

## Chapter 201 - The Past Grievances of the Jianghu

“Your daughter is indeed a clever and polite girl. Seeing her was worth it.” The last time Li Qingshan saw her was when they were surrounded by a group of people from the martial arts society. At the time, he had to constantly remain cautious about the West Gate Granny. Even if they did end up conversing, he would have placed all of his attention on Hua Chenglu. Now that he saw Yu Zijian again, it was quite a surprise.

“You’re too kind, you’re too kind.” Yu Shukuang smiled, but he wondered, Has this Li Qingshan taken an interest in my daughter? The first thought that crossed his head was ‘absolutely not’. How could he hand his daughter to a mass-murderer?

But upon further thought, he realised that it might actually be possible for Li Qingshan to become interested in her. He had seen Li Qingshan’s original appearance before. He knew he was only sixteen or seventeen years old, around the same age as Yu Zijian. He had a somewhat dignified appearance, and he had only become like this to avoid enemies.

As previously mentioned, in the eyes of experienced members of the jianghu, Li Qingshan’s appearance was much more pleasing compared to those pale-faced, slightly more feminine scholars. Moreover, he was startlingly powerful. It would all boil down to what his girl wanted!

However, it was impossible for this thought to come to fruition.

That was because as Li Qingshan studied Yu Zijian, Yu Zijian studied Li Qingshan as well.

The shadow from the bamboo hat had almost hidden his dark face, only exposing a beardless chin. And, while the yellow robes he wore were specially made, several sizes larger than robes for regular people, they were still unable to hide his twisting muscles.

All young women thought of love, but the people they thought of were those graceful gentlemen, those handsome youths, not some supersized musclehead. Probably only desperate women would take an interest in someone like him.

When the sharp gaze swept out from the darkness, Yu Zijian could not help but shudder slightly and lower her head in a hurry. The gaze seemed to be dangerously invasive, preventing her from looking straight into his eyes.

With her head lowered, she now saw the pig and chicken bones littered on the ground. Clearly, this great hero Niu’s mouth had been busy when he had been alone.

Though, Li Qingshan was truly faultless here. The quality of the feast Yu Shukuang had prepared was extraordinary. Whether it be the whole-roasted lamb, the cold pork knuckles, or the braised beef, all of it was delicious. These were all of his favourite foods as a carnivore. There were even steamed bear paws, which were wonderful in favour.

He let his belly loose and ate plenty of it. However, not a single thing left his mouth after entering it, including the bones. He was like a wild beast, grinding the bones to dust and eating them as well.

The bones on the ground came from Xiao An. With how much time she spent by Li Qingshan's side, her appetite had grown as well. When she ate, she took her time chewing and swallowing, eating in a sophisticated manner, but she just happened to be no slower than Li Qingshan, who wolfed everything down.

However, she simply refused to eat the bones. Although she smelted white bones, she had no interest in the bones of cooked animals. Actually, none of what she ate reached her stomach. All of it was refined by her flames. She only did it for the taste.

With how much respect Yu Shukuang had shown towards him, Yu Zijian directly treated Li Qingshan as a senior on the level of her uncles, so she obviously took no interest in him as a man.

"Zijian!" Yu Shukuang tugged Yu Zijian's sleeve, and she returned to her senses. She raised her head, "Thank you, great hero Niu." As she listened to Li Qingshan's deep voice, she remained as calm as stillwater inside. However, she just found him to be slightly familiar, so she asked without further thought, "Have we met before?"

Li Qingshan shook his head and asked with a smile, "Do you have a hundred treasures pouch?"

"I don't," Yu Zijian answered honestly. Originally, Hua Chenglu wanted to give her one, but she was afraid that she would never be able to return the favour, so she refused it. She heard that as long as she could join the Academy of the Hundred Schools, she would be able to collect her own hundred treasures pouch.

"This was the first hundred treasures pouch that I obtained. You can treat it as a congratulating gift!" Li Qingshan took out a rather worn out hundred treasures pouch. It had come from Qian Rongzhi's dead brother.

He found this girl to be pretty good, but he did not actually develop any improper thoughts towards her, wanting to give her something extremely precious in an attempt to please her.

However, if the gift was too insignificant, it would be inappropriate. It had to be suitable. He just happened to have many hundred treasures pouches on him, and they were items that all Qi Practitioners required. Hundred treasures pouches could not be stored in one another, so he could only fold them up and carry them on him. He had so many of them that he almost became a member of the Beggar's gang, with an unprecedented dozen or so bags at that. Now was the perfect time for him to get rid of one of them.

Note: The Beggar's gang, also known as the Beggar's sect, is an organisation frequently appearing in wuxia fiction. Each member carries a 'bag', and the more bags they carry, the more important they are in the gang.

Yu Shukuang was overjoyed. He had heard about the hundred treasures pouches a long time ago. They were even rarer than spiritual artifacts. Li Qingshan was so generous as soon as it came to gift-giving, such that he felt like he had not been busying himself recently for nothing.

"That's far too precious!" Yu Zijian turned it down in a hurry and glanced at Yu Shukuang. She wondered just what relationship this great hero Niu had with her father. How come she had never heard of him before?

Li Qingshan smiled. "I'm just afraid that you'll find it to be far too worn out. If you don't like it, I have others. You can exchange them with me."

"That's not what I meant!" Yu Zijian waved her hands in a hurry, while Yu Shukuang coughed gently. "If great hero Niu wants you to accept it, just accept it!"

Only then did Yu Zijiang happily accept the worn out hundred treasures pouch. She basically felt the same as Li Qingshan before. It was exactly because it was worn out that she could accept it calmly.

Li Qingshan said, "There's still a lot of people waiting for you at the front, so there's no need to waste any more time here. You'd better go!"

Yu Shukuang said, "Then we'll be bidding you farewell. If you require anything, feel free to ask the servants."

With their departure, Li Qingshan took off his bamboo hat and lifted Xiao An from the bamboo basket, placing her on his knee. "Let's keep eating!"

The feast unfolded.

Yu Shukuang had already become bright red from drinking. He was currently involved in a competition of who could drink the most with his good friend, the master of the Elation sect.

At the entrance, a man with a pitted face raised his head and looked at the three words, 'Proud Sword Manor', hanging up above. He sneered in resentment.

He was in his forties, and he wore a magnificent set of robes. A treasured blade hung from his waist. The hilt was made from pure gold, and it was embedded with a cat's eye gem. It was extremely stately, as if he wanted to broadcast that he was rich.

Afterwards, he barged in.

"Who are you?" "You cannot enter without an invitation." Just when the guarding disciples wanted to stop him, the man with the pitted face waved his hand. He had not even touched the disciples, but they were all sent flying backwards.

"An innate master!" There were many people of the jianghu at the feast. They all cried out at this sight. Only innate masters could release their true qi externally.

The man with the pockmarked face stopped before the hall and barked under the gaze of several hundred guests, "Yu Shukuang, you've invited everyone from everywhere, so how could you have forgotten about this old friend of yours?!"

Yu Shukuang heard the disturbance outside and rushed outside with his fellow martial arts practitioners. He looked down from the steps above and gasped, "You Pitted Madman!" His fellow martial arts practitioners all changed in expression.

A young man asked on a table of individual guests, "Who's the Pitted Madman? Why haven't I heard of him before?"

An old man who had a thorough understanding of the matters of the jianghu whispered, "His name is Ma Chaoqun. He's skilled in the thirty-six forms of the Mad Demon Blade style. He's extremely vicious in battle, and he always tries to drag the opponent down with him. His face is pitted as well, which is why they call him the Pitted Madman."

"What past does he have with great hero Yu?"

"The Proud Sword hall used to be called the Mad Blade hall!"

In the past, the two of them had once fought with each other over a woman, gambling with their lives. Ma Chaoqun was defeated in a single move, and from then onwards, he vanished into the wilderness and never appeared again. Yu Shukuang took the woman as his wife and used the Mad Blade hall as a foundation to rapidly expand his influence, uniting the entire city under him in the end.

Never did he think that this old rival of his would appear again after all these years, and he would have become an innate master already.

Yu Shukuang wavered. He put on a smile and clasped his hands. "Brother Ma, it has been several years. Have you been well?"

Ma Chaoqun was surprised at first before bursting out with laughter. "That doesn't sound like something that the pride swordsman I know would say. What happened to your pride? Where's Zi'er? I want to see her!" Then he suddenly called out madly, "Zi'er, your senior brother is back. I've already become an innate master!"

However, no one dared to mock his madness. His call was filled with innate true qi, which shook up the hall. It made everyone's ears ring as they all became shocked.

Yu Shukuang sighed. "Zi'er she... passed away quite a few years ago."

Ma Chaoqun was stunned. His eyes reddened as he gritted his teeth. "Sh- she's already dead? She must have died because of you! You weren't the one she liked. Yes, she must have discovered that you had poisoned me, right?"

"What are you saying? My father would never poison anyone!" Yu Zijian had originally been standing in the crowd. When she heard that, she refused to accept it. She immediately stood forward from the crowd and rebuked loudly.

"Zi'er?" Ma Chaoqun was dazed. Only after a closer glance did he discover that her age did not seem to match. "Who are you?"

"I'm Yu Zijian. I'm my father's daughter. And who do you happen to be, to come and make trouble in the Proud Sword manor?"

Ma Chaoqun suddenly understood. "I will expose the hypocrite that he is before everyone. Back then, I was already a first-rate master, while your father was only at the peak of the second-rate. How could his proud sword defeat my mad blade? If it weren't for the fact that your father poisoned me, how could he have won?"

"Zijian!"

Just when Yu Zijian wanted to rebuke him, Yu Shukuang stopped her. "That's right. I would have never been able to defeat you back then!"

"Father?" Yu Zijian looked at Yu Shukuang in disbelief.

There was an uproar. Although Yu Shukuang was not as upright as Yu Zijian had imagined him to be, he was still a central figure within the orthodox jianghu. He had made a name for himself as a heroic figure.

Ma Chaoqun was surprised at first. He never thought that Yu Shukuang would admit it so easily. He laughed aloud. "You've all heard it! Girly, you heard it too. You know exactly what your father is now!"

"However, the poison didn't come from me. It came from Zi'er." Yu Shukuang's next words made everyone fall silent.

"My mother?!" Yu Zijian was stunned. She did not have a particularly deep impression of her mother, who had passed away so early. She only remembered her to be an extremely gentle and beautiful woman who sighed constantly. Yu Shukuang often told her about her mother's kind-heartedness as well.

Ma Chaoqun felt like his heart had been struck by a boulder, causing it to ripple and surge. "Impossible. You have to be lying. Junior sister has always been infatuated with me, so why would she work against me? Why would she work against me!?"

With a swish, he drew the treasured blade from his waist and pointed it at Yu Shukuang. It shone brightly. It was actually a low grade spiritual artifact.

## **Chapter 202 - Uncle Niu**

Yu Shukuang smiled bitterly. "You should have known this already. I had no chance to tamper with your food or drink."

This was a thought that had lingered in Ma Chaoqun's mind for many years now, but he had always refused to face it or believe in it. It was impossible for the lady he had grown up with who was as kind as they came to do something so cruel to him.

Now that he had suddenly verified this, all of his hard work over the years, all of his thoughts for revenge, suddenly became laughable. He could not help but become overcome by anger as tears streaked across his face. He roared at the sky crazily.

Originally, Yu Zijian disliked him very much. She heard his howl that sounded just like a despaired beast's and could not help but become saddened. She sympathised with him, He must have loved my mother very much. Mother let him down. If she didn't like him, she should have told him directly. Why did she have to poison him?

"D- don't feel too bad. So many years have passed already. You will definitely find someone better than my mother."

Ma Chaoqun stopped howling. He looked at Yu Zijian. Her beautiful face overflowing with sincere sympathy seemed to overlap with the face in his heart. He murmured, "You really do look like her."

"Brother Ma, so many years have passed already. Neither of us are young anymore. It's time for us to drop these grievances. Today is a joyous day for celebrating how Zijian has become a Qi Practitioner.

She'll be attending the Academy of the Hundred Schools next year. Why don't you take a seat and share a drink with us?" Yu Shukuang implied that neither of them were regular people of the jianghu who could be trampled over anymore.

Ma Chaoqun suddenly raised an eyebrow and produced a twisted smile. Combined with his pitted face, he seemed even uglier. "I want to fight you again!" Afterwards, he pointed at Yu Zijian. "She'll be the wager!"

Crack! Li Qingshan snapped the chopsticks in his hands. "That's far too underhanded!"

He noticed the disturbance outside before anyone else. Afterwards, he continued to eat as he listened in on the past grievances of the jianghu out of interest. It went well with his feast.

He was also rather sympathetic towards this pitted-face brother as well. It must have been horrible to be betrayed by a person you trusted. He also felt contempt towards this "Zi'er". She had sacrificed her own senior brother for a handsome man. That was far too dishonourable.

Both of these people could be considered as outstanding, yet they had both chosen a fickle woman. Their insight was horrible. Fortunately, Yu Zijian was not as vicious as her mother.

However, when he heard Ma Chaoqun's final decision, he completely disagreed with it. This was no longer exacting revenge on Yu Shukuang. It was taking revenge on the woman called "Zi'er", along with all of society.

Who do you think you are? Do you really think you can do whatever you want because you have a higher level of cultivation? Even if you want to be Yin Liting, you need to see whether they agree first.

TL: Yin Liting is a character from The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber, whose original fiance breaks off her engagement with him and leaves with another man, only for their daughter to fall in love and marry Yin Liting.

"Don't even think about it!" Yu Shukuang immediately became bright red, despite remaining calm the entire time. He drew his sword with a furious gaze. Yu Zijian was his treasured daughter. If anyone even touched a hair on her, he would throw his life at them.

There was a series of clangs and swishes as weapons were drawn from their sheathes. It was not just the disciples of the Proud Sword manor, but the guests present too. Although some were closer to Yu Shukuang than others, they were still Yu Shukuang's friends. If they did not help their friend at a time like this, they would be despised by their fellow members of the martial arts society.

This bastard was alone anyway. Even if he was an innate master, he would still run out of true qi!

"Alright, alright, alright!" Ma Chaoqun called out under everyone's glares. He was fearless. "I've spent all these years focusing on cultivation on Pheasant's Grace mountain, just for this day. Those who have nothing to do with this, piss off. Anyone who gets in my way will be awaiting the retribution of Pheasant's Grace mountain!"

"Ah!"

With that, a series of disjointed cries rang out. Ma Chaoqun's words rushed into Li Qingshan's ears as well. His expression was strange. Pheasant's Grace mountain? Don't tell me he's the legendary Count of Monte Cristo?

TL: The Chinese name of the place sounds like the Count of Monte Cristo. It's a pun, and it's pretty bad.

Everyone else obviously did not share the same thought as Li Qingshan. No one present had ever been to the Pheasant's Grace mountain. They did not even know where it was. However, as long as they were first-rate masters, they would have heard about it before.

The Green Vine mountain, the Pheasant's Grace mountain, and the Burial Mound mountain were three powerful cultivation sects. They were renowned throughout the Clear River prefecture. Together, they were three famous mountains that stood side by side. Not only did they have Qi Practitioners, but they also had Foundation Establishment cultivators who had undergone the first heavenly tribulation. Their power and influence went without saying.

Regular people only needed to join one of them, and it would be like a change of fate. Their identities would undergo an upheaving change. No one dared to brush aside Ma Chaoqun's threat. To the people of the jianghu, Qi Practitioners were like higher existences on the food chain.

Many of the people present who were not particularly close with Yu Shukuang retreated slightly. Only a few good friends remained by his side, but they too hesitated.

Yu Zijian was bright red. She was speechless with anger and shame. She saw the situation and rebuked loudly, "If you just kill people blindly, aren't you afraid of the Hawkwolf Guard?" She had once witnessed the power of a Hawkwolf Guard in person, which left behind an extremely deep impression on her.

Ma Chaoqun burst out laughing. "The Hawkwolf Guard? Do you really think they'll care about you people of the jianghu?"

Li Qingshan sighed gently. He knew that Ma Chaoqun was right. He was a member of the Hawkwolf Guard, and he knew how they functioned very well. People of the jianghu who could practise inner force were a special group of people who existed between regular people and cultivators, and the Hawkwolf Guard treated them in a very special way too.

The Black Wind stronghold could slaughter whole villages to set precedents and make it onto the blacklist, but not a single Hawkwolf Guard would pay attention to them for several years. However, if cultivators did something like that, it would be regarded as evil, and the commanders would directly send people on a mission to handle them.

If an entire organisation of the jianghu was annihilated, even if it amounted to several hundred lives, the Hawkwolf Guard would investigate the matter at most. They would never handle it seriously. When the people of the jianghu killed regular people, they would be treated like regular people, allowed to run free. However, when they were killed by Qi Practitioners, they would be treated like Qi Practitioners and ignored.

Under Ma Chaoqun's sinister glare, the master of the Elation sect gulped. "Brother Yu, do you think..."

Yu Shukuang clasped his hands at everyone. "I thank you all for holding my ground for me today, but this is a personal grievance. It's got nothing to do with you. Anyone who interferes will be an enemy of my Proud Sword manor. You'll be looking down on me if you do!"

Everyone was touched and ashamed. Great hero Yu truly was valiant, saving his friends from trouble. On the other hand, Ma Chaoqun seemed even more despicable.

The master of the Elation sect wanted to say something, but he still ended up retreating to one side. Yu Shukuang's surroundings immediately emptied out. All that was left was Yu Zijian, who held onto Yu Shukuang's sleeve. She felt both admiration and anxiety. "Father! H- he's a second layer Qi Practitioner!"

First-rate masters had no chance at all if they were matched up against a second layer Qi Practitioner. Meanwhile, she had only ingested the Innate pill recently. Although she was a first layer Qi Practitioner, she might not even be able to match Yu Shukuang's battle prowess as a first-rate master. She was even less of an opponent to Ma Chaoqun.

"You better stop with your act right now. If you're a man, then attack me. I'll give you three free moves!" Ma Chaoqun was furious. This bastard is skilled at winning over people with his fake acts the most. If it were not for his silver tongue, why would Zi'er... His heart ached before he looked at Yu Zijian. His gaze softened. None of his hard work over these years would go to waste. He would be compensated for it all!

Yu Shukuang pushed away Yu Zijian gently. "Don't worry. Just go to the back!" He winked at Yu Zijian before turning to face Ma Chaoqun. "Pitted Madman, come. Let's fight again. Let's see whether your Mad Blade or my Proud Sword is stronger!"

Yu Zijian was surprised. A life-threatening battle was about to erupt, yet father told me to go to the back. What is he trying to do? Suddenly, her eyes lit up. She hurried to the back of the hall without even looking back. The only one who could save her father now was great hero Niu!

The door suddenly burst open and light flooded into the pitch-black room, onto that wide back. Countless specks of dust floated through the air. Li Qingshan sat with his bamboo hat on, currently with a bowl of alcohol in his hand as he drank it like he was striking a pose.

Yu Zijian seemed to see a final glimmer of hope. "Older uncle Niu, please save my father!"

The alcohol almost spurted from Li Qingshan's mouth. Why had he suddenly become an uncle? And why did it make him feel like he was in his forties already?

TL: English doesn't have this distinction, but there are basically two types of uncles in Chinese, one that is younger than your father and one that is older than your father. The one Yu Zijian used here is the one that is older than your father, or in other words, older than Yu Shukuang. I've separated them in this context as older uncle/younger uncle, but I'll revert to just uncle in the end.

All men wished that the women they met would admire them, even if they did not like them; this was especially the case for Yu Zijian, who Li Qingshan had a rather good impression of. He could not help but become slightly dejected. Meanwhile, an extremely soft giggle rang out from the bamboo basket beside him.



Yu Zijian had seen how the world worked with Yu Shukuang. She knew she had to rope people in if she wanted them to help her out. She had never thought that this title of respect would lead to the exact opposite effect.

Before Yu Zijian could say anything, Li Qingshan had already spoken, "I've heard everything that happened outside."

"Older uncle Niu, my father..."

Bang! Li Qingshan placed the bowl on the table and said with a heavy voice, "I'm not your uncle Niu, so you'd better stop referring to me in strange ways!"

Yu Zijian felt wronged inside. She knew that this great hero Niu must have been afraid of the Pheasant's Grace mountain as well, so he was reluctant to help. However, Yu Shukuang's life was at stake right now. In order to save her father, she could no longer care about her pride as a woman. She said loudly, "Then I'll call you younger uncle Niu, alright? Please..."

Li Qingshan's head drooped down. "W- whatever you want!" He kicked the bamboo basket. Xiao An's giggles made him feel utterly humiliated.

Yu Zijian thanked him for agreeing. She wiped away the tears that had almost fallen from the corner of her eyes. "Thank you, uncle Niu! Let's go then!" She was tempted to grab his arm and drag him over there.

Li Qingshan said, "You've heard your father as well. It's a personal matter. I can't interfere."

Yu Zijian paled and collapsed on the ground. "T- then what am I supposed to do?!"

Li Qingshan said, "Though, aren't you a Qi Practitioner too?"

Yu Zijian raised her head. She was a weeping beauty.

The blade and sword clashed, erupting with sparks that flew about, along with a splash of blood that originated from Yu Shukuang's shoulder.

Ma Chaoqun produced a meaningless howl. He seemed like he had almost lost his mind. However, he wielded the treasured blade in his hand like a fierce storm. The dense coldness of the weapon radiated to several meters away, where all the spectating martial arts practitioners became stunned. They retreated backwards.

Yu Shukuang also staggered backwards in retreat. He would leave behind a footprint in the marble with every step. He had already unleashed his sword moves and sword forms to the limit during his three strikes. It formed a thick flurry of swords before him.

However, Ma Chaoqun had managed to cut through it with his very first attack, injuring him. Afterwards, he drew back his weapon and unleashed his Mad Demon Blade style. He forced back the flurry of swords inch by inch, until it was only three inches away from Yu Shukuang, forcing him to retreat.

## **Chapter 203 - A Battle of Puppets**

“Your martial arts will never surpass mine!” Ma Chaoqun moved his feet and raised his shoulder. His treasured blade struck out in a series of slashes. He launched thirteen attacks from thirteen different angles. Every single attack was as swift as wind, tearing through the air and kicking up a violent gale that whistled loudly.

Driven by hatred, his blade style was pushed to the limit. He moved as fiercely as the wind, filled with a terrifying bearing of trying to drag down the enemy with him. Even though the spectators despised his actions, they were unable to despise his martial arts.

On the other hand, Yu Shukuang no longer possessed the might of his proud sword anymore. His clothes were in tatters, and he responded clumsily. Whenever the flash of the blade pierced through his flurry of swords, a new wound would appear on his body, and he would retreat. Ma Chaoqun was like a knight at an enemy country’s border, leading constant raids and skirmishes in the enemy territory. However, he refused to deal a finishing blow, wanting to humiliate his opponent.

Yu Shukuang rebuked, “What do you have apart from martial arts?”

Ma Chaoqun paled. He had been hit where it hurt. He was ugly, and he was vulgar with his words. Apart from his martial arts, he really was not good at anything else, which was why Yu Shukuang managed to steal Zi’er’s heart from him, leaving him alone to wander through the jianghu. Aside from his martial arts, he had nothing.

He roared madly, “Die!”

He channeled true qi into his blade, and it lit up with blinding light, crushing down like a mountain.

Yu Shukuang tried to parry it with his sword, but it had already been heavily damaged, just like Yu Shukuang himself. It shattered as soon as they collided.

“Master!” “Brother Yu!” Numerous cries rang out, but they were not as fast as the blade. No one could stop the attack!

Yu Shukuang closed his eyes helplessly. “Zi’er, I’m coming to see you.”

On a luxurious carriage outside the manor, two young men in lovely, silken robes who were as proud as roosters sat beside each other. They sipped some tea leisurely, as if they had no idea what was happening in the Proud Sword manor.

Ma Chaoqun had entered Salt Mountain city on this carriage before getting off and entering the manor.

The young man to the left said, “Junior brother Ma sure is slow. Why can’t he deal with this faster?” He had the life-like tail feather of a male pheasant sewn to his chest. The embroidery was glorious. It was the symbol of the Pheasant’s Grace mountain. Only formal disciples of the third layer and above had the right to wear it. His cultivation was at an impressive fifth layer.

“It’s some piled-up grievances from many years ago, so it’s understandable!” said the other young man in an unconcerned manner. This originated from his arrogance as someone powerful. He had two tail feathers sewn to his chest, which was a symbol of core disciples above the sixth layer.

“Hmph! He has become so pitiful over a woman. With his talent, the second layer should be his limit!”

“The second layer is enough. Once we take back Salt Mountain city, he can remain here to gather talented children for the Pheasant’s Grace mountain. It’ll stop the people from the Green Vine mountain from always getting ahead of us.”

“Wise be senior brother!”

“Hmm?”

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“Stop!” Yu Zijian called out.

Ma Chaoqun suddenly raised his head. A spark shot towards his face. He called out, twisted his blade, and slashed up.

With a boom, the spark exploded. Ma Chaoqun avoided being blown to pieces, but he was knocked away. His eyebrows were singed. He cried out, “A Scarlet Flame talisman!”

Yu Zijian had already helped Yu Shukuang to his feet. “Father, are you alright?”

Yu Shukuang saw how she was alone. “D- did he refuse to help?”

Yu Zijian shook her head and made Yu Shukuang eat the recovery pill Li Qingshan had given to her. She commanded the disciples of the Proud Sword sect before yelling at Ma Chaoqun, “I’ll be your opponent!”

“Girly, do you really think you’re my opponent just because you possess some talismans? Bug off. Let me kill your father, and then I’ll take you to get married!” Ma Chaoqun burst out into laughter as he spoke. He found this all to be extremely interesting. However, no one in the surroundings agreed with him. They all glared at him furiously.

Yu Zijian had originally been trembling in fear, but when she saw Yu Shukuang’s horrible shape, she became furious. “It’s no wonder my mum wouldn’t like a baddie like you!”

Baddie was language used by children. It would only make adults laugh. However, her words utterly infuriated Ma Chaoqun, who replied with, “How do you know that she doesn’t like me? She liked me the most. She constantly called me senior brother, senior brother when she was young...” As he spoke, he wanted to break into tears again!

With his unstable emotions, he truly was like a madman.

Yu Zijian held a talisman. She was extremely reluctant to use it as she thought of what uncle Niu had just said earlier. “Once you use this talisman, it’ll definitely be able to kill him in a single stroke. You cannot be softhearted!”

Ma Chaoqun raised his treasured blade and directly pointed it at Yu Zijian. “Fine. I’ll take you down first, and then I’ll kill your father!”

Looking at Ma Chaoqun as he howled and charged over, Yu Zijian raised her right hand and swept it forcefully from left to right. She produced a golden crescent of light.

Ma Chaoqun's eyes narrowed. "The Metal Crescent Slash!" However, he had no intentions of retreating. The Metal Crescent Slash was an extremely powerful technique of the metal element. It was swift and fierce, but he was confident that he could block a Metal Crescent Slash from a low grade talisman with his blade. However, the slash was much brighter than he imagined it would be.

Before he could think any further, the golden crescent had vanished from his sight. Oh no, it's a mid grade talisman! The thought crossed his head and blood splattered, followed by intense pain.

A mid grade talisman was equivalent to a technique used by a sixth layer Qi Practitioner. Although it lacked much of the finer control and adaptability, it was definitely powerful enough. It was not something that a measly second layer Qi Practitioner could block.

Li Qingshan possessed many mid grade talismans. Aside from the auxiliary talismans that could increase speed or strength, these offensive talismans were basically useless to him. He did not need these talismans when he faced his enemies, whether they were strong or weak. However, a mid grade talisman in a battle between weaker Qi Practitioners was a divine weapon that could determine the flow of the battle.

Ma Chaoqun suddenly threw himself to the ground, but he discovered that he was still conscious. The slash had produced a horrifying wound on his shoulder, but it was not fatal.

In the final moment, Yu Zijian's hand had turned slightly. She had not killed him on the spot. She breathed heavily as she said to Ma Chaoqun, "You've lost! I'm not going to kill you, so just leave!"

Li Qingshan shook his head slightly in the dim room. He had told her not to show any mercy. Although he sympathised with this person called Ma to a certain degree, the principle he operated off of was to never show any mercy to people that had been deemed as enemies.

However, he could not blame her either. A girl as kind-hearted as her was rare. Helping her would always be better than helping someone like Qian Rongzhi. It made him much happier in comparison. He shook his head and murmured gently, "You need to look at the circumstances when you strike, but when you strike, you must be merciless!"

"Uncle Niu!" Xiao An giggled tenderly.

Li Qingshan looked like he had just been cut. He grabbed her soft cheeks and pulled at them. "If you keep on calling me that, I'll rip your mouth to pieces!"

Xiao An said in an unclear voice, "No mowe..."

Ma Chaoqun's expression changed several times. He stood up by leaning on his blade. "No, I haven't lost. I will never lose again!"

"D- don't move!" Yu Zijian was immediately left at a loss as to what to do. She took out another Metal Crescent Slash talisman, and uncle Niu's words rang through her head, Take an extra one, just in case. He actually seemed to foretell that she would not be able to bring herself to kill him.

Ma Chaoqun continued forwards as if he wanted to die. He had already suffered defeat once. He could not afford to be defeated any more times.

"She has talismans, but don't we have talismans as well?"

Suddenly, someone called out from outside. A yellow light shot over and stuck to Ma Chaoqun's back. It was actually also a mid grade talisman.

Light enveloped him from top to bottom. Ma Chaoqun jolted in vigor, and his body became filled with strength. True qi flowed out from his back endlessly. He turned around and said gratefully, "Senior brother Song!"

Yu Shukuang's expression changed drastically. There were actually other masters from the Pheasant's Grace mountain here.

The young man with only a single tail feather said in the carriage, "Senior brother, isn't it a bit of a waste to use a mid grade Vitality talisman on him?"

"The enemy has the assistance of someone much more powerful. Why would she possess two mid grade talismans if she's just a girl at the first layer? Let's just wait and see. We have to force this person out and see just who is bold enough to oppose the Pheasant's Grace mountain!" senior brother Song said coldly.

Li Qingshan frowned. He had sensed the two auras outside right from the beginning. He was not surprised by what they did. He said, "Girlie, you can't afford to show mercy this time."

His deep, husky voice immediately boomed out magnificently. Everyone only felt like a gust of wind had blown past them, and it immediately suppressed senior brother Song's aura from outside.

Yu Shukuang beamed with joy and completely calmed down. The Tiger Butcher was dangerous, but if he was standing behind him and offering him support, it would be extremely relieving news.

Everyone now understood why Yu Shukuang had specially taken Yu Zijian to the back earlier. The Proud Sword manor was actually hiding a master like that. Ma Chaoqun and Yu Zijian were like two wooden puppets as they fought. The actual people who controlled the outcome of the battle were the puppeteers behind them.

Ma Chaoqun roared out. Tremendous amounts of true qi inflated his clothes. His treasured blade lit up coldly, forcing everyone back by a few steps once again.

Yu Zijian wasted no time at all. With a swing of her hand, a golden arc formed before her. She could no longer afford to show any mercy this time.

The golden arc flashed and directly landed on Ma Chaoqun's chest.

With the support of the Vitality talisman, not only had Ma Chaoqun's true qi increased tremendously, but even his senses had sharpened. He grasped the trajectory of the golden crescent and swung down with his shining blade.

With a great clang, Ma Chaoqun was knocked away. A great dent appeared on the blade, and the webbing between his thumb and finger had been ripped to pieces, drawing blood. However, he only smiled.

Before he had even touched the ground, true qi surged out from his hands, and he pressed it towards the ground. He flew back, rising up, weapon and all, slashing towards Yu Zijian. His eyes were scarlet, like he had gone crazy.

Without the support of any more talismans, Yu Zijian was about to be slain under his blade.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! There was the sound of splintering wood, and a figure moving even faster than Ma Chaoqun rushed out from the hall. He arrived on the steps and kicked out, directly colliding with Ma Chaoqun. They fell out of the air together.

Ma Chaoqun was protected by true qi, but he felt his back ache as blood spurted out from his mouth.

However, the other figure seemed to feel nothing. It immediately turned around and climbed to its feet. Its movements were swift and mechanical. Two sharp blades sprang out from its arms, slicing towards Ma Chaoqun.

Only now did everyone see that it was not a human, but a puppet.

Yu Zijian's eyes lit up. She just found the puppet to be somewhat familiar.

This was the same puppet that Li Qingshan had asked for from Hua Chenglu as a gift for Xiao An. It had come into use now.

#### **Chapter 204 - Niu Juxia**

The puppet and Ma Chaoqun became entangled in battle. When Ma Chaoqun's treasured blade landed on the puppet, it would only leave behind a deep mark and produce a metallic resonance. The wood that went into making the puppets of mohism was all thousand-year ironwood, treated and cured with special methods. As such, ordinary wood could not be compared to them. Although Ma Chaoqun had the support of a Vitality talisman, he was forced back.

"Senior brother, what do we do?"

Senior brother Song's expression finally changed slightly. He could take out a few more mid grade talismans, but that was far too wasteful. With a great swish, he rushed out of the carriage and kicked off the roof of the entrance, rushing into the sky. He soared over the open square like a great bird.

He completely ignored Ma Chaoqun and the others below. He landed on the hall and kicked off it again, directly shooting towards the dim room that Li Qingshan occupied.

The people of the jianghu on the square had never witnessed such agile movement techniques. They all raised their heads, dumbfounded.

Yu Zijian cried out, "The sixth layer!" She had come into contact with a lot of the common knowledge of Qi Practitioners during the time she had spent in the Clear River city. She knew exactly how terrifying sixth layer Qi Practitioners were, so she immediately began to worry for this uncle Niu of hers. She rushed into the hall.

Senior brother Song rapidly drew closer. He bent and curled his finger, and the heavy, wooden door shattered. He immediately spotted a huge figure with a large, bamboo hat in there with his back towards him, as if he had not sensed him.

There's no one this burly among the three mountains! Senior brother Song immediately reached this conclusion and launched a vicious strike towards the man's back. True qi surged.

“Uncle Niu!” Yu Zijian was rushing over as well. When she saw this, her beautiful face paled and sorrow welled up from the bottom of my heart. It’s all my fault. Uncle Niu is going to be killed by this baddie now.

The joy that had just surfaced on senior brother Song’s face vanished, as not only did the man remain there, but he did not even waver from the strike. He continued to drink alcohol from the bowl in his hand. The true qi senior brother Song emitted only seemed to go to waste. It failed to harm this man at all. This was the first time he had ever encountered something so strange!

“W- who are you?”

Li Qingshan suddenly turned around. There was a scarlet flash within the darkness under the brim of his hat. Senior brother Song wanted to pull back, but it was already too late. Li Qingshan’s arm, which was basically twice as long as a regular person’s, reached out. His hand—the size of a dustpan—enveloped Senior brother Song, gripping him by his neck.

Senior brother Song felt like metal chains had wrapped around him, without any hope of him breaking through. As long as the hand tightened slightly, his neck would snap, and he would be reduced to a corpse.

All Yu Zijian saw was uncle Niu finally standing up. His colossal figure was filled with unbelievable power, and his head was close to touching the ceiling. He took a step, and the ground shook, plates falling from the table. After taking a step, he pulled his arm back and yelled, “Call me Niu Juxia!” Then he tossed out senior brother Song like he was throwing a javelin.

TL: If you translate Niu Juxia literally, it would mean colossal hero Niu. It’s a comedic spin on great hero Niu.

With a swish, senior brother Song vanished. He even smashed through the roof, causing a few tiles to fall to the ground loudly.

All the people on the square saw was the figure leaving faster than it had come. It sailed through the air along a curved trajectory and hit the ground outside loudly. Senior brother Song’s mouth hung open unknowingly. Clearly, that Niu Juxia inside was much more vicious than he was.

“Senior brother, senior brother, are you alright?”

Senior brother Song was dazed from the fall, but he was protected by true qi, so he was not injured. Instead, he had been well and truly frightened. Who was that giant man? He actually felt like he could not even put up a fight before him. If that giant man wanted to kill him, he would have been dead already. Senior brother Song was truly afraid that he would suddenly change his mind, so he said hurriedly, “Go, let’s go!”

They completely disregarded Ma Chaoqun. They boarded the carriage immediately, raised the horsewhip, and took off. They scampered out of Salt Mountain city.

Yu Zijian looked at Li Qingshan in a daze. In that moment before, the light from outside landed on him, illuminating his simple face that had been hidden by the shadows.

His face was much younger than she had expected. He gave off a natural sense of power. His lips were slightly pursed as he radiated with a dignified aura. She was confident she had never seen a face like that before, but the familiar feeling only deepened instead of dispersing.

Is this fate? A strange thought suddenly crossed her head, which made her leap in fright. How is that possible? Isn't this fate a little too big?

"Thank you, un... Niu Juxia!"

Li Qingshan returned to his bench and pressed down his hat. "There's no need to thank me. You better go check on your father!"

Yu Zijian turned around and returned to the hall. The square had fallen utterly silent now. Everyone looked at her, as if they wanted to unearth the secret of this Niu Juxia from her.

Ma Chaoqun was ashen. In his eyes, senior brother Song was a lofty existence even with the entire Pheasant's Grace mountain in perspective, yet he had actually been defeated in a single attack, unable to even launch a counterattack. The Vitality talisman on him dimmed and lost its effect, while the puppet soldier locked onto his arm firmly, pushing him to the ground.

Yu Shukuang said, "Is there anything else you want to say?"

Ma Chaoqun struggled desperately. His face was twisted. "It's just like last time. It's just like last time. It's not because of my inability, but because of your despicable cheating! If you have the balls, kill me! The Pheasant's Grace mountain will definitely avenge me! They'll massacre your entire manor!"

Yu Shukuang suddenly laughed aloud, but this was not out of complacency as the victor. Instead, it was filled with bitterness and self-deprecation. "I really don't understand. You're ugly, and your personality's a little extreme. You were only slightly better at martial arts than me. Just which part of me paled in comparison to you? Just why did Zi'er fall in love with you?!"

Ma Chaoqun said, "W- what did you say?"

Li Qingshan was surprised. Since when were there women who would poison the person they liked?

"Because she knew that if I won, I wouldn't kill you, but if you won, you'd definitely kill me, which was why she went forward with that. She had once told me in person that she would marry you, the madman, regardless of the outcome of the battle. Before the battle had even begun, I had already lost."

"But I refused. I wanted to prove to her that even if I have to die for her, I would not mind. But she just couldn't accept me dying for her. How could she accept anyone dying for her?" When Yu Shukuang reached there, tears began to roll down his cheeks helplessly as well.

Ma Chaoqun was stunned. She had once tried everything to convince him to not have the battle with Yu Shukuang, but it only affirmed his belief that she had fallen in love with someone else. He was utterly furious, and he was determined to kill Yu Shukuang.

Yu Shukuang continued, "After the match, you left without saying anything. She was filled with regret. Although she married me with no other choice, she passed away heartbroken just a few years later." Ever since then, he began to grow his beard, swearing to never take another woman. He focused all of his energy into raising Yu Zijian.



Neither of the two young and stubborn men were willing to take a step back, so the woman could only do what she could do, but it was all in vain.

Ma Chaoqun suddenly understood now. That kind-hearted woman had never betrayed him. It was he who had become blinded by envy and doubt. At this very moment, he suddenly wished she had actually fallen in love with someone else so that she could obtain everything she wanted and remain in this world happily.

“I was the one who hurt her!”

### **Chapter 205 - The Seeds of Fate**

Yu Zijiang looked at the sobbing Ma Chaoqun and the weeping Yu Shukuang who reminisced about the kind-hearted woman who had passed away long ago.

Yu Zijian seemed to be able to feel their pain. She was filled with sadness, but she had no idea what to say.

They clearly were not bad people, so why did they have to end up like this? Were the heavens really messing with people?

Suddenly, she heard Niu Juxia’s voice ring out, “Benevolence is not a bad thing, but you cannot ask for perfection with every single thing in this world. Otherwise, you will harm others and yourself. Your soft-heartedness almost killed your father and had made you suffer. If my cultivation was slightly weaker, I would have been dragged in as well. I hope you can take this as a lesson and avoid following the footsteps of your mother!”

Yu Zijian looked at everyone’s faces in the surroundings. Clearly, they had not heard that. She looked at the sky in confusion. “Then what am I supposed to do?”

“Zijian, oh Zijian. Zi, or violet, is a colour of great respect, while jian, or sword, is the lord of all weapons. With the propitious omen of violet qi from the east, a wise monarch sweeps through the world, kills millions, and unites the entire world under them, leading to eternal peace and becoming a figure of great virtue and benevolence.” Towards the end, Li Qingshan’s voice gradually drifted off. Clearly, he had already travelled away.

Yu Shukuang had originally given her the name of ‘Zijian’ to remember her mother. The jian, or sword, obviously represented the Proud Sword manor. Yu Zijian understood this as well, but she never thought her name actually possessed a meaning like that. As if she had been granted a new name, she felt like she had suddenly been enlightened. She subconsciously touched her sword. This was the first time she had felt this vague connection with this cold weapon.

Her pretty face gradually changed. It lost most of its delicateness, now replaced with determination.

Sometimes, a person’s growth and change only required a moment of inspiration, to let the seed sprout, to let the divine sword out of its sheath.

Right now, Li Qingshan would have never imagined just what seed of fate, what seed of change, some random life philosophy he had cooked up would plant.

If what he said became true, if she wielded a sword and killed millions, only in search of great virtue and benevolence, would he regret it? Would he rather she return to this moment and place in time, return to the same kind-hearted, naive girl?

Or would he laugh aloud and praise, Nicely done!

Li Qingshan returned to his manor. For the next few days, he ate pills and cultivated without skipping a beat. The days suddenly mellowed out, but with Xiao An's company, he did not find them boring. However, he would always feel like he was missing a drinking buddy whenever he drank. He felt rather lonely.

The next day, Yu Shukuang brought Yu Zijian to thank him. He told him that Ma Chaoqun had already returned to Pheasant's Grace mountain, and he had said that he would not be returning.

Li Qingshan did not open the door for them. He only said a single word from inside, "Go!" He managed to put on the act of a great hermit master perfectly. The reason why he did this was because there was nothing he could talk about if he did see them. Was he supposed to say, "Betrowth your daughter to me!" instead?

Ever since that day, the meals each day became even more lavish. However, Li Qingshan would always end up picking up the cup of alcohol before placing it back down. After having drunk with someone else so happily in the past, he suddenly found drinking alone to be difficult.

Suddenly, his face lit up. He arrived in the hole and saw a figure slowly walk out within the darkness. He had a long body and a bald head. If he was not Milliped, who was he supposed to be?

Li Qingshan laughed. "You're finally back."

Milliped looked at Li Qingshan and grinned foolishly.

After seeing him properly, Li Qingshan instead became surprised. "What's wrong with you?" Many parts of Milliped's cloak was damaged, and he had many wounds on him as well.

Milliped sat down before the round table assembled from alcohol jars loudly before fishing out a beautiful, red tuber and shoving it into Li Qingshan's hand.

The tuber was elongated and round as well. It seemed extremely plump and gave off an exotic fragrance that made the entire hole smell nice.

Li Qingshan took out a random assortment of recovery pills from his hundred treasures pouch in a hurry.

Milliped ate them before closing his eyes and directly collapsing on the ground. His snores were thunderous. He actually fell asleep.

During this process, his wounds rapidly closed up. Even his pink cloak slowly repaired itself. He was going through a process of self-repair.

Li Qingshan looked at the tuber in his hand and suddenly smiled helplessly. "Isn't this a sweet potato?" Also known as batata, yam or, for more sophistication, Ipomoea batatas. In short, it was a sweet potato.

However, the spiritual qi it possessed was dozens of times denser than the spiritual ginseng Li Qingshan had obtained in the past. He could tell with a single glance that it was a rare treasure of nature.

For a moment, Xiao An and he just stared at each other.

Li Qingshan was filled with questions. Where on earth did this sweet potato come from? Who had harmed him? However, these questions could only wait until he was awake.

Fortunately, Milliped slept very deeply and woke up very soon. He opened his eyes in under two hours. Looking at his fresh, pink garb, he smiled at Li Qingshan. "It's useful."

Li Qingshan raised the sweet potato in his hand. "Just what is going on?"

"Eat it. It's on me!"

Li Qingshan said, "Why don't you tell me what happened first. I can always eat it later."

Milliped explained by waving his hands; although he spoke without clarity, going all over the place.

However, Li Qingshan still managed to roughly understand what had happened. As it turned out, the sweet potato originated from underground, from Milliped's territory, so it should have been his.

However, in recent years, another Daemon General had been constantly encroaching on and claiming his territory, finally obtaining the plant that this sweet potato grew from. As a result, whenever the sweet potatoes ripened, the two Daemon Generals would always fight.

Milliped was originally stronger, but he was alone. The other Daemon General had many subordinates, so he would be outnumbered every time. Milliped suffered defeat most of the time, but this time, he finally managed to escape with a sweet potato after much difficulty.

Originally, Milliped had been grinning foolishly, celebrating this matter. However, the further he went on, the sadder he became, before suddenly bursting into tears.

Only now did Li Qingshan learn that the underground was not peaceful either. Daemon Generals had their troubles too. He raised his hand and slapped Milliped's forehead. He barked, "Stop crying, you good-for-nothing!"

"You're hitting me too!" Milliped sobbed and cried even harder.

Li Qingshan bellowed, "He has subordinates, but don't you have any?"

Milliped shook his head and sniffled, looking over with his misty eyes.

Li Qingshan grabbed Xiao An by the shoulder. "We'll be your subordinates!" Although he hated troubling his friends, he definitely would not just turn a blind eye to his friend's troubles.

"You..."

Xiao An pointed at the sweet potato in Li Qingshan's hand and smiled. "That looks like you more!"

Li Qingshan stood up. "Let's go and check out what the underground is like!"

Taking all of their grain, food, and alcohol with them, the three of them made their way towards the dark underground. Li Qingshan finally began his path as a daemon, entering a world dominated by daemons.

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Under Milliped's lead, they advanced through the twisting and turning caves, constantly venturing deeper. One hundred feet, one thousand feet, until he no longer had an estimate anymore.

Li Qingshan had never been so deep underground before, but the scenery underground was somewhat different from what he had imagined. It was not desolate and barren. Instead, it was hiding secrets everywhere, hiding treasures that Li Qingshan had never seen before.

### **Chapter 206 - Spiritual Stone Vein**

Splash, splash. Amidst the sounds of gurgling water, the three of them crossed an underground river.

Li Qingshan was surprised, as he could sense that the river water contained faint spiritual qi. Lowering his head and taking a gulp, his daemon qi actually grew by an extremely tiny amount.

Many unknown plants grew on the banks of the river teeming with spiritual qi. The spiritual qi they possessed clearly indicated to Li Qingshan that they were rare spiritual herbs.

Li Qingshan plucked one of them and placed it in his mouth.

Milliped said in a hurry, "You can't eat that! It's disgusting!" But he was too late.

An extremely astringent taste spread through Li Qingshan's mouth. His tongue almost became numb, while the spiritual qi in the spiritual herbs instead came into conflict with the daemon qi within him. Most of it was lost.

Li Qingshan poured some alcohol into his mouth in a hurry to rinse it.

Milliped giggled as he looked at Li Qingshan. The streaks of his tears were still on his face, which only made him seem even more foolish. When he caught the fragrance of the alcohol, his eyes widened, now wishing for it eagerly.

Li Qingshan passed the jar of alcohol to Milliped. He drained the entire jar and let out a belch. He had completely forgotten about all those painful memories now.

Li Qingshan, however, had other thoughts. Most of the spiritual herbs in the world probably could not be directly ingested, but there were no spiritual herbs that were useless.

It was very likely that the inconspicuous spiritual herbs on the banks of the river were crucial materials to some kind of pill. However, daemons lacked the ability to practise alchemy, which was why they were useless to them. However, it was exactly because of this reason that the spiritual herbs still remained and were not all harvested away.

Humans, including powerful Qi Practitioners, would struggle to venture so far underground. Although they had not come across a single daemon along the way, Li Qingshan sensed seven or eight powerful

auras at the very least. As soon as they sensed Milliped's arrival, they all avoided him from afar, maintaining their distance.

If there were any humans, they would probably have become the prey of these vicious predators immediately. Even a Daemon General like Milliped would not show any mercy to other races who had intruded on his territory. A half-hearted strike from him was enough to instantly kill any Qi Practitioner.

Daemons could not venture above ground, but underground was also forbidden to humans.

Li Qingshan wondered as he walked. Suddenly, he raised his head, and he saw a speck of blue light. It was like a blue star in the night sky, quietly giving off light that formed a halo. The light was so weak, yet it seemed beautiful and dazzling when he saw it within the absolute darkness.

Only after approaching it did he discover it to be an azure flower that grew out of a crack in the rocks. Its petals that seemed just like the wings of a butterfly would open and close from time to time as if it were a living creature.

Xiao An gently touched one of them, and the petals immediately closed up. The light it gave off vanished as well.

Li Qingshan had never seen such a wondrous plant before. He could sense the spiritual qi it contained. It was much denser than the spiritual herbs he had seen earlier.

As he ventured deeper, the black cavern gradually opened up, and the number of azure flowers gradually increased. They formed small clusters, standing out in the darkness.

The spiritual qi in the air became denser and denser as well. It had surpassed the Zombie Daoist's dwelling a long time ago.

Milliped said, "We're almost there!"

Li Qingshan could tell even without his reminder. Blue light seeped over from up ahead, illuminating his path. It was like a blue moon was hidden underground, waiting to be discovered.

Suddenly, he saw the end of the long tunnel. Li Qingshan ventured forwards rather eagerly, while the light grew brighter and brighter as well. He arrived at the end and suddenly stopped. His eyes widened, shocked by what he was seeing.

Before him was an open area the size of a soccer pitch. There were thousands of flowers there, shining with blue light and illuminating the entire cavern. It was a dazzling sea of flowers. Many butterflies fluttered about on this sea, like it was all an illusion.

This was a sight that only appeared in deep dreams.

Xiao An's sleeve brushed past a blooming, azure flower. The blue flower seemed to break off from its stem, flying up and turning into a beautiful butterfly of light, leaving behind a beautiful trace in the air.

These butterflies actually came from the spiritual herb. They were the fairies of the herbs.

Xiao An extended her hand to grab at it, but the blue butterfly turned into light and slipped through her fingers. It condensed together again nearby, fluttering into the distance to escape.

Xiao An immediately pursued. She crossed through the sea of flowers that almost reached up to her head, and the cluster of flowers all began to dance, turning into countless blue butterflies that lingered around her.

Li Qingshan called out, "Xiao An!" This was Milliped's home. This was their first time here, so they had to be polite. Perhaps these spiritual herbs were extremely important to Milliped.

Xiao An looked back. The blue light dyed her azure, and combined with her delicate facial features, she seemed just like a fairy of the legends.

Li Qingshan was suddenly left at a loss as to how he should follow up. After looking at Milliped, who smiled foolishly beside him, he sighed gently and smiled too. "You sure live in quite a nice place!"

Not only was it absolutely beautiful, but the spiritual qi here was denser than he had ever seen before. If he meditated and cultivated here, both his daemon qi and true qi would increase rapidly.

Milliped said, "What's nice?" He pointed at the blue butterflies. "You can eat those, but they're disgusting!"

Li Qingshan smacked his head. "Do you have anything in your head apart from eating?" Even if they were delicious, he probably could not bring himself to eat such a beautiful thing!

Milliped rubbed his head and continued to smile foolishly. He did not have the grandeur bearing of a Daemon General at all. Since Li Qingshan agreed to go underground with him, he had never stopped grinning foolishly. He even forgot about the matter of being harassed by the other Daemon Generals.

"Stop smiling. Be serious. It's no wonder others would harass you and that you wouldn't get any sweet potatoes with how you act!" Li Qingshan scolded. Since he had made up his mind about reclaiming Milliped's lost territory, they were no longer just drinking buddies, but comrades-in-arms who would fight alongside each other. He had to rely on Milliped's power later on, so he could not help but scold him after seeing how foolishly he behaved.

Milliped stopped grinning in a hurry and said sternly, "Stay! No sweet potatoes is fine too!" For once, he expressed himself clearly.

Warmth flooded Li Qingshan's chest. He was touched. "How can my friend go without sweet potatoes to eat?" Milliped was not particularly bright, but he treated him with absolute sincerity. He had a high cultivation, but he did not capitalise on it. He was much better than those arrogant, sixth or seventh layer Qi Practitioner mongers.

This was the first friend in this life that he recognised from the bottom of his heart. He would never disappoint his friend.

"Friend?" Milliped pondered the word.

Li Qingshan patted his shoulder and smiled. "Good friends!"

"Good friends." Milliped patted Li Qingshan's shoulder. He seemed to understand something and chuckled loudly.

Friends were better than sweet potatoes.

They crossed through the sea of flowers and alarmed countless blue butterflies. Soon, they arrived at the centre of the open area. There was a huge, stone platform without any vegetation. It was thirty feet long, twenty feet wide, and six or seven feet tall.

Milliped laid down on there and spread out his limbs. His dazed face became relaxed as he exhaled happily. After looking at Li Qingshan and Xiao An, he rolled over to one side, opening up some free space.

Li Qingshan had no idea how to react. "You're inviting us to sleep?" Afterwards, all he heard was snoring. This guy had already fallen asleep!

Li Qingshan and Xiao An looked at each other.

Was this stone bed really that comfortable?

Li Qingshan climbed onto the stone platform with Xiao An in his arms before trying to lie down. However, he soon sat up like he had been struck by lightning. He was stunned. For a moment, he did not feel like he was lying on some tough rock, but a pulsing sea of spiritual qi.

He rubbed the surface of the stone platform with some strength and studied it carefully. Resplendent light seemed to flicker underneath the platform, like the most beautiful gemstones of the world had fused together into one. This did not seem to be the first time Li Qingshan had seen its magnificent colour.

His heart skipped a beat, and he fished out a spiritual stone hesitantly. He compared it to the stone platform and finally confirmed. "T- this is a bed of spiritual stone!"

He probably felt like a regular person who had just found a bed made out of gold. His first reaction was disbelief, but he immediately understood why Milliped chose to make this place his dwelling out of all the places available to him in the vast subterranean world.

The first instinct of all daemons was not to eat or drink, but to search for a place rich in spiritual qi so that they could absorb more of the spiritual qi of the world.

The bed of spiritual stone was large, but it definitely could not last for decades or even centuries while it was being drained away by a Daemon General!

A thought that Li Qingshan struggled to believe in appeared in his head. He arrived beside the bed and pushed aside the soil beside the bed. He had guessed correctly. This was not a bed of spiritual stone, but a spiritual stone vein.

This stone platform was just the tip of the iceberg to the vein.

If a bed of spiritual stone was enough to incur the jealousy of cultivators, then a spiritual stone vein was enough for two cultivation sects to go to war, enough for noble cultivators to die like regular people.

The principle that greed could lead to death applied to the cultivation world as well.

This spiritual stone vein was the natural crystallisation of the spiritual qi of the world, often condensed above spiritual veins.

Most of the spiritual stone veins above ground were under the control of powerful organisations and were guarded by powerful cultivators. However, not only did spiritual stones serve as currency, but they were consumables too. Over thousands of years, many of them had been excavated and used up by humans. Some of them had even been drained dry, directly severing the spiritual vein.

However, deep underground where spiritual veins were most abundant, daemons did not have the habit of using spiritual stones to trade, nor would they use spiritual stones in formations, puppets, and artifacts. Unexcavated, daemons would rotate through these spiritual stone veins, allowing the spiritual veins to constantly absorb spiritual qi from the surroundings and nurture countless daemons and spiritual herbs.

Li Qingshan thought, Truly a fool's luck. Originally, he thought that Milliped was broke, which was why he came to him every day to eat and drink his things. Never did he think that he slept on a bed of spiritual stone every single day. He lived an utterly extravagant life.

Milliped had freeloaded food and drink, so now it was his turn to freeload sleep from him. If he did not take advantage of a holy land for cultivation like this, he would be shamefully wasting it.

Li Qingshan laid back down, closed his eyes, and began to use the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression, allowing his mind to settle like a spirit turtle sinking into the sea abyss.

### **Chapter 207 - The Nine Layers Complete**

Despite being rejected at the entrance, Yu Shukuang was not particularly annoyed. Instead, he admired Li Qingshan even more. He had already learnt from Yu Zijian that the foolish bird that flew in and then flew back out was a sixth layer Qi Practitioner.

He became stunned for a very long time when he heard that. Just what did sixth layer Qi Practitioners represent? It was completely beyond his imaginations. He had heard that with a thought and a sweep of their flying sword, they could behead first-rate masters like him.

Yet, someone like that had failed to even withstand a single strike from Li Qingshan before being tossed down. He had even become too afraid to look back. It filled Yu Shukuang with questions.

Just how did Li Qingshan train with how young he was? Was he the illegitimate son of some great clan? Or was he a secret disciple of some cultivation sect?

Even until now, his fantasies still ran wild, but he was unable to make sense of it. All he knew was how lucky he was to be able to establish ties with someone so important.

"Father, I just feel that great hero Niu seems somewhat familiar, as if I've seen him somewhere." Yu Zijian's face reddened slightly when she said that.

Yu Shukuang was shocked instead. He laughed dryly. "How's that possible? It must've been a false impression!" Li Qingshan had specially reminded him to keep Yu Zijian in the dark about his actual identity. Why would he be bold enough to disobey him now?

Yu Zijian frowned. "Really?"

Yu Shukuang said suddenly, "Let's go see your mother!"



What happened yesterday unearthed many of the matters that he had buried in his heart many years ago. He had wanted to do this ever since then. However, it was very late at night when all the guests finally left. He had managed to slight all the curious, probing gazes from them.

Yu Zijian agreed gently.

Stepping through the snow, the two of them arrived in the east of the city. Under a beautiful hill was a small grave. It was regularly cleaned and swept, and there were new offerings on it right now. All of this was obviously due to Yu Shukuang's arrangements.

But today, someone was kneeling in front of the grave with their chest held high. His magnificent, silken robes had been reduced to a mess by mud and blood, but he did not seem to notice it.

"Ma Chaoqun!" Yu Shukuang frowned. As it turned out, he was still here. How had he gotten hold of this place?

Yu Zijian gripped the hilt of her sword and secretly raised her guard. Even she had failed to notice that she was now very different from before.

Ma Chaoqun turned around stiffly. His face was pale, and his lips were dark. When he saw Yu Zijian, his eyes seem to light up, and he murmured, "Zi'er!" Although he had managed to avoid being hit in his vital spots by the Metal Crescent Slash, it had still heavily injured him. He did not tend to his wounds either. All he wanted to do was to die here.

Yu Zijian said worriedly, "I'm not Zi'er. You'd better tend to your wounds, or you'll really die like this!"

Although she had grown to understand now, change would not happen in a single day. The kindness she possessed would linger.

Ma Chaoqun made out her face clearly and smiled self-deprecatingly like a dead man. His hatred from all these years had vanished in a single day. He no longer had the strength to live.

Yu Shukuang said coldly, "If you want to die, go die somewhere else. Don't die here!"

Ma Chaoqun's eyes coldened, and he pressed down on the hilt of his blade.

Yu Zijian called out, "Father!"

Yu Shukuang pushed Yu Zijian aside and roared, "Just why did she have to grow up with trash like you by her side?!"

"You're looking to die!" Ma Chaoqun drew his blade with a swish. His face was murderous.

Yu Zijian blocked Yu Shukuang and said anxiously, "Don't you understand? My mother doesn't wish for you to be like this. If you die and she finds out in the afterlife, she'll be heartbroken."

These words seemed to possess wondrous magic when Yu Zijian said them. Ma Chaoqun was stunned. "I..."

Yu Zijian persuaded softly, "You have to keep living. Only then will my mother rest in peace."

Mao Chaoqun's eyes gradually drooped down. "G- girl, you're... right." Suddenly, he reversed his grip on his blade and stabbed his own leg before wrenching the blade out. He became even paler.

Yu Zijian covered her mouth to stifle her scream. All she heard was Ma Chaoqun say, "I said many crazy things to you yesterday. Just treat this as my apology. Hehe, someone like me deserves death in the first place to have ever fantasized about her. However, I can't keep dragging her down like this. I'll make do and keep living."

Yu Zijian understood that his extreme personality was unchangeable. She sighed gently. "You might look a little different from others, but what's inside is always more important than your appearance. You will definitely find a woman who loves you from the bottom of her heart."

Ma Chaoqun only sneered. All the women in this world liked handsome men. With his current cultivation, there were plenty of beautiful women by his side, but they only liked his money and power. Aside from her, no one had ever treated him with sincerity.

"Even if you just can't get over it, I've heard that the path of cultivation has many wondrous methods that can heal one's face."

Ma Chaoqun's expression gradually changed. There was some light in his eyes now. Suddenly, he turned around and left. He gazed at the grave deeply, as if he wanted to memorise every single word on it. After that, he limped away into the distance.

Yu Zijian could not help but let out a sigh of relief. She smiled. She knew her persuasion had been effective.

However, she failed to hear Ma Chaoqun murmur to himself, "The path of cultivation has many wondrous methods. There'll definitely be one that can save you!"

The tiny sliver of hope landed in his exhausted, despaired heart that had already run dry; this hope like a seed. However, he was just a member of the very bottom of the cultivation world. Even if there were methods that could revive the dead, they would not be something a mere second layer Qi Practitioner could come in contact with.

However, the extreme obsessions and unbelievable fantasies of humans were the source of their power.

Yu Shukuang watched on as Ma Chaoqun gradually travelled into the distance. He was lonely too. He turned towards the tiny grave. "Zi'er, do you see? He's still alive, so don't feel so bad!"

In his mind, he thought about what the woman would say, Even if senior brother Ma has many flaws, he has always been extremely nice to me. I can't let him down.

He could not help but sigh softly. "Only if I hadn't been saved by you, left to die outside Salt Mountain city."

Yu Zijian seemed to read his thoughts. She said loudly, "Mother must have liked you, father. I believe she didn't marry you because she had no other choice."

Yu Shukuang smiled and rubbed Yu Zijian's head. "Perhaps, but she could never forgive herself." Although she was no longer with them, she had given him the best present he could ever receive. He

made up his mind. He had to get that Innate pill from Li Qingshan, no matter what it took. He was still not old yet. He could still take care of her.

Thinking up to that point, he suddenly said earnestly, "I've always been afraid to tell you this, but most of those stories where I upheld justice and helped the weak were false."

"Ah!" Yu Zijian was utterly shocked. She took a step back and looked at Yu Shukuang in disbelief.

Yu Shukuang coughed gently to cover up his awkwardness. "I just want to tell you that good people don't have it easy in this world. You need to be a little more clever and a little worse of a person."

"Hmph, you liar. I'll never be a baddie."

"Just treat it like your father is begging you to."

"No! You liar!"

Yu Shukuang said, "Even I, your father, would lie to you, so who else wouldn't lie to you?"

Yu Zijian was taken aback, but she suddenly smiled mysteriously. "Father, I don't blame you."

"Hmm?"

Yu Zijian said seriously, "You might have been lying to me, but that was so I could uphold justice as a hero. It's still a good deed!"

This time, Yu Shukuang was the one surprised. He knew his own daughter the best. Since when was she so inflexible?

Yu Zijian smiled complacently. I want to be a good person.

.....

Deep underground, the flowers bloomed, and the butterflies danced in the sea of flowers.

The large, stone platform flickered with a magnificent colour.

Li Qingshan shuddered all over. Heavy, ice-cold spiritual qi directly rushed into the Fengchi acupoint on the back of his head, into his Yin and Yang Heel meridians. The meridians that originally still had some empty space were now filled with pure spiritual qi of the world. It was to the point that his meridians ached slightly.

If it were not for the fact that his body as a daemon was extremely tough, this would have been enough to sever his meridians. He began to use the Innate Method of Practising Qi instinctively, wanting to transform the spiritual qi into true qi, but he failed.

There was just too much spiritual qi, such that he could not even do something as simple as mobilising it. The aching from his meridians became more and more intense, but he was unable to feel it at all.

His daemon core began to revolve automatically. It shone brightly, absorbing the spiritual qi to its heart's content while suppressing the other spiritual qi.

Finally, the Innate Method of Practising Qi began to operate, refining the spiritual qi strand by strand into true qi. The sumeru ring on his finger came into use as well, purifying the true qi further.

The pure true qi pulsed like water. With every breath, it would undergo new growth, increasing at a terrifying rate. This was even faster than when regular Qi Practitioners ingested Qi Gathering pills.

Here was a cultivator who could absorb the spiritual qi of the world whilst still a Qi Practitioner. Moreover, he was on an extremely precious spiritual stone vein and possessed a sumeru ring that only Golden Core cultivators would own. Together, they resulted in extraordinary cultivation speed.

In less than four hours, Li Qingshan trembled once more. He had reached the eighth layer with the Innate Method of Practising Qi. The flow of his true qi immediately sped up slightly, and the quantity had increased drastically too.

However, he continued to cultivate. Time passed by bit by bit.

There was no perception of time in the darkness. When Li Qingshan opened his eyes again and introspected his body, he discovered that the Innate Method of Practising Qi had finally reached completion. It had reached the ninth layer. He had reached the peak of the third layer of Qi Practitioner now. This was the first cultivation method he had managed to complete, which gave him a faint sense of satisfaction. He wanted to share this good news with someone.

When he looked at Milliped beside him, he found that he was still snoring away. He seemed to be at great ease, as if he could set aside everything in his sleep. Though, he never had anything that pestered his mind anyway.

For once, Xiao An was asleep too, curled up on the stone platform. As it seemed, the spiritual stone vein was extremely beneficial to her too.

Li Qingshan did not want to alarm them. He raised his right hand and looked at his huge, dark hand. Every time his strength increased, it would make him more confident, making him want to grasp everything. If he used the Cursive Sword Calligraphy to launch a sneak attack now, he might actually be able to heavily injure a ninth layer Qi Practitioner, with no need to transform. He could deal with many more problems whilst maintaining his human identity now.

## **Chapter 208 - Recruiting Daemon Soldiers**

This was extremely important. As he wandered the world of humans, there would be many times and places where it would be inconvenient for him to transform. The stronger he was as a human, the more opportunities there were openly available to him.

However, if he wanted to continue cultivating, he needed to find a new cultivation method. He felt like as long as he had a method, he could break through to the fourth layer immediately and open up his Yang Linking meridian.

Unfortunately, he was not in possession of any of the five primary methods of practising qi. As a result, he could only stop here for now with the path of practising qi. He would have to resume some other day.

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Within the Proud Sword hall, the disciples stood in two rows to the left and the right. They all stared ahead, but their eyes gave away their eagerness.

The weather was cold now, but a layer of perspiration coated Yu Shukuang's forehead. He lowered his head as he said carefully, "Brother Liu, our Proud Sword manor really doesn't have any disciples that can interest you."

Sitting before Yu Shukuang was Liu Fengrui, who had just visited a few days ago. He waved his hand arrogantly, and Yu Shukuang dismissed everyone.

Liu Fengrui smiled happily. "I haven't come for that. Brother Yu, your luck has borne fruit."

"All I do is stay at home, so what luck would I have?"

Liu Fengrui said, "I've heard about what happened a few days ago. The Pheasant's Grace mountain wanted to throw their weight around and steal your domain. Fortunately, brother Yu had a great master assist you, but this won't work long term. As a result, I specially asked my master for the Proud Sword manor to be included under the protection of our Green Vine mountain. From now onwards, whoever provokes the Proud Sword manor will be provoking the pride and dignity of our Green Vine mountain."

Yu Shukuang was surprised. This had been a long-time wish of his, to receive the protection of a sect. Although there would now be a sect master above him, it would still be better than the times when Qi Practitioners could walk all over him. However, now that he had met Li Qingshan, and a wonderful future was waiting for Yu Zijian, he was no longer particularly interested in this.

However, he responded readily. He straightened himself up before bowing deeply with clasped hands. "Thank you for the good word, brother Liu!"

Liu Fengrui was very satisfied with Yu Shukuang's behaviour. The Pheasant's Grace mountain had actually extended their hands into the territory of the Green Vine mountain, so the Green Vine mountain obviously had to make an appropriate response. He pursed his lips. "That's only part of it. Brother Yu will probably be even happier when you hear the other part."

"May I ask what it is?"

"I've heard that your dear daughter has already broken through to the innate realm. Master has made a special exception for her. He's willing to accept her into the Green Vine mountain. I've come this time to take her with me back to the mountain." Liu Fengrui was pleased with himself. He had come up with this plan to kill two birds with one stone. It would both consolidate the Green Vine mountain's presence among regular people and give them a disciple. When Yu Shukuang heard his words, he would probably drop to his knees in joy.

Yu Shukuang said, "About that... My daughter has already agreed to a good friend of hers from the Hua family. They're joining the Academy of the Hundred Schools next year to study together..."

Before he could finish talking, Liu Fengrui's face sank. He had never thought that not only would Yu Shukuang not thank him for this, but he would even want to turn it down. "Oh, are you saying that our Green Vine mountain is not as great as the Academy of the Hundred Schools? And you want to mention the Hua family to frighten me?"

“Why would I ever dare to do that!”

“Then why don’t you let me see your daughter?”

With no other choice, he could only oblige. Yu Shukuang sent people to summon Yu Zijian over. As soon as Yu Zijian heard the proposition, she shook her head. “That won’t work. I’ve already promised Chenglu!”

Liu Fengrui saw Yu Zijian, and his eyes lit up slightly, but his face remained sunken. “My master never decides on something so easily, but since he has said so, he’ll never take it back! Consider it!”

“I said I don’t want to!” Yu Zijian was vexed. She disliked Liu Fengrui the moment she saw him from the way he acted. He seemed to be deliberately doing this.

Liu Fengrui’s eyes coldened. A mere first layer Qi Practitioner actually wanted to disobey him publicly. She was out of her mind.

Yu Shukuang pulled Yu Zijian to the back of the hall as he smiled to Liu Fengrui apologetically. “Please just wait a moment.” He needed Li Qingshan to decide for him here.

Liu Fengrui seemed to read his mind. As if he was afraid that his threats were not enough, he added, “The Pheasant’s Grace mountain has already gathered their people to settle the debt with that Niu Juxia or whoever is supporting you from behind, but they were stopped by us. Does some unknown independent cultivator who defeated a single disciple from the Pheasant’s Grace mountain really think that he can contend with an entire sect?”

Yu Shukuang leapt in fright inside. He pulled Yu Zijian to the back of the hall and immediately ordered people to go to Li Qingshan’s manor. Yu Zijian also looked forward to the arrival of his huge figure. She imagined him grabbing that Liu person and throwing him outside. However, the news they received in the end was that Li Qingshan had disappeared without a trace.

Yu Shukuang immediately collapsed in his armed chair and lamented, “What are we supposed to do?”

Yu Zijian felt the pain of her own powerlessness once more. She tightened her grasp around her sword. “Father, I’ll just agree to him!”

Yu Shukuang said, “How can you do that?” If Yu Zijian went to the Academy of the Hundred Thoughts, she would be under the care of Hua Chenglu at the very least. The Academy of the Hundred Thoughts was a place with rules too. Looking at how Liu Fengrui behaved in comparison, the disciples of the Green Vine mountain probably were not as friendly to one another.

Yu Zijian instead comforted Yu Shukuang, “Don’t worry. The Green Vine mountain might not necessarily pale in comparison to the Academy of the Hundred Schools.” Suddenly, she stifled her voice. “That’s all we can do right now. I’ll pen a letter to Chenglu. She might be able to help me.”

Yu Shukuang could not help but sigh. My daughter really has grown up. He said helplessly, “That’s all we can do then!”

In the hall, Liu Fengrui smiled complacently. Once what had to be done was done, it would not be easy even if the Hua family wanted to interfere with matters of the sect. It was good that this girl would submit obediently. Otherwise, there would be plenty of hardships awaiting her!

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“The great king has sent me to patrol the mountain!” Li Qingshan’s loud, clear singing echoed through the quiet caverns.

“The great king has sent me to patrol the mountains!” Xiao An sat on Li Qingshan’s neck and also sang along.

“After patrolling the south mountains comes the north!” Li Qingshan turned his head from side to side and sang at the top of the voice.

“After patrolling the south mountains comes the north!” Xiao An also turned her head from side to side, singing at the top of her voice.

“It’s wrong, it’s wrong!” Li Qingshan suddenly shook his head, such that even Xiao An began to move with him.

“What’s wrong?” Xiao An firmly wrapped around his neck with her legs and held onto Li Qingshan’s ears to maintain her balance.

Li Qingshan said, “It should be patrolling the caves.”

Xiao An thought about it. “Fair enough!”

It had already been half a month since Li Qingshan had arrived underground. He did not make Milliped declare war on the other Daemon General recklessly and abruptly. Instead, he carefully familiarised himself with the situation underground.

He discovered that Milliped’s territory was not encroached by that Daemon General alone. It was being taken over by other Daemon Generals nearby too. They all had a large number of subordinates under their command, yet Milliped was alone, and he was not particularly clever either. It made no sense if he did not suffer abuse.

Li Qingshan gained a better understanding of the importance of territories as well. The underground world was basically a treasure trove. He had found a spiritual vein that was way better than the Zombie Daoist’s dwelling, drank from a spiritual spring that could rapidly recover his true qi, and discovered various strange spiritual herbs here. This treasure trove was spread throughout the criss-crossing caverns. Losing a piece of territory was equivalent to losing some resources.

However, the most important resource was the various daemons. Logically speaking, all of the daemonic beasts and daemons in Milliped’s territory were supposed to obey him in exchange for him not eating them.

However, with Milliped’s non-existence leadership and intelligence, even if he passed an order, these daemons would agree to it on the surface but secretly ignore him. They never offered him any support. As internal cohesion had to be achieved before addressing external threats, Li Qingshan was visiting these daemons one by one right now.

How could a Daemon General not possess daemon soldiers under his command? Li Qingshan wanted to be the leader of these daemon soldiers.

## Chapter 209 - The Blackwater Salamander

Li Qingshan took out the underground mental map he had obtained from the Zombie Daoist. Unfurling it and taking a look, he discovered that they were completely beyond the range of the map.

When he poured his true qi into the mental map, a speck of light lit up, but there was no image. It was just a blurry path of light. Who knows what was interfering with it.

Xiao An said softly, "It should be due to the underground magnetic field!"

Li Qingshan asked, "How do you know that?"

Xiao An hesitated. "I think I read it somewhere, but I don't remember where."

Li Qingshan smiled. "It must be your past memories!" Otherwise, with how good her memory was, how could she have forgotten about some book?

Xiao An immediately sank into her thoughts. For once, she appeared to be worried. Perhaps it was due to Milliped's great bed of spiritual stone or the fragrance from the blue butterfly flowers, but the memories in the depths of her mind had returned bit by bit, giving her illusionary dreams.

Li Qingshan sank into his thoughts too. He thought of the same thing as her. The unknown hometown in the distant south might suddenly leap into her head at a certain time and take her away.

He lifted her from his neck and held her like a baby. He gently stroked her soft, smooth hair and kissed the red mole on her forehead. The smell of sandalwood lingered on his lips.

"Having your memories return is never bad! Tell me more about the underground magnetic field! I've never heard Milliped mention it!"

Xiao An nodded obediently. She wrapped her arms around his neck. "The underground magnetic field can interfere with the usage of techniques and spiritual artifacts. The further underground you venture, the greater the interference."

Li Qingshan casually used a simple technique. As expected, it was slightly more difficult to use compared to above ground.

This truly was the turf of daemons. Although daemons also used abilities similar to techniques, they basically relied on their powerful daemon qi to deliver it forcefully. They did not have any delicate or detailed processes that they needed to go through. As a result, they were basically unaffected.

"How clever!"

Xiao An smiled slightly. "There's also atmospheric winds in the sky, which become stronger the higher up you go. It can disperse true qi and spiritual qi. It can also blow away the souls of people."

"Really? That's so impressive!"

"And, there's cloud-incinerating skyfires..."

Li Qingshan advanced as he listened closely with a smile. She rarely spoke so much. They forgot about the worries hidden in their hearts and did their best to enjoy the time right now, when they were



together. Afterwards, they hoped that a never-ending banquet actually existed in the world and would be prepared for them.

.....

In the murky depths below the earth, the various things that humans were capable of were useless. All that remained were their instincts as creatures, which were their sense of smell, sense of hearing, sense of direction, and memory.

In these underground caverns thousands of times more complicated than any maze, no one was certain where the tunnel ahead of them led to. When you single-mindedly wanted to travel up, to return to the surface, the cavern might just suddenly turn downward or end, destroying all of your plans and forcing you to find a new path.

Coupled with the ever present threat of daemons hidden in the darkness, even powerful ninth or tenth layer Qi Practitioners could grow anxious and exhausted, maybe even becoming lost in the depths underground. The dangers and terrors of this place were no longer a matter of strength alone.

However, Li Qingshan strolled through this place like it was his own garden. His sharp senses allowed him to find the way easily. As long as he released his powerful daemon qi, the other daemons would maintain their distance, and they would not attack blindly. As for the greatest, most terrifying daemon around here, the great king Milliped, he was his powerful backer.

However, he did not bring Milliped with him this time to restrain the other powerful daemons.

The path of daemons respected the strong. They did not have a rigid order like humans. The principle of strutting around with borrowed plumes was not as useful in the world of daemons as in the world of humans. If he was unable to demonstrate sufficient strength, how was he supposed to make these unruly daemons submit to him, the leader of the daemon soldiers?

Aside from that, he had a further objective in mind.

Li Qingshan followed an underground river that possessed the faint presence of spiritual qi. As the river gradually led deeper underground, he entered the water and went with the flow, swimming away.

An hour later, the cavern suddenly opened up. He entered an extremely spacious region of water. Casting out his gaze, he actually failed to see the boundary. The water surface no longer existed. There were only ripples in the tranquil, dark water, like black jade hidden underground.

Regular people would obviously think of endless earth when the underground was mentioned, but no one would have imagined that the underground actually hid such an abundant source of water.

Li Qingshan thought, The one that Milliped spoke of should be here.

The spiritual qi in the black water was extremely dense. Although it was not as great as the place where resided Milliped, it was still quite a rare holy land for cultivation.

According to Li Qingshan's observations from the past few days, there was a spiritual vein underground that stretched off in this direction. It was very likely for crystalline spiritual stones to exist below the mud and sand in the depths of the black water.

If he wanted to look for hidden daemons, he obviously would not charge off blindly. Instead, he followed what Milliped had told him and the direction of the spiritual vein. All the powerful daemons would claim a place that was rich in spiritual qi.

Li Qingshan made Xiao An wait to one side before letting out a deep growl and completely transforming. He developed the claws and tail of a tiger and the hooves and horns of an ox. The scarlet hair on his head floated up like a ball of scorching fire, and his height had already reached thirty-three feet.

For the past few days, he had stopped practising qi, directing his focus to the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression instead. He continued to chow down on his various pills, and he also borrowed Milliped's bed to get some good sleep. His daemon qi increased extremely swiftly. Gradually, he would be able to suppress the ox demon completely. By then, returning to his original form would not be a problem anymore.

Afterwards, he immediately busied himself with the cultivation of the second layer of the tiger demon.

He could not achieve success with cultivating the tiger demon by blindly eating pills and meditating away. He required intense battles to unlock his potential and overcome bottlenecks.

As a result, he released his daemon qi fearlessly and let out a provoking roar.

A pair of eyes, the size of lanterns, suddenly lit up deep within the mud at the bottom. They shone viciously. With a swing of a huge tail, it shook away the black mud, and the colossal figure darted to several dozen meters away with great agility. It directly swam in Li Qingshan's direction.

Li Qingshan could sense a daemon qi that was even stronger than his own in the distance. Just as Milliped had told him, this guy was very powerful, so powerful that even Milliped himself was reluctant to enter the water and make trouble for it.

However, that was because Milliped skewed toward fire of the five elements, while Li Qingshan skewed towards water. The deep water was also his home turf.

With his spirit turtle's daemon core, he could move in water as well as he could move on land. He dove down to the bottom. His hooves sank into the mud and landed on the rock beneath as he stared ahead calmly.

The daemon qi drew closer and closer. He could already make out a colossal, ferocious figure and a pair of eye-catching pupils. The other daemon must be seeing the same sight.

Before the daemon had drawn near, water had already flooded over mightily. Of course, this was not just due to the flow it had kicked up with its body. There was also the factor of daemon qi.

Li Qingshan remained unfazed. He did not even use the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell to protect himself.

The water surged and rumbled over like the charge of an army, smashing against Li Qingshan viciously. It produced thunderous booms underwater.

His fire-like scarlet hair suddenly swept backwards, but Li Qingshan stood strong in the face of the flow, without moving at all. Even if there was another dozen tonnes of pressure on him, it would not even be able to make him bat an eye.

The surging water produced countless, tiny white streams near various parts of his body. A small, coloured fish could not help but be taken away by the flow. It came into contact with a torrent and was immediately ripped to pieces.

Even something as gentle as water could become a terrifying weapon once it possessed sufficient speed and strength.

However, all of this was just to probe the opponent and demonstrate its might!

Although it saw that its probe was useless, the daemon in the black water did not rush over in a hurry. Instead, it watched on from afar.

“My turn!” Scarlet light flashed through Li Qingshan’s eyes, and he spread his arms, reaching through the water like he was grabbing onto something extremely heavy.

His daemon core revolved as daemon qi seeped out as quickly as possible. Suddenly, he pushed forward forcefully, and all the water within a range of several dozen meters from Li Qingshan suddenly emptied out. Li Qingshan seemed to have lifted up a great ball of water, which he tossed at the daemon.

The daemon swung its tail and shattered the ball. As if several hundred tonnes of dynamite had exploded in the bottom of the lake, the entire lake churned.

However, using water to attack an aquatic daemon would obviously be ineffective. This was akin to the roars beasts would emit when they encountered each other in the wilderness; it was just to demonstrate their power.

As if it had accepted Li Qingshan as an equal opponent, the daemon in the black water swam over. This time, it did not make a single ripple in the water. The black water would automatically part for it no matter where it swam to. It glided through the water quietly like it was in outer space.

Li Qingshan finally saw the daemon’s true appearance. It was a salamander, but it had reached a terrifying fifty or sixty feet in length. Its slick, slippery skin was pitch-black, and it quietly moved through the water like a ghost in the dark. It possessed an indescribable grace. It was the ruler of this lake.

This was the first subordinate that Li Qingshan wanted to recruit, the blackwater salamander.

Two colossal daemon qi collided constantly in the water. The blackwater salamander used the contact between the daemon qi to convey its thoughts.

“Who are you? Why have you intruded on my territory?”

Of course, not all daemons could speak the human tongue. However, every single daemon would grasp a method of communication through the many years it spent inhaling and exhaling spiritual qi.

It used the pulses of daemon qi to replace its vigorous roars. Although it was nowhere near as refined or ingenious as the human tongue, it was much simpler and more straightforward.

Li Qingshan was a daemon, so after learning from Milliped a little, he grasped the method of communication that belonged to daemons. He could obviously understand what the blackwater salamander was saying. Li Qingshan’s heart eased up slightly. As expected, stronger daemons possessed

a corresponding amount of intelligence. This blackwater salamander seemed to be even slighter smarter than Milliped.

He replied through the same method, using daemon qi, "I've come under the orders of great king Milliped to recruit you. I am the leader of the daemon soldiers. From today onwards, you will listen to my command!"

### **Chapter 210 - The First Daemon Soldier**

The blackwater salamander circled through the water nimbly and mocked, "Milliped? Are you talking about that idiot? Only an idiot would follow his commands. You're an idiot. I'm not."

Li Qingshan raised his claw. "What if I say that you must submit?"

"If you can catch me, I'll listen to you!"

"Alright!" Li Qingshan actually roared that out, and the Tiger Demon's Killing Roar followed. It blasted the water apart as it shot towards the blackwater salamander.

The blackwater salamander did not try to dodge. He just let the Tiger Demon's Killing Blow land on his body, which ended up being deflected to the bottom of the lake, creating a great hole. However, it was completely unscathed. It mocked again with daemon qi, "Doesn't even scratch my itch!"

Li Qingshan was slightly surprised. He had seen with great clarity that a layer of light had flowed over its body earlier. Its innate ability seemed to be able to deflect attacks. It was no wonder it wanted Li Qingshan to try and catch it.

The blackwater salamander twisted its body and unleashed a water arrow, which produced a strange, sharp whistle. The arrow arrived before Li Qingshan in the blink of an eye. It did not create the same disturbance as earlier, but it was truly a killing strike. It could easily pierce rock and metal.

Li Qingshan did not dodge either. The water arrow arrived before him, but a barrier of blue light stopped it. It was the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell.

"Doesn't scratch an itch either!" He relaxed slightly. Its attacks were powerful, but they were all water-elemented, so they would struggle to get through his Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell that happened to be of the same element.

However, if four or five ninth layer Qi Practitioners like the West Gate Granny were battling the blackwater salamander in deep water instead, only death would await them. While the blackwater salamander was not a Daemon General, it was very difficult to deal with once it possessed a geographical advantage.

The blackwater salamander was surprised by how its attack was useless. It sucked in deeply and produced thousands of water arrows, creating a series of straight, white tracks within the black water.

Like the rain of a thunderstorm peppering a window, the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell shook slightly as if it could shatter at any moment. However, it actually managed to remain firmly intact in the face of the wave of water arrows. There was not even a crack.

However, Li Qingshan felt his daemon qi rapidly deplete. He knew that while it was difficult to destroy the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell, it was costly to maintain it as well. If this continued, there would be no benefit at all. He kicked off the bottom of the lake and shot off.

The blackwater salamander saw Li Qingshan charge over and prepared itself. It opened its huge mouth and revealed its shiny, white teeth, waiting for Li Qingshan to come to it as it bit down.

Li Qingshan butted his head. He seemed to be delivering his head into the opponent's mouth, but his two sharp ox horns prevented the blackwater salamander from biting down. It twisted its head and bit Li Qingshan's shoulder.

The two colossal creatures immediately became entangled with each other. Black water surged as daemon qi filled the entire place.

Li Qingshan felt his shoulder ache. The sharp teeth of the blackwater salamander had already pierced his hide, but he did not mind it. He wrapped his hands around the blackwater salamander and pulled it towards the bottom of the lake.

Although he was also technically an aquatic daemon, he was accustomed to his lifestyle on land, so he was not as agile as the blackwater salamander in water. However, as long as his feet were planted on the ground, he would be able to draw strength from the ground. He would be able to use his tremendous strength to overwhelm the blackwater salamander.

Originally, the blackwater salamander wanted to bite off a part of Li Qingshan's shoulder, but it felt like it had bit into the tough hide of an ox. It tried to tear away with its teeth, but Li Qingshan had grabbed onto it firmly now, such that it was unable to break free. It became even more surprised now. The opponent's daemon qi was nowhere near as great as its, so why was the opponent's strength greater?

The lake was deep, but it was not the sea. Li Qingshan was tall enough to be able to wade through most of the water. Immediately, his pair of hooves landed on the bottom of the lake again, and he let out a great roar, throwing the blackwater salamander against the bottom. He thought he had succeeded. I've won!

The blackwater salamander's pitch-black skin flashed with a slick light. Li Qingshan only felt it sliding out of his grasp. The blackwater salamander slid away like a ghost. Even his barb-like claws were unable to keep it trapped.

"You can't catch me!" The blackwater salamander mocked as it vanished from the range of Li Qingshan's vision with lightning speed.

Li Qingshan thought, This guy's innate ability is so difficult to deal with. No wonder he doesn't take a Daemon General like Milliped seriously. Although its attacks aren't exactly powerful, fighting it in water is extremely difficult.

However, this was his first battle, so how could he give up? He shot off in pursuit of the daemon qi.

The daemon qi suddenly vanished, and the ripples in the surroundings grew more and more violent. White waves swept through the black water. This place underground descended into a world of black and white.

Without any prior signs, without any ripples in the water that he could sense, a black shadow suddenly appeared behind Li Qingshan, colliding against his waist viciously.

Li Qingshan's waist ached, and he lost his balance. All he managed to see from the corner of his eye was the blackwater salamander disappearing into the water again. Before he could even stabilise himself, the blackwater salamander had changed its direction and collided with him again.

The blackwater salamander produced countless, pitch-black traces in the water, which criss-crossed Li Qingshan.

In a single moment, even Li Qingshan himself had no idea how many times he had been hit. The world spun around him in a dizzying manner, like he was the blackwater salamander's toy.

His body was in pain. He only remained alive because of his tough body. The strongest daemons truly were difficult to deal with! However, he did not become dejected. Instead, his battle spirit was ignited.

He did not use the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell, as his daemon qi was not as great as the blackwater salamander's. If he continued to use the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell, his daemon qi would probably run out very soon, so he could only temporarily retreat for now.

But how was he supposed to retreat? He did not get Xiao An to help him, not because he wanted Xiao An to hide and launch a sneak attack, but because he treated this as a test for himself.

This was not a battle to the death where he needed to fight tooth-and-nail. Instead, he was trying to make a daemon submit to him as a soldier. As a result, not only did he have to win this battle, but he also had to achieve an overwhelming victory.

Their difference in strength was not particularly big. Apart from being slightly weaker in terms of daemon qi, his strength and abilities actually surpassed the salamander. He must be doing something wrong seeing how he failed to gain the upper hand!

Li Qingshan closed his eyes, and he was slammed viciously a few more times by the blackwater salamander. Despite the raging waves, there was peace at the bottom of his heart.

A droplet of water seemed to land at the bottom of his heart and produce a ripple. Li Qingshan suddenly understood. It was water!

Although he was an aquatic daemon, he was not accustomed to battle in water. The way he controlled water was extremely clumsy as well. He had failed to make proper use of the environment, allowing the blackwater salamander to claim the geographic advantage all for itself!

He floated freely in the water, no longer trying to control his body anymore. He no longer forced himself to remain at the bottom. He was like a creature that lived in the water, treating the water like his home.

His daemon qi spread out into the surroundings and established a connection with the surrounding water. It was no longer as clumsy as when he tried to pick up that great ball of water and throw it at his opponent. Instead, it was like sonar, surveilling the surrounding waters with great sensitivity.

The blackwater salamander rushed over once again like a black, ghostly bolt of lightning. Although it did not kick up any ripples, it did come into contact with the water that Li Qingshan controlled.

“Behind!” Li Qingshan suddenly turned around, but he was not as agile as the blackwater salamander. At such a close distance, even if he managed to sense it, he was unable to dodge.

The blackwater salamander was complacent. It was ready to slam into Li Qingshan again and throw him into confusion, yet Li Qingshan’s huge figure moved to the left without any prior signs at all.

Li Qingshan controlled the water to push himself aside. He dodged the blackwater salamander’s attack for the first time.

Now, he finally felt like he resembled an aquatic daemon slightly.

When he sensed the blackwater salamander’s direction, he clenched a fist and threw it at the salamander’s head viciously the moment it brushed past him.

With a bang, a sound wave spread through the entire body of water.

Li Qingshan’s long-prepared strike of fury was no joke. It could even crush rock and steel. He just happened to be wondering whether he had been too heavy-handed.

“Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!” The blackwater salamander clutched its head with its two front limbs and swam far away with a swing of its tail. In that instant, it had used its ability that could deflect attacks again, deflecting most of the force. That was why it had not entered a daze after suffering the attack.

Li Qingshan bobbed up and down in the water as he looked at the blackwater salamander. His daemon qi pulsed. “Why don’t you admit defeat?”

“Have you caught me?” The blackwater salamander was infuriated. It actually just swam away. “Even if I can’t beat you, don’t even think about capturing me and making me listen to your command!”

Li Qingshan raised his eyebrows. He adjusted his posture and leaned forwards in a freestyle position. His limbs swept backwards, and then he controlled the water to rush at the blackwater salamander.

How could the blackwater salamander lose to Li Qingshan when it came to swimming? With a swing of its tail, it darted over ten meters to the side. No matter what swimming style Li Qingshan used, he would never be able to match its natural agility.

Just when it wanted to mock Li Qingshan, it suddenly felt something tighten around its tail. Li Qingshan had grabbed its tail, but the tail was the slipperiest part of its body. With a flash, it immediately swam into the distance, and it no longer stopped this time round.

Two colossal creatures dwelled within this expansive, underground lake, one chasing desperately and one fleeing madly.

Even though the blackwater salamander had nowhere to hide, Li Qingshan was clearly too slow. He could not even touch its tail.

After three whole days and nights, they slowed down to the speed of regular fish. Both of them were utterly exhausted, but they both refused to admit defeat.

Li Qingshan felt like he had become an actual fish. He had gained a completely new understanding of how to swim and how to control the water flow. Battles in water were no longer a weakness to him anymore.

Even though he was exhausted, he managed to tail behind the blackwater salamander the entire time with his ox-like endurance, giving it no time to rest.

The blackwater salamander was utterly infuriated and called Li Qingshan all sorts of things. Suddenly, the space before it lit up, and a ball of fire burned quietly in the water. Within the fire was a tiny skeleton.

Just like daemons, she used her aura to communicate. "We might as well kill it and eat its daemon core." Two large skulls resided beside her, opening and closing their mouths like they were waiting for a meal.

"I admit defeat, I admit defeat! Don't eat me! Or I'll blow up my daemon core!" The blackwater salamander's instincts warned it of danger. It knew that this was the end of the rope now. It felt dejected inside, but it also admired Li Qingshan's endurance a little.

"I'll submit to you as the leader. What kind of thing are you supposed to be?"