what they thought, but they instead fled even faster. If Zhuo Zhibo really did arrive and saw the corpses of three Hawkwolf Guards, wouldn't they face an unexpected disaster if they were treated as accomplices of the Qian family?

They moved very quickly, and the guards and attendants all used this opportunity to flee as well. In the blink of an eye, the hall was empty. Only the people of the Qian family remained, along with two corpses.

Countless guests fled down the mountain. Only the people of the Qian family moved against the flow, rushing towards the hall.

Li Qingshan said, "Qian Yannian, it's time for you to face retribution for your crimes." Compared to stealthy assassinations, he preferred something like this much more—direct confrontations that would be as straightforward as it could get.

Li Qingshan looked back at Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi behind him. He had used a special method to band these two conflicting colleagues together with him to face the opponents before them.

Qian Yannian stomped over furiously as the tiles cracked. He stared straight at Qian Rongzhi. "You ungrateful slut!" With Li Qingshan's announcement, he no longer had any room to maneuver about. All schemes and plans were useless now. Even if he killed the three of them now, the Qian family would enter the blacklist of the Hawkwolf Guard, becoming targets for them to hunt down. The Qian family was approaching the edge of destruction.

Qian Rongzhi, who he had taken great pains to nurture from young, had caused all of this. He roared out hoarsely, "I gave you everything!"

Qian Rongzhi smiled instead. She smiled very sweetly. "Grandfather, haven't I come to return the kindness?" Afterwards, she said to the remaining second layer Qi Practitioners in the hall. "We're only killing direct descendants of the Qian family. You've all been oppressed by Qian Yannian for all these years. Do you plan on dying with them now?"

Out of the five second layer Qi Practitioners, only one was a direct descendant of Qian Yannian. Originally, all of them had been glaring at Qian Rongzhi furiously as well, but with that, they began to look at one another.

The furious Qian Yannian would never spare the three Hawkwolf guards, but they all knew the consequences of killing Hawkwolf guards in public! If they remained here, they really might end up becoming suspects of this horrible crime, turning into criminals who would be hunted down across the world. No place would be able to shelter them anymore.

"Shut up!" Qian Yannian attacked out of anger. A palm strike condensed from true qi tore through the air towards Qian Rongzhi.

With a flash of light, a blade was drawn from a sheathe, sounding just like a tiger's roar.

A Wind-entwining blade was placed across Qian Rongzhi's pale face, cleaving the palm strike in two; the redirected force struck the ground and the door frame. It left behind a great ditch in the ground, and the entire door frame collapsed. Between it all was the pale-faced Qian Rongzhi.

Li Qingshan gripped his Wind-entwining blade as he said to Qian Rongzhi without looking back, "Keep talking!" This woman really did have a clever tongue that was rather useful.

However, Qian Rongzhi's response was turning around and fleeing!

Li Qingshan was taken aback. As it turned out, he still ended up overestimating this woman. However, he had never thought that the second layer Qi Practitioners of the Qian family would all flee from the hall as well, bursting out the windows. Even the second layer Qi Practitioner related to Qian Yannian by blood, basically his son, did the same.

This was not only due to Qian Rongzhi's words, but also due to Qian Yannian's control over the past few years, which had left the entire clan disjointed. They had no sense of unity at all. He was able to keep them together using the threat of his strength and offers of pills during usual times, but once they faced a great threat, they immediately collapsed like a pile of sand.

Qian Yannian ignored Li Qingshan and Diao Fei. He launched another palm strike and slammed a second layer Qi Practitioner against the wall. All of his bones and organs shattered. The Qi Practitioner looked at Qian Yannian and cried out, "Father!" Out of these people, he was Qian Yannian's only son.

Qian Yannian said with bloodshot eyes, "All traitors will die!"

"I'll leave here to you. I'm going to go hunt them down!" With that, Diao Fei actually left as well. He did not have the courage to face a fifth layer Qi Practitioner.

Due to different reasons, the main hall had become a place of disaster that all people had to avoid. The only two people left were Li Qingshan and Qian Yannian.

Li Qingshan muttered to himself, "That works too. All the benefits are mine then!" Afterwards, he raised his head and said to Qian Yannian, "Today is your birthday, then the same day next year will be your death day."

Qian Yannian made his way towards Li Qingshan. His stature that was as skinny as an old monkey suddenly became much larger and taller; he almost cast down a shadow that enveloped Li Qingshan.

"Die!"

A hundred and thirty two years ago, a child was born in Ancient Wind city. He was born into a poor family, where he even struggled to keep himself fed, constantly harassed by others. This continued until he caught the eye of a passing daoist one day, who took him into the mountains to cultivate.

Thirty years later, he emerged. He had already become a middle-aged man approaching his forties. He went knocking on doors and killed every single person who had once harassed him; these people were also near their forties. Afterwards, he founded the Qian family.

He never had any experience with women, so he took wives and concubines like a madman. Every single woman who caught his eyes became a plaything to him. He did not have a proper dwelling, so he took the property of the local aristocrats, building the current Qian estate. He wanted to make up for everything he had once lacked in the past.

Almost a century had passed since then. The Qian family became the only large clan in Ancient Wind city, having five generations living under one roof. There were several hundred children and grandchildren. He wanted his own bloodline of authority to continue.

Qian Rongzhi rushed out of the hall as she thought rapidly, I need to escape from here as quickly as possible and find a place to hide. After Qian Yannian kills Li Qingshan, I'll be next.

"You slut, you bitch! How dare you betray our Qian family? You will suffer a horrendous death! Grandfather will kill you!"

Before Qian Rongzhi had travelled far, she heard a series of curses directed at her. Looking back, she saw that it was the eldest grandson of the Qian family, Qian Xingwei. He was afraid of becoming involved with a battle between Qi Practitioners, so he had used the flow of people earlier to arrive outside the hall. However, he refused to leave, so he hid in a corner, waiting for his grandfather Qian Yannian to resolve everything.

Qian Rongzhi stopped. She turned back and looked below the mountain. The people of the Qian family were currently rushing over to kill her. There were countless familiar faces among them, which also floated through her head. Lecherous faces, gazes of disdain, threatening punches, and so on melded into a mess with the countless faces.

She rubbed her temples as she experienced a splitting pain in her head. Two thoughts began to entangle and conflict with one another.

One was life. One was death.

Qian Xingwei saw how Qian Rongzhi had stopped, lowered her head, and was now trembling uncontrollably. He thought she was afraid, so he roared, "You slut! You whore! The Qian family should have never adopted you! I should have skinned you alive before!"

Qian Rongzhi raised her head. She was smiling. She even used her slender fingers to fix her hair as she made her way towards Qian Xingwen.

Life was the desire to survive, while death was the nefarious flames of revenge!

At that moment, life was no longer important. Death filled her mind.

"W- what are you trying to do?" Qian Xingwei finally experienced a tinge of fear. Due to Qian Yannian's presence in the past, she would never resist no matter what he did to her. He was accustomed to her obedience as well, which was why he was bold enough to stand forward and curse her. Only now did he seem to remember that Qian Rongzhi was a powerful Qi Practitioner.

"Save me, grandfather!" Qian Xingwei used his movement technique to leap outside as he called out.

Qian Rongzhi extended her right hand and grabbed him by the shoulder, pulling him before her. She pressed her index finger against Qian Xingwei's forehead. "What are you running for?" Her long nail pierced his skin, drawing blood.

"S- stop! I'm your elder brother!"

Qian Rongzhi said gently with a clear smile, "You wanted to skin me alive. Is this how you do it?" Like a sharp paper knife, her nails slid down as horrendous shrieks filled the area before the hall.

Chapter 139 - Don't Use My Things

"Xingwei!" Qian Yannian heard the shrieks outside, so he could not help but take a step forward. Li Qingshan would never let an opening like this slip by. He swung the Wind-entwining blade at Qian Yannian's waist.

The blade moved swiftly and forcefully. Qian Yannian's expression changed as a result. He never thought a second layer Qi Practitioner could produce such a fierce attack.

In Qian Yannian's eyes, Li Qingshan was only able to kill the old elder in grey due to his underhanded sneak attack. He did not take Li Qingshan seriously at all. He only treated him as an annoying insect he could flatten to death at any time.

He did not flatten him immediately because he was still hesitating over the consequences that came with killing a Hawkwolf guard. He was thinking whether there was an actual way out of this or not.

However, the swing of Li Qingshan's blade clearly told Qian Yannian that, I'm not asking whether you want to kill me right now. Instead, I want to kill you!

"Kid, you're asking to die!" Qian Yannian yelled out. His right hand similar to a chicken's claw opened up and grabbed the blade forcefully, catching the swift attack.

At a closer glance, a tiny distance separated the blade and the hand. Qian Yannian and Li Qingshan's true qi clashed violently in that tiny distance.

They were like two armies waging war on an extended front. One side was composed of elite soldiers, but they were unable to match the opposing army that outnumbered them one hundred to one.

Li Qingshan's blood vessels swelled up as he poured all of his strength into the blade, but it failed to move an inch further.

Qian Yannian was surprised as well. With his strength, he actually failed to rip the blade out of Li Qingshan's hand. This kid's strength was simply startling.

The almost indestructible Wind-entwining blade creaked painfully.

Despite their various thoughts, only a moment had passed, and the two of them basically reacted at the same time. Qian Yannian threw a punch at Li Qingshan's chest, while Li Qingshan reached towards Qian Yannian's head, completely ignoring the attack. As soon as they had clashed, Li Qingshan already seemed like he wanted to drag Qian Yannian down with him.

There were many aspects Li Qingshan had no confidence in, but his defences were not one of them. I got plenty of hit points and a high defence. Taking a couple of your blows won't do anything, but if you're hit by even a single one from me, you're dead!

Qian Yannian felt like if he followed through with his strike, his head would be crushed. He was old, so he valued his life, so why would he risk it against Li Qingshan? He released the Wind-entwining blade and retreated in a hurry while throwing out over a dozen punches.

Just when Li Qingshan wanted to advance with his advantage, he saw the punches condensed from true qi fly over. He produced a flurry with the Wind-entwining blade and protected himself.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! With a series of collisions, a violent gust of wind swept out. The huge table was knocked onto the ground as all the lanterns and candles in the hall were extinguished.

Li Qingshan staggered backwards as his legs carved out two deep marks in the marble tiles.

With a crack, he kicked off the huge, broken door frame behind him with a foot and steadied himself. He raised his eyebrows.

"You're a Body Practitioner!" Qian Yannian cried out. The true qi earlier would have smashed apart the organs of ordinary second layer Qi Practitioners. They might have even been ripped to pieces on the spot, unless their bodies had been strengthened by the arts of training the body.

Li Qingshan did not feel the slightest bit of displeasure. Instead, it was satisfying, like he had just stretched his body. He stared at Qian Yannian as his eyes revealed bloodthirsty excitement.

Qian Yannian looked at Li Qingshan. Contempt had vanished from his eyes, replaced by some caution, but it was only some. He had just been too careless earlier, which was why Li Qingshan had the opportunity to swing his blade. It was impossible for second layer Qi Practitioners to match fifth layer Qi Practitioners; this was simply common sense.

"Do you really think you can kill me just because you can endure a few attacks from me? Since you seek death, I'll give you death. Then I'll go kill that slut Qian Rongzhi."

Outside, Qian Xingwei's shrieks grew more and more miserable, but Qian Yannian completely ignored them now. Although he liked this eldest grandson very much, he had plenty of grandchildren. It did not matter if a few died.

Li Qingshan did not just stand around as Qian Yannian spoke. He grabbed his blade with both hands and raised it high above his head. His extremely pure true qi circulated along the Yang Heel meridian, channelling into the Wind Entwining blade through his arms and coating the blade with a layer of light. As he swung down, he produced an extremely sharp wind blade that whistled towards Qian Yannian.

Qian Yannian sneered. With a deep breath, a streak of golden light emerged from his nostril, piercing through the wind blade and shooting towards Li Qingshan. It left behind a thin, golden streak in the air.

A flying sword? But I thought only sixth layer Qi Practitioners could use them?

Li Qingshan was rather surprised, but he responded immediately. This should not have been a flying sword, but some kind of technique. However, it was much more powerful than regular techniques. It basically gave a fifth layer Qi Practitioner the methods that only sixth layer Qi Practitioners could use.

The information that Qian Rongzhi had provided about how Qian Yannian was only as strong as a fourth layer Qi Practitioner was completely false.

As a fifth layer Qi Practitioner, Qian Yannian obviously did not practise the Innate Method of Practising Qi that had a limit at the third layer. Instead, he practised a stronger cultivation method, the Geng Metal Method of Sharpening Qi.

This was the Geng Metal Swords of Qi of the Geng Metal Method of Sharpening Qi. The lungs were metal attributed, and it condensed a sharp aura within it. The lungs were linked to the nose, which produced swords of qi. The streaks of light sliced through the air as they produced a sharp whistling sound similar to sirens. Just the whistling alone would have been enough to kill ordinary people.

Note: The Geng Metal part comes from the twelve heavenly stems. They don't really mean anything by themselves, heavily depending on the context. For example, they can be incorporated into calendars or used for fortune telling.

Li Qingshan bent his knees and leapt high into the air. The sword qi brushed past the soles of his feet. Taking advantage of the opening, he leapt towards Qian Yannian, rapidly closing the distance between them.

Qian Yannian saw Li Qingshan lunge over, and he snorted once again. His eyes were filled with viciousness.

Suddenly, another sword of qi emerged from his nostril, stabbing towards Li Qingshan in the air. At the same time, the other sword of qi made a turn under his control, stabbing towards Li Qingshan's back.

The lungs were split into the left and the right, so there were two Geng Metal Swords of Qi as well, one left and one right, which formed an ultimate killing move.

Li Qingshan used his right foot to hook onto the beam above, and with a tug, he leapt up, essentially dodging the swords of qi by a hair's breadth. However, in the next moment, a sword of qi surged up, piercing through the beam. He bent backwards suddenly, and the sword of qi brushed past his face, dazzling his eyes.

Li Qingshan was already prepared. The blade in his hand lit up, and without any sign, it landed on the sword of qi.

Clang!

The blade and sword collided. It actually left behind an extremely small nick on the Wind-entwining blade, but the sword of qi collapsed as well. However, before he could celebrate, the collapsed sword of qi condensed once again, but it had lost an undetectable sliver of sharpness.

Li Qingshan flew backwards as the swords of qi pursued him. He constantly leapt about and made turns within the large hall. He would avoid the swords of qi by a hair's breadth every time. He was as agile as a monkey. Whenever the swords of qi were unavoidable, he would swing out with his Wind-entwining blade, temporarily blocking it.

He discovered that while the swords of qi were similar to flying swords, they were not as nimble or swift as Zhou Wenbin's flying sword. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for him to dodge them.

However, this must have been due to Qian Yannian's insufficient strength. If he reached the sixth layer, the swords of qi definitely would become weapons no weaker than flying swords.

Qian Yannian paled out of anger as he constantly snorted angrily. He placed more focus on controlling the Geng Metal Swords of Qi as he tried to chase down Li Qingshan. However, he would keep a sword of qi by his side out of great caution as well; this was not only to guard himself against an attack from Li Qingshan, but also because his mind had deteriorated with his old age, so it was rather difficult for him to split his attention between two swords of qi. However, he believed that a single sword of qi was more than enough to kill Li Qingshan. With one attacking and one defending, he was undefeatable. He had no openings.

Li Qingshan was amazed. As it turned out, fifth layer Qi Practitioners were impressive. He wondered what cultivation method this old man practised. Although he did not know about the Geng Metal Method of Sharpening Qi, he did understand that these two swords of qi must have been a technique that was bound to the cultivation method, which was why Qian Yannian could control them so freely. In comparison, the Innate Method of Practising Qi was just like its name, only able to practise qi. It did not offer any proper accompanying techniques.

Back when he killed the naked Zhao Liangqing, he had used the absolute difference in their strength to directly crush him. He had killed him in a single stroke, which was why he had not experienced the strength of a fifth layer Qi Practitioner.

Although there was no one present now, he was in no hurry to transform. It was easy for him to kill Qian Yannian in a single attack, but once he returned, the entire world would know he killed Zhao Liangqing. As a result, he came up with a prudent plan. He would simply play around with this old man for now and practise his abilities so that he could understand the essence of the second layer through actual battle.

Qian Yannian believed he had gained the upper hand, but he never imagined that Li Qingshan only treated him like a hunk of meat on the chopping block, currently thinking about how to carve it up. Moreover, he wanted to have some fun before he got down to business.

He could see how he could not kill Li Qingshan so easily. He was also afraid that Qian Rongzhi would escape and was worried that Qian Rongzhi was telling the truth, that Zhuo Zhibo was already on his way. As a result, he was in a hurry to end this battle, which was why he took out a well-made hundred treasures pouch.

Li Qingshan's eyes lit up. He had finally seen the main reason for all of this. Afterwards, he saw Qian Yannian fish out a talisman, just about to use it.

Li Qingshan roared out, "Stop, you old coot!"

Qian Yannian mocked him and said, "You're finally afraid?"

Li Qingshan said frigidly, "Whether it be the pills, spiritual stones, or talismans, everything in your hundred treasures pouch is my property. You best not use it, or you will die very soon!"

Your things are mine! You best not use them! That was as arrogant as one could get.

Qian Yannian had utterly lost his temper as well. Without any hesitation, the talisman in his hand exploded with light.

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Several hundred feet in front of the hall was a large, square terrace connected to five stairways, leading to various parts of the Qian estate. However, there was only one path that led up the mountain to the main hall.

Tonight, due to the birthday celebration, every single person of the Qian family had been mobilised. They had mobilised all the forces they had for the celebration. As a result, they gathered over from all directions due to the alarming activity on the mountain. There were even several people of the Qian family who knew neither martial arts nor how to practise qi. They all wanted to understand what had happened.

They saw a single figure standing on the terrace. People with better eyesight spotted her and cried out, "That's Qian Rongzhi!" "Kill her!"

Everyone in and near the Qian estate had heard Li Qingshan's previous words. Many of them ground their teeth at the thought of this traitor of the Qian family. However, when they got a little closer, they were all dumbstruck.

Qian Rongzhi was covered in blood as she smiled crazily and joyfully. A person covered in blood laid on the ground as he constantly gasped and moaned. She was holding something in her hand that fluttered in the night breeze.

Chapter 140 - Paradise in Purgatory

"Argh!" Many of the more timid cried out, almost falling down the stairs. Meanwhile, rumbles constantly rang out from the main hall behind the terrace. The large building tottered in the darkness as if it could collapse at any time.

Qian Rongzhi glanced back. As it seemed, Li Qingshan could still last a while longer, which would give her enough time to do what she wanted. She really was grateful to him.

Of course, you would be utterly wrong if you thought her opinion of Li Qingshan had changed. In her eyes, the best outcome of the battle would be for Li Qingshan and Qian Yannian to die together.

"Master! Master! Is it you?" A middle-aged woman identified the person on the ground from his hoarse shrieks. She choked back tears as she said, "Qian Rongzhi, you slut! You mad woman! Since when has our master done anything to you? Not only have you tried to seduce him, but you even want him dead?"

"I seduced him?" Qian Rongzhi licked the blood from the corner of her mouth. "Wasn't he the one who said he wanted to skin me alive? I asked him whether this was the correct way about it, but he wouldn't say anything. Did you know that?" She kicked the bloody person off the terrace, who rolled down the steps.

People parted to the sides, avoiding him like the plague. Just as their attention was drawn away by this blood person, a water arrow pierced through the crowd.

The middle-aged woman who had just spoken before had her throat pierced all the way through. She lowered her head and glanced at it in disbelief. This little slut was actually bold enough to attack me? That was her last thought before collapsing on the ground.

“Seems like you don’t know either,” Qian Rongzhi murmured.

Dark clouds shrouded the moon as the world turned dark.

Over a thousand people of the Qian family gathered on the terrace, only increasing in number. The flickering torches illuminated her bloody, beautiful face. It became twisted with the flickering firelight.

A young man in luxurious robes wailed, “Father! Mother!” Afterwards, he looked at Qian Rongzhi in utter hatred. “Let’s get her together, everyone! Let’s kill this mad woman and help out great-grandfather. Our Qian family will definitely survive this threat!”

With someone rousing them together, over a thousand people charged over menacingly. Their might was enough to frighten ordinary people to death. Even mosquitoes could kill elephants if they were sufficient in number. Moreover, even Qi Practitioners would run out of true qi, not to mention the fact that there were over a dozen first layer Qi Practitioners among them.

Qian Rongzhi was facing a dire situation.

However, there was no fear on her face at all. Instead, there was a hysteric smile. She moved her rosy lips gently and casually listing a bunch of names, “Qian Ronghui, Qian Rongcheng...”

There were old and young, men and women, out of the people that she had named. The one similarity they shared was that they were all Qi Practitioners, and their surnames were originally not Qian. However, they had been adopted by the Qian family due to their talent of being able to practise qi. They were taken aback when they were mentioned, and they halted.

“Haven’t you had enough of the abuse from the people of the Qian family? They view us as livestock, as slaves, yet you still want to die for them right now? The Qian family is already on the brink of destruction. Everyone from the Qian family will be slaughtered by the Hawkwolf Guard.”

Qian Xingwei’s son, the young man in luxurious robes, called out, “Don’t listen to her bullsh*t! Great-grandfather will deal with everything very soon. A horrible fate awaits all those who betray the Qian family!”

The people with the blood of the Qian family all echoed his words. The group pushed closer once more, and the swathe of weapons was only ten steps away from Qian Rongzhi now. However, due to their fear of Qian Rongzhi’s strength, they could not help but slow down.

Before they had even realised it, the people who Qian Rongzhi had named were avoided by the rest of the crowd. People even looked at them with gazes of caution.

Qian Rongzhi said, “The old coot Qian Yannian is in the main hall right behind here. If he could leave there, he would have left a long time ago. If you don’t consider for yourselves right now, it’ll be too late.”

Rumbles constantly rang out from the main hall. The people in there were clearly engaged in an intense battle. Qian Yannian, who had weighed on their hearts constantly and ruled over Ancient Wind city for almost an entire century, had clearly encountered a powerful opponent.

If Qian Yannian were present, all dissent would vanish. However, Qian Yannian was not here. Many people thought uneasily, is the Qian family really going to be destroyed?

The person who had been mentioned at the very beginning, Qian Ronghui, finally gave in. "What do you want?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's still not too late for you to leave the Qian family right now, or none will be spared when the clan is destroyed!"

Qian Ronghui hesitated. Many people hesitated. The young man called out, "Qian Ronghui, are you betraying our Qian family as well?"

Qian Rongzhi said with a corrupting voice, "You see? That's how the people of the Qian family treat you. Do you want to die under the Wind-entwining blades of the Hawkwolf Guard?"

Qian Ronghui glanced at the main hall in the darkness one last time before roaring out, "Alright, I'll leave the Qian family. From now onwards, I have no ties with the Qian family anymore." He turned around and made his way down the mountain. He did not plan on getting involved in this. He did not have the same, deep hatred for the Qian family as Qian Rongzhi. With him as a first, other people were tempted as well. They were prepared to leave.

The people of the Qian family cursed aloud. They pointed many of their weapons at Qian Ronghui. Qian Ronghui yelled out, "Move!"

"Did I say you could leave?" Qian Rongzhi's icy-cold voice made Qian Ronghui halt. He turned around furiously. "What else do you want!?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "If you leave right now, just wait until the world turns against you and tries to hunt you down!" Afterwards, she said to everyone, "I know you all. None of you even think about leaving here today. Right now, as long as you are not a direct descendant of the Qian family, you can clear your names by offering up the heads of the people from the Qian family. Otherwise, only death awaits you."

She was amidst danger, but not only did she not beg out of fear, but she even threatened everyone present viciously.

Everyone was thrown into a state of disarray. There were not a lot of direct descendants of the Qian family. Even they did not have the determination to die for the Qian family. They had just been tied to the Qian family, which dragged them down, let alone others.

She could understand what Li Qingshan felt; this feeling was utterly fantastic.

The pressure reached the limit. The air was reeking with the smell of blood. In the scorching summer night, under the illumination of firelight, droplets of sweat rolled down the foreheads of many people. Everyone was wary of the people around them as they tried their best to distinguish who was a direct descendant and who might try to clear their names between the firelight and darkness.

Within a century-old clan, the connections between the people were as dense and complicated as a spider's web, with countless grievances and resentments woven into it all.

Within the darkness, no one knew where the first blade fell and where the first shriek rose up. It seemed to set off a chain reaction. The first splash of blood was like a tiny spark falling on a swathe of dried grassy plains. It rapidly evolved into a raging wildfire.

Someone called out, "Kill these traitors!" "Encircle the Qian family!" Others called out, "For revenge!" There were even more shrieks and wails.

Pairs of eyes that had been dyed red by blood were unable to recognise whether the people beside them were family or foe. They swung their blades at everyone who approached them.

Many talismans turned into lightning and fire, erupting within the crowd.

The sounds of spears stabbing into flesh and blades cutting through bone wove together into a requiem. The estate of the Qian family devolved into a purgatory of asura.

Qian Rongzhi laughed crazily at the centre of the massacre. Great joy flooded her heart and head. All of her memories burned brightly. She had forgotten about the hidden threat from Qian Yannian. She had even forgotten about the boundary of life and death. She felt like this was heaven and that she was in paradise right now. Even if she died here immediately, none of it would matter anymore.

There were people who wanted to kill this traitor of the Qian family out of anger, as well as people who charged towards her after being carried away by the bloodbath.

However, out of everyone present, just who could kill a second layer Qi Practitioner? They all died to the Water-splitting bard, reduced to corpses, forming a ring around her. Gradually, no one dared to approach her. The tiny ring formed by corpses became the only land of peace within this purgatory of massacre.

Not a single person of Ancient Wind city would be able to forget about this night. They all raised their heads and watched this from within the city. They watched as the prosperous clan that had dominated Ancient Wind city for a century collapsed in the flames of disaster. They showed mixed emotions of fear, surprise, and joy.

Most of the Qi Practitioners who had fled from the hall had not left. They watched on in the darkness as well. They saw the horrific sights within the firelight and were all taken aback. None of them had thought that this would happen.

Originally, they thought Li Qingshan's declaration was just a joke where he bit off more than he could chew, something that would lead to his death. Qian Yannian would kill these three Hawkwolf guards swiftly before fleeing with the core members of the clan.

However, the matter had developed beyond their expectations. The Qian family was being destroyed! Qian Yannian remained in the main hall. He did not come out to end all of this. Someone had actually managed to stop him.

This was impossible! Even if they worked together, just a single arm from Qian Yannian was more than enough to kill a third layer Qi Practitioner and two second layer Qi Practitioners, unless there were other people from the Hawkwolf Guard hidden away, or had that Zhuo Zhibo already arrived in Ancient Wind city silently?

This was the most logical conclusion. It also explained why Li Qingshan was so arrogant. All of the Qi Practitioners felt fortunate that they did not remain on the mountain. In their eyes, the Hawkwolf Guard was not a system that could be reasoned with. It was even less likely for any of them to go assist the Qian family.

Once fire ran out of fuel, it would be the time for it to be extinguished. The flames of disaster used people as fuel. When most of the people were dead, it gradually subsided as well.

In an extremely short amount of time, over a thousand people were dead or injured. Blood flowed down the steps as corpses lay strewn.

On the top of a tree that no one noticed, the blood-red flames in Xiao An's eyes flickered as he watched all of these horrific sights unfold from beginning to end. He did not show surprise or fear like ordinary people. Instead, he was in thought as if he had comprehended something.

Tonight, Li Qingshan had made up his mind about striking, so he did not bring Xiao An with him, which was why he was not trapped in the jar and could move about freely. He could not help but worry for Li Qingshan. No matter how powerful Li Qingshan was, Xiao An still arrived outside the main hall using the darkness of the night, but he ended up seeing this, and he was unable to shift his gaze anymore. Li Qingshan's aura was extremely strong. He did not need his worry.

An eminent monk of buddhism created the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. The essence behind it originated from buddhism. As a result, he read and studied many buddhist scriptures to comprehend the true meaning behind it.

However, the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty completely overturned the scriptures, reversing the essential ideas. Even for him, a person that the black ox had deemed to be very talented, would frequently be confused.

In Li Qingshan's eyes, he just had to devour flesh and blood with great ease, and his cultivation would advance rapidly. He did not even need to eat pills. However, only he understood the difficulties behind it all. Whenever he hid within the dark jar, he never felt bored at all. He had not even considered boredom before. He constantly thought about the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty; he was like an ascetic monk in seclusion.

Now that he had witnessed this, he comprehended something.

Suddenly, a figure flew out from the main hall, landing on the terrace heavily. He wore a tattered Black Wolf uniform and seemed to be in a rather horrible shape. He was Li Qingshan.