

Chapter 191 - Xiao An Speaks

On the carriage, the two of them discussed, "Senior brother, I heard the great hero Niu who stays there stands nine feet tall and is built like a rock."

The mild-mannered young man expressed his doubts, "Is he really that tall? I find it all quite strange. Since when did the world have masters who bear the surname of Niu?"

"What's wrong with the surname Niu? My surname is Ma!"

TL: Niu is ox, while Ma is horse in this case.

"It's not like I'm talking about you, so what're you getting so frantic for? Sigh, what a nice child. She'll definitely become a great beauty when she grows up. It's just a pity she's mute. What a pity!"

The carriage had already pulled extremely far away, far beyond the hearing range of regular first-rate masters. However, Xiao An was able to hear it all clearly outside the door as she moved the boxes in. Her face sank slightly.

She placed all of the boxes in a secret room that was relatively cool so that Li Qingshan could feast on them whenever he roused from his cultivation.

However, Li Qingshan never roused. She just sat on the stone step by herself in the autumn wind and fallen leaves. She opened her mouth and clenched her fists, using everything she had in an attempt to speak.

When she recovered her body, she was still unable to speak. The disappointment on Li Qingshan's face was embedded in her mind. Although he had comforted her by saying that it did not matter, she never wanted to cause any disappointment to him, so she had always tried to practise speaking whenever he was not looking.

However, she had not been successful. She felt like an invisible film plugged her throat the entire time, preventing her from producing any sound. She could not even emit a single syllable no matter how hard she tried.

Her voice had been taken away by the witch, like she would never be able to get it back again.

Failing once more, she became filled with disappointment again, almost to the point where she wanted to cry. Do the heavens think that I'm too greedy? Since I can already feel his warmth, and I can remain by his side properly, I shouldn't desire anything more!

After who knows how long, Li Qingshan opened his eyes and shook his head gently. He had accidentally become engrossed in cultivation. As he slowly raised his eyes, he saw Xiao An wielding the broom that was even longer than herself as she swept away the leaves. He smiled to himself. She sure had nothing better to do. He also felt slightly apologetic for this.

He asked casually, "Xiao An, how long has it been?"

Xiao An just happened to be lost in her thoughts, thinking about speaking, when she suddenly heard the familiar voice. She turned around in a hurry. “Eek!”

Li Qingshan stretched and yawned. “What’re you eeking... about...” His eyes widened in disbelief as he pointed at Xiao An. “Y- you...” He seemed like the one who struggled to talk now.

Xiao An covered her own mouth with her eyes wide open. She had clearly failed with all of her attempts before.

After all these months of hard work, all she lacked was a moment of inspiration.

Li Qingshan knelt on one knee and stood up. He gulped and extended his hands forward. He said as calmly as he could, “Relax... and try again!”

Xiao An placed down the broom, parted her lips, and tried. “Eek!” The short syllable seemed to originate from within her chest, like a droplet of water landing in a tranquil lake, causing prolonged ripples throughout.

She had used the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty to condense a perfect body, and that included her voice. Even though it was just a single sound, it was like striking the string of a zither.

Li Qingshan smiled happily. “That’s fantastic. Again.”

Xiao An gained some confidence. She sucked in a deep breath. “Eeee...” It was a long, drawn-out sound, like how a phoenix’s cry could linger for three whole days.

Li Qingshan took a step forward and embraced her firmly. “This is fantastic! I knew you could do it!”

Xiao An rubbed her eyes as tears rolled down her face.

Li Qingshan wiped them away for her. “Don’t cry. If you keep crying, I’ll end up crying too!” He pinched her cheek. “Come, come, come. Say a little more for me.”

Under Li Qingshan’s eager gaze, Xiao An’s face became bright red with how hard she tried. She finally spat out another syllable. “Ah!”

“What else?”

“Eek!”

“Uh...”

“Ah!”

Li Qingshan’s lips tightened, left at a loss over how to respond. He rubbed her head. “Forget it. We’ll go slowly, just like cultivation.” Mentioning cultivation, he checked his daemon core and discovered that his daemon qi had grown slightly, but only by a tiny amount. Although the spiritual qi of the world was endless, he discovered that he could only draw in a tiny portion of it.

In comparison, it was still faster to chomp on pills. However, he suddenly noticed something. “Hmm? Since when did I reach the third layer?” True qi flowed freely through his Yin Heel meridian without any obstruction at all. His original plan was that he would only be able to break through to the third layer

after a while longer. Yet now, he had actually broken through unknowingly. He really was slightly taken aback by how sudden it all was, such that he became slightly lost.

Xiao An moved her arms and eeked and ahhed, explaining to him what had happened. She had remained by Li Qingshan's side the entire time, so she understood what had happened to him.

"I see!" Li Qingshan held his chin. He did not wonder about why he was able to understand her at all.

Although he could enter a form of meditation that was almost like hibernation with the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression, he would not be able to sense anything in such a state. He would only rouse when he sensed danger. He would not be able to consume any pills, forcing him to take the route of a regular daemon, which was why he never really used this state.

The spiritual qi of the world was like fine wine, but there was only a single jug, while he could wolf down Qi Gathering pills like entire tanks of dregs. And, as long as he maintained a steady supply, he could eat as many as he wanted, allowing him to accumulate daemon qi very quickly.

However, he never thought the cultivation method of daemons would have such a wondrous effect on practising qi. When he broke through to the second layer, he had used the means of traditional qi practitioners, constantly consuming pills to provide support and condensing his true qi to smash through the obstacles. It utterly wore him out. In the end, he had almost failed and only succeeded thanks to Xiao An's assistance.

Yet now, he had managed to break through from just sleeping. It was as clear as day which way was better. To his surprise, using the method of daemons to practise qi and the method of humans to cultivate as a daemon was the most optimal choice.

He needed to be like a regular human cultivator right now, gathering as many pills as he could to accumulate daemon qi. Afterwards, he would need to be like a daemon, finding a den and then constantly absorbing the spiritual qi of the world to cultivate true qi.

These completely different paths actually supplemented each other. In the very beginning, he felt like cultivation as both a daemon and a human was very tiresome, but he felt the exact opposite now.

Li Qingshan felt like he had been enlightened. He laughed aloud and lifted up Xiao An, spinning around with her. "I know what I need to do now."

At this moment, there was a rumble. The muffled boom rang out from underground, which was caught by Li Qingshan's sensitive ears.

"An earthquake?" He felt the ground beneath him shake slightly. Did his stomp from earlier set off some kind of reaction with the crust of the earth?

A while later, the tremors subsided, and Li Qingshan did not pay too much attention to it either. There had been a string of good news today, so he was in a very jovial mood. He placed Xiao An on his knee and teased her. After talking for a while, his stomach growled again. He rubbed his belly. "Do you have food?"

Xiao An pulled him by his hand into the secret room, but all she discovered was that all of the food boxes had been opened, while everything inside had vanished into thin air. She was stunned.

Li Qingshan smiled. "Since when did you have such an appetite?"

Xiao An gesticulated in a hurry and eeked and ahed. Her voice was like the gurgling of a spring, an extremely pleasant sound. With how clever she was, she had already grown accustomed to the two syllables. She used them like morse code, and when combined with her expression and movements, she seemed to be able to convey everything she was trying to say.

On the other hand, Li Qingshan was like a professional cryptographer, accurately interpreting what she was saying. He was stunned. "To think that there are people bold enough to rob me!" He went to the other room to take a look, and the grains and food stored there had been polished off as well.

Xiao An was certain that she had not seen anyone enter, so Li Qingshan thought of something and immediately checked the hole he had opened up. He sniffed carefully, and just as expected, he detected a powerful daemon qi. There were signs of displacement in the soil and earth as well. The uninvited guest had just left.

Xiao An analysed carefully with her eeks and ahhs.

Li Qingshan agreed. "Yep. I also think it's a daemonic beast. Why would humans sneak in here to eat the food? I wonder which ignorant daemonic beast is bold enough to steal from us!" Afterwards, he smiled. "It has been quite a while since you've refined flesh and blood. Let's lure it out as dinner for you. We can hold a celebration. Perhaps there might even be a daemon core!"

Xiao An eeked and ahed in worry.

Li Qingshan was confident. "Don't worry. I have a good idea!"

The sky dimmed, while the secret room that had been emptied out earlier was now filled with a hundred jars of alcohol. The seal for every single jar had been opened, such that their fragrance wafted everywhere, hiding all other smells, such as poison.

Within the alcohol was all of the poison and drugs that Li Qingshan, or should you say Yu Shukuang, could find. This was Li Qingshan's good idea. In his former life, he had heard about many stories where they used alcohol to triumph over demons and monsters.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An waited in the study. Li Qingshan smiled. "What do you think about my plan?"

"Eeah!" Xiao An raised her thumb to express her admiration.

"Hah, it's not that impressive."

However, the two of them waited until the middle of the night, but there was still no disturbance. Li Qingshan wondered in doubt. "Don't tell me that this bastard doesn't like alcohol!"

Xiao An said, "Eeah, eek eeh, aaah, eek ah ah, eek ah..." After being translated, that meant, "That can't be the case. The alcohol in those boxes had all been polished off."

Li Qingshan said, "Then let's keep waiting!"

Before he had even finished speaking, there was a tremor underground again. Li Qingshan's eyes lit up. "This daemon must be quite big too. You're about to witness just how terrifying the intelligence of

humans can be!" He pressed his ear against the ground and gathered all the sounds from underground. All he heard were jars of alcohol being tipped over and smashed, along with a series of rustles.

He waited with great patience, waiting for the alcohol to kick in before dealing a fatal strike to the daemoniac beast. An hour later, the sounds underground vanished.

Li Qingshan nodded at Xiao An. Xiao An pulled the mechanism and the bookshelf opened, revealing the hidden staircase behind.

Xiao An stopped Li Qingshan from entering, letting the Iron Plate corpse charge ahead first as a scout. Afterwards, the two of them charged into the secret room.

Li Qingshan had already equipped his talisman pouch on his waist. There were several mid grade Immobilisation talismans in there, as well as all of his Lightning Summoning talismans. He had made ample preparations.

They charged into the secret room boldly, but when Li Qingshan saw the sight inside, his excited face suddenly froze. He grabbed Xiao An beside him and covered her mouth, standing exactly where he was, afraid to move.

Chapter 192 - Daemon General Milliped

Not a single daemoniac beast, no matter how vicious or terrifying, could make Li Qingshan react like this. However, what he saw was not a beast of any kind, but a person. More accurately, it was a fair-skinned fatty sprawled out at the centre of the alcohol jars.

His head was shiny, and he wore a pink cloak, exposing his bulging, white belly. He gave off heavy daemon qi and the smell of liquor.

As a result, Li Qingshan performed a very simple calculation. What do you get when you combine a daemon with a human form?

Li Qingshan breathed in deeply and swallowed back the foul language he was about to let loose. The one who had been secretly eating his food was actually a Daemon General!

He had only seen two Daemon Generals in his life, a cat and a rat. Xuanyue had been utterly spoiled, so she went without saying. However, even that rat happened to be the great king of Black Rat mountain. He was an imposing figure with countless under his command.

A mighty Daemon General was an existence on Wang Pushi's level if it were a human, standing above millions. Why would something like that do something so degrading?

This was why he had never thought of this in the beginning. In the end, he was slapped across the face by the cruel reality. He clung onto the hope that the poison and drugs in the alcohol had come into effect.

However, the bald Daemon General's heaving belly and his thunderous snoring completely obliterated all of Li Qingshan's hopes. He had not been poisoned. He had just fallen drunk.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An looked at each other. Li Qingshan slowly retreated backwards, while Xiao An controlled the Iron Plate corpse in a slow retreat as well. They had created the hole as a path of retreat,

but who knew it would actually lead to the den of something so terrifying. They could not remain in this mountain manor any longer.

Clang!

The bald Daemon General with his pink cloak scratched his belly and knocked over a jar.

However, it was like a clap of thunder to Li Qingshan's ears. He immediately stopped. Only after seeing how there was no more activity for quite a while did he continue with his gradual retreat. True qi formed a thick cushion below his feet, preventing him from producing any sound.

Under Xiao An's control, the Iron Plate corpse's feet landed on the ground softly as well.

The bald Daemon General suddenly opened his eyes. He writhed in a strange manner as he stood up. At first, his calves straightened up, followed by his thighs, and then the upper half of his body. He looked at Li Qingshan and Xiao An in a daze.

Li Qingshan felt a chill run from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head before emerging from his scalp. This completely originated from his instincts towards danger as a daemon. He became more and more certain that this Daemon General was not someone he could deal with right now.

However, a cocked bow had to be fired. He waved his hands and launched ten talismans. They were all Immobilisation talismans, seven low grade and three medium grade. He did not try to kill him. He only hoped that the Daemon General could be immobilized for even just a second so that he could take off with Xiao An.

The bald Daemon General did not seem like he had completely sobered up yet. The ten talismans landed on him perfectly, including one on his face.

Li Qingshan rejoiced over his good fortune. At the same time, he stuck a Swift Breeze talisman to his legs and immediately tried to charge out. However, just when he was about to turn around, his eyes narrowed, and he halted.

The bald Daemon General just stood right in front of him, almost right in his face. The Immobilization talismans on him were eaten away rapidly, until not a single sliver remained, revealing his dazed face.

Only from this angle did he notice that the Daemon General was not particularly fat. He was long and mellow. As he stood there, he actually towered above Li Qingshan. He bent over as he stared straight at Li Qingshan with his bulging eyes. It was an indescribably terrifying sight.

Xiao An reacted by moving a finger. The Iron Plate corpse hugged the Daemon General, and Li Qingshan used the opportunity to retreat in a hurry.

The bald Daemon General trembled, and a pink gas emerged around him. The Iron Plate corpse that charged over seemed like it had stepped into a vat of acid. With a series of hisses, white smoke rose up from its body. Its powerful body that had been strengthened with metal and refinement was completely eaten away in the blink of an eye. All that was left was a ball of pale, red flames that returned to Xiao An's hands.

The Iron Plate corpse that could even kill sixth layer Qi Practitioners could not even last a single attack. It had not even been enough to make the enemy move a finger.

Li Qingshan was astounded. He became extremely fearful of the pink gas.

The bald Daemon General moved extremely quickly and without any rhythm at all. They could not escape. Li Qingshan released his violent daemon qi and immediately reached thirty feet, smashing through the earth above his head. He grabbed Xiao An and tossed her outside. "You go first!"

The pink gas spread rapidly, enveloping Li Qingshan's surroundings. Hisses rang throughout the secret room. Large portions of the stone floor weakened and collapsed. To think that Li Qingshan had wanted to deal with him using poison. He had finally witnessed what poison actually was.

There was an azure, blue colour within the surging pink gas. It originated from a spherical barrier composed of countless hexagons, which protected the area around Li Qingshan and stopped the invasion of the pink gas. As a result, Li Qingshan eased up slightly. Fortunately, the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell was sturdy enough. Now, he had to think of a way to get out of this situation.

He stomped down with his hoof. Explosive power filled both his legs, causing the ground to crack. His steel-like body creaked as it twisted, using the force to launch himself into the air.

The bald Daemon General took another strange posture, with his body bent forward and his bald head directed at Li Qingshan. His tall body contracted significantly, like a spring that had been forced down before being let loose suddenly.

All Li Qingshan saw was a blurry figure charge towards him ten times faster than he had launched into the air.

Thunk!

A large crack appeared on the indestructible Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell. Li Qingshan was knocked off his trajectory, from flying up vertically to horizontally. Who knows just how many walls he smashed through before becoming deeply embedded in the soil.

He was shocked. He had just achieved the strength of two oxen, so he had absolute confidence in his strength. However, the Daemon General was still much stronger.

The bald Daemon General sprang up from the ground and rubbed his head in a daze. He raised his head and looked at Li Qingshan, as if he had never imagined that he would fail to destroy Li Qingshan's Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell.

At this moment, two prayer beads whistled down from above, directly striking the Daemon General's bald head.

The Daemon General raised his head. A petite figure landed behind him with lightning speed, surging with pale, red flames. She used all of her strength, directly converting a portion of her own flesh and blood into flames to deliver the most powerful thrust she had ever unleashed.

Li Qingshan instead panicked. He called out, "You idiot! Get out of here!" Daemon Generals were not existences who could be defeated with tricks like that. He disregarded the poison and punched out as hard as he could.

The Daemon General did not try to avoid the attack. He said sluggishly, "Are you daemons? Why do you attack me?" His voice was slightly slurred, but Li Qingshan still managed to make out what he was saying.

Everyone present stopped like an invisible hand had interfered with the situation. Li Qingshan's punch stopped before the Daemon General, while Xiao An's hidden blade remained three inches away from his bald head. The falling Skull Prayer Beads halted above the Daemon General's head too.

Li Qingshan slowly pulled back his fist and laughed dryly. "Exactly. Daemons shouldn't fight among themselves." He glanced at Xiao An. "Why don't you get over here!" Xiao An stowed away her hidden blade and prayer beads and returned to Li Qingshan's side.

Li Qingshan reverted to human form and clasped his hands. "May I learn your name, great Daemon General? I am Black Mountain. I've cultivated for five centuries in the mountains, and I've barely managed to assume a human form. I had no intentions of offending you. It truly is my fault."

"I'm Milliped. What does offending mean? And what's 'fault'?"

Li Qingshan was slightly relieved, having confirmed that this Milliped was not angry about what had happened earlier. He seemed to be slightly dim, and his reactions were extremely sluggish.

He suddenly thought of something. By Milliped, that's basically just a millipede. This guy is actually a millipede daemon, so it's no wonder that he's so powerful and fast, yet his reaction speed was so slow.

He had once heard Xuanyue mention a lot of common knowledge regarding daemons. Daemons with flesh and blood were primarily divided into four groups, the scaled, the furred, the feathered, and the carapaced.

The scaled referred to animals of the water, the furred referred to terrestrial animals, the feathered referred to animals capable of flight, and the carapaced referred to insects.

Among them, the carapaced possessed the largest variety. There were countless insect daemonic beasts. No one knew just how many insects there were in the world.

Insects were born without much intelligence, completely acting on instincts, so there were many that could become daemonic beasts. However, there were far fewer that could condense daemon cores or reach even higher realms of cultivation compared to the other categories.

However, insect daemons would often be the strongest. Whether it be strength, speed, endurance, or tenacity, they would exceed all other daemons of the same cultivation level.

An ant could carry four hundred times its weight. A flea could jump a hundred times its length, and it could jump once every four seconds for several dozen hours on end. The tenacity of cockroaches was as clear as day. These creatures all resided at the bottom of the food chain, but if they had the opportunity to turn into daemons, they would immediately reach the very top. They would become the most terrifying hunters in the world.

However, insect daemons had one fatal flaw, which was their very low intelligence. Even if they gained self-consciousness after condensing a daemon core, they would not be particularly clever. Intelligence was basically their weakness.

Li Qingshan came up with an idea as a result. He asked, "Milliped, why have you eaten my things?"

Milliped said, "I didn't know it was yours. No, it's all mine, everything underground."

Li Qingshan said, "Do you want more?"

"Yes!" Milliped opened his mouth and saliva flowed out.

Li Qingshan said, "There's no more food here, but there's plenty above ground, so why don't you go there?"

Milliped shook his head like a motor. "Can't go above ground."

"Why not?"

Milliped's dazed expression revealed a sliver of fear. "Orders. I can't go against them."

Li Qingshan rejoiced. He had gotten him to speak so easily. He sure was simple. He was much easier to handle than someone clever like Xuanyue. Intelligence would always be the most important standard for comparing creatures. Humans used this only advantage of theirs to suppress all other beings by themselves. If they were dim-witted, it would be useless no matter how powerful they were.

"There's none left here. I'll go up and grab some more for you, okay?"

"Okay, okay. Go quick, go quick!" Milliped's eyes lit up and urged him on.

So simple! Li Qingshan was slightly stunned. It was so simple that he felt rather embarrassed. In order to make it more convincing, he followed up with, "Then what do you like to eat?"

Chapter 193 - An Ox Munching on Peony

Milliped considered the question seriously, while Li Qingshan grew nervous. He was afraid this Daemon General would say something along the lines of, "You!" He would be done for if that were the case.

But fortunately, Milliped said at the end, "Yellow seeds. White seeds."

It took Li Qingshan a moment to understand that he was talking about millet and rice. He was actually a herbivore, but he soon remembered that most millipedes in the world were herbivores anyway.

Of course, most daemons never followed this. Even if it had been a goat who had grazed on grass for most of its life, it would happily eat meat and drink alcohol after turning into a daemon. This guy was probably so stupid that he had not even bothered to change his diet!

"I'll go up to grab them!" Li Qingshan was just about to leap out of the hole above him with Xiao An.

"Hold on!"

Li Qingshan's heart sank, but he heard Milliped say, "And that colourless water!"

"Water? You mean alcohol?"

"I think so..."

"Okay, I'll go fetch that!"

As expected, Milliped did not stop him. He did not even try taking Xiao An as a hostage. He just pressed him. "Quickly! Quickly!"

Li Qingshan leapt out of the secret room underground. The hole just happened to be above the back garden, which was why the buildings had not collapsed. He rushed out with Xiao An, before collapsing on the ground and gazing at the deep, blue night sky, gasping for air.

He felt like he had gone fishing, only to catch a great white shark. That was far too dangerous. Fortunately, this shark was not particularly clever, nor could it leave the water, or it really would have cost him his life this time.

Xiao An laid beside him, also looking at the night sky. The faint wisps of clouds floated by, but she seemed slightly depressed.

Li Qingshan suddenly stood up, grabbed her, and helped her to her feet. He lectured, "You haven't been behaving yourself at all. I told you to go, so you go. Why'd you come back?"

Xiao An waved her hands and eeked and ahhed in argument.

Li Qingshan shot her a glance. "Hmm? You've just learned how to speak, yet you're gonna talk back at me? It was pure luck in the Boundless mountains, which was why you happened to help me. That doesn't mean you were right. If I say you're wrong, then you're wrong. I'm saying all of this for your sake!"

The rims of Xiao An's eyes reddened from anger. She turned around and no longer said anything.

Li Qingshan said, "You're not allowed to cry!"

As a result, tears streamed down Xiao An's face.

Li Qingshan's heart immediately began to ache. He steeled his resolve. "Crying won't work this time. You need to learn."

Xiao An suddenly raised her head and looked at Li Qingshan with a gaze she had never displayed before. Her chest heaved heavily. She was like a volcano welling up with lava as she suddenly erupted and said, "Just how many times do you have to abandon me before you're satisfied!?" Her voice grew clearer as she spoke, while her face was filled with sadness. As soon as she was done, she turned around and rushed into the house.

"You-" Li Qingshan was completely stunned, like he had been struck by a Lightning Summoning talisman.

Xiao An had finally spoken a complete sentence; this should have been something worthy of a great celebration, but the sentence made his heart ache slightly. He laid back down on the ground, defeated. He too experienced the worries that came with a growing child.

In the hole in the garden, Milliped asked, "Do you have it?"

"I don't!" Li Qingshan barked.

"Why are you so loud?" Milliped asked in a daze.

"It's got nothing to do with you!" Li Qingshan barked again, "Just keep waiting!"

“Okay.”

This was the first time Li Qingshan had realised the severity of the issue. Xiao An was growing up slowly, so she would definitely develop her own thoughts and opinions. Perhaps, there might even be the legendary rebellious phase. It was impossible to avoid conflict as a family—no, it was possible to say that the closer they were as a family, the more easily they would come into conflict with each other.

As the head of the family, he had to consider just how he was supposed to communicate with her. He had to guide her growth slowly and patiently, but just how was he supposed to go about it?

He felt his mind descend into a mess. This was far more complicated than cultivation. As a result, he just laid there as he thought about a lot of things. He thought about how his parents treated him. He thought about the methods of education mentioned by those professionals on television during his previous life.

Li Qingshan suddenly sat up. “Yep. I need to treat her as an equal first.” He crawled to his feet and made his way over to the door slowly. He raised his hand to knock, but he ended up hitting nothing. The door suddenly swung open and a petite figure threw herself into his arms.

Li Qingshan was slightly taken aback before breaking into laughter. He could feel how attached she was to him. He stroked her hair. “I’m sorry. I was too brash earlier. I’ve never wanted to abandon you. I just want to protect you.”

“I... want to... protect... you too...” Xiao An was still not very fluent, but she was extremely serious.

Her expression was simply adorable, which both touched Li Qingshan and made him develop a desire to protect her. He smiled. “Alright, great king Xiao An. This one is under your protection. Come, let me give you a kiss!” He swept aside her fringe and pecked down heavily on her smooth forehead.

The daemon young man who stood like a black tower and the small, tender girl formed an extremely unique sight. Instead of smacking your lips and saying something like, “In me the tiger sniffs the rose,” the current situation was more like, “An ox munching on peony, wasting it for being unable to appreciate its beauty.”

Xiao An’s face was bright red. She raised her heels and gently kissed his great face that was as black as the bottom of a pot.

Li Qingshan rubbed his face. The feeling of the kiss lingered there. He could not help but chuckle.

In the hole, Milliped called out again, “I’m hungry!”

Li Qingshan curled his lip. “Let’s find a way to deal with him first!”

Xiao An covered her mouth to hide her smile.

Li Qingshan was rather reluctant to leave behind this secret cultivation spot he had just created, and Milliped did not seem like he posed much danger either.

Then he thought about the habits of millipedes, which did seem like a harmless bug. Millipedes would usually play dead if they were toyed with, and then they would release some kind of irritating gas at most.

Now that he thought about it, the pink, poisonous gas that Milliped released, which was also what the Iron Plate corpse ran into, was no irritating gas, but actual, acidic poison that could eat through rock and metal.

If the Sect of Clouds and Rain came for him right now, all he would have to do was lure them into the hole before waiting to collect their corpses. What ninth layer or tenth layer? They were all useless before a Daemon General. Even if the sect master came, defeat was probably more likely against an insect Daemon General.

After quite a while of thought, Li Qingshan wore the bamboo basket and took Xiao An with him. He arrived in Salt Mountain city and found Yu Shukuang. "I'll be gone for a while. Don't let anyone approach my estate!"

This was what he eventually decided on. A Daemon General was just too dangerous. He seemed very stupid and could be toyed with or used, but that would come with an element of unpredictability in whatever he did. If he angered him by accident, an extremely miserable fate would await him.

From a certain perspective, Milliped was even more dangerous than Xuanyue. At the very least, Li Qingshan knew what Xuanyue wanted. He could even relate to her. Even if he angered her, she would not kill him.

Wagering his life on the mood of an idiot was not a clever choice. Before he had obtained the power to protect himself, he had decided to maintain his distance. I can't afford to provoke him, but that doesn't mean I can't avoid him.

Yu Shukuang jerked awake from his dream. "Great hero Li- Niu, where will you be going?"

"That's not for you to worry about." Li Qingshan pondered that question slightly. He was obviously going to go provoke the people he could afford to provoke.

Yu Shukuang said, "Then, please go, please go!" Before he had even finished talking, Li Qingshan had vanished already, kicking up a violent gust of wind and causing the door to swing wildly.

Yu Shukuang was rather reluctant to see him go. The 'Tiger Butcher' was terrifying, but he stuck to his word, and he was very generous. All he made him do was buy an estate and deliver a few days worth of food, and in return, he received a million taels of silver and a Hundred Grasses pill. He was an ideal backer that he could rely on. If he could help him out with a few things in return for some more pills, there was a lot of hope for him to reach the innate realm.

He climbed out of bed and took out an envelope from his drawer. He carefully took out the letter and read it under the lantern light.

His daughter's letter told him that she had already ingested a legendary Innate pill and had already begun cultivating.

The edges had even become roughed up. Clearly, he had read it countless times already, but whenever he saw it, he would smile happily. That little girl who leaned on her arms as she listened to his stories of maintaining justice and helping the weak had finally grown up! She had surpassed her father!

However, what followed his joy was despondence and unease.

The world of Qi Practitioners was completely different from the world of the jianghu. In the jianghu, he was the great hero Yu who maintained justice and was revered by countless. However, before even the weakest Qi Practitioner, he had to bow and scrape to them, careful with every single move.

Only the ignorant common people would treat Qi Practitioners like gods. He understood this very well. No matter where, human nature was just as vile. He could only blame himself for enjoying her gazes of admiration too much, making the stories he told her too perfect. In the end, the stubborn girl really ended up believing in some 'path of justice'. She might end up suffering as a result.

Recalling that, he could no longer fall asleep anymore. Sigh, he really was unable to help her at all now!

He was clearly still in his late thirties, yet he suddenly felt like he had aged. He stowed the letter away carefully and returned it to the drawer. He wanted to break through to the innate realm more than ever right now.

The starlight pierced through the trees and fell into the hole, landing onto Milliped's dazed face. His eyes were wide and his mouth was wide open as he stared at this sight that he rarely ever saw. Saliva flowed out of his mouth. "Looks like sesame!"

"How slow!"

Li Qingshan left Salt Mountain city. He travelled a few dozen kilometers, found a cave, and dove in. He travelled underground and arrived before the Zombie Daoist's dwelling before suddenly stopping. His nose pricked up, and he sniffed the air gently. His expression immediately changed.

It was extremely faint, but the familiar smell of rouge was something he could never forget. It came from that deviant, the West Gate Granny!

Aside from that, there were three other different scents of rouge. At least four people of the Sect of Clouds and Rain were here, and it was very likely that they were the four grannies of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, or four ninth layer Qi Practitioners in other words.

He had never thought they would actually come here in search of him. He felt like he had still been too careless. If he were caught in the dwelling by these people, the consequences would be unthinkable.

PS: Xiao An's first words, which probably aren't what everyone was expecting! As one of the main characters in this book, she will gradually display her own flair. She obviously won't be surpassed by some deviant of a woman. To be honest, they do bear different things on their shoulders in this book, but they definitely don't exist just to become the main character's women. I like this feeling very much. If you like it too, then give me some monthly tickets in support!

Chapter 194 - The Tiger and the Snake's Trap

Smell would always be the aspect that human cultivators missed the most. Li Qingshan possessed a sense of smell that was a hundred times stronger than regular beasts. Combined with his instincts for danger and killing intent, it was impossible for him to be ambushed so easily.

He concealed all of his aura and gripped his Wind-entwining blade firmly. He prepared all of his talismans and approached the Zombie Daoist's dwelling slowly. He constantly sniffed for the lingering scent in the air and did his best to discern where they were hiding right now.

He had set out for the Sect of Clouds and Rain, so how could he flee right after seeing them? Of course, his battle tactic would be to retreat if there were many people, but if there were only a few, he would kill them. If he worked with Xiao An, he had some confidence in being able to triumph over a ninth layer Qi Practitioner.

When he finally set foot in the dwelling, it was empty inside. All that was left was a lingering scent that slowly dispersed.

Why would these great Qi Practitioners remain in the pitch-black underground, waiting for the arrival of a junior? They only waited for a few days before leaving this place to search for Wei Yingjie's whereabouts.

Li Qingshan was slightly disappointed. It seemed like it would take him some effort.

.....

In the middle of the night, Li Qingshan climbed up the mountain where the Hawkwolf Guard resided on and arrived before his original residence. As expected, there was an aura inside, but it was much stronger than he had expected, but the smell was right. Qian Rongzhi had actually broken through to the fifth layer. She was even faster than him.

With Xiao An outside keeping an eye out, Li Qingshan climbed up the residence alone and opened the window. He saw Qian Rongzhi meditating in the room and practising qi. She did not seem to be lascivious at all. Instead, she seemed rather solemn.

Qian Rongzhi heard the window open, so she immediately stood up and grabbed her weapon and talismans, assuming a defensive posture. Afterwards, she was surprised. "It's you?"

Li Qingshan said, "It's me."

Qian Rongzhi eased up. She did not even ask why Li Qingshan had become so big. Her eyes lit up as she said, "You've reached the third layer. You really are a genius!" The first time she had seen Li Qingshan was only a few months ago. Back then, he was still a first layer Qi Practitioner.

Li Qingshan said, "Your cultivation surprises me more."

Qian Rongzhi said, "The worthless have their own worthless ways. Unfortunately, it's still not enough to defeat you."

Li Qingshan squinted his eyes. "What will you do if you could defeat me?"

Qian Rongzhi smiled thinly. "You'll know when it happens!"

Li Qingshan refused to dwell on this matter. He cut to the chase. "What's going on with the Sect of Clouds and Rain? Who's in charge of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain now?"

"Don't ask me. I was dragged into the matter due to Wei Yingjie's disappearance. I've already been expelled from the Sect of Clouds and Rain. I knelt on the ground and begged the granny for a very long time, but it was all useless. I've been tested for all this time, all for nothing. I didn't even get a single cultivation method. Aren't I pitiful?" Qian Rongzhi said bitterly and pitifully, as if she had not personally abused Wei Yingjie to death.

“Dragged into the matter?” Li Qingshan sneered. “The same as before. If you can lure the West Gate Granny out alone to a certain place, everything that has to do with the Sect of Clouds and Rain in her hundred treasures pouch will go to you.”

Qian Rongzhi widened her eyes. “You can kill ninth layer Qi Practitioners?” She knew Li Qingshan had a trump card, so he was as powerful as sixth layer Qi Practitioners at the very least. However, she never imagined he would actually reach such a high level.

Originally, she believed that catching up to Li Qingshan was just a matter of time with her cultivation speed. However, her confidence completely evaporated now. The disparity separating her from Li Qingshan was not shrinking. Instead, it was growing exponentially.

She also understood why he did not take her too seriously as a potential threat. He possessed absolute confidence in himself. Before absolute strength, rarely would any schemes or plans be effective. This man was probably different from all of the other men she had seen before. He was surprisingly difficult to deal with.

“That’s why you’d better maintain some fear for me. That’ll do us both good!”

Qian Rongzhi stopped smiling. “I understand. The vice sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, Wei Zhongyuan, and the four grannies found nothing when they went to the Zombie Cave, so they split up to search for you. There are Parlours of Rain and Clouds littered through the lands, and they’re well-connected. As soon as you appear, they’ll discover you.”

Li Qingshan said, “Did you send them to the Zombie Cave?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “I said Wei Yingjie went there in search of you, but I didn’t say that you killed him. You’ve fallen out with the Sect of Clouds and Rain completely anyway, so it’s no difference to you. Don’t tell me you were stupid enough to hide there?”

Li Qingshan felt like he had been slapped across the face. He said boldly, “Of course not. Continue.” She had said that so nonchalantly, so it was not like he could lose his temper over that.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. “The Parlour of Clouds and Rain has lost two parlour masters, one after another, so they haven’t sent anyone new. If you want to deal with the Sect of Clouds and Rain, I’d recommend targeting Wei Zhongyuan. He’s currently going through the sorrow of losing a son. He’s irrational, so he’s easy to control.”

“What’s his cultivation?”

“The tenth layer.”

“I refuse,” Li Qingshan said without a second thought. Tenth layer Qi Practitioners were people who had opened all of their acupoints, along with the twelve standard meridians and eight extraordinary meridians. They were only a step away from Foundation Establishment. Compared to the ninth layer, they were like sixth layer Qi Practitioner to fifth layer Qi Practitioners. He was confident in his own strength, but he had not become blinded by it.

Qian Rongzhi was disappointed. Her plan to use Wei Zhongyang to break through had fallen through, but it also gave her some peace of mind. At the very least, Li Qingshan did not possess the strength to deal with the tenth layer right now.

“Then just the West Gate Granny. However, I need time. I need time to plan, and I also need time to explain my cultivation. And, they’ll be sending over a new Black Hawk commander soon!”

“So what?”

“I will contend for the position of Black Wolf commander. As long as I get promoted to commander, the Sect of Clouds and Rain won’t touch me even if they suspect me as long as they don’t have any evidence. Of course, I need to thank you for opening up this position for me.”

She was scheming before others, but before Li Qingshan, she would always be extremely honest. This was not because she had any good will towards Li Qingshan. Instead, she just adapted to circumstances. She knew that this was the only way to cooperate with Li Qingshan, to maximise her own benefits.

Only now did Li Qingshan recall that she had reached the fifth layer and that she really did have the right to be promoted to Black Wolf commander. They had joined the Hawkwolf Guard together, yet unknowingly, she had already reached such a step. She really was a woman who could not be underestimated.

Leaving behind a talisman for communication, Qian Rongzhi smiled. “It’ll take me one to three months, but I’ll deliver the West Gate Granny to you.”

Li Qingshan nodded. He wanted to use this time to finish off his remaining pills so that he could be as strong as he could be to increase his chances at victory with regards to this battle. Once he was victorious, he could use the pills in the West Gate Granny’s hundred treasures pouch to maintain his cultivation speed.

The two measly Qi Practitioners made a deal. The deal was about a ninth layer Qi Practitioner.

Li Qingshan then said, “Oh right, help me appraise some pills!” He had obtained several dozen bottles of pills, including a few high grade ones. However, he did not know about their effects and whether he could eat them or not. Qian Rongzhi had grown up in a clan after all. She had learned proper alchemy with Qian Yannian, so she should be able to appraise them.

As expected, Qian Rongzhi’s eyes lit up when she saw the pills Li Qingshan took out, describing all of their names and effects with great familiarity. Most of them had similar effects to the Pearl Dew pills. They were for cultivation.

However, there were two bottles of Eruption pills that could instantly unleash the potential the human body had to offer, as well as two bottles of Concealment pills for concealing aura and three bottles of Healing pills for recovery.

If he had eaten them blindly, it would have been a waste.

In the end, Li Qingshan took out three pills the size of goose yolks. “And what are these?” He did not know alchemy, but he could sense that the spiritual qi within these three pills was extremely special. It was extremely pure, yet also surprisingly mellow. They did not seem like pills for cultivation.

Qian Rongzhi said, "These are Innate pills! They're worth even more than Pearl Dew pills, but they're not for Qi Practitioners."

Li Qingshan understood the value of Pearl Dew pills very well. They were enough to make countless Qi Practitioners fight over them. Since these Innate pills were not for Qi Practitioners, they must have been for ordinary people. "Don't tell me they're--"

Qian Rongzhi said, "That's right. They're pills that can allow ordinary people to practise qi. However, it doesn't guarantee success. It'll depend on their talent. In the past, Qian Yannian spent a tremendous amount of effort to obtain one for a beloved son of his. He ate it, but he failed to reach the innate realm in the end. Only large clans can refine pills like that."

Li Qingshan understood that unless they possessed tremendous wealth and had as many pills as they wished for, all Qi Practitioners would be more willing to exchange for a few Pearl Dew pills to increase their own cultivation than an Innate pill to nurture their children. He stowed away the Innate pill first before saying, "Pick a bottle as remuneration."

Qian Rongzhi chose the bottle of Concealment pills without any hesitation at all. That also happened to be the type that Li Qingshan needed the least. Afterwards, he stowed all the pills away and was about to leave.

Qian Rongzhi suddenly asked, "Is that child with you?"

"Hmm?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "I want to see her." She saw Li Qingshan hesitate, so she took out a bottle of Qi Gathering pills.

Li Qingshan said, "I won't make any deals involving her."

He spoke calmly, but it was like a thunderous clap to Qian Rongzhi's ears. She was immediately left at a loss as to what to do with her hand holding the bottle of Qi Gathering pills. She even began to feel ashamed. She forced out a smile. "You two sure are lucky." Her smile exuded indescribable envy, as well as some sadness.

Li Qingshan changed his mind. He called in Xiao An, but she said, "Forget it. You should go!"

After Li Qingshan left, Qian Rongzhi leaned against the window sill. Her eyes were slightly lost. An indescribable, irrepressible wild wish appeared in her heart. She wished someone could say something like that to her. Even just once would be enough. But would there be anyone? And would she believe it even if they did?

She laughed at herself. In her mind, the word 'trust' had already ceased to exist.

People of misfortune had to avoid getting too close to those who were fortunate, or they would lose their resolve. They would have nothing left. She had stopped depending on luck a long time ago. Kneeling on the ground and begging the heavens was useless, no matter how many times a person tried. Begging others was useless too. It would only make them smile wider. She had to obtain everything with her own pair of hands.

She looked at her right hand. It was pale and elegant, with five, long fingers. The light in her eyes gradually calmed down. It was a calmness of apathy. The corner of her lips curled coldly as she suddenly extended her right hand. I'll rip apart the smile in the sky!

Hehehehe!

Chapter 195 - Drinking under the Moon

He dove underground once more. Li Qingshan used the underground mental map and found a great cavern. He said to Xiao An, "It looks like we'll have to tough it out for a while. You can't compare this place to Salt Mountain city."

"Alright," Xiao An said obediently. Her voice was slurred. Apart from when she yelled out the first time, she was unable to say anything clearly. However, it was an extremely pleasant voice, similar to a spring breeze. It was a comforting voice.

Within a forest-like series of stalagmites, Li Qingshan checked the pills on him. He had already used up half of the Qi Gathering pills, so only around four thousand remained. However, he had only used up one of his Hundred Grasses pills, so over a thousand remained, while there were almost a hundred high grade pills left for cultivation. He was quite wealthy in terms of resources.

Li Qingshan stowed away a talisman. This talisman was known as a Communication talisman. It came in a pair, and as long as they were within five hundred kilometers of each other, the other would respond if one was activated.

Although it was unable to deliver any complicated messages, it was enough for signals. As for how Qian Rongzhi would lure out the West Gate Granny, Li Qingshan did not probe into that too much. It would require quite a lot of adapting for her to do that. She was extremely familiar with this line of work anyway.

He was not worried that she would betray him. She did not exactly have any moral thresholds to speak of, but she was motivated by her own interests, which were instead easier to grasp. If she betrayed him, just her actions of feeding information to the enemy would have been enough for the Sect of Clouds and Rain to hunt her down.

All he needed to do was wait quietly in a suitable location for a suitable time. All of this made him think of a fable from his former life—A tiger caught a fox, and then the fox told the tiger that if it spared him, it would lure other animals over.

However, this was based on the premise that the tiger had the ability to eat all the animals the fox lured over.

He raised his head and poured Qi Gathering pills into his mouth. He began to cultivate.

Six days later, Li Qingshan began to miss his courtyard in Salt Mountain city. This was not just because he missed the tasteful alcohol and dishes, but because of Xiao An as well. In the empty cavern, there was nothing for her to do. When she was bored, she would just lean on her hands and watch him cultivate.

This made Li Qingshan feel very ashamed. He would often stop cultivating and play or talk with her for a while. If he were alone, it did not matter what he did. Even if he used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression and went into seclusion for a whole year, it would not matter.

However, with her by his side, he wanted to do everything he could for her to lead a better life. Looking around, all he saw was the murky, smooth rocks. This was nowhere close to his ideal location. It would only be detrimental to the mental development of children.

Li Qingshan made up his mind. "Since we don't have to be here, let's go back and take a look. That millipede must have run out of patience and left already!"

.....

The mountain manor was desolate, while the aura of autumn had deepened. Li Qingshan opened the front door and directly went to the back garden. He made his way through the well-spaced vegetation and glanced into the cave. He could not help but smile bitterly.

Milliped's eyes were closed as he laid in the hole. He slept like he was dead, as if he had not even moved from his original position. Suddenly, he snapped open his slightly bulging eyes and stared straight at Li Qingshan. He asked quietly, "Where's the food?" He had not realised that Li Qingshan had stood him up.

Li Qingshan grinned, "It's coming!" Afterwards, he turned around and left with Xiao An. Perhaps he had been touched by his only interest in food, or perhaps he was just too easy to fool that it made Li Qingshan slightly uneasy.

In the Proud Sword manor, Yu Shukuang looked at Li Qingshan in surprise and joy. "Great hero Niu, you've finally returned."

Li Qingshan nodded. "Yep, yep, I'm back. There's something else that I must trouble you with."

Yu Shukuang saw how cautious he was, so he said with much emotion, "Anything for you, great hero Niu, no matter how dangerous or life-threatening..."

Li Qingshan interrupted him. "It's not that intense. Just prepare three things for me and deliver them to my manor."

"Do you mean?" Yu Shukuang was unable to imagine just what was enough for Li Qingshan to verbally request for them. Even if he wanted them, he should not have come to him, right?

"Millet, rice, and alcohol." Li Qingshan took out another million taels of silver and slammed it on the table.

"Just those?" Yu Shukuang was so surprised that his chin almost dropped off. He was asking him for regular grains and food in such a formal manner.

Li Qingshan said, "As well as other grains, vegetables, and fruits. Prepare whatever you have, the more the better. Of course, I'll need those twenty tables of food as well. You need to undertake this as secretly as possible too. Don't let too many people know."

"Don't worry at all, great hero Niu. I'll send people to make preparations immediately. You'll get as much as you could possibly want." Yu Shukuang slammed his chest as he guaranteed. As one of the

leading figures in the jianghu, he might not be able to obtain certain things, but gathering some grains and food was a cake-walk.

Li Qingshan said in a seemingly unintentional manner, "Oh right, I obtained a few Innate pills recently." With that, he turned around and left.

The speaker had said that intentionally, while the audience obviously cared about what had been mentioned.

Yu Shukuang's eyes gradually widened. As a member of the jianghu, he did not know much about the various pills that Qi Practitioners possessed, but there was one that he just had to know, which was the Innate pill. It was a sacred pill that all practitioners of martial arts could only dream about. With how much effort they devoted to martial arts, all of them wanted to rise up and step into a whole new world.

Yu Shukuang wanted to as well, and he wanted it much more than most other things. When Li Qingshan mentioned those two words nonchalantly, he became a donkey that was being led around by a carrot on a stick. Even if he knew that it would be impossible for him to get his hands on one, he wanted to give it his all and try. Not to mention that Li Qingshan was clearly implying that it was possible for him to give Yu Shukuang one with his tone.

Immediately, he gathered a few trusted subordinates and gave orders to them solemnly. If it were not for the fact that Li Qingshan wanted him to keep a low profile over the operation, he was basically tempted to carry out this matter in person so that he could demonstrate himself to Li Qingshan.

When a powerful, local organisation got to work, they would be surprisingly effective. In just an hour, everything that Li Qingshan wanted was delivered to him in an endless flow.

"Here!" Li Qingshan grabbed a bag of rice and tossed it into the hole.

Milliped extended his hand and ripped in open. The shiny grains of rice flowed out. His mouth expanded in an exaggerated manner, such that it made Li Qingshan think about those characters from the cartoons. In the blind of an eye, the entire bag of rice had been tipped into his mouth.

He smacked his lips. "Tasty!" Afterwards, he kept staring at Li Qingshan.

"If it's tasty, then have some more. Once you're full, stop bugging me." Li Qingshan tossed another bag of rice down.

Milliped was absorbed by the rice. He paid no attention to Li Qingshan at all. Another bag of rice vanished into his mouth, but he had yet to seem satisfied.

As a result, Li Qingshan just tossed all of the bags of rice, several dozen of them, in there. However, the influence of the Innate pill managed to take Li Qingshan by surprise. Afterwards, rice and millet flour, along with various other grains, were all carted over one by one by the disciples of the Proud Sword manor, along with various fruits and vegetables. There were even a few that Li Qingshan failed to recognise.

Li Qingshan held a few bags of rice in his hands with a few on his shoulders. He seemed like the ultimate worker. He rushed back and forth from the entrance and the back garden, tossing bags of food into the hole.

Milliped, who had always seemed dazed, now smiled from ear to ear. As a foodie, seeing these various foods fall from the sky probably made him feel what a money grubber felt watching it rain money.

He was overwhelmed. He almost became lost as to what to eat first.

Li Qingshan shook off the sweat on his forehead and said to Xiao An, "Keep an eye out. I'm going to go cultivate a little. Remember to not venture into the cave. I'm worried he'll end up eating you too."

Xiao An obviously did not take something for frightening children to heart. She agreed with a smile and squatted by the hole, watching Milliped eat. She was very intrigued.

By dusk, Li Qingshan's twenty tables of food had arrived as well. He sat by the hole and opened the boxes of food, also wolfing them down. He had to admit that watching Milliped eat made him develop an appetite too.

Li Qingshan ate by the hole, while Milliped ate in the hole. Xiao An could see Milliped if she looked down, and she could see Li Qingshan if she looked up. She found this to be fascinating.

He could use the energy of the world to replace food after he daemonified, going for very long periods without food. With how much spiritual qi of the world he could absorb as a daemon, he could basically attain what humans called inedia. He would be able to thrive even after stopping all intake of food. However, his appetite would remain, and it would only grow stronger as time went on.

The reason why humans chose to go without food was because regular food contained far too many impurities. It would build up in their bellies and affect their cultivation. However, the cultivation method and constitution of daemons were completely different from humans. To daemons, being able to fill themselves would never be bad. Their powerful bodies could easily digest any impurities.

The process of human cultivation was like a sculptor producing a delicate piece of art. They would choose the most suitable cultivation method and the most suitable pills after careful consideration. Subsequently, they would divide the cultivation process into many detailed steps before inching towards their objective slowly. They wanted to be in control of everything, constantly striving towards perfection, to become someone above all, an immortal.

The cultivation process of daemons, on the other hand, was like a painter casually flicking their brushes and producing landscapes from splashes of ink. It was coarse, liberal, and unconstrained. The painter might not even be themselves, but nature; it was just like using the elements of nature, the wind, frost, rain, and snow, to grind away a strange rock. They just happened to be a little more special than other rocks, known as daemons.

Milliped's mouth suddenly stopped. He raised his head to look at Li Qingshan, and the snowy-white grains of rice leaked out from the corner of his lips. He sputtered, "Alcohol!"

Li Qingshan just happened to be drinking a jar of alcohol heartily. Sensing his gaze, he tossed the jar down. "For you!"

Milliped glugged it all down before asking for more.

Li Qingshan tossed down four or five of them together. He had drunk quite a lot, and in the spur of the moment, he forgot about his own warning to Xiao An. He leapt into the hole with his alcohol and food, bumping alcohol jars with Milliped before tilting his head back and drinking it all.

Milliped looked at him in a daze, at a loss as to what he was doing. Only when Li Qingshan drank half of his jar already did he suddenly seem to realise what was going on. He drank his alcohol in a hurry. He even looked at Li Qingshan as he drank it.

However, Li Qingshan still ended up finishing first. He laughed happily, but Milliped was unhappy with this result. He picked up a jar of alcohol and shoved it into Li Qingshan's hands before lifting up his own. He bumped jars with Li Qingshan before opening his great mouth in a hurry and drinking it all.

Li Qingshan broke out in laughter. Despite how dazed he always seemed, Li Qingshan never thought that he would have some character about him. "Again!"

Chapter 196 - Resting Before Fighting

The sun had fallen, and the moon had risen. Moonlight flooded the hole, illuminating the two people drinking together. One was bald with a pink cloak, while the other was like a tower.

Alcohol was the best item for bringing people closer, but it required a lot of it.

Li Qingshan drank a lot of it. As he sat in the grain and smelled the natural fragrance of it, he dropped his guard.

Drinking with the simple-minded Milliped was much more satisfying than any of the banquets he had attended in the past. There was no scheming, no disputes over interests. They ate for the sake of eating and drank for the sake of drinking.

With over a hundred jars of alcohol down, both of their bellies bulged up, while their eyes became hazy from the influence of alcohol.

Milliped's shiny, bald head became even more dazzling under the moonlight. Li Qingshan could not help but extend his hand over and rub it. "You're not bad. You have no bad intentions, no, you don't have any intentions at all."

Milliped smiled foolishly. "You're very good too. You coming underground?"

Li Qingshan shook his head in an exaggerated manner. "Nah, nah. I still have things to do. If you want to eat, feel free to look for me. I welcome you to!"

Milliped was originally rather disappointed by his reply, but after hearing Li Qingshan's words, he agreed profusely. Suddenly, his vision grew hazy, and he fell backwards, producing a thunderous snore.

Li Qingshan cursed jokingly, "All you do is eat and sleep. Nothing else bothers you. What an envious life." He raised his head and yawned. He settled himself into the golden millet, and the pile collapsed, covering most of his body like a great big blanket. He fell asleep as well.

Xiao An came down and tidied up the leftovers. She crouched at the entrance of the hole to watch the night.

Before he knew it, Li Qingshan discovered that he had turned back into a child. He had a pair of small hands and feet. He wore a garment that had been patched up several times as he ran through the boundless plains, chasing the sun in the sky.

His sweat poured down, but he did not wipe it away. His feet were pierced by sharp stones, but he ignored them. Stumbling, he rolled on the ground before climbing back to his feet. He did not stop. He stared straight at the sun in the sky.

A great green mountain blocked his path. He did not stop, charging right into the mountain, but it was not as tough as he imagined it to be. An extremely large ox's head extended over from one side of the mountain. It looked at him with its moist, ox eyes and said with a grand voice, "What're you hurrying for? It's not like the sun will run away."

He was surprised. He climbed onto the ox's back that seemed just like a ridge and looked at the sun near the horizon. Just like he had said, the sun had not run away. He touched his waist, and a flute appeared. It was very crude, but also very familiar. He grabbed it and began playing it.

The moon was replaced by the sun. The warm sun of noon hung in the sky lazily, casting its warm gaze into the hole.

Li Qingshan opened his eyes and yawned. He discovered that Milliped was still sleeping. Who knows when he would wake up. He leapt out of the hole and felt that his mind was particularly clear. The autumn colours of the distant mountains were pleasant. It was a refreshing sight.

He felt like it had been a very long time since he had been so relaxed. Ever since he arrived in the dangerous place of Jiaping, there were enemies and danger around every corner. All he could do was constantly cultivate and breakthrough. Even when he slept, he was thinking about how he could increase his cultivation and deal with his enemies.

His heart had always been tense. Even he himself had failed to realise just how much fatigue it had accumulated. Only after a hearty session of drinking and a good dream did his heart finally loosen up.

He thought about the dream from the night before and smiled. He muttered to himself, "Yeah, what am I hurrying for?" He reached into the depths of his hundred treasures pouch and pulled out his forgotten flute.

The sound of the flute echoed through the autumn mountains. Milliped opened his eyes, while Xiao An listened on quietly.

From that day onwards, Xiao An discovered that Li Qingshan smiled much more, and he played the flute much more. He would even get her to teach him penmanship a lot of the time, or he would take her around on idle strolls in the forests of fallen leaves.

As he strolled, he would suddenly stop and look at Xiao An solemnly. Xiao An would immediately grow nervous. She would ball her fists and think, Here it comes!

Li Qingshan's lips rapidly opened and closed, "Eating grape without spitting out grape skin. But spitting out grape skin without eating grapes."

TL: A Chinese tongue twister.

Xiao An stammered in a hurry, "Eat- not eat grapes without eating grape skin. Spitting out grape skin... without eating grapes."

This was what Li Qingshan came up with to teach her how to talk. He called it the home education of 'Qingshan teaches you fluent speech'. But right now, Li Qingshan was completely absorbed by how cute she was with her bright red face as she struggled with the tongue twister.

He extended his hand to pinch her cheek. "Why don't you keep laughing over my horrible penmanship?"

Xiao An turned her head in a fuming manner, dodging his hand, but she was in an extremely good mood. Although she did not want to interfere with his cultivation, she also desired his care. She did not want him to be distant from her.

In reality, Li Qingshan had never stopped cultivating. He continued to eat pills everyday, but he lost most of his tension. No matter what he did, he focused on staying relaxed. If he spent every single day on the edge, then it would be easy for him to spiral once something actually important came up. It would make him inflexible.

And, his responsibility was not just to protect her.

Unknowingly, over a month had passed.

All of his Qi Gathering pills were gone now, while Li Qingshan's daemon qi had reached an unprecedented level, but Qian Rongzhi had yet to contact him. However, he was not worried. He began to eat the Hundred Grasses pills.

The first snow of the year arrived very early. When the first flake of snow fell onto Li Qingshan's nose, he was staring greedily at Milliped, while Milliped stared nervously at Xiao An, or should you say, the dice jar in Xiao An's hands.

A few alcohol jars were turned upside down, forming a table with bowls of alcohol atop it.

Li Qingshan and Milliped sat facing each other, while Xiao An sat to the side as the dealer.

Xiao An rolled up her sleeves and revealed her slender arms, lifting the dice jar while smiling.

Li Qingshan smiled. "Fifteen! That's big! Drink!" He grabbed a handful of peanuts from the piles of food beside him, peeled their shells, and tossed them into his mouth.

Milliped chuckled. He lifted up a bowl and drank it all. Compared to when Li Qingshan first saw him, he was much livelier and slightly plumper.

Xiao An held a long peanut between her fingers and asked Milliped, "Doesn't it look like you?" Her voice was clear, as pleasant as the gurgling of springs and as touching as the music from a zither. 'Qingshan teaches you fluent speech' had achieved some results now.

Milliped looked at himself, and then he looked at the peanut. He nodded. "It does!"

"Here!" Xiao An placed the peanut in Milliped's palm.

Milliped immediately tossed it into his mouth.

“You’ve eaten yourself!”

Just when Li Qingshan wanted to add something, his face stiffened. Xiao An immediately turned around and looked at him. Bring it on! She was now even faster than Li Qingshan at tongue twisters.

Li Qingshan smiled at her and pulled out the Communication talisman from his bosom. The talisman burned rapidly, turning into ash that dispersed in the wind very soon.

Qian Rongzhi’s signal had finally arrived!

Li Qingshan stood up quickly, and Milliped stood up as well. He opened his mouth in complete surprise.

Li Qingshan pressed down on his shoulder, pressing him back down. “I have some matters to attend to. I’ll be back very soon.”

Li Qingshan did not get Milliped to help him, nor did he have any plans to use him against the Sect of Clouds and Rain. He was an extremely great drinking buddy, but that was all. He obviously had to handle his own matters.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An, one small and one large, vanished from the hole. Xiao An even looked back and waved goodbye to Milliped.

Milliped sat there in a daze. Suddenly, he felt empty inside. Flakes of snow fell into the bowls of alcohol. He ate a mouthful of his favourite rice, but he felt like something was missing. He scratched his bald head in confusion.

Qian Rongzhi sank into her thoughts as she furrowed her brows in the residence. She went through the plan carefully—how to begin, how to deal with the consequences, and how to pull out if it failed. She ensured that there would be no holes in the plan.

Suddenly, she raised one of her arched eyebrows and turned around. “You’re finally here.”

Li Qingshan happened to be standing right behind her. Apart from remaining extremely burly, he had basically returned to how he was before. This was the result of the increased efforts he had placed into practising the Spirit Turtle’s Method of Sea Suppression recently.

He noticed the different Black Wolf uniform on her immediately. “You’ve become the Black Wolf commander?”

Qian Rongzhi stood up and turned around. She showed off. “What do you think of it? It’s pretty good, isn’t it!”

“It’s pretty good.”

“Thank you. It looks like you’ve been well recently too.”

“I’ve been alright.”

They greeted each other like they were old friends, using fake courtesy to maintain the fragile alliance.

Before Li Qingshan could ask, Qian Rongzhi said, “The fish has taken the bait. Just as you had requested, we’re just trying to catch the West Gate Granny.”

Li Qingshan asked in wonder, "How did you achieve it?" Luring out the people of the Sect of Clouds and Rain was easy, but luring out just the West Gate Granny without alarming everyone else was nothing short of difficult.

Qian Rongzhi did not explain. She stroked the Black Wolf tablet on her waist with the tip of her fingers and smiled. "That's my job. It's up to you now. If this all falls apart, I might not keep my word."

"As long as you've done your job. You obviously have nothing to worry about regarding my part." Li Qingshan was absolutely confident. He had adjusted himself to peak condition. He needed a battle. His relaxed heart gradually tensed up again as his interest for battle rose.

Qian Rongzhi changed the topic. "Though, I still need to prepare for the worst. Before you've confirmed the number of enemies, I'd advise you to keep your aura hidden."

Li Qingshan narrowed his eyes. Qian Rongzhi said calmly, "There are no plans that are perfect. Even I can't remove all factors of uncertainty. There's no need for me to go into detail with that. You'd better think about how you'll handle defeat before you start wondering how you'll celebrate."

"Naturally." Even if Qian Rongzhi had not told him that, Li Qingshan would have prepared for the worst anyway. He would never place all of his trust in her. She said this just as a disclaimer, telling him to not come for her if any accidents happened.

Li Qingshan smiled. "You only have one life anyway. You'd better value it!"

"Of course!" Qian Rongzhi smiled as well. She knew that even if she tried to butter up to him, she would not be able to fool Li Qingshan.

However, Li Qingshan never imagined that the place Qian Rongzhi had chosen would actually be here.

He raised the brim of his large, bamboo hat and gazed at the lofty estate of the Qian family.

Choosing a place she was familiar with originally made a lot of sense, but she had caused the deaths of almost a thousand people here. Regular people would avoid it like taboo, but she would not. She made the most optimal choice for everything.

Li Qingshan arrived on the other side of the mountain. He found a cave among the withered grass and fallen leaves and entered. It gradually widened, turning into a huge, natural cavern in the end.

Li Qingshan checked the height of the ceiling. He even tested it by transforming. Afterwards, he began to make his preparations, constantly inspecting the cavern. He stuck seven talismans to a few hidden stalactites on the ceiling first before giving a few talismans to Xiao An.

Even a lion would use its full strength to catch a rabbit. And this time, it would be a vicious beast of great danger.

Chapter 197 - A Fight of Life and Death

"You sure cultivated quickly!" The West Gate Granny squinted and studied Qian Rongzhi in deep suspicion.

A few young men surrounded the granny, massaging her hands and feet. They looked at Qian Rongzhi in her valiant Black Wolf commander uniform with envy and hatred.

Qian Rongzhi knelt and begged. "Rongzhi only managed this from obtaining a daemon's core out of pure luck, but this won't continue for long. Please, granny, let me back into the Sect of Clouds and Rain. I won't disappoint granny."

The West Gate Granny stroked a tender, handsome face gently. "If you're telling the truth, then I might consider it. I still actually like you very much." She felt very happy to be able to receive a bow from a Black Wolf commander.

A handsome, young man looked at Qian Rongzhi arrogantly and complacently, like Qian Rongzhi was kneeling to him.

Qian Rongzhi was overjoyed. "Rongzhi has only spoken the truth. I used the informants of the Hawkwolf Guard to find him after becoming the Black Wolf commander. Li Qingshan appeared in Ancient Wind city with that child before. I specially sent people to investigate this, and I found his hiding place after quite a lot of difficulty."

"Not only does he possess the Zombie Daoist's hundred treasures pouch, but it's very likely that he was responsible for the deaths of Zhuo Zhibo and his subordinates too. He possesses a wealth of several thousand spiritual stones at the very least. You definitely won't be disappointed, granny."

This was her scheme. If a powerful Qi Practitioner learned that a weaker Qi Practitioner possessed tremendous wealth on them, they obviously would not contact their companions. Instead, they would find a way to obtain all of it for themselves.

Right when the West Gate Granny's wrinkly face had curled into a smile, a croaky voice rang out from outside the window, "Old woman, how can you forget about me when there are all these benefits presented before you?"

The West Gate Granny's expression suddenly changed, while Qian Rongzhi's heart sank. It was the East Gate Granny's voice.

The East Gate Granny walked in slowly with a happy grin.

The West Gate Granny and East Gate Granny were on bitter terms with each other, so they constantly kept an eye out for the other's movements. As soon as the West Gate Granny left Clear River city, she was discovered by the East Gate Granny. She became suspicious, so she tailed her silently. The people who cared for you the most in the world were not your friends, but your enemies.

The East Gate Granny ignored the sunken-faced West Gate Granny. She said to Qian Rongzhi, "Girly Qian, lead the way. That kid's very vigilant. We can't afford to go with someone's wretched idea and waste a few days for nothing again."

Qian Rongzhi glanced at the West Gate Granny in a troubled manner. The West Gate Granny said with a sunken face, "Let's go!" It had already happened, so there was no use fuming over this. She could only let this old coot win a round over her.

The three of them arrived on the other side of the mountain that the Ancient Wind city sat on. They stopped before the pitch-black cave.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Grannies, Li Qingshan should be hiding in there."

"Lead the way!"

"Yes!" The setback from the failure of her plan had not deterred her. It did not make her give anything away. She planned and prepared carefully. As long as she could prove that Li Qingshan had appeared in the city in the past, the two grannies probably would not blame her too much.

And, before she had left, she had specially told the new Black Hawk commander that she would be going to Ancient Wind city with them. The investigation that followed any missing Hawkwolf Guards served as a protective talisman.

If she failed this time, then she still had next time. As long as she constantly tried, there would be a time when she succeeded.

They advanced forward along the winding path until they reached a large cavern.

Qian Rongzhi's expression suddenly changed drastically. She almost broke out cursing.

Li Qingshan did not conceal his presence and hide. Instead, he just sat on a rock out in the open, meditating.

The West Gate Granny and the East Gate Granny walked past her. The East Gate Granny even patted her shoulder. "Good job!" She failed to notice her pale expression at all.

Qian Rongzhi said with difficulty, "Please capture Li Qingshan, grannies! I'll be waiting outside the cave."

The West Gate Granny nodded without caring too much. All she did was stare at Li Qingshan. "Go wait on the carriage. We'll be out very soon."

The East Gate Granny's eyes shone. "Old woman, go easy. You don't come across kids as healthy as him often. Let me try the Vitality Devouring technique!"

"The Vitality Devouring technique!" The West Gate Granny thought of something and glanced at Qian Rongzhi in thought.

Qian Rongzhi felt the sharp, sword-like gaze slide past her, but she did not seize up at all.

The West Gate Granny set her doubts aside before turning around and cursing, "I knew you'd become restless. You can have the kid, but I'm taking an additional ten percent of his possessions!"

The East Gate Granny agreed with a sinister smile as she looked at Li Qingshan greedily.

"Though, don't suck him dry. We still need to ask him about Yingjie's whereabouts, along with that child with the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty." The West Gate Granny looked around, but she failed to find Xiao An.

"Didn't Wei Zhongyuan already get Ma Buyi to take a look already? That unlucky kid is probably done for. He's probably dead already. The murderer was in the north, probably this kid, as a matter of fact."

Qian Rongzhi's heart trembled. There were actually such accurate divination techniques in the world. If it were not for Li Qingshan, who bore the blame for her, she probably would have been exposed already.

She made her way out of the cave while holding her breath; then she sat down slowly against a rock, like she had collapsed weakly. She slammed the rockface viciously and left behind a deep handprint.

If Li Qingshan were captured, she would definitely be exposed for murdering Wei Yingjie, and she would have to face the wrath of a tenth layer Qi Practitioner, along with the entire Sect of Clouds and Rain. The Hawkwolf Guard would be incapable of protecting her, nor would they try to protect her.

Right now, all she could do was flee immediately, the further the better. However, where was she supposed to go? There was nowhere she could go, unless she copied Li Qingshan and fled underground.

Why didn't Li Qingshan flee?

"Look at that woman. No matter how high her cultivation is, she still looks like a bitch." The handsome young men huddled together on an open piece of land with sparse vegetation near the carriage as they jeered at Qian Rongzhi.

"You're the bitches!" Qian Rongzhi glanced at them in contempt.

The young men were stunned by that. One of them became enraged. "How dare you talk back!" Another one said in a sunken fashion, "Just that would have been enough for granny to cut you to pieces." Under the protection of the West Gate Granny, rarely did anyone rebuke them.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "But, the old woman's not here right now!" She walked over with her Water-splitting barb. Even if she was going to flee, she wanted to take a few people with her.

"W- what are you planning on doing?" The young men became afraid. They retreated slowly before turning around and fleeing towards the carriage.

Qian Rongzhi swung her hand, and there was a flash of light. Four pairs of legs were chopped off together.

The fine horse that pulled the carriage whinnied uneasily and reared its front legs. After Qian Rongzhi gave it a glance, it immediately settled down.

However, there were some people who could not settle down. The young men rolled on the ground in pain.

Qian Rongzhi stopped their bleeding wounds with great familiarity and injected some true qi into every single one of them so that they remained conscious. They would not faint, so they could properly enjoy the painful torture.

"You whore, you bitch! Granny will definitely kill you! Just you wait- ahhhh!" The young man in red clothes sobbed as he cursed. The Water-splitting barb swept past his face, slicing off his nose and destroying his handsome appearance.

Qian Rongzhi patted his bloody face. "I hope your granny will keep doting on you, you noseless, ugly boy!"

The other three young men immediately stopped cursing. They looked at Qian Rongzhi in fear and resentment. Their handsome faces were their most valuable possession. If they lost their legs, those could still be reattached, but if they lost their appearances, they would completely lose the granny's favour.

Afterwards, shrieks and howls rang through the forest like ghosts in the pits of hell.

Qian Rongzhi cut off another three noses, completely shredding and obliterating all of their hopes.

She did not choose to flee. Instead, she faced the nearby cave and meditated amidst the howls.

If the West Gate Granny emerged and saw what her beloved faces had become, she would definitely tear her to shreds.

However, she had already calmed down completely. She knew Li Qingshan's character very well. Since he did not flee, he definitely possessed the confidence that he did not need to flee.

Since he was bold enough to fight, what was she supposed to be afraid of? At most, she would just die with him. Having reached this step, death no longer worried her. She refused to take a step back in retreat.

Qian Rongzhi had guessed correctly. Li Qingshan was fighting.

When he caught the two scents entering the cave, he knew that the plan had gone wrong, but it should not have been one of Qian Rongzhi's schemes. If she wanted to get him, she could have called for everyone from the Sect of Clouds and Rain.

Against just the West Gate Granny, he was absolutely confident that he could emerge victorious, but if the East Gate Granny were added to the equation, his chances at victory fell to around seventy percent. If he was seventy percent confident and still refused to fight, would he still be a man?

This was why he did not hide, sitting there instead. He adjusted every single strand of muscle in his body to peak condition, like a tiger on the hunt, quietly waiting for its prey to get closer.

Li Qingshan glanced at the pale-faced Qian Rongzhi and confirmed his thoughts. After hearing what the two old coots said, he directly treated them like their heads were on the chopping block. He sat right where he was as his killing intent surged.

The West Gate Granny saw how Li Qingshan did not even move, so she asked in wonder, "The kid's not running?"

"He must be stunned by fear. Don't be afraid, my good child. I won't hurt you." The East Gate Granny used her arts of charm as she smiled. No matter how impressive the arts of Body Practitioners were, he was an easy target with his strength at the third layer.

The West Gate Granny sneered. She knew that the arts of charm were not particularly effective against Li Qingshan, but she purposefully did not warn the East Gate Granny so that she could make a fool of herself.

Li Qingshan laughed aloud, which reverberated through the cave. The spirit turtle's daemon core bobbed up and down in his body, suppressing all distracting thoughts.

The East Gate Granny was alarmed. "What are you laughing about?"

Li Qingshan stopped laughing. "There are two old and ugly monsters who are trying to flirt like young girls. How hilarious. You can fool others, but have you fooled yourselves too? Why don't you check yourselves in the mirror and count how many wrinkles you have?"

That hit a sore spot for the two grannies. They hated it the most when others reminded them of their appearances and age.

The East Gate Granny was enraged. "Kid, you're looking to die!"

With a wave of her hand, colossal true qi, as black as ink, formed a huge wave that swept towards Li Qingshan.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The thick stalagmites that blocked the path of the true qi were smashed to pieces, knocking rocks into the air. It was like a huge, black snake that crawled across the ground, arriving before Li Qingshan in a single instant. It raised its head and bit down viciously.

With a boom, the rock that Li Qingshan sat on shattered.

Li Qingshan had already vanished. In that close moment, he had leapt into the air. He stared at the black true qi. "Profound Yin true qi!"

Chapter 198 - Well I Fucking Do

Aside from the true qi of the five elements, there were yin and yang as well. They were all known as Profound Yin true qi and Profound Yang true qi. The Sect of Clouds and Rain practised dual cultivation of yin and yang, where men cultivated profound yang and women cultivated profound yin, which was represented as black and white. When they reached the limit, yin could produce yang and yang could produce yin. They would be in harmony. Not only was it not regarded as an evil cultivation method, but it was even regarded as a standard cultivation method of daoism.

Yin and yang were capable of endless variations. The cultivation methods derived from them would surpass the true qi of the five elements, and it would come in all sorts of forms. What the Zombie Daoist happened to cultivate was Profound Yin true qi as well, but his Profound Yin true qi was for refining and nurturing corpses. It could not enchant anyone or devour their vitality.

Li Qingshan was secretly surprised. Profound Yin true qi was not known for their vigour, yet it was still capable of something like this. Ninth layer Qi Practitioners truly were not people who could be trifled with.

Suddenly, a shadow enveloped Li Qingshan, A huge, black hand reached over viciously.

The West Gate Granny had her right hand extended in the empty air and said in a sunken fashion, "I'd like to see where you run off to this time."

"Why would I run?" Li Qingshan said boldly. He parted his hands and took out the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. Pure true qi surged into it wildly, and a series of strokes lit up like swords and blades.

The last time he had tried using the Cursive Sword Calligraphy was when he was still in Qingyang city. He had not even reached the second layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi back then, but he was on the seventh layer now. His true qi had grown over ten times in quantity. A total of twenty-one strokes lit up on the Cursive Sword Calligraphy and shot towards the black hand.

The sword qi shot through the air, and the black hand crumbled.

“A high grade spiritual artifact!” The West Gate Granny was surprised. She called out, “Black Clay Vortex!” Thick, dark true qi formed a huge vortex that revolved rapidly before her; it was as if it was trying to swallow everything.

This was the strongest defensive technique that the West Gate Granny knew. She was confident that she could block the attacks of any Qi Practitioners with it.

The twenty-one strands of sword qi plunged into the black vortex simultaneously, and it immediately began to ripple.

The West Gate Granny was stern. She poured all of her strength into the technique, such that the Black Clay Vortex spun as quickly as it could as it attempted to grind the twenty-one strands of sword qi to pieces.

With a boom, the vortex of true qi collapsed, while the West Gate Granny hunched over. A streak of light swept past her shoulder, followed by a bloody splash.

Li Qingshan immediately took out a spiritual stone. Pure energy gradually flowed into his body through his palm, and his true qi rapidly recovered.

He felt shocked too. Originally, he just wanted to stop the black hand and use the opportunity to flee, but he never expected the Cursive Sword Calligraphy to be so powerful. He actually managed to injure a ninth layer Qi Practitioner in a single attack, but that was also due to the fact that his true qi was simply too pure. Other Qi Practitioners would probably need to be at the fifth layer to unleash the same power as him.

“A supreme grade spiritual artifact?” The West Gate Granny’s expression changed drastically. This piece of the Cursive Sword Calligraphy was still rather incomplete, which was why even the West Gate Granny was unable to discern its grade. All she knew was that it was important. Aside from her anger that had risen from frustration and shame, she became extremely greedy as well.

“That’ll be mine. Old woman, you’d better not fight over it with me.” The East Gate Granny’s eyes lit up. Then she closed her eyes, forming seals with her hands and chanting. The Profound Yin true qi all returned to her side like black, surging water; it was as if it was alive!

A sense of danger rose up inside Li Qingshan. It must be an extraordinary technique since even a ninth layer Qi Practitioner needed to expend effort to prepare it.

However, he advanced instead of retreating. He held the hilt of the Wind-entwining blade in a reverse grip as true qi surged out of the acupoints below his feet like a cushion. He stepped on the walls like it was flat ground and strode vigorously. He took a total of seven steps and leapt over the West Gate Granny.

There was a flash of cold light, and the Wind-entwining blade exited its sheath with a clang. He swung down with it like he could cut through anything.

The West Gate Granny's technique had just been defeated, so she was unable to provide any assistance. Or perhaps she did not want to provide any assistance at all. She had just made a fool out of herself in front of the East Gate Granny earlier, so she obviously wanted to make up for it right now. She just stood aside and watched on as she thought, The kid's art of practising the body sure is impressive. If you throw that supreme grade spiritual artifact into the equation, even sixth layer Qi Practitioners might end up falling to his hands if he strikes suddenly.

The East Gate Granny suddenly snapped open her eyes. She pressed her hands together and raised her index and middle fingers together, directing them at Li Qingshan. "Snakebind's Curse!" Black true qi transformed into thousands of pitch-black snakes that surged over together. Just the sight of it would be enough to frighten the wits out of ordinary people.

The Wind-entwining blade became bound by several dozen black snakes and could not move another inch forward; it was like it had sunken into mud. Li Qingshan's body was surrounded as well, only leaving behind the figure of a human.

Li Qingshan focused on a single point and concentrated all of his strength on the Wind-entwining blade. He peered past the black true qi and locked onto the top of the East Gate Granny's head. He erupted and yelled, "Go through!" His arms suddenly swelled and darkened. Daemon qi rushed through the restraints of the black snakes, and he swung down violently.

The expression of the East Gate Granny, who had just begun to smile complacently, suddenly stiffened. "What's this?!"

The West Gate Granny sensed that something was off as well. She produced a scarlet needle. The needle was small, but it shone extremely brightly. It was actually a high grade spiritual artifact. There were not a lot of high grade spiritual artifacts, with even fewer high grade needles. They were even more difficult to forge.

Once they were refined, however, they were tremendously powerful. Not only could they move with great secrecy and speed, but they could even pierce through all protective true qi and techniques. They could instantly kill a Qi Practitioner who did not have any protective spiritual artifacts in battle.

The needle produced a thin, red streak and basically arrived near Li Qingshan's head the moment it had shot out.

A Skull Prayer Bead flew out and struck the needle, while the other one transformed into a huge skull that bit down on the West Gate Granny.

Xiao An emerged from the soil and leapt out of the darkness, stabbing towards the East Gate Granny's back. A total of three talismans were stuck to her arms, legs, and blade, maximising her speed, strength, and lethality, just so that she could launch a fatal strike.

Li Qingshan had misled the enemy by appearing weak for the sake of creating the opportunity to launch this attack. If they could kill one of the grannies first, victory would be certain.

Fine streaks of light emerged from the East Gate Granny, enveloping her completely.

The blade swung down, and the sword stabbed out. They produced two great ringing booms, causing the streaks of light to tremble, but they did not shatter.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An used the rebounding force to quickly leap backwards. A nick appeared on both of their weapons. They both found this to be a pity. The East Gate Granny possessed an extremely powerful defensive spiritual artifact.

The East Gate Granny screamed and fled to one side. It had been several years since she last experienced life-threatening danger. If it were not for the mid grade spiritual artifact she had purchased before at a great cost, the Mirrorplate of Luminance, she would have lost her life in such an easy matter. She checked the Mirrorplate of Luminance and discovered two deep marks. Its spiritual qi had decreased drastically. She was both astounded and furious.

When she looked at Li Qingshan again, he had already grown to ten feet in size. His skin was pitch-black like iron, and a pair of horns protruded from his forehead. His scarlet hair draped near his waist.

She yelled out, "There's something wrong with the kid! Use your full strength!" She raised her hand, and a comb flew out of her sleeve. It expanded as it shot towards Li Qingshan. The comb shone brightly. It was also a high grade spiritual artifact.

She had never expected the kid to be so troublesome. Even the child with the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty was extremely strange. However, she believed that as long as the two of them became serious, Li Qingshan would never be the opponent of two ninth layer Qi Practitioners wielding two high grade spiritual artifacts.

She saw Li Qingshan take out a talisman. She recognised it in a single glance. It was a mid grade Lightning Summoning talisman, which made her sneer inside. It was not like there was a storm right now. A mid grade Lightning Summoning talisman would not even be able to pierce her protective true qi. It only confirmed to her that Li Qingshan was out of tricks now.

Li Qingshan smiled. He had yet to complete his killing combination.

The Lightning Summoning talisman was activated, but it did not shoot towards the East Gate Granny. Instead, it turned into countless, tiny sparks that illuminated the entire cavern. It also illuminated the eight talismans that Li Qingshan had prepared earlier, setting them off with the sparks.

The eight talismans activated simultaneously. They gathered into a scorching-white bolt of lightning, as thick as a pillar, which landed on the East Gate Granny in the air. The thin layer of true qi was unable to stop it at all, pierced through instantly, while the Mirrorplate of Luminance shattered immediately. She shrieked out and fell out of the air, smouldering with smoke.

"What a crafty kid!" The West Gate Granny's face darkened at this sight. Her wrinkles writhed.

She used a high grade Golden Shield talisman to block the flame-spitting skull as she guided the flying needle towards Li Qingshan again. It was both swift and vicious. The Skull Prayer Bead was unable to intercept it.

Li Qingshan's face stiffened. His height exploded to thirty feet. He extended his hand to grab the comb that had lost control and released the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell.

With a ding, the needle stabbed into the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell and became lodged in there, unable to advance any further.

The West Gate Granny was surprised. Her flying needle had actually failed to pierce through the protective technique. When she looked at Li Qingshan's terrifying form again, a thought crossed her head. She cursed aloud, "It's that little bitch's trap!"

At the same time, Xiao An shot over to the East Gate Granny's side. She swung down with her sword, giving her no time to catch her breath.

There was a clang, and the sword landed on a layer of golden light. In that moment of danger, the East Gate Granny stuck a Golden Shield talisman on herself as well. High grade talismans were extremely precious, so they never wanted to use them unless they had to.

Xiao An was unfazed. The hidden sword stabbed out in a storm-like barrage as her hand almost turned into a blur. The golden light receded slowly.

The East Gate Granny was surprised, but not frantic. She used the opportunity to eat a recovery pill and take out a spiritual stone to recover true qi. Although she was charred all over, just a few Lightning Summoning talismans were not enough to kill her. She was utterly enraged as she desperately tried to wield the comb.

The comb trembled in Li Qingshan's hand, but how could it contend against his strength of two oxen? As soon as he had begun to smile, there was a sudden flash of light and several dozen blades of light shot out from the teeth of the comb. They were no weaker than the sword qi from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. With how close the weapon was to him, he was unable to dodge the attack, nor could he use the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell to block.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! There was the resonance of metal. The blades of light landed on Li Qingshan's chest and produced spurts of blood.

Xiao An did not even look at him. She struck out even more viciously. The hidden sword was unable to endure the wear and began to crack. The East Gate Granny's Golden Shield talisman had been worn down as well. It was close to shattering.

Li Qingshan gained several dozen terrifying wounds that criss-crossed across his body. Some of them were bone-deep, but none of them were fatal. Wounds like that were nothing to daemons. With a surge of daemon qi, his injuries rapidly closed up and vanished.

Just when the East Gate Granny began to smile complacently once again, her expression froze. "That's impossible. Even daemons don't possess such a tough hide!" Little did she know that after Li Qingshan achieved the second layer with the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, his Ox Demon Forges its Hide had reached a whole new level as well.

"Well I fucking do!" The moment Li Qingshan uttered this first word, he had already arrived before the East Gate Granny in a leap and thrown out a punch.

Chapter 199 - Slaughtering Both

The Golden Shield talisman shattered.

The East Gate Granny's charred face revealed a mysterious expression. She held a talisman between her skinny fingers.

"Hmm?" Li Qingshan was slightly surprised. Something was amiss.

The talisman was activated. Frigid light poured out as coldness permeated the surroundings.

Crack, crack. The frigid ice climbed up Li Qingshan's arms from his fists, sealing up his entire body. His punch struggled forward, but it ended up stopping before the East Gate Granny's face.

Li Qingshan's colossal body had turned into a huge piece of ice. His expression was still one of shock. The terrifying killing intent that the East Gate Granny almost found to be suffocating had been frozen as well.

Xiao An on the side was not spared either. She was immobilised by the ice.

Li Qingshan was not the only one with trump cards.

The West Gate Granny sneered. "You've finally managed to bring yourself to use the supreme grade Frost Wave talisman." She knew that the East Gate Granny possessed this trump card all along, which was why she would always go easy on her. Now that she had finally been forced to use it, she could not help but rejoice.

The East Gate Granny had just survived a life-threatening attack, but she was filled with dejection. Over the century of cultivation, who knows just how much effort it had cost her for her to end up with this supreme grade talisman. It was truly her protective talisman. Even if she killed Li Qingshan now, it probably would not be able to make up for her losses.

In hindsight, she should have never come in the first place. If that old coot could die in the trap alone, it would have been something joyous. She looked at Li Qingshan again, and her eyes were filled with resentment and bitterness. She was tempted to skin him alive and break all of his bones immediately, torturing him to death.

The West Gate Granny studied Xiao An and sighed. "It's a pity with this kid, or we could have erased her memories and controlled her with the Heart Bewitching technique. She would be able to serve as quite a powerful weapon to our sect."

The Frost Wave talisman did not just bound people in ice. It also froze their bodies and destroyed their meridians. It was almost equivalent to a strike from a Foundation Establishment talisman. It was impossible for them to survive.

The East Gate Granny said, "The child is very strange, so it's not exactly bad news that she's dead. As for this Li Qingshan, he was actually a daemon, and he actually managed to hide his daemon qi so well, even posing as a Qi Practitioner!"

In the blueish-white ice, Li Qingshan's eyes suddenly swivelled.

The East Gate Granny was stunned. "He's still alive! Finish him off quick, or we'll be the ones who'll die here today!"

The West Gate Granny was startled too. How is that possible!

Thump! Thump! Thump! Li Qingshan's heart beat like a war drum, becoming faster and faster. His blood vessels swelled, and his muscles bulged as he produced a soundless roar.

Crack, crack. A series of cracks stretched over the ice.

The West Gate Granny wasted no time at all. She controlled the flying needle, directly stabbing towards Li Qingshan's heart with one hand while clutching a supreme grade talisman in the other. Suddenly, there was a burst of golden light that dazzled her eyes.

Xiao An's frozen flesh and blood transformed into raging flames once again. She stuck a talisman to her shiny bones. It was a high grade Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings.

A huge, golden figure burst out of the ice. It was complete with a golden sword and clear facial features. It could not be compared to the same inferior talismans from before.

At the centre of the golden man was a tiny set of shiny bones. They actually became slightly golden under the golden light, giving off a buddhist aura. It turned around and locked onto the West Gate Granny, which actually seemed like the furious glare from a guardian king.

The West Gate Granny became dazed. Her mind had been shaken, overwhelmed by the glare. She focused on practising the arts of enchantment to affect the minds of others, so her mind was obviously very powerful, yet she was actually affected now.

The Path of White Bone and Great Beauty resonated with the Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings and unleashed unbelievable power.

Guardian kings were the protectors of buddhism. Even just a sliver of their aura was not something that Qi Practitioners could endure. Both their strength and minds would be suppressed.

The furious glare of guardian kings could subdue demons, while the downward gaze of bodhisattvas brought benevolence to the six realms.

Xiao An did not let this opportunity slip by. She rushed over to the West Gate Granny. Her white bones were emotionless, while the guardian king was furious. It raised its golden sword high into the air and swung down with enough power to purge all evil.

The threat of death allowed the West Gate Granny to return to her senses. The golden sword was only inches away now. She let out a scream and used a technique. Profound Yin true qi surged out from her body, forming a barrier. She made up her mind and also took out her supreme grade talisman. She hesitated on whether to retreat, or to activate the talisman.

Swish!

The sword cut through the true qi barrier and cut off her hand that held the supreme grade talisman.

The West Gate Granny clutched her severed arm as she shrieked and retreated. She wanted to use her true qi to retrieve the talisman, but the guardian king grabbed it instead, turning it into a futile attempt. The guardian king launched a second slash.

She immediately became afraid to remain there for even a moment longer. She used a technique that could increase her speed and rushed out of the cave, but when she looked up, she discovered that the East Gate Granny had already fled ahead of her. She could not help but curse inside.

All of this happened in a single moment. Boom, the ice exploded, and Li Qingshan emerged. He called out, "Where do you think you're going?" He took a step forward, and the Ox Demon Tramples followed.

A crack spread from the bottom of his feet and rapidly approached the East Gate Granny. However, she was not the target.

Dust was thrown into the air as the cave collapsed. The cavern was completely sealed off now.

The East Gate Granny had only just turned around, yet this all happened before she could even say anything!

The sound waves and wind blades emitted from the Tiger Demon's Killing Roar swept over and slammed her against the wall. Before she had even slid down to the ground, Li Qingshan caught up and threw a punch at her.

"Black Clay Vortex!" The East Gate Granny actually still managed to use a technique despite the current situation. It nullified most of the power, but it still made her spurt blood.

However, Li Qingshan launched over a hundred punches in a single moment. He collapsed the Black Clay Vortex and punched her into the wall, turning her to pulp.

Li Qingshan suddenly turned around. Xiao An was currently chasing the West Gate Granny around everywhere. The West Gate Granny actually managed to pierce the golden figure with her flying needle, but she was unable to harm Xiao An's forged bones at all.

The West Gate Granny abruptly felt a set of scarlet eyes lock onto her. The colossal body rapidly approached her with the shade of death. She could not help but despair.

Even without Xiao An's extraordinary performance, Li Qingshan still possessed absolute confidence as long as they outnumbered the enemy two-to-one. He took advantage of the moment when the West Gate Granny was unable to dodge due to Xiao An and scooped her up. He grabbed her in his hands and crushed down forcefully. Her protective true qi shattered, and the West Gate Granny followed in the steps of the East Gate Granny. She could not even let out a shriek. She was simply crushed to a pulp.

Li Qingshan let out a small exhale and smiled resplendently. He had won this fight!

As his daemon qi was water elemented, the supreme grade Frost Wave talisman did not hurt him too much, but even with that, he suffered from frostbite across his body. If it had been a different talisman, he might have been in danger.

He had made quite a few mistakes in this battle. First, he had failed to gauge the power of the Cursive Sword Calligraphy correctly. Otherwise, if he had incorporated it into his plan properly, he should have been able to heavily injure or even kill the East Gate Granny.

He had also underestimated the wondrous effects the Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings had on Xiao An. Of course, there was no need for him to be so fixated on perfection. Li Qingshan had been constantly learning about fighting during the battle.

In comparison to him, the West Gate Granny and the East Gate Granny made many more mistakes. If they had been prepared at the very beginning and used their full strength instead of trying to toy with them, Li Qingshan's chances of victory would have been reduced to fifty percent at the very least.

It was exactly because of their careless and arrogant mindset that Li Qingshan had managed to get the first strike. They did not cooperate with each other at all. Instead, they faced the constant attacks frantically. Their ultimate defeat had basically been determined from the very beginning.

However, would there be any ninth layer Qi Practitioners who would take a third layer Qi Practitioner seriously? His greatest weapon was not the Cursive Sword Calligraphy, nor was it the Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings, but his weak, outward appearance. No matter when, he would always be able to catch his opponent off guard and get the first strike, claiming an advantage.

The flames devoured the corpses of the West Gate Granny and the East Gate Granny before returning to Xiao An. Afterwards, it gradually condensed into a body of flesh and blood, which smiled towards Li Qingshan sweetly. She offered up the two hundred treasures pouch, the two high grade spiritual artifacts, and the supreme grade talisman.

Li Qingshan returned to human form and opened the hundred treasures pouch to take a look. He was surprised. He had never seen such a large space before, and there were countless pills, spiritual stones, talismans, and cultivation methods.

However, there was not a single Qi Gathering pill at all. Instead, their pouches contained something called Qi Amassing pills. They were slightly worse than Pearl dew pills, but they were ten times as powerful as Qi Gathering pills, and there were very few impurities within them. They amounted to a thousand in total, while the other pills amounted to several dozen as well.

The items that surprised Li Qingshan the most were two embroidered boxes covered in inscriptions. They held two faint, purple pills that gave off a special fragrance. The embroidered box was clearly to prevent the pills from losing their effects.

Li Qingshan was afraid of looking at them for too long, so he closed the boxes in a hurry. Since ninth layer Qi Practitioners treated them with so much care, they definitely were not something ordinary. He had to carefully investigate the names of these pills when he had the chance.

Apart from the two or three high grade talismans that Li Qingshan paid some attention to, the rest were not worth mentioning. There were only two spiritual artifacts, but a single grade was enough to increase the value of a spiritual artifact by at least ten times over. Just the value of the high grade scarlet needle and spiritual comb had exceeded the total value of all the spiritual artifacts he had obtained so far, apart from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy.

Aside from those, there were very few spiritual stones as well, just a few dozen. They must have spent all of their wealth on their supreme grade talisman, the high grade spiritual artifact, and the purple pill.

Li Qingshan scooped up Xiao An and rubbed her hair. He smiled. "We're rich!" He split the two hundred treasures pouches between them.

Xiao An said, "We're rich!"

Li Qingshan took out ten Hundred Grasses pills and meditated on the spot for a while so that his true qi and daemon qi returned to peak condition. Only then did he draw the Wind-entwining blade and dig his way out again. He arrived outside with Xiao An, but when he noticed Qian Rongzhi seated in the open nearby, he could not help but be slightly surprised. "You haven't left?"

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "I still haven't received my share, so how could I just leave?" She appeared to be calm and composed, but she had actually been nervous the entire time. Only now did she ease up. She was now even more surprised by Li Qingshan's strength. He had actually managed to kill two ninth layer Qi Practitioners.

The cultivation methods of the Sect of Clouds and Rain focused on bewitching the mind of the enemy and was not exactly battle-oriented, but the strength of ninth layer Qi Practitioners was still a great deal. Li Qingshan became more and more mysterious and unfathomable in her eyes.

Then she looked at Xiao An beside him. She also seemed to be filled with mystery. She could not help but sigh. That child is still just so pure!

Xiao An saw Qian Rongzhi look at her, so she smiled bashfully. "Hello!"

Chapter 200 - Yu Zijian

The voice that was like an oriole's cry left Qian Rongzhi stunned for quite a while. She replied with a smile, "Hello!" However, she only looked at her from afar. She did not come any closer.

According to their agreement, Li Qingshan gave the pills and cultivation methods that were relevant to the Sect of Clouds and Rain to Qian Rongzhi. However, even with Qian Rongzhi's mental fortitude, she struggled to maintain her composure.

There were nine bottles of first-rate Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain, as well as three bottles of Profound Yin pills that were specially prepared for those who practised Profound Yin true qi. The other pills, such as Pills of Passion and Pills of Calming, were not worth mentioning.

However, what attracted her attention were not those, but a book called the Method of Bewitchment. It was a technique that specialised in bewitching people, with the Method of Clouds and Rain serving as a foundation. Only people who had some status in the sect had the opportunity to practise it. Regular disciples could only learn regular charming techniques.

It was basically overkill if she obtained a method for bewitching people, with how skilled she was at controlling people already.

Li Qingshan suddenly said, "Give me two bottles of Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain."

Qian Rongzhi gave them to him without any second thought. When Li Qingshan wanted to give her two bottles of Qi Amassing pills in exchange, she declined instead. She said enthusiastically, "I can lure other people over too..."

Li Qingshan interrupted her, "You better think of a way to distance yourself from this matter first!" The status of the two grannies in the Sect of Clouds and Rain was far greater than the likes of Zhao Liangqing. Their disappearance would lead to major movements from the sect.

And, he had to be extremely careful. When he faced two ninth layer Qi Practitioners, he only had a fifty percent chance at emerging victorious. If the tenth layer vice sect master, or the unfathomable sect master, were added into the equation, he would basically be doomed.”

Qian Rongzhi’s smile stiffened. She had thought of the same thing too. Once the Sect of Clouds and Rain looked into the tracks of the two grannies, it would be rather simple for them to find out that they had been in contact with her. She needed to handle this extremely carefully, so how could she afford to take on any further risks? Her plan seemed elaborate, but she was actually dancing on the edge.

“Thank you for your reminder. I’m still a woman at the end. When I see these petty profits, I become blinded by them and become short-sighted as a result.”

“Don’t thank me. I’ve only said that for my own sake.” Li Qingshan casually tossed the two bottles of Qi Amassing pills into her hand, before vanishing into the woods with Xiao An.

Qian Rongzhi looked at the Qi Amassing pills in her hands and instead reflected on her successes and failures this time. She personally believed she was resourceful, vicious and decisive, but whenever she encountered a significant manner, her narrow-mindedness would show. She was not as great as Li Qingshan.

.....

The distant mountains were layered in white snow, while the crystalline snowflakes fell into the bowls of alcohol, causing it to spill.

A large hand picked up the bowl and drank all of it.

Li Qingshan smacked his lips. The flavour of alcohol had already faded, replaced by coldness. It was quite the taste.

He could not see Milliped. He must have run out of patience and returned underground.

He remembered Milliped’s invitation and shook his head and sighed, What’s so great about underground?

From all the drinks he shared with Milliped over the past few days, he already knew this was all due to the Daemon Commander’s order, and further up, the decree of the greatest Daemon King of the Green province, the Dragon King of Ink Sea.

If Milliped returned to his original form and arrived in a human city, he was basically a devastating monster. This arrangement was probably to maintain peace between humans and daemons.

Suddenly, there was a gust of wind from behind him. Li Qingshan turned his head slightly and a snowball brushed past his cheek. Turning around, all he saw was Xiao An covering her mouth, snickering.

Li Qingshan said, “Alright, alright. Don’t you regret this!” Before he had even finished talking, another snowball flew over. When he tilted his head to dodge, the snowball even changed directions, slamming against his face viciously, causing snow to splatter everywhere.

A shiny, white prayer bead inside flew back to Xiao An’s hand.

Li Qingshan wiped away the snow from his face and shot a glance at her, "I'm going to get angry!"

Xiao An stuck out her tongue and fled from the hole. She looked back and just as expected, Li Qingshan tailed behind her closely. He yelled out, "Great Snowball technique!"

The floating snowflakes all gathered in Li Qingshan's large hand, forming an ultimate snowball that spanned several feet across. He pushed it towards Xiao An.

"Giddy up! Giddy up!" A carriage driver yelled and swung the reins, urging on the horses as they pulled the carriage through the accumulated snow. He wore the uniform for the Proud Sword manor. He was a trusted disciple of Yu Shukuang, the mellow young man who was often sent to deliver items over. His name was Yu Lian.

The carriage crossed through a forested region and arrived before a manor surrounded by snow mountains.

The carriage came to a steady stop at the entrance and Yu Lian said, "Master, we're here."

A bearded swordsman climbed down from the carriage. He stood with his head and chest held high with a great bearing. He was Yu Shukuang. His face was filled with joy as he wore a set of red silk robes. He arrived before the entrance, before bowing slightly and knocking on the door gently in a somewhat nervous manner, "Is great hero Niu present?"

He suddenly heard a strange sound. He pressed his head against the door and listened closely. The strange sound drew closer and closer.

Rumble.

"Oh no!" Yu Shukuang used his movement technique and rose up. A huge, white ball smashed through the vermilion entrance, brushed past the bottom of his feet and rolled down the mountain.

Yu Shukuang was shaken. If he had been hit by that, he would lose half his life. Though, that seemed like a snowball? However, he had never seen such a large, such a hard snowball before.

Li Qingshan stood in the courtyard and looked at Yu Shukuang from afar. He asked loudly, "Great hero Yu, what brings you here?"

Yu Shukuang hurried forward to bow. He looked around and was stunned. There were signs left behind by the giant snowball everywhere. A corridor had been smashed through, while quite a few firewood sheds to the east had collapsed.

"W- what were you doing, sir?"

"I was waging a snowfight!" Li Qingshan lifted up Xiao An by the collar, "I wanted to show this girl what's what!"

With her head of long, curly seaweed-like hair, she just remained silent in an obedient manner. She basically seemed like she was slightly afraid. However, Li Qingshan knew she was afraid of unfamiliar people the most. As soon as a stranger appeared before her, she would become sheepish.

Yu Shukuang shivered. The Tiger Butcher sure was ruthless! He had actually thrown such a large snowball at such a cute child. If the snowball hit her, it would be murder! However, he was too afraid to persuade him otherwise as well. He began to hesitate over what he originally planned to do.

Li Qingshan asked again, "What brings you here?"

Yu Shukuang made up his mind and fished out an invitation from his sleeve. He invited Li Qingshan to a banquet at the Proud Sword manor at noon tomorrow, to celebrate Yu Zijian in reaching the innate realm and becoming a Qi Practitioner.

Li Qingshan asked, "Your daughter's back?"

Yu Shukuang said, "Not yet. She'll probably come back tonight."

"Then congratulations!" Li Qingshan asked Xiao An, "Do you want to go?"

Xiao An looked at Li Qingshan hesitantly, as if she was trying to guess what he was thinking.

Li Qingshan said, "Then let's go!" It had been quite some time since he had taken her out for a stroll. He said to Yu Shukuang, "Alright, I'll go, but I don't want to expose my identity, so please prepare a special, individual time for me."

Yu Shukuang was overjoyed. He agreed to it fervently.

At noon on the next day, the light snow had just cleared up, but there was not a speck of snow on the square in front of the Proud Sword manor. All of it had been swept away by the disciples of the manor. There were lanterns and decorations everywhere as everyone brimmed with joy.

To the people of the jianghu, even if the four joyous occasions of life were combined, they probably still would not be as happy as breaking through to the innate realm. That represented a whole new world unfurling around them, which possessed unimaginable possibilities.

Authority and wealth might have only been like the fleeting clouds, but a longer life was what all people desired. A high level Qi Practitioner could even live for two centuries.

Now that Yu Zijian had become a Qi Practitioner, the status of the entire Proud Sword manor would rise as a result. Regular disciples would benefit from this too. And, while Yu Zijian was Yu Shukuang's treasured daughter, she completely lacked the arrogance and pride of a young miss. Not only did she treat regular disciples kindly, she liked to uphold justice and help the weak too. The citizens of Salt Mountain city constantly praised her.

When someone like that received the blessings of fate, others would always feel happy for her from the bottom of their hearts.

However, there were also many young disciples who secretly lamented inside. This had severed any possibilities for them to become the son-in-law of the Proud Sword manor. Perhaps the marriage of a rich young miss to a penniless man would happen a few times in life, but a Qi Practitioner would never marry an ordinary person.

“Sect master Liu, you’ve come! Please come in, please come in!” Yu Shukuang personally stood at the entrance to welcome the esteemed guests. When he saw his fellow martial arts practitioner, he felt so proud of himself that he almost wanted to laugh his head off.

Yu Zijian sat in the central seat in the hall rather unnaturally, receiving everyone’s congratulations. When she saw the various bigshots and uncles of the jianghu congratulate and greet her, she felt fantastic inside. As it turned out, becoming a Qi Practitioner was actually so great.

The banquet began, but Yu Shukuang apologised to everyone and took Yu Zijian to the back of the hall.

“Father, where are we going?”

Yu Shukuang said, “I’m taking you to see an esteemed guest. When you see him, be polite.”

Yu Zijian was rather puzzled. Earlier, Yu Shukuang would not even permit her to be polite when she wanted to, telling her to maintain her bearing as an innate master. So just who was it that made her father so serious?

Within a dim room that had all of its shutters shut, Yu Zijian saw an abnormally tall and burly figure. He wore a great big hat on his head. Beside him was a bamboo basket and laid out before him was a rich feast.

Yu Zijian was unable to sense any aura that belonged to a Qi Practitioner or martial arts practitioner from him, but it did not weaken his bearing at all. It made her sterner.

Yu Shukuang introduced, “This is... Niu Er, or great hero Niu to you!”

“Pfft!” Yu Zijian’s stern expression immediately collapsed.

“Damn brat, don’t laugh!” Yu Shukuang rebuked loudly, afraid she would anger Li Qingshan.

Yu Zijian had already begun apologising before he could finish, “Great hero Niu, I’m not laughing at you, so please don’t take any offense!” She felt very bad for laughing at someone’s name, but she really could not help herself when she saw what the climax lead up to.

Li Qingshan’s impression of Yu Zijian was limited to the girl in violet who followed Hua Chenglu around as well. Now that he heard her talk, he took a liking to her. He studied her.

Her hair was unadorned, just tied into two thick buns with a few draping down to her cheeks. It only made her face seem even brighter and prettier. She wore the same faint purple robes, with a deeper purple band around her waist, highlighting her slender waist as a young woman.

It made her seem natural and gentle, and she spoke quickly and gently. Although she was not enough for him to fall in love at first sight, she was still a cute girl who could make his heart stirr. She could bring ease to his mind.

As the saying went, I hear the jade hair needle fall to the ground through the curtain. You would either be stupid or extremely wise if not a single bad thought crosses your mind. Fortunately, I’m neither.

Note: Comes from a work by Chen Xuru of the Ming dynasty. It basically entails Ruan Ji, an ancient Chinese poet and musician, lived near a family with a beautiful young daughter, who often tended to an

alcohol stall. He would often drink there and when he fell drunk, he would fall asleep by her. The rest is an innuendo with the hair needle falling to the ground, which could be inferred as they're going at it. Or not.