

Chapter 141 - Qian Yannian's Death

The lightning from the talisman immediately illuminated the dark hall, but it could not hide the two balls of red light that had suddenly appeared.

The scorching white lightning struck the iron-like skin viciously, but it failed to leave a trace behind.

Qian Yannian took a step back. He looked at the huge monster that stood like an iron tower behind him as he became frantic. "D- daemon!"

He could not sense any daemon qi at all, but the tremendous pressure that had almost materialised crushed against his chest such that even his breathing became sluggish.

His mind was a mess. How could a teenager who seemed like a regular, weak second layer Qi Practitioner transform like this? This was an ability that completely exceeded his imagination.

Li Qingshan stretched a little. The sharp horns on his head almost reached the beams up top. He lowered his head and looked at Qian Yannian below as he said with a voice that sounded like resonating metal, "I said to stop! Why didn't you listen? Huh?"

Qian Yannian roared out crazily. The two Geng Metal Swords of Qi turned into two streaks of golden light, stabbing swiftly towards Li Qingshan. It seemed like he would struggle to dodge an attack like this with such a cumbersome body, but Li Qingshan did not plan to dodge either.

Before the Geng Metal Swords of Qi could even touch Li Qingshan, they were blocked by the shield shaped like a turtle's shell, directly crumbling into pieces under the attack of daemon qi. They failed to condense again.

Qian Yannian reached towards his hundred treasures pouch instinctively. Inside were talismans that could save his life, pills that could turn the situation around. The hundred treasures pouch was a second life to Qi Practitioners.

A sharp, crescent claw extended out from an index finger that seemed like a metal column. With a sharp, resonating screech, it stopped before Qian Yannian's forehead, forcing him to halt. He was afraid of even moving a finger. It was so fast that he was unable to react.

If Li Qingshan wanted to kill him, the claw would have penetrated his head already, claiming his life.

Qian Yannian's voice trembled as he said, "What do you want? I can give you everything! Just don't kill me!"

Li Qingshan fished the hundred treasures pouch from Qian Yannian, holding it between his fingers before picking up the tiny, toy-like Wind-entwining blade.

Qian Yannian's expression was mixed between fawning, flattering, and fear. Afterwards, it all collapsed like a mask.

Li Qingshan pierced Qian Yannian's chest with the blade without any hesitation at all. This was not a fatal wound to a fifth layer Qi Practitioner, but it was enough to take away most of his battle prowess, especially so when he was an old man over a hundred years old.

Qian Yannian's eyes widened. He opened his mouth as if he wanted to say something.

Li Qingshan flickered his finger, which shattered Qian Yannian's chin like a ballista.

Afterwards, Li Qingshan drew out the Wind-entwining blade, retreated a few steps back, and gradually shrank once again, returning to human form. He said to Qian Yannian, "Let's continue now! Do be aware that I'm coming to kill you now!"

Having lost his hundred treasures pouch, his two Geng Metal Swords of Qi, and suffered a stab in the chest, Qian Yannian was like a heavily injured, clawless and fangless beast. All he let out were meaningless howls and growls.

It was as if he knew fleeing was no longer possible. Qian Yannian forcefully sealed off his wounds with true qi and charged towards Li Qingshan while mobilising all his true qi.

Before Qian Yannian had even arrived, a fierce gust of wind rushed over. Qian Yannian shone with a faint, metallic lustre.

Li Qingshan swung down with his blade as hard as he could. Qian Yannian did not try to dodge it. He condensed faint golden qi blades with his arms and stabbed them at Li Qingshan's ribs.

Clang! The Wind-entwining blade that Li Qingshan had imbued with true qi and great strength cut through Qian Yannian's protective Geng Metal true qi and left behind a bloody gash on his shoulder.

Li Qingshan ignored it. Wiping and twisting the blade, he swung it towards Qian Yannian's neck this time. There was a clang of metal again, and he felt two stabbing sensations of pain from his ribs.

Qian Yannian's blades of qi easily cut through the Black Wolf uniform that could even stop crossbow bolts; it also broke through Li Qingshan's protective true qi, but it was unable to pierce Li Qingshan's skin that was as tough as an ox demon's hide.

There was a string of heavy barrages. Within such a tight space, neither of them took a step back, nor did they try to dodge. They launched several dozen attacks against their opponent.

Li Qingshan's Black Wolf uniform was already in tatters, while Qian Yannian was covered in blood. The wound on his chest constantly oozed with blood.

Qian Yannian's eyes reddened. He was like a wild tiger. In the end, he did not even try to use any moves. He just tackled Li Qingshan into a pillar.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! They smashed through five pillars in the hall, and the entire structure collapsed, kicking up dust everywhere.

Li Qingshan was covered in dust. He seemed to be in quite a horrible shape, but his eyes remained as tranquil as water the entire time. An attack as crazy as that obviously could not harm him, but a devastating battle like this was what he wanted.

A fifth layer Qi Practitioner who knew he was going to die, who fought like a caged beast, possessed tenacity beyond Li Qingshan's imagination. Even when he was heavily injured, he could still unleash startling battle prowess.

Li Qingshan discovered that with his strength as a second layer Qi Practitioner, it would be very difficult to defeat Qian Yannian despite his tough body.

All of his true qi was blasted away wildly. Li Qingshan basically could not counterattack at all, and finally, a fist landed firmly on his chest. He did not try to stabilise himself. As a result, he flew over thirty meters away, landing heavily on the terrace. He did not even forget to add, "How powerful!"

There obviously was a reason for his act. He wanted to kill Qian Yannian in public, not kill him in a single strike. He purposefully made a disturbance to clear up any potential suspicion that he was related to Zhao Liangqing's death; he wanted to hide his identity as a daemon.

Not only could he appear weak to his hidden enemies to numb their sense of danger, but he could also mislead some of them as well so that they would not be in a hurry to kill him; this would earn him even more time to grow. It truly was quite the plan.

However, before Li Qingshan could take pride in the facade that he had spun, he became stunned when he looked around.

The heavy smell of blood enveloped the entire terrace. The moist, sticky blood dried and blackened. Over a thousand corpses, men and women, old and young, were piled on the terrace and steps. It was impossible to imagine just how horrific of a sight it was unless people had seen it in person.

There were countless arms and legs, countless twisted faces, and countless eyes that remained wide open even upon death. Li Qingshan had been locked in a 'battle to the death' with Qian Yannian within the hall, so he was in no shape to care about the shrieks and howls outside. He basically turned a deaf ear to it all. Now that he had seen it in person, he felt deeply shocked even when he had killed many people with his own hands before and believed he had grown accustomed to bloodiness and death.

Who was it? Who did all this?

The moon emerged from the dark clouds, coating everything with a silver glow. The surroundings were deathly silent. There were no chirpings of insects, as if all the living creatures there had been stunned, afraid to make a disturbance.

The person behind all this, Qian Rongzhi, currently held a Water-splitting barb as she sent the survivors who still groaned and breathed in the piles of corpses off to hell.

Qian Ronghui retreated with difficulty. "Don't, Rongzhi! We have no grievances!" He had been sucked into the bloody massacre in the very beginning, but with his strength as a peak first layer Qi Practitioner, he had managed to survive. However, all of his true qi was depleted, and he was covered in wounds. He basically had no strength left.

Qian Rongzhi responded, "During the autumn four years ago, on August 15, you called me a whore!" The Water-splitting barb stabbed into Qian Ronghui's head mercilessly.

Qian Yannian followed Li Qingshan outside the hall. He saw this and was immediately stunned. He recovered a sliver of rationality. Was the Qian family over just like this?

Qian Rongzhi looked back at Qian Yannian. There was no fear on her face. Instead, she said with great satisfaction, "Haha, grandfather, do you see now? All of your descendants are dead!"

With a wild howl, Qian Yannian descended into even greater madness. He ignored Li Qingshan, charging straight towards Qian Rongzhi.

Li Qingshan held the Wind-entwining blade that was covered in knicks, but he did not swing it. This woman was wicked and two-faced. She had repeatedly worked against him, so why would he save her?

Watching Qian Yannian charge over, Qian Rongzhi took out three fire talismans and launched them at Qian Yannian as fireballs.

Boom! Boom! Boom! With three explosions, fire rose into the air as the shockwave blasted away the corpses.

However, before Qian Rongzhi could celebrate, she saw Qian Yannian forcefully charge through the fire. His remaining strands of hair were singed away, and he was charred all over. He was even still on fire as he charged towards her recklessly.

Qian Rongzhi finally showed a sliver of fear, but she did not flee. She gripped the Water-splitting barb tightly, and it shone with azure light as it stabbed towards Qian Yannian.

Suddenly, verdant, green vines sprouted from the ground, wrapping around Qian Yannian like a snake. He erupted with Geng Metal true qi, tearing away the vines, but he had halted due to it. The azure light pierced his chest and blood gurgled from the wound that Li Qingshan had originally dealt him. It now flowed relentlessly.

Qian Yannian staggered a few more steps forward. Even more green vines sprouted beneath him, wrapping around him. He was like a moth caught in a spider's web. His struggle became more and more powerless.

Diao Fei had returned at a certain time. He held his right hand in a seal before his chest as he stared right at Qian Yannian. The green vines came from a technique he used.

Only then did Li Qingshan learn that Diao Fei did not practise the Innate Method of Practising Qi, but probably a cultivation method from Green Vine mountain!

Qian Yannian seemed like she never imagined her strike would be effective either. Her face lit up crazily, but she did not rush up to finish him off. Instead, she retreated over a dozen steps away cautiously. "Grandfather, your concubines, wives, and children are all here. Do you see them? Look, just right beside your foot! Oh, you've kicked your beloved concubine's head. But that doesn't matter anymore. I've also helped you kill all the traitors of the Qian family. What do you think? I've returned all the kindness the Qian family has shown me!"

Qian Yannian howled, but he had already reached the end of his rope during his battle against Li Qingshan. This charge took up the last of his energy. He only remained alive due to his heavy true qi. He glared at Qian Rongzhi viciously as if he wanted to dig out a piece of her.

However, Qian Rongzhi only smiled widely and chattered endlessly, "I remember, you promised me in the past that you would make me the leader of the Qian family. Of course, I knew you were lying to me. Why would you make an outsider, moreover a woman, the leader of the family? But now, there's no one else who can inherit the position of patriarch, so just let me inherit it."

Then she seemed distressed. "But now, the Qian family doesn't have anyone left, so there's no point in being a leader anymore, so I think I'll return the position to you. You are the first and last patriarch of the Qian family."

Every single word from Qian Rongzhi was like a blade, piercing Qian Yannian and making him tremble all over. However, his chin had been crushed, so he was unable to utter a single word. He raised his head and let out a spurt of blood before the green vines swallowed him.

Chapter 142 - Carrying out Justice

The verdant green vines formed quite a contrast with the world of blood and darkness. It extended and grew, teeming with vigor as it formed a tight cocoon.

For quite a while, only the rustling of the green vines were present.

Qian Rongzhi had stopped talking at a certain time. She just stared at the verdant cocoon dazedly.

After confirming Qian Yannian's death, Diao Fei rushed up urgently and removed the vines. He searched through Qian Yannian's body, but he obviously failed to find the hundred treasures pouch.

He could not help but turn back and look at the tenacious sixteen-year-old, but all he saw was him standing among the blood and corpses, gazing at the night sky. His gaze was basically drawn away by the night sky. The moonlight enveloped his body as if all of this bloodiness had nothing to do with him.

The stars in the summer night sky were extremely resplendent, where even the moon failed to drown them out. Li Qingshan discovered that compared to all of these corpses, the starry sky was still prettier.

He was not putting on an act like he was contemplating the philosophies of life. Instead, he just suddenly felt lament, but he was unable to describe what he was lamenting over. He could not help but think of that dream again, where all the stars were submerged in a sea of blood.

After thinking about all that, Li Qingshan lowered his head. "How many did you get?"

"Three. Two escaped."

"That's pretty good."

"You're too kind."

It was a very short conversation. Diao Fei obviously would not ask where Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch was like an idiot, nor did he ask Li Qingshan to give him a share of it. Originally, he had his own plans as well, which was to chase down the utterly harmless second layer Qi Practitioners. After that, he would quietly return here to check on the development of the situation. If Li Qingshan were dead, he would leave quietly and report back to Zhuo Zhibo. Such an approach ensured that he would be in no danger at all.

However, he had never thought that Li Qingshan would actually be able to reduce Qian Yannian to such a state. Diao Fei knew the best himself. His Entangling Vines could never capture a fifth layer Qi Practitioner under ordinary circumstances. Qian Yannian was clearly at the end of his rope—all because of Li Qingshan.

Although it all seemed extremely difficult, Li Qingshan had truly managed to tire out and waste away a fifth layer Qi Practitioner. It was still best for Diao Fei to maintain some respect for the powerful.

Although the Qi Practitioners below the mountain were far away, they had many ways to see what happened on the mountain. All of their faces were filled with disbelief. From the beginning till the end, they had not seen a single hidden master from the Hawkwolf Guard. It had just been the teenager, all by himself. As a second layer Qi Practitioner, he had actually managed to battle with Qian Yannian for so long?

In the end, he even won somehow. Had Qian Yannian really grown senile to the point where he would be defeated like this? This was probably the only explanation.

Gong Liangbai murmured, "How's this possible?" He spoke the minds of all the Qi Practitioners present.

With a clang, the Water-splitting barb fell to the floor; faint sobs followed.

The moment Qian Rongzhi saw Qian Yannian's corpse, she shuddered. Her smile vanished completely, and she remained dazed for quite a while as a warm liquid flowed down her face. They were not tears of blood, just ordinary tears.

She did not know why she was crying. She just suddenly burst into tears.

Li Qingshan and Diao Fei looked at each other. Neither of them said anything.

Li Qingshan took in a deep breath and announced, "Today, the Hawkwolf Guard, composed of Li Qingshan, Diao Fei, and Qian Rongzhi, has formally carried out justice and executed Qian Yannian here." He paused before adding, "And we've destroyed the Qian family as a warning for others. You Qi Practitioners are naturally endowed, so take this as a lesson. If you turn a blind eye to what is right and wrong, act as you please, and defy the principles of nature and morality, this will be your fate!"

His loud, clear voice drowned out Qian Rongzhi's sobs. It reached the bottom of the mountain clearly, resounding through the entire city.

The first cheer came from a gloomy corner in an alleyway. It came from an abject scholar. He could not help but sigh in admiration, but even when he did so, he did it carefully. Two years ago, the Qian family wanted to build a garden, so they forcefully demolished his ancestral home. His wife and children became homeless, and out of pure anger, his wife fell sick, which almost claimed her life. He managed to make it through this rough patch after great difficulty, renting a small room and relying on his calligraphy to barely make ends meet. However, the indignation remained within him. Originally, he wanted to repress it for the rest of his life, but he never thought there would finally be a day of retribution.

However, his cheer was like the start of a chain reaction. It led to a tremendous clamour, rising steeply and reaching the terrace at the top of the mountain, as if it was a response to Li Qingshan's proclamation.

All Li Qingshan saw was Ancient Wind city ablaze with lanterns. Countless people emerged from their homes, cheering in excitement. Many people hugged each other tearfully as they walked around the city. It was as if a huge celebration of a festival was taking place. The lanterns and firecrackers that the Qian family had forced them to prepare finally came into use. However, they were now celebrating the end of the Qian family.

Li Qingshan smiled. Perhaps there were many innocent people among the corpses on the ground. However, he was not some perfect hero, scrupulous over morality. Couldn't he just bear the burden of a few human lives? If the entire Qian family was slaughtered, then they were slaughtered. There was nothing he was afraid to admit.

How could the misfortune of one be compared to the misfortune of many?

Only the expressions of the Qi Practitioners hidden within the darkness changed drastically. Li Qingshan's threatening tone clearly targeted them. They found it humiliating, and they felt furious, but at the same time, they could not help but repress it. They even felt a sliver of fear. They subconsciously checked themselves to see if they were the same as the Qian family or not.

Barely killing Qian Yannian and the destruction of the Qian family led to cheers from all; it was as if Li Qingshan was a god who enforced law, standing on an altar and glaring and provoking all sorts of evil spirits. No one was bold enough to openly confront them. All could only shrink back and tremble.

Li Qingshan did not show any respect to these people. It did not necessarily mean that they had all committed heinous deeds like Qian Yannian just because they came to celebrate the birthday. As a matter of fact, they would probably try to explain themselves as completely ignorant of the Qian family's actions. However, there was not a single person who could not hear the cries, wails, and howls that even echoed through the clouds. Unfortunately, they probably all just turned a deaf ear to it. They were knowledgeable about protecting themselves. They would not offend a Qi Practitioner clan over some common people.

The Qi Practitioners all remained hidden in the darkness as they left Ancient Wind city. They all memorised one name.

Li Qingshan said, "Have you cried enough?"

Qian Rongzhi raised her head in confusion.

Li Qingshan said, "If you've cried enough, then let's go. Our mission is complete!" He had already obtained what he wanted.

With that, he glanced at the top of a tree in the distance before making his way down the mountain with no regard to Diao Fei or Qian Rongzhi.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Hold on!"

Li Qingshan turned around in doubt, and all he saw was Qian Rongzhi smile from ear to ear. She wiped away her tears and said, "I still haven't grabbed anything yet!" Afterwards, she flipped through the pile of corpses as she said, "If you leave behind a weak girl like me, I'll be scared."

Li Qingshan was taken aback. Originally, he thought the pressure she was under would ease up after achieving revenge. Perhaps she would not achieve instantaneous comprehension about everything in the whole wide world, but at least she should have developed some understanding towards life and lose some of her pettiness and viciousness. However, the reality was the exact opposite. Revenge had indeed released certain things in her heart.

However, what was released was not some great feeling of joy, or any repressed purity or kind-heartedness. She finally did not have to act as the young miss of the Qian family anymore. As she laughed amidst the pile of corpses, the craziness seemed to become a part of her, twisting her even more.

Only now did Li Qingshan understand that instantaneous enlightenment and repentance was all just stuff from fairytales. The true norm of the world was that while the world was easy to change, the nature of people were not. There were both buddhas and demons in the world, or perhaps, that was the norm as well?

Qian Rongzhi bowed slightly. "Thank you for helping out today. Only then was I able to achieve revenge. If you don't mind, I'm willing to offer up myself." She smiled from ear to ear. She seemed to be in an extremely good mood.

Li Qingshan did not stop at all, while Diao Fei walked away even faster, acting like he was avoiding the plague. They pulled away from Qian Rongzhi's crazy laughter.

Qian Rongzhi paced around through the corpses like a pitch-black ghost. She had stopped searching for things a long time ago. Instead, she was more like an artist, admiring her greatest piece of work, like a tourist strolling through a wonderful garden.

She would stop from time to time, holding a familiar face and saying some things to it. Even when there was no reply, she would still giggle for quite a while. Compared to this purgatory of corpses, she seemed much stranger and more terrifying.

Having received Li Qingshan's signal, Xiao An did not leave immediately. Instead, he remained hidden to one side, sinking into an intense thought process.

The eminent monk was gifted with both fortune and wisdom. The world seemed like it was on fire, in a sea of misery, with all people submerged within it. They were afflicted with greed, hatred, and ignorance and were unable to break free from it. As a result, the eminent monk practised Mahāyāna buddhism, yet he was still unable to help and save all living creatures. He either took pity on their misfortune or was furious at their incapability.

With pity came endless benevolence. With fury came an endless urge to kill.

In the face of the great tribulation of the world, between life and death, he discovered that there was still something obstructing his heart. He gained an understanding of himself again, so he followed his true nature, swearing the four encompassing vows. As such, nothing obstructed him anymore, allowing him to overcome the tribulation.

Just like māra with their natures of great malevolence, they understood their natures and slaughtered freely, achieving ishvara or unencumberance, standing on equal footing to buddha.

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“Oh, I understand now. The eminent monk was an ultimate genius who saw how all the living creatures were so foolish and stupid. They would never listen to him no matter what he said, and they would never understand him no matter how he put it, so it cast a shadow in his heart, but then it was repressed by the three words ‘I am benevolent’, so he could only keep it repressed inside, unable to release it. As a result, he experienced tremendous pressure.”

“Compared to bringing salvation to an idiot, no, a bunch of idiots, it was just easier to kill them off with a single stroke. It’s just like a group of flies surrounding him all day long, so he caught one, split open its stomach, and dragged out its organs, using its own organs to choke it. Heh, even its tongue would stick out! Afterwards, he would raise his blade; once it fell, whoosh, the whole world was peaceful.”

In a small inn below the mountain, Xiao An wrote down his understanding on a piece of paper and told Li Qingshan. That was what Li Qingshan said after thinking about it.

His words left Xiao An utterly stunned. He felt like with what Li Qingshan said, this eminent monk was nowhere near as impressive as he seemed to be. The White Bone Bodhisattva was one who possessed great wisdom and great power even after descending into the demonic path, but now, all the pains and sufferings this bodhisattva went through seemed no different from the hardships of common people.

Li Qingshan said, “Look, Xiao An, let me tell you. If you want to live as a person, the most important part is being happy. It’s not different for skeletons either. You can’t go to the extremes. Everyone who goes to the extremes has something wrong with their heads. If you come across someone, you are welcome to reason with them, but if reason doesn’t work, just give them a swing of your blade.”

Author’s Postscript: It all seems to be too intense lately, so I added some wisdom from Li Qingshan to ease it up. We’re currently approaching the name and synopsis of this volume step by step. Oi, oi, oi, instead of caring for some twisted woman, let’s worry about our cute Xiao An instead. That’s more important. Look, when it comes to writing, the most important part is the monthly tickets. You all understand me.

Chapter 143 - Bountiful Returns

Li Qingshan continued, “Alright, look. You wanted to be a good person, but you’re basically bending over backwards for slaps to the face. And then you couldn’t put up with that, so you became a bad person, basically killing everything and everyone in sight mindlessly. You couldn’t bring salvation to all living creatures, so you decided you would destroy all living creatures. If that’s not a mental disorder, what would it be? If you should comprehend this ability, then comprehend it. If you should cultivate it, then cultivate it. But don’t take it all too seriously.”

As a result, a certain powerful being beyond the Nine Heavens became labelled as someone suffering from a mental disorder.

If the black ox were present, it would have definitely chimed in with praises, not because of how impressive what Li Qingshan saw was, or how intelligent he seemed. Instead, it was the exact opposite. This all sounded slightly stupid, but contemplating the philosophy of life, the truth of the world, had never been his specialty.

He was not a wise man. He did not have great wisdom or knowledge. He was not a benevolent man either. He did not have great benevolence or great mercy.

He was a courageous man. He gave off an aura of unruliness and fearlessness. If he could not think it through, then he would just stop thinking about it. He would approach matters in whatever way that made him happy.

This was easy to say, but even great cultivators countless times more powerful than Li Qingshan could only carefully comprehend and understand the essence of an ability created by immortals and buddhas beyond the distant Nine Heavens. It was impossible for them to be like what Li Qingshan had said, "Don't take it too seriously."

People could not go without reverence and fear, yet those who were courageous were fearless. At the end of the day, abilities and cultivation methods would only be tools to me, existing purely for the sake of achieving what I want. This would never be reversed, where it supersedes my original goals.

Xiao An obviously treated Li Qingshan's teachings as the gold standard. He viewed it with much greater importance than the essential ideas from the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. Although he did feel that there was something off about Li Qingshan words, he definitely would not be wrong. Instead, either Xiao An had not thought it through, or there was something wrong with this eminent monk. However, it did clear up his messy, abstruse thoughts, preventing the ability from affecting him too much.

Probably no one would have imagined that something as wondrous as this would arise from a half-assed teacher and an ignorant student.

Li Qingshan felt rather proud of himself. Whether it be Xiao An's talent or his intelligence, they were both extraordinary. Moreover, Xiao An was still a child, so he needed his guidance that served as a beacon.

As he said that, Li Qingshan's stomach rumbled again. He would always become famished after a great battle. He went out and had a great meal before coming back and locking his door.

Li Qingshan calmed himself down from his excitement and took out Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch. "Now let's see what we've gotten in return for all of this!"

As soon as he channeled true qi into it, he could not help but gasp. The space inside was as large as a store room. This was the largest hundred treasures pouch he had obtained so far. It was even slightly larger than Zhao Liangqing's.

Li Qingshan was worried that Zhao Liangqing's hundred treasures pouch had been imprinted by the Sect of Clouds and Rain, so he was afraid of carrying it around with him. There was no possibility with this one, so it could replace the one he obtained from the Hawkwolf Guard.

There were various items stored in the hundred treasures pouch, forming quite an assortment.

The first thing that Li Qingshan searched for were pills.

For once, Qian Rongzhi was not lying. He took out small bottle after small bottle, placing them onto the table. Before long, the table was covered by them. The pill refining arts of the Qian family did not seem

to be particularly impressive. Each Qi Gathering pill was the size of a longan at the very least, and each bottle only held three of them.

However, even with that being the case, there were over four hundred of them. This was Qian Yannian's greatest tool to control the Qian family, but it was just easy pickings for Li Qingshan now. Just these pills were enough for him to reach a whole new level with his daemonic path.

He probably could reach the second layer with the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, and afterwards, he would be able to practise the Tiger Demon's Fist of Bone Forging. As for the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression, he had basically been practising it everyday, even when he practised qi. Most of the power from the Qi Gathering pills had been devoured by it. Although there was still a very long road ahead of him before he could face the first heavenly tribulation and become a Daemon General, he was travelling very swiftly towards it.

With over a hundred bottles of Qi Gathering pills placed together, Li Qingshan was overjoyed by the sight. He smiled from ear to ear like a poor man who had suddenly won the lottery. He casually took out a pill, tossed it into the air, but he did not swallow it immediately. Instead, he sucked on it like candy. The Qi Gathering pill that was refined from several dozen medicinal herbs was extremely bitter and astringent. It viciously stimulated his mouth, but Li Qingshan sucked on it like he was tasting tea. There was a certain sweetness to it.

Xiao An saw how Li Qingshan's brows were furrowed as he smiled ear to ear before counting through the Qi Gathering pills on the table. He thought of the sight when Qian Rongzhi spoke to the corpses again.

The collection was not limited to Qi Gathering pills. There were several bottles of relatively more precious pills similar to Pearl Dew pills. They were called Hundred Herb pills and were basically a stronger version of the Qi Gathering pill. As they required even more precious herbs and had a greater requirement on the alchemist's ability, there were not a lot of them. There were only around a dozen in total. Li Qingshan planned on saving them for important moments when he needed to break through.

Aside from that, there were other pills for strengthening vitality like Blood Invigoration pills. Clearly, the old coot Qian Yannian knew his life was coming to an end and wanted to last for a little longer.

The twenty-seven talismans exceeded all of the talismans Li Qingshan had collected so far ever since he began cultivating. Looking at the squiggly writing on the talismans, Li Qingshan only managed to recognise a small portion of them. Five of them were mid grade Lightning Summoning talismans. This daoist talisman was extremely powerful. If it were used during a lightning storm, it could even summon heavenly lightning. It had startling power to incapacitate or kill.

Even without the other talismans, if Qian Yannian used these five Lightning Summoning talismans together, he could basically kill any Qi Practitioner below the sixth layer instantly. Even sixth layer Qi Practitioners would have to be wary.

If Li Qingshan did not possess the tenacity from daemonifying, only death would await him from making trouble with Qian Yannian.

However, to Li Qingshan's slight pity, there were not a lot of spiritual artifacts. There were only two at the low grade. Clearly, Qian Yannian was not skilled at forging artifacts, nor did he go around killing Qi Practitioners like the Hawkwolf Guard.

Out of the two low grade spiritual artifacts, one of them was a patterned, hidden blade around a foot in length. Once true qi was channeled into it, a blade five feet in length would extend out from it, becoming an extremely long sword. Li Qingshan immediately gave it to Xiao An.

The other spiritual artifact was rather special. It was a wooden buckler the size of a washbasin. When he tried channeling true qi into it, the tiny buckler suddenly expanded to the size of a pedestal. It became much heavier as well.

Li Qingshan already knew that some spiritual artifacts could transform, such as Wang Pushi's metal baton. However, this was the first time he had obtained something like this, and it was for defence as well.

However, he found this spiritual artifact to be extremely fitting. With this, he would be able to wield a huge shield in hand and run around carelessly. If he came across an enemy, he could slam them with the shield. Just who would be able to block an attack like that?

Aside from that, the pouch contained items that ordinary people desired. The first item out of all of them was gold and silver. There were one and a half million taels of silver notes, which was slightly less than he had imagined. Qian Yannian had ruled over Ancient Wind city for all these years, yet he had not even accumulated as much wealth as Zhao Liangqing. However, with further thought, it did make sense. The Qian family was a large household, so they had a lot of people that needed to be fed. And, most of the money would probably be in the hands of the caretaker under Qian Yannian's command.

However, there was not just money. There was a large pile of deeds for property as well. Just from a casual glance at it, he could tell that the Qian family owned most of the real estate in Ancient Wind city as well as much of the fertile land outside the city.

According to the rule, everything that a Hawkwolf guard obtained from a mission would belong to them. In a single night, Li Qingshan had become a great landowner. As he compared this to the days he spent in the cowshed, he could not help but sigh in amazement.

Originally, Li Qingshan wanted to check out Qian Yannian's cultivation method that allowed him to emit sword qi from his nostrils, but he failed to find it. However, he was not particularly affected by this. He had contribution once he returned to the Hawkwolf Guard anyway, so he could check out their library. And, before he reached the ninth layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi, he had no plans to change cultivation methods. He was in no hurry to find a new one.

The sounds of celebration outside continued. Gongs and drums rang through the air as firecrackers were set off. They seemed to celebrate for the entire night.

Li Qingshan smiled. He ate another Qi Gathering pill and began cultivating.

Xiao An meditated as well, sitting beside him with his legs crossed.

The morning next day, the district magistrate who had a weathered and rather miserable face, but also happened to be smiling from ear to ear, knocked on Li Qingshan's door. When he saw Li Qingshan, he

was taken aback. He had never thought that the great sir Hawkwolf guard who had destroyed the Qian family and shocked the Ancient Wind city the night before would actually be so young. He basically doubted whether he had the right person or not.

Li Qingshan said, "Sir, what's the matter?"

The district magistrate was extremely familiar with the voice that pierced through the darkness last night. After confirming that Li Qingshan was the person he was looking for, he stated his reason for visiting.

Li Qingshan had no idea how to respond. The district magistrate wanted to parade him through the streets as a hero. He said that the hand-held carriage was already prepared downstairs. Li Qingshan obviously declined.

The district magistrate did not try to insist on it. No one would be bold enough to force someone who seemed like a vicious god like him into anything.

Li Qingshan said, "If you want to do that, you'll be better off sending people up the mountain to clean up the remains instead. The weather is warm right now, so it might lead to diseases if you don't."

The district magistrate said, "Thank you for your reminder, sir. I've already sent people to deal with this. There's an open pit near the Qian estate, at the bottom of the mountain to the west. I've tried to gather the people to move the remains there to be buried, but they all find it to be a foul job. Moreover, since it's the remains of the people of the Qian estate, none of them want to do it."

Li Qingshan considered it. "There should be quite a lot of gold and silverware left in the Qian estate. You can send people in to gather them and pay the people with those items. You need to deal with this today. We can't afford any delays."

The district magistrate was overjoyed. He agreed in a hurry as he thought to himself about how well Li Qingshan understood the common people. If Li Qingshan had not spoken, no one would have been bold enough to touch the items of the Qian estate.

Li Qingshan had another plan for all of this. After sending off the district magistrate, he said to Xiao An, "Can you really cultivate like this?"

Xiao An nodded.

Li Qingshan said, "Around how long do you have to take?"

Xiao An shook his head.

Li Qingshan said, "Alright. Then we'll stay here for a while. It'll be perfect for me to settle down and cultivate a little as well. Once we return to Jiaping city, it probably won't be as peaceful as before."

"How impressive of you, Li Qingshan!"

In the office of the Hawkwolf Guard of Jiaping city, Zhuo Zhibo held a letter in a small garden as the corner of his eyes twitched. He lost his temper and shattered the stone table with a slam of his hand.

His contact in Clear River city had responded to his letter. He finally knew everything that had happened under the lone pine tree outside Qingyang city.

Chapter 144 - The Vicious Tiger, the Venomous Snake and the Vulture

Li Qingshan did not have any backing at all. As a matter of fact, Wang Pushi had not even taken a liking to him, which was why he had directly sent him to Zhuo Zhibo's command. If Gu Yanying really did take special note of this kid, Wang Pushi would obviously treat this kid carefully, just like how Zhuo Zhibo would carefully serve someone Wang Pushi cared about.

This was a principle that could not be more simple. Zhuo Zhibo had just been too cautious, constantly wondering, What if? The aspect that had affected him the most was still the kid's attitude. He was just too haughty, to a point where Zhou Zhibo felt like he possessed a powerful backing.

With the cruel truth now revealed, Zhuo Zhibo only felt like he had been viciously played. His face reddened before darkening. His fury towards Li Qingshan immediately erupted.

"Please calm down, commander Zhuo," Ge Jian persuaded in a sensible manner.

Zhuo Zhibo said frigidly, "As a Black Hawk Commander, I stand above millions. Who knows how many lives I have control over. It has been so many years since someone has been bold enough to play me like this! Li Qingshan, oh Li Qingshan, how very impressive of you!"

Ge Jian said, "Though, the kid probably won't be able to return from Ancient Wind city. There's no need to be angry over a dead person, commander."

Zhuo Zhibo said, "It's just a pity that I couldn't kill him personally. And that Zhou Wenbin, he's nothing good either."

Ge Jian said, "He has been sent here all alone to serve as the district magistrate. He does not have a single Qi Practitioner under his command, so why does the commander have to put up with him? Our Hawkwolf Guard has the responsibility of monitoring the government. Why don't we find some evidence of crimes and try to make him guilty?"

Zhuo Zhibo said, "Shut up. What evidence can you find? He comes from the Academy of the Hundred Schools. He has countless colleagues, and even the prefect appreciates him very much. If I fall out with him, I'll only disappoint commander Wang."

Ge Jian said, "Yes, sir. I've misspoken."

Zhuo Zhibo said, "Let's just wait for the news of this kid dying on duty!" Afterwards, he would immediately set off for Ancient Wind city and destroy the Qian family to avenge Li Qingshan, showing off the might of the Hawkwolf Guard. That old man Qian must have saved up quite a lot of things over all these years. It was time for harvesting.

This was Qian Rongzhi's original scheme. They would kill two birds with one stone, destroying the Qian family and Li Qingshan, while Zhuo Zhibo would obtain some rich spoils of battle as well.

At dusk, Li Qingshan arrived at the open pit to the west of the mountain that the district magistrate had mentioned. The pit was not particularly large, but it was more than enough to hold the remains of over a thousand people.

There was a heavy rotting smell from the pit. Li Qingshan subconsciously held his breath. It had only been a day, but the corpses had rotted quite a lot. It was even more unbearable than the heavy smell of blood last night.

The recruited civilians were currently moving the corpses over, stripping them of their clothes and throwing it into a fire on the side before tossing the pale corpses into the open pit.

Every single person furrowed their brows as they covered their noses and mouths with moist cloth. If it were not for the hefty rewards from the district magistrate and the threat of a disease outbreak, none of them would have been willing to do this. Not only was it disgusting and unbearable, but they also felt like it would all lead to misfortune.

Black smoke rose up from the fire, floating directly into the sky. There was not the slightest breeze in the wilderness. The red sun that was about to set continued to produce a scorching heat, causing the foul air to shimmer.

Countless crows circled in the air as they cawed. They would dive down from time to time to feast on the eyes of the corpses.

All of this seemed even more ominous compared to the night before.

There probably was no other place more foul than this in the world.

The district magistrate originally maintained a wide berth from all of it, but when he heard that Li Qingshan had come as well, he rushed over in a hurry and said, "Sir, how do you find this? Is it sufficient?"

Li Qingshan nodded, but before he could even reply, the district magistrate glanced at the open pit and covered his mouth as he vomited. In the end, he scrambled away from there.

Once all the corpses were thrown into the pit, the civilians began filling up the pit with soil. This lasted until the sun had set and night had descended. Only then were they almost done.

Li Qingshan hesitated before throwing the jar in his hand into the centre of the open pit. He allowed the people to bury it together with the corpses.

Li Qingshan stood at the edge of the pit for quite a while. Even after quite some time, the stink did not disperse.

"Did you know that plants grow particularly well in places where corpses are buried? When I was young, I poisoned a dog to death. I buried it in the garden house, and from then on, the flowers that bloomed every year would be particularly beautiful."

Li Qingshan turned around. Diao Fei and Qian Rongzhi stood nearby.

Qian Rongzhi made her way over and looked at the pit. "In under a year, this will become the place with the lushest vegetation."

Li Qingshan had no interest in joining this conversation with her. Meanwhile, Diao Fei said, "The mission has been complete. It's time for us to return, right?"

Li Qingshan said, "I still want to stay here for a while. I want to deal with the property and land under my name. You should return first."

Qian Rongzhi sneered as she said, "Don't tell me you're thinking of running now? You don't know Gu Yanying at all, do you? How is it possible for a bumpkin like you to know a woman like that? Zhuo Zhibo has probably already gotten to the bottom of this now. It will be your time to die when you return. However, how are you supposed to run away? There won't be a single place in the world to shelter you if you bear the crime of betraying the Hawkwolf Guard."

Li Qingshan grabbed Qian Rongzhi by the throat and said calmly, "Do you believe that I can kill you right now? And have you buried with those other people?"

"Stop, Li Qingshan!" Diao Fei wanted to go up and stop him, but Li Qingshan raised his left hand towards him, and he stopped.

Qian Rongzhi said with difficulty, "If you kill me, then you'll have to silence Diao Fei as well. Can you really manage that?"

Diao Fei's expression changed drastically. He could not help but take a few steps back as he raised his guard. After last night, he no longer believed that he was Li Qingshan's opponent.

Li Qingshan was unfazed. His hand gradually tightened, and Qian Rongzhi's face became bright red. Fear appeared in her eyes. Just when she felt that her neck was about to snap, the grip suddenly loosened, and she collapsed on the ground on her knees, gasping heavily.

Li Qingshan said, "Don't piss me off." He stared right into Qian Rongzhi's hateful eyes. "Go back and tell Zhuo Zhibo that I'll be returning to Jiaping very soon. If he's sick of waiting, he can come to Ancient Wind city to find me. I welcome him at all times."

Afterwards, he crouched down and said to Qian Rongzhi, "If you're scheming to kill me, then you'd best be prepared. You'll only have one chance. If you fail, I will use everything I have to kill you. Of course, it's best if you forget about that, or perhaps one day when I'm in a bad mood, I'll just kill you off to cheer myself up."

Hatred was gradually replaced by fear. Qian Rongzhi felt an indescribable pressure from his calm voice. The suffocating feeling felt even more realistic than being choked earlier.

"W- what benefit would I get out of your death?" Qian Rongzhi dodged Li Qingshan's gaze as she said stiffly.

Just like how people would always meet their match, once her vicious 'wickedness' was compared to Li Qingshan's cruel and overpowering 'wickedness', it would naturally shy away in response.

Li Qingshan stood up and left the pit, making his way back to Ancient Wind city.

Qian Rongzhi stood up and flicked off the soil from her body. She tidied her clothes and recovered her smile. She stared at Li Qingshan's back as she said to herself, "One... chance?"

Diao Fei shivered inside. He asked, "Are you going back?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "I've managed to return home after so much difficulty, so how I can leave so soon?"

Diao Fei was actually relieved by her reply. He was clearly the greatest cultivator out of the three of them, at the third layer of Qi Practitioner, and he was the oldest, so he was the most experienced in roaming the jianghu. As a matter of fact, he was even more widely-renowned compared to the two of them. His name of Diao Fei, or master Diao, was widespread in the jianghu. It was not something that a name like the Black Tiger could rival. He was known for his craftiness, coldness, and being difficult to handle.

However, he felt like he was standing between a venomous snake and a vicious tiger, constantly feeling like he could die at any time.

This was not a false impression. Whether it be Qian Rongzhi's devilish schemes or Li Qingshan's forceful methods, there was nothing ensuring Diao Fei's personal safety. He faced the most amount of danger.

Qian Rongzhi wanted Qian Yannian to kill Li Qingshan, so Diao Fei would be finished off with him. When Li Qingshan directly confronted Qian Yannian, it was also very likely for Diao Fei to die if Qian Yannian unleashed his trump cards right from the beginning, summoning the Geng Metal Swords of Qi and using the Lightning Summoning talismans. Li Qingshan would not just sit by and watch this happen, but he would never expose his identity as a daemon just for him.

It had to be mentioned that Diao Fei had not gone through those life-threatening dangers when he roamed the jianghu for nothing. His senses were extremely sharp.

Earlier, when the black, vicious tiger pressed down on the colourful venomous snake and let out a threatening growl, the unrelated Diao Fei would involuntarily become one of the venomous snake's cards, which would make the vicious tiger consider whether it should show no mercy this time.

Diao Fei left in a hurry. In the end, he glanced at Qian Rongzhi from afar before vanishing into the darkness. He decided to never go on a mission with the two of them again, no, he would maintain his distance from them at all times.

The colourful venomous snake stood before the pit of a thousand corpses that she was personally responsible for as she silently produced new venom. She was even rather thankful for the threat from the black vicious tiger earlier. Once she showed her venomous fangs, that would be when she would die. Even if she succeeded, she would be ripped to shreds by a furious tiger.

However, she was not too worried. Patience had always been the best characteristic of a venomous snake. She could put up with the Qian family for over a dozen years, to the point where everyone believed she had already become docile, without any grievances towards the Qian family. It was even to the point where Qian Yannian let her go to Jiaping city to become a Hawkwolf guard.

She had already reached the second layer of Qi Practitioner three years ago. She possessed the ability to leave the Qian family. At that time, Qian Yannian had basically trusted her already, giving her as much freedom as she wanted. If she wanted to, it was completely at her discretion to flee, leaving the range of the Qian family's influence so that Qian Yannian could not find her.

Ordinary people would have run out of patience a long time ago. They would have used the opportunity to break away from the clan, but she did not. She was willing to endure another three years of humiliation so that she seemed even more obedient, allowing her to win even more trust, just for a single opportunity to inject her venom into the throats of her enemies.

She would continue to wait patiently for a chance that would probably never appear. However, she felt like there was no need for her to do anything much at all. The figure of a vulture in the air had already enveloped the tiger. The tiger might have been startlingly fierce, but it was still too young at the end of the day.

Author's Postscript: I really like this analogy. Hehe, how perfect! If you like it too, give me a monthly ticket in agreement! ^_^

Chapter 145 - Pale Flames of Bone Smelting

However, there were many parts that seemed strange to Qian Rongzhi.

She had already gained some understanding as to what kind of person Li Qingshan was. He might have been courageous and staunch to his morals, but he was not stupid. Anyone knew it would be a futile effort to face a sixth layer Qi Practitioner while at the second layer, but he was fearless.

She had purposefully probed him earlier, confirming once again that he really did not have any backing he could rely on, so just what was he relying on?

When they came, during the night on the boat, Qian Rongming went to make trouble for Li Qingshan. He did not die at Diao Fei's hands, but his hands, as he used a special method to hide his strength.

Was his true strength beyond the second layer of Qi Practitioner?

Qian Rongzhi thought of something. Zhao Liangqing and Furong's mysterious disappearance might have purely been a coincidence, but she knew Qian Yannian's strength very well. Even if he managed to get past the two Geng Metal Swords of Qi, there would be many powerful talismans waiting for him in Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch, so why had they not been used?

She shut her eyes and began to recall the past as best as she could. Washing away the blood and craziness of last night, it reappeared before her.

Qian Yannian stared at her furiously, but he did not say anything to her. Why? His chin had shattered. He was covered in many wounds, but the critical one was located at his chest, which was why her Water-splitting barb had pierced him so easily.

When Qian Yannian emerged, he was basically on his last breath already. Li Qingshan seemed to have been knocked out in a horrible shape, but he did not seem to be injured at all. He had defeated Qian Yannian in a direct confrontation.

Li Qingshan must have had an extremely powerful trump card, which was why he was bold enough to be so haughty and arrogant.

She thought about Qian Yannian's wounds. Li Qingshan's arts of forging the body might have been much more powerful than he had displayed, powerful enough for him to steal Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch, shatter his chin, and pierce his chest in a single instant. Afterwards, he was knocked away as an act. If that were the case, everything made sense. All of Li Qingshan's actions and words fell in place together.

Just like how thieves were petty people, yet they were more clever than kings, Li Qingshan had never thought that everything he did would be deduced in such detail.

Qian Rongzhi saw something else. A vicious tiger laid within the woods, waiting for the vulture to dive down from the sky. Who was the predator? Who was the prey? That was undecided!

The idiot, Zhuo Zhibo, was bold enough to bear the word 'intelligence', or 'zhi' in his name, yet he failed to see the danger hidden in this. As it turned out, he was just like Qian Yannian. They seemed clever and experienced, but they had actually wasted away instead, now just fools. However, it was not their fault. It had been far too long since their strength alone was insufficient to defeat their opponents, so they obviously stopped using their heads.

She obviously was not kind enough to warn Zhuo Zhibo. It was just like before. She would be happy no matter who died. Hopefully, they would fall in battle together.

For the first time, she felt like Li Qingshan had a slightly greater chance at victory, as he hid in the darkness. Those who hid in the darkness were terrifying. She understood this very well herself. If she used this matter to threaten Li Qingshan right now, she would definitely die, but if she reported this to Zhuo Zhibo, there would probably be no benefit either. Moreover, if she lost the gamble, she would have to be buried along with Zhuo Zhibo. Li Qingshan's warning was not a joke.

Then, if she wagered on Li Qingshan, was it possible for her to get a share of Zhuo Zhibo's corpse?

She seriously considered these possibilities. Being a crafty, petty person really was much more difficult than being an impractical person of noble character. At this moment, her cold thinking completely discarded any consideration for her own honour or disgrace, even more than a wise and open-minded king. Everything was for the sake of benefit.

A cold breeze suddenly swept towards Qian Rongzhi from the pit. It caused her to shiver. Unknowingly, it was already very deep into the night.

She turned around and saw a green will-o'-wisp floating above the pit.

Even ordinary people would be startled by that, let alone her, the reason behind all of this. However, she only cursed jokingly, "Damned ghosts!" Afterwards, she cast aside the matter regarding Li Qingshan. There were even more important matters for her to attend to at the moment!

Now, it really was time for her to pay a visit home.

She raised her head and smiled at the starry sky. Father, mother, my brothers and sisters, you must be all sick of waiting!

After Qian Rongzhi left, something startling happened beneath the soil in the pit.

Web-like cracks expanded over the jar. It exploded violently, and Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration spread out in all directions, devouring all of the corpses and the foul flesh and blood, turning it into a part of the flames. It burned even more vigorously.

The dim depths turned into a brilliant sea of fire. The foul, rotting corpses turned into clear, surging flames.

The will-o'-wisps vanished from above the pit.

With a rattle, over a thousand skeletons fell to the bottom of the pit.

Xiao An sat at the centre of the raging flames with his legs crossed, controlling the fire while absorbing the energy of the blood flames.

The skulls at the bottom of the pit stared at him silently with their empty eye sockets.

Xiao An extended his index finger downwards, and the blood flames turned into thousands of snakes, slithering through the skulls.

Blood flames similar to his lit up in the empty eye sockets. All of the skeletons began to shake, constantly banging against one another and producing a hurried rattle. Afterwards, they flew up, and the scattered bones assembled together.

Over a thousand skeletons of various sizes leapt about at the bottom of the pit, dancing around in the flames. The rattling of the bones were like percussive instruments, while the chattering of teeth was like singing. They surrounded Xiao An like they were holding a grand sacrificial ceremony.

The Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration could be divided and imbued into corpses, developing a link with Xiao An so that he could control them at will. He knew this already. However, there was no point to this at all. The weak skeletons could not even defeat weaker practitioners of martial arts.

A skull flew over and landed in Xiao An's hand.

With eye sockets to eye sockets, their blood flames burned together.

Within the brilliant redness of the Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration, a sliver of pale whiteness gradually appeared.

Joy appeared in Xiao An's eye sockets. This was an evolved flame of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty—the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting.

The fire was just like its name. It could smelt white bone.

If it were ordinary flames, it could only burn white bone to ashes no matter how hot it was, but as it was licked by the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting, the skull melted like candy. This process was extremely gradual and just as unbelievable.

After a very long time, the skull melted completely, turning into a droplet of pale-white liquid that dripped onto the centre of his forehead.

Afterwards, he raised his head, and a bone arm landed in his hand. He continued to smelt it.

As he smelted the white bones, the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting burned more and more vigorously. It smelted Xiao An's white bones as well.

This process was a hundred times more painful than using blood to cultivate. It felt like countless steel needles, saws, and grindstones piercing, cutting, and rubbing against his body.

Just a single instant of it was enough to drive an ordinary person into insanity, or even death, let alone enduring it. However, the flames in Xiao An's eye sockets burned brilliantly. He was fearless.

Whenever it almost became too painful to endure, a snowstorm would appear before him. He would return to that snowy night below the Ice Sword cliff.

Li Qingshan had waved his hand and knocked him aside, telling him to leave before vanishing into the snow and wind, climbing up the Ice Sword cliff alone and embarking on a road to death.

He stood in the wind and snow, alone, for a very long time. He did not hide as Li Qingshan had instructed. Instead, his body had stiffened. Coldness pierced his bones. He thought in fear, Would he die? Afterwards, he collapsed on his knees and agony filled his body.

In the end, he managed to catch up to them and lent Li Qingshan a helping hand at a crucial moment, as he had no idea just where else he was supposed to go apart from there.

Once everything ended, he watched on as Li Qingshan roared at the sky. He said nothing, but he gritted his teeth and clenched his fists.

The influence of that night on him was no less than what Li Qingshan experienced.

How could what he was going through right now compare to the pain back then?

The roaring Pale Flames of Bone Smelting enveloped him completely, smelting away the impurities and imbuing him with even more bone fluid; this process continued endlessly.

Before he rebuilt his body, he wanted his new body to be even stronger so that he could catch up to his steps.

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Li Qingshan arrived at the local government office and handed the pile of property deeds to the district magistrate so that he could auction them off.

The district magistrate was utterly flattered. "Sir, I probably won't be able to sell them all immediately."

Li Qingshan said, "It's urgent, so it's fine even if you lower the price a little. Just treat it as a boon from me to the citizens of Ancient Wind city." With a tremendous sum of several hundred Qi Gathering pills on him, he did not care too much about the silver. He had considered just throwing it all into a fire, but that would definitely lead to great turmoil in Ancient Wind city, which was why he did this.

The district magistrate said, "Sir, you sow endless good karma. I must thank you for your kindness for the sake of the people of Ancient Wind city."

Karma? Li Qingshan smiled. That was not something he believed in. "Just get it done within a month." Even without a warning, he did not believe the district magistrate would rip him off. At most, he would just skim a small part of it, which only made sense.

The district magistrate said, "Sir, are there any other matters?"

Li Qingshan made his way out through the door, "I'll be staying in the city for a while. Just don't annoy me."

Li Qingshan obviously did not continue staying in an inn. After all, he was the largest landowner of the city. He chose a small courtyard on the mountain side. It was close to the Qian estate, and the surroundings were extremely tranquil. Most important, he could see the pit from there.

He stood in the courtyard. There was an overarching grid with grapevines and below it was a rocking chair. Beside it was a great water tank to put out fires. A carp lived in the tank, swimming around freely. A rippling, crescent moon reflected on the dark water surface.

Xiao An never mentioned it, but he could vaguely sense that the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty was an extremely impressive ability. It did not require any pills or medicines, progress could be made rapidly, and it possessed astonishing power.

However, everything was balanced and equal. It required talent far beyond the reach of ordinary people. It required people to endure intolerable pain.

Xiao An was just a child, but he was a very clever and very strong child. He did not need his worry. The only thing he worried about was the future. Their future.

After all these years, Xiao An's family have probably all passed away already! Perhaps there would only be a few gravestones waiting for him once he returns, and afterwards, I'll adopt him.

Li Qingshan scratched his head. "Haha, my damned demonic thoughts."

In the end, he decided to not think that much. He just sat down on the ground and tossed a Qi Gathering pill into his mouth. Chewing it to pieces, the bitterness and astringency spread through his mouth, which instead cleared up his head. He began to cultivate.

A ray of sunlight fell on his face. His eyelashes trembled, and he opened his eyes.

In the eastern horizon, setting all the clouds alight, a red sun slowly but firmly rushed into the sky, radiating with endless light and warmth and dispersing the fog. The endless view of golden wheat rippled in the morning wind.

Chapter 146 - The Illusionary Riches of Human Society

Looking down from this vantage point, Ancient Wind city seemed like a series of steps, and the rows upon rows of roofs and buildings were built upon these steps. Currently, all of it was doused in a layer of red light.

Many people flowed through the intersecting streets and alleyways. There were vendors selling breakfast, people buying groceries, and travelling merchants who had risen early. It was a clamorous sight of society.

The sight from here was extremely vast and wide, which opened his mind and allowed him to see further as well.

"So the scenery here was actually so magnificent?" Li Qingshan sighed in surprise slightly. He took in a deep breath and began practising martial arts, moving his arms and legs around.

He sensed the flow of true qi through his body. After eating nine Qi Gathering pills last night, it had strengthened slightly yet again. His cultivation at the second layer was gradually consolidating.

He was not in a hurry to revert to daemon form and eat a huge quantity of pills.

That was because he could feel he would remain here for a while, and he would have to go back to Jiaping city for his next portion of Qi Gathering pills. Instead of eating a large number of pills and suffering from a temporary shortage, it would be better for him to take it slowly. The daemon core would naturally absorb a part of it.

He found a set of clothes from the past owner of the room and changed out of his Black Wolf uniform. Afterwards, he left the place and made his way down a series of stairs. He ordered some local specialty snacks in a store with the word 'tea' written on a plaque.

He felt like he was a tiny step closer to completing his great dream of eating all the delicacies of the world. Afterwards, he went off on a stroll in satisfaction. He purposefully moved very slowly so that he could appreciate the scenery along the way.

Who knows how long it had been since he had settled down and done something like this. Ever since he began cultivation, every single day was tense and pressing. Even when he returned to human society and arrived in the ancient Jiaping city, he had to deal with an endless number of problems constantly.

He had punished the wicked, assassinated a powerful opponent, and taken precautions against enemies. Even when he had the slightest leisure, he had to take advantage of every moment to cultivate, afraid to relax even by the slightest bit.

He had almost forgotten what leisure was like. He recalled the past, those times he spent on Crouching Ox hill, watching over the ox as it grazed, looking at the mountains, playing a reed flute, and avoiding the oppression of his elder brother and his wife. Unknowingly, a morning passed like this.

It seemed like two completely different lives. They each had their own charms, but he preferred his current lifestyle more. He was not someone who would lament about the past.

Looking at the clamorous crowds on the streets, he had already developed a sense of estrangement with it all unknowingly. He was still a Qi Practitioner of the lowest and weakest level, but he had gone down a diverging path of no return from ordinary people.

Ordinary people seemed to walk on level crowds, getting married, having children, covering daily necessities, until they passed away. On the other hand, cultivators seemed to be climbing a mountain that they could never reach the top of. Every time they made progress, they would see new things. Their lives would be elongated, spared from the grasp of death.

An official notice had already been placed before the government office. They even stationed a literate, minor officer there to read it aloud, announcing that all the property of the Qian family would be auctioned off in seven days.

Several hundred people gathered in front of the government office, forming a tight encirclement. They all pointed or indicated at it as they discussed.

Li Qingshan stood within the crowd and stared at it for a while like everyone else. The district magistrate sure was fast.

Afterwards, he passed through the crowd and entered a small bookshop. He paid two taels of silver and purchased several books of leisure, including poems, history, and random essays in general. Afterwards, he checked out a musical instrument shop and spent thirty-five taels for two scores and a jade flute.

Returning home, he sat down on the rocking chair below the grape vines and casually flipped open a book, reading through it carefully. The sun had already risen into the sky, turning from red to white. It pierced through the dense leaves of the grape vines and scattered on the slightly yellow pages as well as his face.

Right now, he seemed especially like a teenager and not a fearless cultivator, a decisive Black Wolf guard when it came to killing. The sharpness of his chiselled face seemed to mellow slightly, while his gaze that was like drawn blades was sheathed once more. They became deep and clear.

The spirit turtle's daemon core gradually revolved within his body with unprecedented translucency. Water vapour flowed out from him naturally, moistening his clothes.

He failed to notice that he had become completely engrossed by a great war within a history book.

That was a certain type of mood and a certain way of cultivating.

A bow that was not in use had to be unstrung. He eased up from being so tense, nurturing his mind and body, only so that he could shoot an even more powerful arrow in the future, perhaps soon.

Not every single person could be so leisurely. There was a small town several dozen kilometers from Ancient Wind city. It was called Shangguan town, as most of the people living there had Shangguan as their surname.

Although they possessed a rare surname, they were not some clan of the martial arts society. The people were just the most ordinary common people.

However, there was a family in the town who went from being an ordinary family to the wealthiest and most influential family in the town, just because they produced a daughter who bore the surname Qian. They had whitewashed walls and jade-green tiles with countless servants. There was cheerful singing everyday. Everyone in the village was envious of them.

A rider in black on a fine, white horse slowly advanced along the path that connected Shangguan town to Ancient Wind city.

Qian Rongzhi looked at Shangguan village on the horizon from afar. Her mind that had been as still as water suddenly became a mess. She could not help but tighten her grasp around the Water-splitting barb on her waist. The cold weapon brought her a sliver of warmth.

The sun blazed in the sky, yet there was a sliver of lingering gloom in her eyes. She mocked herself, "Qian Rongzhi, oh Qian Rongzhi. You really have overestimated yourself."

She had been taken away from this family. After she became accomplished with cultivation, Qian Yannian permitted her to return home and see her family. Ever since then, she frequently returned. She treated every single person in the family with great warmth. She wanted Qian Yannian to believe she treasured her ties and her past. Moreover, she wanted to make the Qian family believe they could control her using these people.

But now, she had already broken free from all of this. It was pointless for these facades to exist anymore. Her heart gradually turned cold. It was time for her to end it.

No one should be able to derive happiness from her misfortune! Nobody!

The vermilion gates of the Shangguan estate were wide open as blood flowed out from under the screen wall at the entrance.

Qian Rongzhi clutched her Water-splitting barb and frowned in thought as she stood behind the screen wall. There were over a dozen corpses strewn across the ground. There were guards, servants, servant girls, and maidservants...

She could name every single person there, but now, they were all dead.

She ventured deeper into the estate and saw more and more corpses. When she arrived in the internal courtyard, she saw a madam on the floor. She was originally a country woman, but her head was now adorned with precious jewelry, and she wore expensive silks from the south. However, she had been reduced to a blood mess now.

Qian Rongzhi had basically forgotten the name of this madam, as she had called her 'mother' for too long.

However, she felt her heart ease up for some reason. She gazed at the corpse deeply before stepping over it.

Afterwards, there were even more familiar people. Siblings.

Despite it being noon, the ancestral hall was still very dark. Several tablets stood in the heavy darkness as it enshrined the past ancestors of the Shangguan family.

A white-haired old man with a darkened face held a chubby, middle-aged man. He cast his cold, hateful gaze at Qian Rongzhi as she walked in; he yelled, "Shangguan Rongzhi, I knew you would return here!"

Qian Rongzhi said with mixed emotions, "Third uncle!"

This old man was Qian Yannian's nephew. He had practised martial arts for many years. Finally, he broke through to the innate realm, reaching the second layer of Qi Practitioner to become one of the masters of the Qian family. Last night, he managed to escape from the main hall of the Qian family. Diao Fei did not choose to pursue him, which was why he managed to escape alive.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Did you do all this?!"

The third uncle said, "That's right. Shangguan Rongzhi, you traitor! How dare you still call me third uncle! You killed the entire Qian family! You destroyed the Qian family! You've destroyed my everything. I will never forgive you. I will kill your entire family."

"Rongzhi, save me!" The chubby, middle-aged man's body jiggled. Snot and tears flowed across his face, perhaps out of fear, or perhaps out of sorrow.

This was the person she called father. Qian Rongzhi said furiously and fearfully, "Father, I'll definitely save you! Qian Haode, release my father!"

Qian Haode said, "Now you know fear? You bitch! Throw away your weapon and kneel!" Qian Rongzhi hesitated at first, so he crushed the chubby man's shoulder. The man howled and Qian Haode ordered, "Kneel!"

With a clang, Qian Rongzhi threw the Water-splitting barb aside and knelt. She inched forward on her knees as she begged in anguish, "Please! Release my father!"

Qian Haode smiled crazily and complacently. He refused to just kill her off. Not only did he want to kill off her entire family, but he even wanted to torture her closest family right in front of her.

Qian Rongzhi inched closer on her knees. She reached backwards with her right hand and true qi sucked the Water-splitting barb back into her hand. She leapt up from below, stabbing towards Qian Haode.

Qian Haode pulled the chubby man in front of him as a meat shield, blocking his body firmly. Then he grabbed the man's other shoulder, waiting to force back Qian Rongzhi before torturing him viciously again. He wanted this bitch to regret her actions.

However, he felt a chill in his chest. Qian Rongzhi had no intention of pulling back. The Water-splitting barb stabbed deep into the meat shield, and the tip entered Qian Haode's chest. True qi turned into blue light, piercing through him.

"You—" Qian Haode and the chubby man looked at Qian Rongzhi in disbelief. However, the anguish on her face had already vanished completely. It was replaced by cold satisfaction.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "It would have been rather difficult for me to kill you otherwise!"

Qian Haode said, "Shangguan Rongzhi, y- you venomous bitch! You won't even spare your own family!"

Qian Rongzhi corrected him, "I'm not Shangguan Rongzhi. I'm Qian Rongzhi! Most of my family is dead already. Only you remain. From today onwards, I won't have any family at all." She drew out the Water-splitting barb viciously.

Qian Haode and the chubby man collapsed on the ground together. Qian Rongzhi did not even glance at the chubby man. She removed the hundred treasures pouch from Qian Haode and said sweetly, "Thank you, third uncle." Just like an obedient little girl.

Qian Haode raised his hand with difficulty as he tried to gather true qi. The Water-splitting barb stabbed through his head without any hesitation at all. "There's no need to hold back with Rongzhi."

"Rongzhi, s- save me!" The chubby man extended his hand with difficulty and grabbed Qian Rongzhi by the corner of her clothes.

"Who are you?"

Chapter 147 - The Arts of Alchemy

"I'm your father!" The chubby man called out as blood spurted out from his mouth.

"You have a daughter?" Qian Rongzhi was taken aback. She thought about it seriously. "Oh, you did. However, didn't you sell her off already? Afterwards, you used the money to take a few concubines!"

The chubby man said with difficulty, "I did all of that for... for your sake so that you would... would have a good future. You should be... be thanking me."

"Everything I possess right now came from my desperate and painful struggles! Stop trying to claim credit for yourself!" Qian Rongzhi suddenly lost her temper and kicked his hand away.

The chubby man opened his mouth, but he said nothing. Hatred and despair filled his face. He finally passed away.

“You derived fortune from my misfortune, and now, you’re suffering misfortune because of my fortune. It’s very fair, isn’t it?” Qian Rongzhi muttered to herself. She made her way out of the estate, throwing everything behind her.

All of her memories had been eliminated now.

Qian Rongzhi held a grand funeral in Shangguan town. She undertook the most noble and tedious ceremony, throwing joss paper into the air.

She knelt before the memorial tablets, almost crying to a point where she fainted as she held the coffins. Eventually, she forced her up, thanking every single person who had come to mourn in anguish.

“Rongzhi was just under the order of the government. Who would've thought that it would lead to such a disaster.”

“Sigh, to think that a girl as good as Rongzhi would suffer a fate like this. The people of the Qian family really have no conscience at all.”

Night descended. Everyone dispersed, and the gate was firmly shut. A pair of white lanterns before the gate swayed in the wind.

After turning down the neighbours who wanted to help watch over the coffins, Qian Rongzhi leaned against the coffins of her entire family in her white, mourning apparel. She took out a jar of wine from her third uncle Qian Haode’s hundred treasures pouch and took a cup from the altar. She poured away the wine that was offered to the dead and filled it up again. She toasted to the memorial tablets before drinking all of it.

The next day, the coffins were buried, and she had already become a great, filial daughter in utter sorrow.

Just like the customs, she mourned for seven days. By the seventh night, over a dozen alcohol jars were scattered on the floor. Suddenly, she felt a chill and opened her eyes in a daze. Over a dozen figures stood before her. They all had extremely familiar faces, staring at her coldly. The chubby man cursed and scolded her loudly in anger.

She let out a drunken laugh, pulled out the Water-splitting barb, and swept out with it. The chilling wind dispersed, and the shadows screamed.

Her mind cleared up. When she looked around again, there was not a shadow at all. It was difficult to distinguish between the real and the fake while drunk.

Bang! A jar of alcohol was thrown onto the memorial tablets, and the tablets scattered on the ground. The alcohol splashed everywhere. She held a candle and gently let go. The fire spread rapidly, swallowing the names on the tablets and spreading throughout the entire ancestral hall.

She made her way out of the blazing ancestral hall, disappearing into the darkness without even looking back. Behind her, the fire spread across the entire estate.

Another person swore the oath to never return home again.

.....

The flute resounded through the dusk, lasting for a very long time.

Li Qingshan placed down the jade flute. He felt like it really did have a better tone compared to the reed flute he used in the past.

He began a quiet lifestyle. Everyday, he would cultivate, read and play the flute. During his leisure, he would stroll through the city and eat something new. Life was very peaceful.

Plop! There was a splash in the water tank. A carp waved its huge tail.

“Stop messing around!” Li Qingshan said, “I’ll give you a larger pond in a few days!”

The water tank immediately fell quiet.

A few days ago, he crushed a Qi Gathering pill of very poor quality and scattered it in the water tank. The next day, the carp grew larger, and on the day after that, it grew larger once again; then today arrived. The water tank had already become cramped. It could no longer swim around freely.

Li Qingshan looked at the huge, red carp in the water tank. “I might as well just have you cooked.”

With a swish, the carp swam to the bottom of the tank.

“It’s just a pity that my culinary ability is only so-so!” Li Qingshan laughed. He reached towards the water take, and his daemon core revolved. The water in the tank surged out, constantly changing shape in the air as the carp swam through it.

Li Qingshan took the carp and made his way towards the Qian estate. There was a large pond in the Qian estate that could hold this bastard.

Leaping over the wall, the large estate was empty. It had gone from being lively and bustling to deserted and quiet. It had only been ten days since someone tended to the place, and weeds had already begun growing on the pathways with dodders climbing up the beams. Within the vitality was a feeling of decay, while the stone steps were even worse. The dried traces of blood that could not be cleaned off gave off an even more ominous feeling.

So many days had passed already. Not a single person in this city was bold enough to approach this place. They would only look from afar and sigh.

Although he had made the district magistrate auction off the estate as well, Li Qingshan knew without even thinking that no one would buy it. Before long, it would fall into disuse completely and become a ghost house.

The lotus flowers had already wilted and fallen away in the pond, but the lily pads remained verdant.

“No one will eat you here.”

With a splash, Li Qingshan threw the carp into the lotus pond. The carp raised its head and bobbed up and down, as if it was thanking him before opening its mouth.

“Fine. Let’s just say it’s your lucky day.” Li Qingshan smiled and placed a Qi Gathering pill into its mouth. Only then did it turn around and swim towards the depths of the lotus pond.

Just when Li Qingshan wanted to turn around and return, he suddenly saw a speck of firelight in the distance. It pierced through the shrubbery and shadows. He passed through the shrubs and approached the speck of firelight. He caught a whiff of a heavy fragrance from afar.

Entering through the door, he saw a large, circular, three-legged cauldron that currently gurgled with white steam. There was a heavy fragrance with the steam.

A pretty figure sat on a cushion in front of the cauldron with her hands extended, sending true qi into the cauldron. The amount of steam varied over time, controlled by true qi.

Li Qingshan recognised her with a single glance. “Qian Rongzhi, what are you doing here?”

Qian Rongzhi did not answer him. A while later, she pulled back her hands and regulated her true qi slowly. The cauldron top opened violently and steam filled the entire room.

Li Qingshan found this smell to be extremely familiar. “You’re refining pills!” He looked around and discovered that this should have been the alchemy room of the Qian family. It was also where all the Qi Gathering pills in his hundred treasures pouch came from.

He had eaten quite a few Qi Gathering pills before, but this was the first time he had seen someone refine pills. Then he looked at the huge cauldron. It was covered with green rust, but it continued to shine. It was actually a low grade spiritual artifact.

Originally, Li Qingshan believed that the Qian family would store something like that in a hundred treasures pouch if they possessed it, but he never thought it would be like this. The cauldron was so large that Qian Yannian would barely be able to fit it in his hundred treasures pouch if he placed it in completely. The inscriptions on low grade spiritual artifacts were limited. Since the cauldron could spray water, it obviously could not shrink.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. “This is my home!”

Li Qingshan said, “It’s mine now.”

“I’ve already bought it from you. According to our deal, everything in the Qian family is mine. That obviously includes this cauldron. It sure has been a profit for me.” Qian Rongzhi took out the deed to the estate as she smiled.

“Let’s just say you were lucky.” Li Qingshan turned around to leave. He did not feel any pity at all. Even if Qian Rongzhi had not done all of this, he would have never bothered to search through the estate anyway.

Qian Rongzhi said, “Do you want to learn alchemy?”

Li Qingshan stopped. He looked back. “What do you want?”

Li Qingshan had already realised that apart from the most rudimentary cultivation and practising of qi, there were also several subsidiary occupations on the path of cultivation, such as making talismans,

refining pills, forging artifacts, formations, and so on. Cultivators would normally learn one or two of them, which would bring about great benefits to their cultivation.

He could tell from the objects in Qian Yannian's hundred treasures pouch that Qian Yannian had not studied forging artifacts or formations much, but he was rather skilled at creating talismans and refining pills. These also happened to be the areas he was interested in.

"I want you!" Qian Rongzhi hesitated before biting her lip and looking at Li Qingshan in complete seriousness. She said with a hint of embarrassment, "You must think that I'm a lascivious woman, but actually, I've never done anything with a man..."

She believed she had mostly understood Li Qingshan now, so she secretly came up with a plan. Although it was rather surprising for her to come across him tonight, it was perfect for her to try it. Li Qingshan would probably turn her down, and she would react with becoming overwhelmed by grief. Then she would tell him about her sorrowful childhood and shed a few tears when it mattered. She refused to believe she would not earn his sympathy. They would sleep together, and he would swear a pledge of love. With how straightforward and generous he was, she definitely would be able to get something out of him.

However, just when she had come up with a serious plan and written a script for all of this, Li Qingshan's improvisation completely kicked in once more.

He interrupted her with a smile. "Alright. Teach me alchemy, and I'll sell my body for just this once." Although he found her actions to be appalling, there was no reason for him to turn down something as great as this. I'm a man, so am I supposed to be afraid of being ripped off by you?

Qian Rongzhi's expression stiffened. Although she had thought of many possibilities before, she had never imagined that Li Qingshan would be such a scoundrel. It was completely different to her plan. She could not continue the act any longer. She suddenly recalled the first time she had seen him, when he was drinking and eating in the restaurant with all those women. She had misunderstood him far too much.

The vine wanted to climb onto a tree, to suck out tree sap and receive even more sunlight. Hopefully, it would kill the tree as well. However, never did it think that it had wrapped around a metal pole.

As a transcender, just what hadn't he seen? Qian Rongzhi's actions were nothing but commonplace in the society of his former life. Even news for entertainment and magazines for gossip could not be bothered reporting something like that. At most, they were just not as vicious and crafty as her.

Qian Rongzhi laughed dryly. "You sure know how to joke."

Li Qingshan said, "Since the joke is over, let's get to the point. What do you want in exchange for teaching me alchemy? Though, let me just say that I myself can be included in the deal for free. I won't loathe you at all."

Qian Rongzhi understood that seduction was useless against Li Qingshan, and even if she succeeded, only he would benefit. Not only was there no point to all of it, but it would even cost her, so she revealed her true colours and cut right to the chase. "I want the Geng Metal Method of Sharpening Qi."

Li Qingshan said, "The cultivation method that Qian Yannian practises? I've already checked. It wasn't there. Choose something else."

"That old bastard must have destroyed it." Qian Rongzhi cursed.

Li Qingshan said, "There are cultivation methods in the library of the Hawkwolf Guard. You can check it out once you go back."

Qian Rongzhi said, "I've already checked. There's plenty of garbage that lets you cultivate to the sixth or seventh layers, but there's not a single one that reaches the tenth layer of Qi Practitioner."

Li Qingshan asked, "Where'd you get the contribution from?"

Qian Rongzhi only smiled.

Li Qingshan said, "Forget that I asked. Where else can you get tenth layer Qi Practitioner methods from?"

Qian Rongzhi asked, "Don't you find me to be very shameful?"

"That's your freedom. It has nothing to do with me."

Chapter 148 - Refining Pills and Forging Artifacts

Qian Rongzhi found Li Qingshan to be just too strange. He did not seem like a teenager at all, and the more she understood him, the more she found his thought process to be different from regular people. She thought about it before explaining with a smile, "Regarding Qi Practitioner methods that can be practised until the tenth layer, there are five that are the most famous."

"Which five?" Li Qingshan gathered his attention for this important information. Qian Rongzhi originated from a small clan, but according to the official documents, Qian Yannian had once joined a large sect to cultivate, so he must have seen a lot.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Do you know that every person possesses all five elements?"

"The five organs, heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's not as simple as just the five organs. The study of the five elements is extremely profound. I can't explain it in a short amount of time, but every single person can choose to cultivate one of them. By focusing all of their efforts on a single one, their speed at practising qi will increase significantly. There are many cultivation methods for practising true qi of the five elements. The five most renowned methods are the Geng Metal Method of Sharpening Qi, the Yi Wood Method of Living Qi, the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi, the Bing Fire Method of Burning Qi, and the Wu Earth Method of Unyielding Qi."

Note: It's the ten heavenly stems once again, which I mentioned when the Geng Metal Method of Sharpening Qi appeared for Qian Yannian.

Besides a few special sects, such as the Sect of Clouds and Rain, many of the actual, large sects would make their disciples choose one of the five cultivation methods to practise.

Li Qingshan had originally been considering just which cultivation method to choose after completing the Innate Method of Practising Qi, but now he had a vague direction, no longer carried away by those make-believe divine arts or secret techniques. Although it was not absolute, he believed this world followed the survival of the fittest.

If a cultivation method could become renowned, it would mean that countless people had actually used and experienced it themselves. As a matter of fact, who knows just how many generations of people had improved it, making it universal. And, when it came to cultivation, they could use the experience of predecessors as a reference. It really was true that all's well when everyone's well.

Li Qingshan said, "Is it possible to practise whatever true qi you want?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "Of course not. Everyone is biased towards different elements. The large sects all have their methods to test this, which they will then use to choose the most suitable cultivation method for you to practise. However, I've heard that talented geniuses can practise two or even three types of true qi at the same time. Their quantity of true qi exceeds cultivators of the same level who only practise a single true qi, and it's easier for them to break through."

"Since when did you become so nice?" Li Qingshan was surprised by how Qian Rongzhi demanded nothing from him.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "I was never a bad person!"

Li Qingshan said nothing.

Qian Rongzhi said, "If you don't believe me, I can teach you how to refine pills as well."

Li Qingshan asked, "You don't want anything in return?"

Qian Rongzhi replied, "I don't want anything in return."

Li Qingshan answered, "That sounds great!" However, he did not seem particularly happy at all.

Qian Rongzhi actually began to teach him in detail. "Alchemy requires three most basic things. The first one is materials, whether it be the most common medicinal herb or the most precious medicinal herb. There is a limitless assortment of them, spanning an enormous range. The second is the formula. Every pill has a set formula, which has an extremely detailed requirement for materials and time of the day. The third is the cauldron, or should I say, the fire. Refining materials according to the formula is alchemy..."

Li Qingshan listened closely, and before he knew it, four hours had passed, and he only managed to gain a basic understanding of the art of refining pills, alchemy. This art was just too extensive and profound. Even if he devoted his whole life to it, he might not necessarily reach the peak. Right now, he had basically only learned about it slightly. He could not even be considered as having grasped the basics.

Qian Rongzhi said, "This is roughly all I know regarding alchemy. If you want to study it further, you'll have to ask someone more competent."

Li Qingshan nodded.

Qian Rongzhi pointed at the cauldron beside her. "Do you want to try? There are still a lot of medicinal herbs left."

Li Qingshan was slightly taken aback. He wondered whether she had changed. However, after hearing so much about alchemy, he was itching to give it a try, so he sat down before the cauldron. He personally controlled the cauldron and refined pills under Qian Rongzhi's guidance. However, as the fire was slightly too intense, he destroyed a batch of Qi Gathering pills.

Qian Rongzhi did not show any pity, nor did she scold him. Instead, she encouraged him to keep trying.

Li Qingshan said nothing either. He continued to try. His true qi was extremely pure, and he could control it as freely as his own arm. During the process of alchemy, his control over it deepened. After wasting another two batches, he finally succeeded. He pulled both hands back, let out a deep breath, and smiled.

Qian Rongzhi also praised him very much.

Li Qingshan saw the horizon light up. Knowingly, a whole night had already passed. She stood up and placed a few bottles of Qi Gathering pills on the ground as compensation for the destroyed batches and as fees for her guidance.

Qian Rongzhi watched Li Qingshan leave through the door, and she picked up the Qi Gathering pills. Just like how Li Qingshan did not rejoice over her generosity earlier, Qian Rongzhi showed no joy right now either.

The information regarding the Qi Practitioner methods of the five elements and the rudimentary alchemy was not actually a secret at all. And, the pills that Li Qingshan had left behind were far more than the number he had destroyed. Moreover, even if she had been the one making them, it would be impossible for her to say she would succeed every time, so she made quite a profit from this transaction.

Ordinary people would be very happy, but she felt something enough to turn people cold inside. That was an extremely cold sense of alienation. He would never owe people, nor would people ever owe him. At any time, as long as she tried her schemes against him, he would throw her on his kill list without any hesitation at all. He would never just put up with it.

She tasted failure once again. This was not a man who could be controlled by his emotions. Did he really not have a single point of weakness on him?

Li Qingshan did not think as much as her. He only felt happy over learning something new. The path of cultivation was so broad and deep. There were endless mysteries waiting for him to explore. Learning from others was not a bad thing.

.....

The flames roared in the pit. Currently, the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting had already occupied almost half of the entire space.

Xiao An's skeleton became glassy like jade. Compared to before, his bones were even more powerful and tough now.

The white bones in the pit had smelted his skeleton, which he had completed now. There were still several hundred white skeletons in the pit.

However, Xiao An continued smelting the white bones.

The Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration and the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting were only the most basic techniques from the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. Their greatest use was not to harm people, but for cultivation. The Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration were for completely absorbing the essence in flesh and blood such that not a single shred of it went to waste. On the other hand, the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting could melt the bones into fluid, which could be used to strengthen himself.

Besides that, it had one more use, which was for forging artifacts.

Practitioners of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty were different from other cultivators. The weapons they used were extremely special. There was a special part of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty devoted to forging weapons, which recorded several dozen special artifacts.

The Blood Sea Banner, the Triseptural Robes, the Skull Prayer Beads...

Xiao An decided to use these several hundred skeletons to forge his first white bone spiritual artifact, the Skull Prayer Beads.

Chapter 149 - The Flesh and Blood of a Thousand People

Xiao An parted his hands and several hundred skeletons flew before him with a series of rattles, forming a tight sphere.

The Pale Flames of Bone Smelting surged up and swallowed the sphere of bones. Its surface gradually melted.

Xiao An brought his hands together and sat in a meditative pose; his eyes were directed to his nose, and his nose was directed to his heart. However, there was nothing. He had no eyes, no nose, and no heart. He chanted the buddhist scriptures, but he made no sound.

This was an extremely strange and terrifying sight, yet he happened to give off an aura of solemnity and righteousness. There was nothing related to evil or the undead.

The process of melting the bone sphere was extremely slow, but under Xiao An's control, the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting burned more and more vigorously.

Unknowingly, another half a month had passed. Ever since that night when he learned alchemy, Qian Rongzhi had visited him several times, but she failed to get any benefit out of him, so she hurried back to Jiaping city. The only message she left behind was that she would await his return to Jiaping city.

As for Li Qingshan's peaceful lifestyle, it finally began to fall apart.

Although the Qian family's reign over the Ancient Wind city had collapsed, it would not turn the city into a happy paradise where people could live in peace. This world was not a fairytale world where people could live happily.

In the valley of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. The people of the martial arts society that Qi Practitioners had originally suppressed began to show up. They formed gangs and fought for territory. Every single day, they would have several battles on the street over the possession of each brothel in the city, with even more battles and assassinations that happened in the dark.

On this day, Li Qingshan went to a restaurant he frequented and ordered a table of delicious dishes. As soon as he began to eat, a large number of people flooded the place and ordered all the customers to leave. It seemed like the leaders of the two largest gangs in the western part of the city wanted to negotiate something.

A burly man arrived before Li Qingshan's table and said impatiently, "Are you done eating? If you're done, then get out of here!"

Li Qingshan looked at the burly man before looking at his table of food and drinks. He shook his head firmly. "I'm not done."

The burly man said, "Kid, have some sense. Don't act like you have a tough backbone. I've crushed many bones in the past few days."

Against a threat that had no substance and had no deterrent influence at all, Li Qingshan could not even rouse his anger. He just sighed over how he really had been a little too laid-back recently.

The burly man lost his temper. He launched an attack without any hesitation at all. He was just as he seemed on the surface, all brawn and no brain, no, he did not even have brawn actually.

The burly man flew out of the restaurant and knocked down a wall. However, with one man down, several dozen stood up. They all leered at him. They yelled out a few threats that had just about the same substance as the previous one before charging over together. Afterwards, they all flew out of the restaurant.

Only then did the remaining people suddenly seem to come to a realisation. They stood there trembling and watched Li Qingshan finish his meal, place the money on the table, and make his way out of the door. He muttered to himself, "What peaceful life? If I didn't have the strength, I wouldn't even be able to have a proper meal."

The two gang leaders walked over from the two ends of the street as their own people surrounded them. In order to show their contempt for each other, they had both chosen to come late out of pure coincidence. However, they just happened to catch Li Qingshan at the entrance, or should one say, Li Qingshan just happened to catch them at the entrance.

As soon as Li Qingshan made his way down the steps of the restaurant, he raised his head and looked at the hazy sky. Summer was almost over.

"Who are you?"

Li Qingshan thought about how they truly were the bosses after all. At the very least, they would ask about their opponent's origins and name. Of course, this was very likely due to overestimating him. The several dozen men groaning on the ground played quite an effect.

“I am Li Qingshan of the Hawkwolf Guard. You are their bosses. Your crime of attacking a Hawkwolf Guard on the street cannot be forgiven. Today, I will be executing you on the spot... forget it, I don't have much interest in killing lately, so let's just say it's your lucky day.”

As Li Qingshan spoke and his aura rose, the two bosses turned sheet-white. Even in ten year's time, the people of Ancient Wind city would not forget about his name. Of all the people they could run into, why him?

When Li Qingshan said 'executing you on the spot', their knees had already given way. They could not even plead for their lives. They just closed their eyes, waiting for their deaths. However, Li Qingshan's tone and aura suddenly declined like a singer unable to hit a high note; it was as if he had just chosen to give up on it.

Only when Li Qingshan's figure vanished did their subordinates help up the two bosses. They looked at each other with the joy of surviving a disaster. In the end, the two of them put aside their differences because of this encounter and celebrated together, forming a new gang. The rest was self-explanatory.

Li Qingshan returned to his courtyard and smacked his face in the mirror. “Get yourself together, Li Qingshan!”

Suddenly, he felt like he understood the mindset of those so-called masters, like 'someone like you is unworthy of me killing you'. However, he immediately made up his mind to abandon this mindset. You're still just a low level Qi Practitioner. You're nowhere close to the point where you can be pretentious. Yep, no matter who provokes me in the future, I'll step over them, even if it's just a piece of sh*t on the ground.

Then, Li Qingshan looked towards the pit. Xiao An, are you well?

He had already begun to miss Jiaping city and Zhuo Zhibo.

Only when he was under pressure did he have motivation. Compared to this peaceful, tasteless lifestyle, he would much prefer running into powerful enemy after powerful enemy, where he needed to do everything he could to kill a way out. However, once he returned this time, Li Qingshan probably could give him a surprise.

Although he had been rather lazy, he had not stopped cultivating in the past half a month. With almost two hundred Qi Gathering pills down his belly, not only did his daemon qi grow tremendously, but he had even completely consolidated his cultivation at the second layer as well. Pure, plentiful true qi flowed through his Yang Heel meridian endlessly. He had touched on the boundary of the fifth layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi as well.

Within the pit, the tremendous sphere of bones had already melted completely. It formed a pure-white, crystalline sphere, but at a closer glance, it was actually an extremely hideous skull.

The several hundred skeletons had only managed to be smelted into this tiny prayer bead. Xiao An held the prayer bead between his fingers. If he wanted to gather a string of the Skull Prayer Beads, he would need fourteen at the very least. White bone spiritual artifacts were actually so difficult to forge.

This was also the reason why Xiao An had chosen the Skull Prayer Beads as his first spiritual artifact. Every single item recorded in the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty possessed devastatingly great might. They were not items he could forge and play around with at his current realm.

However, he could forge the Skull Prayer Beads one by one. There was no need for him to forge them all at once. He could take it step by step.

Xiao An held the prayer bead in his hand. He could sense that his mind was connected to it; it was as if the prayer bead was not an independent spiritual artifact, but a part of his body. The reality was not far from that either.

The flames in the pit subsided, returning to his skull. Only two balls of fire remained in his eyes. He leapt through the soil and left the pit by following Li Qingshan's aura.

Having lost the invisible supporting force, the layer of earth on top immediately collapsed. It was discovered by people on the very next day. The remains of the Qian family had vanished into thin air. It became a mystery.

In the darkness, Li Qingshan opened his eyes as he smiled. "Xiao An, are you done?"

The glassy little skeleton stood before him with red and white mixed around in the flames in his eyes.

Li Qingshan rubbed his head. "You really are much more pretty." At least from the perspective of a skeleton, that was.

Xiao An opened his hand and presented the Skull Prayer Bead like it was a treasure.

Li Qingshan picked up the prayer bead. "What is this?" The prayer bead suddenly broke free from his grasp and flew around the room. It formed a white blur as it produced a string of swishes. It was actually no slower than Zhou Wenbin's flying sword.

Li Qingshan was stunned. "Is this... a spiritual artifact?" It was a mid grade spiritual artifact at the very least.

With a smile, Xiao An bent his finger, and the prayer bead in the air suddenly swelled in size, turning into a huge skull. The teeth chattered as they collided together, like it was producing a strange laughter. Its eye sockets contained red and white flames similar to Xiao An's.

When a child obtained something good, he would obviously show it off to the person who was the closest to them.

When Li Qingshan learnt the whole story of Xiao An forging an artifact, he could not help but sigh emotionally once more. The Path of White Bone and Great Beauty sure was nice. This White Bone Bodhisattva was very thorough with his considerations. If there was no weapon, they would suffer against the enemy even if their abilities and techniques were powerful.

Due to being connected to the user, the white bone spiritual artifacts could be wielded with great ease, however Xiao An liked. As a result, it was even more powerful than regular spiritual artifacts.

In fact, calling it a white bone spiritual artifact was not particularly correct. Even though it was just a single prayer bead, it was far more powerful than just a spiritual artifact. However, due to Xiao An's limited cultivation and materials, he could only forge it to such a level for now.

The Skull Prayer Beads were the easiest to forge, but they definitely were not the weakest. Fourteen beads formed the smallest string of prayer beads. It would be followed by eighteen, twenty-one, until one thousand and eighty, resulting in a total of ten levels. They could try immortals and buddhas and possessed boundless powers.

Li Qingshan expressed his admiration once again before asking about what he cared the most, "Can you sense just how many more sacrifices you need before you can rebuild your body?"

Xiao An lowered his head and fiddled with his fingers before raising his head and extending a single finger.

He still required the flesh and blood of a thousand people!

Li Qingshan said, "That's a very formidable task, but at least we have some sight of it. Let's go cause a massacre then!"

The moment he extended his finger, the world was destined to lose a thousand evil people.

On the same night, Li Qingshan went to the government office and received the silver from selling the property from the district magistrate. Although they had been sold in a hurry, there were still over a million taels of silver. It was enough to exchange for ten Qi Gathering pills from Zhou Wenbin.

They did not even wait for the next day. Li Qingshan hurried out of the city with Xiao An during the night. He did not even glance back at Ancient Wind city. He no longer had any plans to return here.

In the pond of lily pads on the mountainside, a carp swam around freely, shaking up the lily pads. Their destiny had ended today. Who knows whether they would meet again.

Li Qingshan strode through the darkness in a straight path. By dawn, he had already arrived at a port on Clear River. He boarded a large ship and sailed downstream, heading directly towards Jiaping.

In Jiaping city, Zhuo Zhibo said, "In other words, he really did defeat Qian Yannian?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "Yeah. I find it quite difficult to believe as well. That old coot Qian Yannian had weakened with age. He was far too useless. He probably never thought Li Qingshan would be a Body Practitioner, so he was careless, and Li Qingshan managed to get him. Looks like you'll have to take action personally."

When Qian Rongzhi left Ancient Wind city, she travelled slowly as she had hired a great cart in order to bring the spiritual artifact cauldron with her. She had only just arrived back at Jiaping.

Zhuo Zhibo immediately summoned her to confirm the news he received from Diao Fei. Not only was Li Qingshan still alive, but he had even defeated a fifth layer Qi Practitioner.

Chapter 150 - From Dawn till Dusk

Not only did Qian Rongzhi give Zhuo Zhibo no warning that Li Qingshan might have been hiding his strength, but she even purposefully misled him, making it seem as if Li Qingshan had won out of pure luck. Even when there was no element of profit in the matter, she was tired of this old thing right in front of her. She hoped very much that he would be killed like that old bag of bones called Qian Yannian. These methods of just allowing matters to develop without making a sound would often be much more terrifying than those straightforward schemes.

Zhuo Zhibo also sneered just like he would normally. "It's good that he's alive. That'll save me a trip, and I'll be able to take his life personally. I'll be able to vent what I've pent up."

"Are you going to kill him as soon as he returns?" Qian Rongzhi's smile was hidden deep within her pitch-black eyes. She was ready to watch a fascinating show.

However, Zhuo Zhibo said instead, "I'll need to put further thought into this matter." Despite being the commander, he was not bold enough to kill a Hawkwolf Guard in public. Afterwards, he sneered, "But he's still under my command, so do you think he'll be well off? I'll show him just whose command this Hawkwolf Guard office is under."

Qian Rongzhi said, "Is there anything on this mountain, in Jiaping city, that doesn't belong to you? Even I'm no different."

Zhuo Zhibo let out a hearty laugh. He would continue watching over Jiaping city until the day he died; he was just like the iron hawk, watching over everything.

When the Clear River twisted around the mountain once more, Li Qingshan directly leapt off the boat. Under a series of cries from the people on the boat, he climbed up the cliff face.

He returned to his residence first and set Xiao An down before going to see Zhuo Zhibo. He wanted to see just how this commander Zhuo would treat him now.

Li Qingshan clasped his hands. "Subordinate Li Qingshan greets commander Zhuo." That was what he said, but he stood with his chest held high, standing as straight as an arrow. He showed no respect at all.

Zhuo Zhibo no longer tried to act all polite either. He questioned coldly, "Why didn't you return immediately after completing the mission?"

Li Qingshan answered in a manner that was neither too humble or arrogant, "I obviously had matters to attend to."

Zhuo Zhibo became even more displeased. To think that someone who was about to die would still be bold enough to act so arrogantly. "I'm deducting half of your contribution. You can leave!"

He had actually lost half of the contribution he had earned after so much difficulty. That was equivalent to several dozen Qi Gathering pills. Anyone would be irritated by that.

Li Qingshan held back his anger. He did not try to dispute it. He just turned around and left. He also could not kill a Black Hawk commander on this mountain.

Right now, they were targeting one another, but due to the same reason, they could not directly attack one another. However, they were already sharpening their knives.

As soon as Li Qingshan left the office, he ran into Ge Jian.

However, Ge Jian had been waiting for him. He sneered as he said, "Li Qingshan, do you really think you're a big deal just because you killed an old man who had a foot in the grave? How dare you speak to the commander like that? Now you know the consequences, don't you?"

Li Qingshan said, "You really are a good dog raised by Zhuo Zhibo."

He said that with confidence. Obviously, he did not need to worry that Zhou Zhibo, who was in the office, would miss it; the latter's face darkened.

"What did you say?!" Ge Jian lost his temper after being insulted right to his face. This was no longer the first time Li Qingshan had humiliated him. He had only endured it because he was worried about the latter's backing.

Li Qingshan mocked, "To think that you would be bold enough to bark at me here!"

Ge Jian choked up. Originally, he wanted to infuriate Li Qingshan. As long as Li Qingshan attacked him first, there would be grounds for Zhuo Zhibo to interfere. But indeed, without Zhuo Zhibo, where would he get the courage to provoke Li Qingshan? This fellow was a monster who had killed a fifth layer Qi Practitioner.

Li Qingshan waved his hand. "Come, let's go to the front, and you can tell me clearly. I'll let your scheme succeed for once. Let's see whether Zhuo Zhibo comes to save you or not."

Ge Jian would never follow him. Once that happened, even if Zhuo Zhibo's plan succeeded, he would be dead. He tried to put on a front. "D- don't be cocky. I'm looking forward to the fate that you'll suffer."

Li Qingshan did not spare an additional glance at him. He made his way to the library. Just when he was about to climb up the stairs, he was stopped by the old man who guarded the library. "Who let you up?"

Li Qingshan said, "I have contribution, so of course I can go up!"

"Move. The library is currently under maintenance. Miscellaneous people are forbidden from entering."

Li Qingshan's eyes narrowed, and he frowned slightly.

All the old man felt was an invisible pressure against his chest, so heavy that he struggled to breathe. He forcefully endured it. "What, do you plan on forcing your way in?"

Li Qingshan slowly raised his right hand. The old man gulped as all of his muscles tensed up. His measly amount of true qi that had been eaten away by the passage of time began to circulate furiously. He could feel that as long as Li Qingshan tried, he could launch a devastatingly terrifying attack. Under the tremendous pressure, he did not even have the confidence to receive a single attack from him.

However, all Li Qingshan did was pat the old man's shoulder. "Take care!" Afterwards, he turned around and left the library.

The old man broke out into a cold sweat and breathed heavily as he leaned on his knees. He had wandered the jianghu for many years, but he had actually been frightened by a half-grown junior. He was utterly humiliated. He yelled at Li Qingshan, "You're the one who should take care!"

What Li Qingshan experienced afterwards was basically the same. There were no spiritual artifacts or pills. The contribution he had earned after great difficulty became a meaningless number.

Li Qingshan wanted to exchange for a new Wind-entwining blade, but he was turned down. Originally, Hawkwolf guards could exchange their weapons destroyed in missions for free. However, none of these people said that he did not deserve to. They just came up with various reasons to shrug off his request, but unless he gave them a beating, there was no other way for them to yield to him.

These important places that held items and wealth were obviously under the control of Zhuo Zhibo's trusted subordinates. As a matter of fact, there was not even a need for Zhuo Zhibo to say anything. All he needed was a signal and that would be enough to prevent Li Qingshan from accessing anything in the Hawkwolf Guard.

In the end, Li Qingshan arrived before an extremely old building, with one, large word on it—Falconry. This was where the Hawkwolf Guard issued missions. It was probably the only place on the mountain not under Zhuo Zhibo's control.

It was not that he was unable to control. Instead, it was because there were no spiritual artifacts or pills here. There were just a pile of troublesome missions. However, exchanging the contribution from the missions for actual things required Zhuo Zhibo's permission.

Li Qingshan smiled. As long as this place was still open to him, all was well. To him right now, whether it be spiritual artifacts or pills, none of them were urgent. What he required the most right now was in the falconry.

There were a few Black Wolf guards accepting missions in the hall. When they saw Li Qingshan enter, they immediately fell quiet. Their mouths moved soundlessly as they communicated via true qi. They discussed between one another silently.

Li Qingshan made his way over to the counter. The envoy in black stood up in a hurry and said politely, "Sir, you've just returned. Do you plan on going out again?" On this small mountain, there were not a lot of secrets. He had heard about the disagreements between Li Qingshan and Zhuo Zhibo, but he was afraid of disrespecting Li Qingshan as well.

Li Qingshan said, "I want to see what missions there are."

The envoy in black immediately took out a thick book. "Please have a look, sir."

The book was dark all over as if it was covered in countless layers of filth. It also seemed like the colour of congealed blood. It felt ominous just from a single sight of it. However, it shone with a gentle glow, and as he held it in his hand, it gave off a slight warmth.

Li Qingshan said, "This book is probably pretty old."

The envoy explained obediently, "It has existed since the office was established in Jiaping city. It's probably over a millennium old."

Li Qingshan said, "Then it really is quite old. Does this book have a name?"

The envoy said, "This is just a low grade spiritual artifact used to record missions. It does not have a formal name, but the people of the jianghu call it the blacklist!" Although he was just an envoy, he naturally revealed pride as the person in charge of the blacklist.

Li Qingshan said, "The blacklist? Why's that? What's the story behind it?"

The envoy said, "That's because names that make it onto the blacklist will definitely die."

Li Qingshan smiled, "Dearth, old age, illness, and death go hand in hand. Even if you don't make it onto the blacklist, you'll still die."

According to his knowledge, the White Lotus Mother who had sacrificed two hundred thousand people should have made it onto the list as well. She even required a mighty White Hawk Commander like Gu Yanying, a Golden Core cultivator, to personally take action. However, Gu Yanying still seemed to have failed to bring her to justice. At the end of the day, it was still all about strength in this world. Nothing was definite.

However, to the people of the jianghu, it basically was a list of death considering the fact that it was written by Qi Practitioners. Afterwards, Li Qingshan realised the things he was about to do next was quite similar to what the White Lotus Mother had done. However, he was on the side of law, moving as someone carrying out the law. He had the license to kill.

Although the envoy was displeased by Li Qingshan's joke about the blacklist, he was afraid to rebuke him. He just told Li Qingshan about how to use it.

Afterwards, Li Qingshan understood why it was called the blacklist. He would see a string of names with each page. There were normal names among them, as well as strange daoist or dharma names. It was used in a rather similar fashion to mental maps. All he needed was a thought and the list would be arranged according to different criteria.

These criteria included the amount of contribution, the danger level, the strength of the opponent, the estimated gains, and so on. If he selected one of the names, he would receive a set of extremely detailed information, including their cultivation method, spiritual artifacts, area of activity...

Li Qingshan sighed inside. The Hawkwolf Guard really was a major organisation that had existed for several millennia. There was rigour to the organisation, and they were fully-equipped. This information had basically simplified the steps of investigation, allocating all the work that could be completed by ordinary people to ordinary people. Afterwards, they would confirm the crimes and make the list so that the Hawkwolf Guard could hunt them down one by one.

Every single Qi Practitioner was a powerful master who stood above many, with longevity as their greatest objective. Cultivating and practising qi was their greatest priority. There was not a single Qi Practitioner who would waste their time on these miscellaneous tasks, being ordered around by others like servants. Otherwise, no matter how great the benefits of the Hawkwolf Guard was, it would still not be an attractive occupation to Qi Practitioners.

"Once you've chosen your mission, sir, there will be a file that you can read up on whenever you'd like. The information in there is all the most detailed information our leads have obtained. However, we

cannot ensure that it will be completely accurate. You'll need to adapt to circumstances," the envoy gave a warning as a formality.

"Of course," Li Qingshan replied. With a thought, the list was now ordered according to descending strength. He glanced at the name at the very top—the Zombie Daoist, sixth layer Qi Practitioner. He was on the list for capturing living people and turning them into zombies en masse. The danger level was extremely high, and the contribution that came with the completion of the mission was actually as much as twelve thousand points.

But clearly, there was no one who could complete this mission apart from Zhuo Zhibo and the Black Wolf commander who had never shown himself. Of course, Li Qingshan possessed the strength to complete it, but he only paused on it slightly before flipping further until the last few pages.

The last few pages of the blacklist mostly contained the names of gangs and sects, not the names of individuals. These were places like the Black Wind stronghold. They no longer possessed a single person that was worthy of being regarded as a single target by the Hawkwolf Guard.

Afterwards, Li Qingshan chose his missions.

The envoy was stunned. "Sir, do you really plan on accepting these missions?"

Li Qingshan nodded without any hesitation at all. "Go retrieve the files. I'll be setting off right now."

The envoy instructed some people in a hurry, and before long, other envoys brought over stacks of documents. Many of them seemed extremely old, with dust floating around in the air near them. Clearly, they had only just been wiped down.

Li Qingshan placed all the files and documents into his hundred treasures pouch and left immediately. As soon as he made it out the door, a few Black Wolf guards hurried over. "What mission did he choose?"

Afterwards, they looked at one another, stupefied.

"What is the kid planning?"

"Carrying out justice and protecting the weak? Don't kid with me."

"No matter how many missions he completes, he won't get anything in exchange for it as long as he doesn't have commander Zhuo's permission."

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In the main office, Zhuo Zhibo drank tea leisurely. "So what's the kid up to."

Ge Jian smiled, "The kid ran around, but he has nothing at all." His anger had finally eased up slightly.

Zhuo Zhibo placed down the tea cup. "Toying around with him before we take his life isn't necessarily bad. I'd like to see just how much longer he can endure this for."

Ge Jian said, "I think he'll have to endure it no matter what."

At this moment, a Black Wolf guard walked in hurriedly, "Commander, that kid has found a reason to leave the mountain!"

Zhuo Zhibo said, "Oh, he wants to avoid me? What mission did he accept?"

The Black Wolf guard said, "More than one."

"How many?"

The Black Wolf guard said in a strange manner, "He accepted twenty-seven missions."

"What! Bring them over." Zhuo Zhibo took the mission document, which had a dense list of the missions that Li Qingshan had accepted. However, the contents of the missions surprised him very much, not because they were too difficult, but because they were too easy.

The pirates of the Water Snake gang, the horse bandits of the Giant Deer valley, and so on. All of them were missions that the Hawkwolf Guard had accumulated over time but could not be bothered completing.

That was because the targets in the mission were all just ordinary people of the jianghu. At most, these people would be carrying around some silver on them, while spiritual artifacts and pills went without saying. And because they were far too easy, the contribution they offered was as low as it could be. At most, new Black Wolf guards would just use it for practise before never looking at them again. They would much rather remain on the mountain and cultivate instead.

As an office of the lowest tier within the Hawkwolf Guard, black iron, they were completely composed of Qi Practitioners, and they primarily targeted other Qi Practitioners. They mainly served as a deterrent force to martial arts practitioners.

As a result, this led to the formation of a tiny vacuum of law in the system. This place was called the jianghu.

Ge Jian said, "If that's the case, he has managed to find another reason to leave Jiaping city."

Zhuo Zhibo snorted. "If he wants to do the manual labour, let him do so."

By now, Li Qingshan had already left the mountain. He calculated in his mind that completing these missions should roughly amount to a thousand people.

This was his main goal: to help Xiao An rebuild his body. For the sake of this goal, he could temporarily put aside everything else.

Right now, his choice in joining the Hawkwolf Guard seemed to be more and more correct. Otherwise, where else was he supposed to ask about bad people? And, if he committed a massacre against ordinary people as a Qi Practitioner, even if they were all bad people, it would attract a great deal of attention. It might have even earned him a spot on the blacklist, which would force him to oppose the government.

It was simple now. The information provided by the Hawkwolf Guard was extremely detailed. Every single person who could make it onto the blacklist of the Hawkwolf Guard through their cultivation method and martial arts alone were sinful, and they all occupied a single region for most of their lives,

so they were very easy to find. All he needed to do right now was to go find them one by one with his license to kill, and then kill out a bloody path from dawn till dusk.

Li Qingshan placed his hand on the porcelain jar on his waist and thought to himself, Don't worry, Xiao An. Very, very soon you'll be able to breathe air, taste delicious food, feel warmth, and smile just like the other children.

Li Qingshan did not directly leave the city. Instead, he paid a visit to the government office first. He wanted to exchange the several million taels of silver on him for some Qi Gathering pills. He could feel that he would be gone for quite some time after this departure, and his enemies would not be carrying hundred treasure pouches. They would not be a ready source of Qi Gathering pills. He also gained a deeper understanding as to why the Hawkwolf guards were reluctant to hunt down these annoying insects.

Zhou Wenbin saw Li Qingshan, and his eyes lit up, "You're already at the second layer. You've been progressing much faster than I expected."

Li Qingshan said, "Thank you for your concern, sir. With a powerful enemy right by my side, I obviously cannot tarry."

Zhou Wenbin said, "As long as you know. I heard you killed Qian Yannian in a direct confrontation?"

Li Qingshan said, "I just got lucky!"

Zhou Wenbin said, "Even if it were all luck, it's still an unbelievable achievement for a second layer Qi Practitioner to kill a fifth layer Qi Practitioner. Though, I must warn you again that sixth layer Qi Practitioners are completely different from those at the fifth layer."

Li Qingshan nodded. Afterwards, he thought of the various things that Xiao An could do. If he was measured according to the standard of Qi Practitioners, he was at the sixth layer or even higher, and he was as swift as lightning with boundless strength. Even if a low grade spiritual artifact landed a blow on him, it would fail to injure him at all. He was much more powerful than regular sixth layer Qi Practitioners. If he really became involved in battle, and it was a Qi Practitioner's duel where he could not use the Skull Prayer Bead, all he had to do was rush over and forcefully pierce the protective true qi and dig out their hearts; he would win just like that.

The Path of White Bone and Great Beauty had completely exceeded the powerful abilities of this world. The further Xiao An progressed, the more evident his terrifying strength would be.

Zhou Wenbin said, "Although the Sect of Clouds and Rain has expelled Zhao Liangqing, they've sent people to investigate. You've probably caught their attention. People from sects often don't have any qualms when they go about their business, so do be careful."

Li Qingshan said, "Thank you for the warning, sir. I will be careful." The Sect of Clouds and Rain had lost their business in Jiaping city, as well as a master who was about to break through to the sixth layer. A reaction like this was expected.

Zhou Wenbin said, "Nothing good will come out from striving for a moment of glory. Why don't you take my advice and go to the School of the Hundred Thoughts to cultivate for a while? You can avoid him temporarily, and once you're no longer a fledgling, would you still need to fear a measly Zhuo Zhibo?"

