

Chapter 211 - Unifying the Territory

The blackwater salamander had been curious about what kind of daemon Li Qingshan was supposed to be a long time ago.

Li Qingshan said, "You're a thing!" He punched down with his fist. Although the blackwater salamander was exhausted, it was not stupid. It dodged quickly.

Li Qingshan shot a glare at him. "How dare you dodge when the leader is hitting you? Do you still want to live or not?"

Xiao An's two skulls pressed over threateningly. With no other choice, the blackwater salamander made his way back over and let Li Qingshan hit him.

Li Qingshan let out a sigh of relief and sat down on the spot. He looked at the first daemon soldier under his command in satisfaction. He had never thought he would end up becoming a leader among daemons before he even managed to become a Black Wolf commander. Moreover, he was one that led some of the strongest daemons out there.

According to the standard of human Qi Practitioners, the blackwater salamander was around the ninth or tenth layer. It was quite close to Daemon General now.

If Li Qingshan's strength as a daemon was measured using the standard of Qi Practitioners, it would be rather impressive if he managed to reach the seventh or eighth layer. He was still very far away from Daemon General. There was nothing he could do about it. Cultivating as a daemon took up tremendous amounts of time in the first place. Those pills had already been of great help to him to be able to reach his current strength so quickly.

His three powerful abilities were the only reason for his victory.

Now that there was no danger, the blackwater salamander settled down to rest as well. It glanced at Xiao An carefully before asking, "Leader, Milliped..."

Li Qingshan corrected, "Call him great king."

The blackwater salamander continued, "Why has great king Milliped sent you to beat me up?"

Li Qingshan said, "It's not just you. I'll be beating up all the daemons underground. I'll spare them if they yield, but if they don't, I'll beat them all to death."

Although the blackwater salamander was not the strongest daemon in this region, it was the daemon that was the most difficult to handle. Even Milliped was reluctant to venture into its waters. Even if he did, subduing him would still be very difficult. That was why Li Qingshan decided on him as his first target.

The blackwater salamander looked at Xiao An. "Leader, who's this?"

Li Qingshan said, "That's the vice leader!"

The flames in Xiao An's eye sockets surged. She had actually become the vice leader.

Li Qingshan asked, "Do you know where great king Milliped's dwelling is?"

"I do, I do!" Probably all the daemons in this region that had some intelligence knew where it was.

Li Qingshan said, "Alright. In three months' time, I'm going to be holding a meeting there. If you don't show up, there's no point for you to remain in this lake of black water anymore."

He was not satisfied with just beating up these daemons and making them submit to him. His primary objective was still to turn them into a combat force that he could control. As a result, he came up with a daemon's gathering with Milliped, where he would summon all the daemons who had condensed daemon cores.

The blackwater salamander could only agree helplessly.

Li Qingshan thought of something. He took out an uneaten roasted chicken from his hundred treasures pouch and tossed it to the blackwater salamander.

The blackwater salamander ate it in a single gulp. The various spices, and the taste of salt in particular, permeated its mouth. It swam around Li Qingshan excitedly and stared right at him. "Leader, is there anymore?"

Li Qingshan thought, Just as I had expected. Although the underground was like a great treasure trove, possessing spiritual veins and various spiritual herbs, it could never match the abundance of food available on the surface. Even a Daemon General like Milliped could not eat whatever he wanted, let alone regular daemons.

He only needed to absorb the spiritual qi of the world within the black water, and he would not starve to death even if he went a decade without food. However, the instincts of creatures would never vanish. The carrot and the stick had been proven to be highly effective throughout history. Now that Li Qingshan had used it properly, it resulted in exactly what he had expected.

"Hmph, if you go when the time comes, there'll be as much as you want!"

"I'll definitely go! I'll definitely go!" The blackwater salamander immediately became extremely eager. If he could eat such good food every single day, there would be nothing wrong with being a daemon soldier.

Li Qingshan left the region with Xiao An. He ate a Hundred Grasses pill and recovered most of his daemon qi before asking Xiao An curiously, "Why did you turn back?"

Xiao An explained. As it turned out, she did it to hide her identity. There would be a time when they would return to the surface. If she remained in human form, she would be remembered by far too many creatures. It might even lead to the exposure of Li Qingshan's identity in the future. And, in this subterranean world, a non-humanoid form was instead more convenient than a humanoid form when it came to moving about.

Li Qingshan admired Xiao An's cautiousness. He could not be certain that the world of humans and the world of daemons never intersected. There would never be anything wrong with being a little more careful. They could communicate using their auras anyway. Xiao An's aura consisted of the flames that surged from her body.

“Let’s go to the next place.”

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Outside Salt Mountain city, in the quiet garden, within the hole.

Li Qingshan looked at the daylight pouring in from above and felt dazzled. He turned around and said to Milliped, “I’ll go prepare some food and drinks for them. You can go back first!”

Milliped returned reluctantly. Li Qingshan returned to the surface with Xiao An, but they found the surroundings to be bare.

Snow covered the ground and mountains in the distance. Clearly, there had been quite a lot of snowfall during the time that they were gone.

Li Qingshan was happy. He smiled at Xiao An, who smiled back.

His punitive expedition against the daemons had been much more successful than Li Qingshan had imagined before setting out. Apart from the troublesome blackwater salamander, there were a few other powerful daemons.

One of them was a boulder viper over thirty meters in length. It was even stronger than the blackwater salamander. Its body was basically made out of rock, impermeable to regular weapons, and it hid in the soil without giving off any aura at all. Li Qingshan was almost injured by its sudden sneak attack.

However, when Li Qingshan stated his intentions, the boulder viper immediately expressed its willingness to follow Milliped’s command. It would be taking part in the gathering of daemons.

The blackwater salamander looked down on Milliped due to the geographic advantage it possessed. However, even the boulder viper was not bold enough to openly confront a Daemon General.

As a result, Li Qingshan managed to recruit his second powerful daemon soldier without even whipping out the carrot and the stick. As long as the king possessed absolute strength, expeditions would always become much easier for the general.

There were a few other battles, but basically all of them were more threatening than dangerous. Of course, that was because Li Qingshan possessed sufficient strength, or who knows how many times he would have died already.

Although the strongest daemons featured Milliped’s strength, they had to probe out Li Qingshan’s strength if he was to be their leader. The boulder python had yielded so quickly because its ambush attack on Li Qingshan had failed, and a punch from Li Qingshan had cracked the rocks on its body.

Even though Li Qingshan was not confident he could achieve victory half of the time if they really did become embroiled in a battle to the death, no daemon was willing to battle other daemons of the same strength to death without a proper reason.

The world believed humans were intelligent and rational, while daemons were bloodthirsty and crazy.

That was not true. Even when wild beasts in the wilderness fought for a mate or territory, they would not battle their opponents to the death. The loser might not even suffer particularly severe injuries. Most of the time, victory would be determined through roars and demonstrations of strength.

However, humans would often gamble their lives without any regard for the sake of women and power. Even when they knew there was no chance, they would still want to try it. They would end up defeated and dead, never able to learn from their mistakes. Perhaps it would just be a small scuffle, going from a small insult to fighting. Finally, they would end up with a battle to the death over the vague concept of pride.

The only thing that existed within wild beasts was an instinct for survival. They did not have complicated emotions like humans; this aspect would not change even after becoming a daemon.

As a result, Li Qingshan had faced a group of surprisingly rational opponents.

If even powerful daemons would yield, it went without saying for the weaker ones. They basically bowed their heads the moment Li Qingshan unleashed his daemon qi; it was so simple that even Li Qingshan was left in disbelief. It only took him a single month to do all of this, far quicker than he had anticipated.

Milliped was just too slow-witted, so he could be easily ignored. He had no awareness of recruiting subordinates either, which was why he was in his current situation. Li Qingshan made up for Milliped's lack of intelligence, immediately taking over control of his territory for him.

Now, Li Qingshan had basically gained a few dozen daemon soldiers under his command, and his identity as the leader of the daemon soldiers had come true. All he had to do was wait for the gathering of daemons, where he would establish his control completely. He would be able to command these daemon soldiers around, and he would have a Daemon General as a friend.

If the Sect of Clouds and Rain still wanted to touch him, they would be seeking their own doom. As long as there were no masters who had undergone tribulations, he could deal with them no matter how many people they sent. Even if the sect master came, bold enough to venture underground, he would show the sect master the power of a carapaced Daemon General.

Thinking about the perfect future awaiting him, Li Qingshan put on the large bamboo hat and the bamboo basket again, letting Xiao An hide in there.

Although he could return to normal, he purposefully maintained his huge figure so that it would be convenient for him to move around within human society. For the sake of the gathering's success, he needed a banquet. He would have to rely on Yu Shukuang for this.

In the Proud Sword manor, Yu Shukuang grabbed Li Qingshan's hands excitedly. "You've finally returned?"

Li Qingshan saw how panicked Yu Shukuang had become. He asked in a hurry, "What happened?"

Yu Shukuang told him the whole story. Li Qingshan replied furiously, "He has gone too far. Have you contacted Hua Chenglu?"

Yu Shukuang said bitterly, "I've already sent the letter, but there has been no reply."

Li Qingshan understood that even if Hua Chenglu did something, she would not go as far as to reply to the letter and explain everything. However, this was probably much more complicated than it seemed. Even if Hua Chenglu wanted to act, the Hua family might not necessarily be willing to develop bad blood with the Green Vine mountain over a friendship between children.

He had already witnessed the unruliness and arrogance of cultivation sects from the Sect of Clouds and Rain in the past. They were even bold enough to kill Hawkwolf guards, so why would they be afraid to forcefully recruit a disciple?

Yu Shukuang asked, "What am I supposed to do? Sigh, it's all because I'm useless!"

Li Qingshan tried to persuade him. "Don't worry too much. At most, she'll suffer some hardships as the disciple of someone else. She won't be in danger. Getting her to experience the vile side of human society isn't necessarily a bad thing." The Green Vine mountain was an orthodox sect after all. They were not thugs.

Yu Shukuang sighed heavily. That was true, but how could he stop worrying?

Li Qingshan was rather worried as well. He liked Yu Zijian's straightforwardness and kindness very much. He did not wish for her to endure any abuse.

"I'll go to the Green Vine mountain to check on her. You stay here and prepare some things for me."

Chapter 212 - The Busy Streets Deep Within the Mountains

Yu Shukuang was elated. He bowed deeply. "Whatever you wish!" As long as Yu Zijian was safe, he would be willing to do anything.

Li Qingshan said, "Extend your hand!"

Yu Shukuang extended his hand in doubt. A shiny pill landed in the centre of his palm. Wasn't this the Innate pill that he dreamt of every single day? He was both overjoyed and surprised. He bowed deeply again. "Thank you for your generous reward, Niu Juxian. May I ask what you need me to prepare?"

Li Qingshan said, "Ingest the pill first and see whether you break through to the innate realm. See if you can produce a sliver of true qi. We'll talk about the rest after that."

Yu Shukuang immediately ingested the pill. He sat down and meditated to digest the pill.

If regular people ingested the Innate pill, they were not guaranteed to be able to practise qi. However, if a first-rate master like him ingested it, it was basically certain. The effects of the pill permeated every inch of his body and fused with his dense inner force. Gradually, a strange feeling appeared.

The clumsy inner force gradually became agile, as if it had broken free from the restraints of his body. It extended outwards endlessly. Great joy welled up in his heart. However, Yu Shukuang knew now was the most important moment. He had to maintain his focus to avoid suffering from any deviations.

Li Qingshan sat to one side and pulled out a buddhist scripture that Xiao An regularly read. A while later, he felt his head ache. What form and emptiness and namo? He had no idea what was going on, nor did he have any idea how in the world she managed to understand this with that little head of hers, or how she was able to become so absorbed in something so boring.

A while later, Yu Shukuang shuddered. Li Qingshan turned around and smiled. "How is it?"

Yu Shukuang's body loosened up. He seemed exhausted, but he was unable to hide his joy no matter what. "The kindness you have shown me is like granting me..."

Li Qingshan interrupted him. "You can skip the formalities. I've said a long time ago that I won't mistreat you if you do things for me. I have a cultivation method called the Innate Method of Practising Qi, which I can pass onto you as well. With your dense inner force, reaching the second layer shouldn't be a problem."

Yu Shukuang almost could not think straight anymore from all of these joyous events happening one after another. However, he was still someone who had been through thick and thin before, so he composed himself very soon. He internalised his joy. He knew the kindness that had been shown to him was so great that it could not be returned with just a few words of gratitude. He waited for Li Qingshan's instructions quietly.

Li Qingshan passed him the Innate Method of Practising Qi before tossing an empty hundred treasures pouch to Yu Shukuang. "What I want you to do is to fill up this hundred treasures pouch with whatever alcohol, meat, and food you can find, and then give it to me. You have under two months to do this, and I want you to do it discreetly."

Yu Shukuang was slightly taken aback. This mission was just a little too simple. However, when he channeled his true qi into the hundred treasures pouch according to the method Li Qingshan had told him, he finally became stern.

This hundred treasures pouch originally belonged to the East Gate Granny. It was extremely large inside, the size of several large warehouses. It really would be difficult for him to fill it completely, especially if he had to do so within two months. Even if he slaughtered all the livestock near Salt Mountain city, it would not be enough. However, if he imported it from elsewhere, he might not make it in time, and it would create too much of a disturbance.

It was exactly because Li Qingshan did not want to attract too much attention that he had assisted Yu Shukuang in becoming a Qi Practitioner. He wanted to make use of the fact that he was well known in these parts of the land, which would save Li Qingshan a lot of trouble.

Yu Shukuang nodded. "I definitely won't let you down!" Although this mission was rather troublesome, it was not exactly dangerous. Searching for meat and alcohol was hundreds of times simpler than searching for an Innate pill.

Li Qingshan gave him a few more details. After all, the tastes of daemons would not always conform to the tastes of humans. As a matter of fact, many of them did not even like cooked food. They liked fresh meat.

Yu Shukuang memorised every single thing he said. Li Qingshan thought about if he had anything else to hand over before picking up the bamboo basket, putting on his wide hat, and making his way out. He suddenly stopped. "The path of cultivation is boundless. Does the swordsman still possess some of the pride of the past?"

He strode off with that, leaving Yu Shukuang standing in a daze. He subconsciously stroked the full beard on his face. He had grown it the year he swore he would never take a wife again. His gaze gradually became determined before he suddenly drew his sword and shaved himself with a few flashes.

At this moment, the mild young man who regularly delivered meals to Li Qingshan came in to pay his respects. "Master, Niu Juxia's..." However, he became stunned by Yu Shukuang's appearance.

It was a handsome face. Although it had been weathered by time, leaving behind many small wrinkles, it only added the charm of maturity to his face. Seeing how stunned his disciple had become, he laughed aloud. "Go fetch me some alcohol. I'll prove it with my actions!"

His mind was exceptionally clear, as if he had returned to his young past where he wandered around for the sake of justice, with his own life beyond his concern. However, he was no longer young. He was no longer carefree, now tied down. He had something extra called responsibility on his shoulders. As a father, if he could not even protect his own daughter, what was the point of living?

Li Qingshan had already exited the manor. He glanced back and smiled. Regardless of their moral alignment, the willpower and determination of anyone who could become a first-rate master was as clear as day, and Yu Shukuang happened to be the best of the best among them. That was why he was able to create the Proud Sword manor.

He needed a few usable people like him to help him handle some matters within the human world. People like him did not have to be too powerful, but they could not be too weak either. Right now, perhaps all Yu Shukuang could do for him was collect some food, but he would definitely bring even more benefits in the future.

He unfurled the mental map of the Green province and slid his finger around it. With a thought, there was a flash, and finally, his finger stopped on the sharp outline of a few mountains. Beside it detailed 'Green Vine Mountain'.

The zigzagging outline transformed into great mountains that rose and fell, towering precipitously. White clouds and mist lingered between the mountains, making it seem a little otherworldly.

Even more wondrously, within that snowbound land in the encirclement of snow mountains, only a single mountain remained lush and verdant, like an emerald gem on the white snow.

Li Qingshan stood on a snow mountain and looked into the distance. He marvelled at the wonders of nature. Although the formations of Green Vine mountain played a big part, the real reason why the mountain experienced eternal spring was because of the spiritual vein underground.

Not only was this place close to Jiaping city, but it was even close to his hometown, Qingyang city. It was located in one of the outlying ranges of the Boundless mountains.

Of course, it was close at Li Qingshan's current level of strength. Just the several hundred kilometers of dangerous, precipitous mountain paths were enough to sever all chances of regular people reaching here. Even if they managed to reach here out of sheer luck, the pervasive mist hid many secrets. Not only would it be impossible for regular people to climb the mountain, but they probably could not even see the green mountain.

Li Qingshan could see it, but he hesitated over how he was supposed to reach there.

Was Yu Zijian on the mountain somewhere right now, suffering?

Li Qingshan stood atop the mountain in thought. He stomped his foot and true qi spurting out from the bottom, kicking up a ring of snow. He had already leapt towards the cliff several hundred meters below him, having locked onto a pine tree that grew vertically from the cliff face. After pushing off it, he arrived on a mountain on the other side. He wanted to make his way to the back of the Green Vine mountain to see if there were any cracks he could enter through.

By now, the night had already darkened. Winter nights were extremely long, and the dark night was beneficial to Li Qingshan's movements. If there was some wind and snow, it would be even better.

Perhaps the heavens had really decided to answer his prayers, as snow began to fall a while later.

Li Qingshan concealed his aura, but when he arrived behind the mountain, he was slightly stunned.

A small town sat on a region of level ground. It gave off warm lantern light. Was there actually a village located right beside where cultivators cultivated?

However, as Li Qingshan was born in a village, he knew that regular towns or even small cities should have been pitch-black by now, just so that they could save some oil. The town was bustling with people flowing to and fro. It seemed extremely busy. It seemed out of the ordinary for such a busy place to exist within the frosty mountains.

When Li Qingshan approached the place, he became even more shocked, as there was not a single regular person wandering the streets. They were all cultivators.

Li Qingshan had never seen so many cultivators gathered together in his entire life. Although most of them were at the second, third, and fourth layers, they were still cultivators.

Were these Qi Practitioners from the Green Vine mountain?

Li Qingshan immediately shook his head. There were several hundred Qi Practitioners here at the very least. The Green Vine mountain definitely did not have that many Qi Practitioners. And, the clothes of these people on the streets varied. They bore different insignias. They did not come from the same sect.

At a closer glance, he discovered that many of the Qi Practitioners were like peddlers. They called out to attract customers, without the slightest dignity that belonged to Qi Practitioners.

Li Qingshan's curiosity immediately rose beyond his control. He knocked the bamboo basket on his back. "What do you think? Wanna check it out?"

The bamboo basket seemed simple on the surface, but there was a thick layer of cushioning inside. Xiao An sat in there leisurely, leaning against a silken pillow as she read in great interest a buddhist scripture that Li Qingshan had found to be boring.

"Let's go!" She replied very succinctly. She could clearly tell what Li Qingshan was feeling right now.

Li Qingshan emerged from a dark corner and made his way over to the town. However, he maintained his guard constantly. He had been screwed over by far too many Qi Practitioners in the past, and he had claimed the lives of many Qi Practitioners as well. As a result, he was even more vigilant of those like him than the daemons underground.

When he set foot in the town, everything remained the same as before. Everyone continued about with what they were doing. There were far fewer people who looked at him due to his abnormal size compared to on regular streets.

However, Li Qingshan's huge size still solicited a lot of attention.

"Fellow cultivator, why don't you check out this fantastic golden silk for tailoring robes? It's only three spiritual stones for a tael!"

Li Qingshan declined with a smile before turning his head and seeing a second layer Qi Practitioner call out at the top of his voice from a building, "A fifth layer Qi Practitioner explaining the essence of the Innate Method of Practising Qi, only a spiritual stone for entry! In exchange for a single spiritual stone, you can save three years worth of time! You'd better get in here fast, or it'll be gone before you know it!"

Li Qingshan's ears pricked up instinctively. However, the building was surrounded with formations, such that it was impossible to eavesdrop on what was being said inside no matter how great his hearing was. Two first layer Qi Practitioners discussed at the entrance whether to go in or not.

Li Qingshan turned his head again and saw a familiar, violet figure.

Chapter 213 - Safe and Sound

Li Qingshan struggled to believe his eyes. He had already thought of many predicaments Yu Zijiang could potentially be going through, such as carrying several hundred kilograms of firewood on her shoulders as she trudged through the snowy path. Or, perhaps she would be looking in the direction of her home sadly.

As for her father, Yu Shukuang, his imaginations probably ran a hundred times wilder.

However, not only did Yu Zijian face no hardships right now, but she was even smiling happily instead.

She was strolling through the streets happily with a few Qi Practitioners. The Qi Practitioners varied in gender and strength, but they all wore green robes. Their collars and cuffs were all embroidered with green vines.

Li Qingshan had seen that disciple Liu who had come out to run errands before, so he knew that this was the uniform of the Green Vine mountain.

Yu Zijian was among them. While they were not exactly following her around, he could tell that everyone liked her very much. They introduced the various strange products on the sides of the streets to her patiently.

Apart from changing her twin buns to a hairstyle more befitting of a female cultivator, she basically had not changed at all. She did not seem like she was suffering abuse at all.

Yu Zijian felt that someone was looking at her. She turned around and noticed Li Qingshan's colossal figure that stuck out like a sore thumb immediately. Her small mouth hung open from surprise before all of it turned into joy. She called out, "Niu Juxia!" Everyone on the streets looked over.

She jogged over to Li Qingshan. "Why have you come? Where's my father? Has he come too?" As she said that, she looked around Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan said, "Your father hasn't come. I've come to see you. You're... still well, right?" As long as he had not gone blind, she seemed to be doing rather well.

"Yep, yep!" Yu Zijian nodded.

"Zijian, is this your friend?" A few Qi Practitioners made their way over as well. The leader of them was a young man, a sixth layer Qi Practitioner, who asked in surprise.

Yu Zijian glanced at Li Qingshan first, as if she wanted to confirm that she was his friend. Seeing how he did not object, she smiled boldly. "Yeah!" After that, she glanced at him again to see if he was angered by that or not.

Why would Li Qingshan decline having such a cute girl as a friend?!

Yu Zijian introduced everybody. Only then did Li Qingshan learn that the leading sixth layer Qi Practitioner was called Mu Zhicong. Although he behaved in a rather modest manner, he gave off a natural sense of superiority. It did not just come from his superior strength, but his pride and arrogance as a member of a sect. The three companions beside him gave Li Qingshan roughly the same feeling.

This sense of superiority was beneficial to their sect instead of being detrimental. It proved that they held the three words, 'Green Vine mountain' on a very high pedestal, which was why they took pride in their sect.

Yu Zijian felt that introducing him as Niu Er was rather inappropriate, so she just said, "This is Niu Juxia!"

The disciples of the Green Vine mountain mistook that for Li Qingshan's name. They thought, That's a rather strange name, but it does seem to be rather befitting of his figure.

Mu Zhicong recalled something. He asked in surprise, "Are you that Niu Juxia who tossed Song Ming over the wall in a single stroke?!"

Li Qingshan smiled and admitted to it. He knew that Song Ming referred to the senior brother Song. The news had spread pretty quickly. Unbeknownst to him, although the three mountains were in an alliance, they also competed against one another. The humiliating matters among the disciples would spread the fastest. Otherwise, it would have been impossible for Liu Fengrui to have visited the Proud Sword manor so quickly.

The disciples of the Green Vine mountain immediately treated Li Qingshan with deep esteem. A grin of white teeth appeared on his face that was as dark as the bottom of a pot. It seemed rather mysterious.

The only female disciple there, Cheng Jiali, probed curiously, "May I ask which mountain you happen to cultivate on? And what is your current cultivation?"

Li Qingshan smiled. "I was naturally endowed with tremendous strength, and I came across a cultivation method for Body Practitioners by chance in the mountains. In terms of cultivation, I'm nowhere close to fellow Mu."

Independent cultivator, Body Practitioner.

They rapidly summarised these two phrases from what Li Qingshan had told them, and their attitude changed once again. They recovered their faint sense of superiority as disciples of an orthodox sect.

Body Practitioners in the world of cultivation were like practitioners of external martial arts in the jianghu. They would always be looked down upon. Of course, practising both internal and external martial arts was a method that existed as well. However, to them, Li Qingshan clearly did not fall into that category, and he was an independent cultivator without a sect. He was no different from a blade of grass in the wind. People from sects would pressure and abuse him often.

While Li Qingshan did stand tall, he was already lower than them in their hearts.

In particular, the displeasure that Mu Zhicong felt from how familiar Yu Zijian behaved with Li Qingshan had basically completely vanished. While he was quite strong, he was just a martial artist who used brute force. If his cultivation as a Qi Practitioner could not develop any further, it was useless no matter how powerful he was. He was so ugly as well. To think that I had compared myself to him. I sure have underestimated myself.

Li Qingshan could clearly sense the changes in their attitude. He maintained his smile and lamented about the fickleness of the world slightly, but he did not take this too seriously. Temporarily accommodating for people was common in human relationships. There was nothing for him to be displeased about.

However, this was all because Li Qingshan was strong enough and confident enough. Otherwise, it would lead to some ill will. The breadth of mind of people would be directly tied to their strength. When weaker people wanted to be broadminded, it was just self-consolation most of the time.

“I’ve come to see her in place of her father. She was taken away forcefully by a senior brother of yours called Liu. You have no idea how worried her father was.” Li Qingshan indirectly asked them a question. This child sure was heartless, having a good time right now. However, her decisions were not for him to make.

“Are you talking about senior brother Liu? Master has already scolded him.” The young man frowned slightly. He was slightly displeased by Li Qingshan’s question.

Li Qingshan became even more surprised. Although he had only seen this senior brother Liu once, he should have been a powerful Qi Practitioner who had already split open his sea of qi. Just what fortunes did this girl possess to make the sect master of the Green Vine mountain scold his own disciple?

Li Qingshan could tell that these people could not be reasoned with. He glanced at a teahouse on one side, which was rather quiet and tasteful inside. Then he checked the sign on the door, which detailed ‘Tranquil Teahouse’. It really did live up to its name. There were not a lot of people in there at all. It was very tranquil.

“Here’s not a place to talk. Let’s go in there and have some tea. I’ll ask Zijian some things for the sake of her father.”

This was the first time Yu Zijian had heard him call her directly by her name. She felt strange inside. Then she thought about how he had specially come to check up on her, and her heart warmed up. Her ears

reddened slightly as she pinched the edge of her clothing, unsure of what to say. All she thought of was, Niu Juxia sure is a great person!

This was the first time Mu Zhicong had seen Yu Zijian like this, and the flames of envy lit up in his heart for some reason. He asked with a strange smile, "Are you inviting us in there for tea?" After receiving Li Qingshan's confirmation, he and his companions looked at one another. They all smiled strangely.

Li Qingshan entered the teahouse and learned why they were smiling, as well as why the teahouse was so tranquil. A few bamboo signs hung on the wall on the west side, detailing the prices.

Even the cheapest pot of tea cost seven spiritual stones, while the most expensive one was over twenty spiritual stones. Were there any Qi Practitioners who would come drink tea with their spiritual stones instead of spending it on pills for cultivation or talismans for protection?

There were no waiters or waitresses in this store, only the shop owner. He was a spirited old man with pepper hair. He also happened to be the tea brewer. He did not even raise his head when Li Qingshan and the others entered. A few curtains divided the teahouse into a few rooms. There seemed to be people talking in there, but it was quiet. Clearly, this was due to the effects of formations as well.

Li Qingshan said, "Tsk, this tea is not cheap!"

Yu Zijian pulled Li Qingshan towards the outside. "It's too expensive, so let's go elsewhere. There's a steamed bun store on the corner of the street. They use the venison of three-coloured deer for their fillings."

Three disciples of the Green Vine mountain added with smiles, "Yeah, there's nothing great about the tea here!"

None of them were surprised. Independent cultivators were basically synonymous with broke. They did not even have enough money to buy pills, so why would he have money to invite them to the famous tea of the Tranquil teahouse? They obviously did not have a lot of ill will behind this, but it would always be rather funny when a bumpkin embarrassed himself.

It was obviously impossible for this group of people to scamper out of the store like this. Naturally, a generous and straightforward man would save the situation.

Mu Zhicong said, "The Tranquil teahouse is renowned in the world of cultivation. Being able to try their fine tea is one of the greatest joys that life can offer. Since we've come, let's stay. Since it's Zijian's friend who has come to the Green Vine mountain, I should be the one to play the host."

Li Qingshan had not even heard of the renowned Tranquil Teahouse before, so he was obviously ignorant.

Cheng Jiali glanced at Mu Zhicong in an infatuated manner. "Then we'll be forcing senior brother to go to some expenses today. Zijian, why don't you thank senior brother? Let alone people from remote areas, but even we don't enjoy something so extravagant often."

Li Qingshan could sense Cheng Jiali's hostility towards Yu Zijian. She was clearly trying to say that Yu Zijian was a bumpkin just like him. This was the troublesome aspect of humans. Daemons directed their hostility at the individual, while humans hid it all in their hearts.

Yu Zijian just happened to miss what she was implying. She said in embarrassment, "Thank you, senior brother Mu. Actually, I've been curious to try what something so expensive would taste like. Let's get the Cloudmist tea!"

The Cloudmist tea was the cheapest tea here. Naive, straightforward women were already rare, let alone those that were also kind-hearted and considerate. She seemed to possess both her mother and her father's merits. The more that they got to know her, the more they found her to be loveable and worth protecting.

Mu Zhicong's gaze became softer. "We'll drink whatever you want, Zijian."

Cheng Jiali's smile stiffened slightly, while the other two disciples looked at her in a somewhat mocking manner.

Li Qingshan snickered inside. This was like a clash between a third-rate master and a powerful Qi Practitioner. Right off the bat, Cheng Jiali had suffered a crushing defeat.

While Cheng Jiali possessed some beauty about her, she lacked the charm that could touch people. She was like a song that had been sung along all the rules and standards of singing. While there was nothing wrong with it, people could go without listening to it. However, the singing of certain people could touch the hearts of people.

Just when Mu Zhicong wanted to tell the tea brewer their order, he was stopped by Li Qingshan. He grinned. "We might come from a remote place, but we can still afford to drink some tea, right, Zijian?"

Only then did Yu Zijian suddenly understand what Cheng Jiali was trying to say. She frowned. "Exactly!" She was irate. You can look down on me, but how can you look down on Niu Juxia?

Chapter 214 - Lucky

Mu Zhicong was displeased. Cheng Jiali immediately said, "Fellow Niu, it's not easy for independent cultivators to earn spiritual stones. You should keep it for the pills that you need!" The other two disciples added to it as well.

"I'm aware of my limits!" Li Qingshan said indifferently. I had to kill a bunch of Qi Practitioners just like you to earn what I have right now. It's true that it wasn't easy. However, that's no reason for me to let you lot look down on people from remote places. He did not mind being mocked a little, but he could not just watch them mock Yu Zijian.

He said to the tea brewer, "Uncle, give me a pot of your most expensive, uhh, Worryless tea!" Li Qingshan sat down at a tea table boldly, like he was extremely wealthy. He could not help it. He had several hundred spiritual stones on him, and he had a spiritual stone vein underground. He would be lying if he tried to pass himself off as poor.

The tea brewer finally raised his head and studied Li Qingshan. There were not a lot of people who could afford to drink the Worryless in this town of Qi Practitioners. He said indifferently, "Please wait!" He went about brewing the tea.

The disciples of the Green Vine mountain were all stunned. The Worryless tea was a famous tea of the Tranquil teahouse. A single pot came at an astronomical price of twenty-seven spiritual stones. If that

was all converted into Qi Gathering pills, it would be enough for a Qi Practitioner to cultivate for a year or two. Even Mu Zhicong would be reluctant to buy a pot of Worriless tea. He smiled dryly. "Fellow Niu, how generous of you!"

Yu Zijian tugged Li Qingshan's sleeve and whispered to him to try and convince him otherwise, "Niu Juxia, that's so expensive."

Li Qingshan patted the exquisitely sculpted stool beside him. "It's for us, so what's there to worry about?"

He was speaking from the bottom of his heart. Trying all the delicacies that the world had to offer was a part of his grand dream anyway. Although tea was unlikely to fall into that category, he wanted to try anything and everything that could fulfill the desires of the mouth and belly. Since he could not try all the teas in the world, he would try the best ones. Moreover, his principle when it came to unfamiliar people, particularly people he disliked, was to never owe them anything. How could he make others pay for his tea?

Yu Zijian sat beside him. She could feel that Li Qingshan wanted to stand up for her, so she felt rather mixed inside.

The disciples of the Green Vine mountain all looked at Mu Zhicong. They were unsure whether to sit down or not. They also wanted to try the Worriless tea. Mu Zhicong thought, Since you want to impress us at your own cost, do whatever you want.

Li Qingshan asked Yu Zijian about what she went through after she had been taken away.

As it turned out, Yu Zijian just became a regular, miscellaneous disciple who ran errands after she had been brought to the Green Vine mountain. In the end, when the Green Vine Elder appeared at the entry ceremony and tested everyone's talent, she was deemed to be the most outstanding.

Out of joy, the Green Vine Elder decided to ask about her origins. If she was just some regular girl, she would have been left speechless already by the lofty sect halls and the dignified Foundation Establishment cultivator.

However, Yu Zijian pointed at Liu Fengrui and said, "I didn't want to come, but he forced me to come." She went into detail about how he had threatened her and how he tried to silence her as tears trickled down her cheeks.

The children that Liu Fengrui had initially brought back from the Proud Sword manor were close with this young miss in the first place, so they began to miss their homes. For a moment, all of the children in the main hall burst into tears, turning the formal entry ceremony into something that was very awkward.

The Green Vine Elder felt rather humiliated. He pointed at Liu Fengrui and scolded him. He said, "If other people saw us, they would think that we abducted all of our disciples here!"

Liu Fengrui begged and apologised for his behaviour. His personality was not very likeable even among his own seniors and juniors, so no one stood up for him. They all mocked him secretly.

The Green Vine Elder turned around and left furiously. As a result, Yu Zijian turned her misfortune into a blessing. As a matter of fact, it could even be said that she had turned the tables.

However, the Green Vine Elder did not let Yu Zijian leave, nor did he let her join the sect. As a result, she just remained behind cluelessly, becoming the only non-disciple on the mountain.

Li Qingshan guessed that the Green Vine Elder definitely wanted Yu Zijian to join the Green Vine mountain, but he did not want to force her either. The Green Vine mountain accepted disciples, not enemies. Only someone as opinionated as Liu Fengrui would handle everything so coarsely.

The disciples could all tell what the Green Vine Elder was thinking, so they purposefully approached Yu Zijian, trying to persuade her to just join the sect. Coupled with how likeable she was, she became familiar with everyone in under a month. Coupled with the protection of a group of suitors like Mu Zhicong, Liu Fengrui was actually unable to do anything to her despite being an inner disciple.

“The senior brothers and sisters all said that he’s a bad person. They all told me to forget about him.”

Mu Zhicong said awkwardly, “Don’t blabber, Zijian. Senior brother Liu was just a little rash. He’s not a bad person.” Although he hated Liu Fengrui, he still had to preserve the dignity of his fellow seniors and juniors.

Li Qingshan was truly speechless with what Yu Zijian had gone through. He could not help but sigh that some people were just luckier than others. This luck did not come in the form of a powerful clan, but a certain ability. It was an ability that smiled at the world. The world was like a mirror. If you smiled at it, it would smile back. People could not be born with this ability. Instead, it originated from being raised with the gentlest care and the best education.

Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi were not so lucky. Both of them had developed a fierce personality from what they had gone through in life. They used the teeth and claws called “cunning and resourcefulness” and “courage and resoluteness” to fight in this world. Those were the strengths they relied on to live.

Yu Zijian was neither resolute nor resourceful, and her cultivation was pitifully low. However, she was able to obtain an Innate pill from the little adult that was Hua Chenglu, and she was able to make Li Qingshan, who had a heart of steel, travel several hundred kilometers for her. This was her strength.

At this moment, the tea brewer served up a pot of tea. The tea poured into the teacups was clear and colourless, just like water, but it gave off a refreshing fragrance.

Li Qingshan said, “Allow me to toast you with tea instead of alcohol. Thank you for taking care of Zijian.” He drank an entire cup, and the flow of heat directly reached his belly, expanding from there. It made him feel warm all over. The fragrance did not just linger in his mouth, but in his heart too.

Being able to drink a cup of this on a cold, winter night was absolute bliss. With a cup down, he felt like all of his various distracting thoughts had been washed away. He felt languid. Both the tea leaves and water contained pure spiritual qi. It was even better than regular pills. His mind and body benefited tremendously.

“It truly is good tea!”

Mu Zhicong and the others drank slowly instead. They were indescribably relaxed. Their arrogance had vanished when they looked at Li Qingshan now, and they were even more polite when they spoke, just like how they could not bite the hand that fed them. They were not shameless enough to continue mocking Li Qingshan.

Cheng Jiali's gaze towards Li Qingshan became slightly gentler. She could tell that Li Qingshan was not a broke independent cultivator who wanted to impress them. Instead, he was truly a generous man who would not be troubled by a mere twenty or thirty spiritual stones. That was always a likeable feature to women.

Li Qingshan smiled. "The tea truly lives up to its name of Worryless."

Only Mu Zhicong was unable to cheer up. Originally, he was the central figure of this group, but all of his attention and glory had been stolen from him by this brute with his pot of tea. He would never just relent like this. "Fellow Niu, it is a bit of a waste of this tea with how you drink it."

Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow. "How so?"

Mu Zhicong had been waiting for that. He smiled. He went on a ramble, going into the essence of tea ceremonies to display his great knowledge. Cheng Jiali and the others praised him quite a lot.

The two bumpkins, Li Qingshan and Yu Zijian, held their teacups and listened in as they drank.

When Mu Zhicong finished his speech and wanted to moisten his mouth with some tea, he discovered that Li Qingshan and Yu Zijian had already 'wasted' away all of the tea. He immediately became stunned.

Yu Zijian said in admiration, "You know so much, senior brother Mu."

Li Qingshan said, "I think you've enlightened me too."

Yu Zijian had been drinking in small, short sips, but Li Qingshan actually drank like an ox, tipping cup after cup into his belly. You're drinking my tea, yet you still have so much nonsense to spout. You might as well not drink it.

Cheng Jiali and the other two were glad that they had been fast. They did not forget to drink tea as they listened on. They managed to steal a few cups from Li Qingshan's mouth, which saved them half a month's worth of cultivation. The spiritual tea was unlike regular tea, where several pots could be made from the same leaves. The tea brewer used special techniques to extract all of the flavour of the tea leaves into the spiritual water so that none of it went to waste. As a result, there was only a single pot.

Yu Zijian rubbed her belly. "How warm!"

Li Qingshan said, "Exactly."

The two of them looked at each other and smiled. All Yu Zijian noticed was that the whites and pupils of Li Qingshan's eyes seemed so clear-cut. His gaze was no longer as sharp as when she first saw him. Instead, it seemed calm and clear, like he had gone from a vicious tiger to a gentle ox. He seemed much gentler.

She suddenly found that it was even more difficult to maintain eye contact with a gaze like that than the sharp gaze from the other day. Her eyes avoided him, and she lowered her head.

Mu Zhicong felt like everything he had said earlier had been pointless. He ground his teeth. "Fellow Niu, do you understand just how profound tea culture and tea ceremony can be now?"

Li Qingshan smiled. "I'm a coarse, unsophisticated man. I can't remember that much." Then he turned towards Yu Zijian. "What do you think, Zijian? Do you want to go back with me?"

Before Yu Zijian could even answer him, Mu Zhicong said resolutely, "She can't. Without master's permission, Zijian can't leave the Green Vine mountain."

Cheng Jiali tried to persuade him softly. "Senior brother." She only wished for Yu Zijian to be further away, but when two men began to fight over something, it would not just be about who it ended up with in the end. It was about their pride as well. They could not be easily persuaded by others.

Li Qingshan did not look at Mu Zhicong. He only asked Yu Zijian, "What do you want?"

Yu Zijian immediately became uncertain. The disciples of the Green Vine mountain had taken great care of her during these days. If she just left like this, she felt like she was letting down their kindness, and it would probably make things difficult for Niu Juxia.

"Think it through. Don't worry about anything else. Go with what you want. I believe the Green Vine Elder is a great, understanding, and reasonable senior. Don't forget about the way I taught you to handle decisions." Li Qingshan could understand what she was feeling. He patted her shoulder and ignored Mu Zhicong's ugly expression. He stood up and arrived before the tea brewer to pay the bills, but just as he fished out twenty-seven spiritual stones, the tea brewer asked him a question.

"How is my Woriless tea? Hopefully you were able to appreciate its flavour and it didn't go to waste, like an ox munching on peony!" said the tea brewer arrogantly. He specialised in tea culture, and he felt displeased when he saw how Li Qingshan downed it cup after cup. He finally could not help himself and said something about it.

Chapter 215 - Ice Condensate Water

Mu Zhicong laughed aloud. "It's not just like ox munching on peony. Everything I said was useless, like playing the zither to an ox! I'm just kidding. I hope you don't mind, fellow Niu."

Li Qingshan smiled indifferently. "The tea was good tea, but the water was so-so. Zijian, you need to make friends like that. You have to choose good water, or it'll ruin the famous tea."

Yu Zijian agreed softly, while Mu Zhicong's expression changed.

The tea brewer said irately, "Kid, you have no idea what you're talking about, yet you just have to act like you do and blabber away. I retrieved the water from the Sky spiritual spring of Sky mountain."

Mu Zhicong said, "Fellow Niu, you haven't heard of the Sky spiritual spring before, have you? It's ranked ninety-seventh within the Spiritual Springs guide of the Green province."

The ranking was not particularly high, but making it within the top hundred across all fifteen thousand kilometers of the Green province was already very outstanding. The ninety-six spiritual springs that ranked ahead of it were all claimed by various large sects. The springwater they had was not something a mere independent cultivator could taste.

The tea brewer fumed. "You sure know a bit. You really do come from the Green Vine mountain after..."

Li Qingshan interrupted him. "So what?"

The tea brewer said, "So what? If you can take out better water, you can count that jug of tea on me. Otherwise..." His aura radiated out. He was actually at the seventh layer.

Yu Zijian said in a hurry, "Please calm down, senior. My friend was just..."

Li Qingshan stopped her and smiled. "With how many springs the world has to offer, a single guide probably can't include all of them. Since senior wants to invite us to some free tea, I might as well oblige." He took out a jar of water from his hundred treasures pouch and presented it before the tea brewer.

This came from a spiritual spring that Li Qingshan had discovered underground when he followed the spiritual river to its source. The water was sweet and icy, enough to quench the thirst of the very hearts of people. Although he lacked a single inkling about tea, he could feel that the spiritual qi in the water was much more abundant than that Sky spring water or whatever it was called.

The sources of most of the spiritual springs in the world were extremely deep underground. As they flowed to the surface, their spiritual qi would disperse, and the quality of the water would drop. However, just how many people in the world could venture so deep underground? And, how many people were willing to venture deep into that dangerous world just for the sake of some water so that they could brew some tea?

The spiritual spring had been protected by one of the strongest daemons Li Qingshan had met. Even if Qi Practitioners managed to make it there, only death would await them. However, if Li Qingshan wanted to drink some water as the leader of the daemon soldiers, how could his subordinate turn him down?

The jar was just a regular old jar. Mu Zhicong watched on, ready to see Li Qingshan make a fool of himself, while Yu Zijian was concerned for him.

The tea brewer opened the jar casually and peered inside. His furious sneer suddenly stiffened. "T- this water?" A layer of white mist appeared on the surface of the water, and a film of perspiration had already formed on the jar the moment it was taken out.

Mu Zhicong walked over impatiently. "How's the water?" He became stunned as well. The spiritual qi the water gave off actually rivalled quite a few pills.

The tea brewer used an exquisite, bronze ladle to drink some, and he shivered. The water seemed to be even colder than ice. He was still in disbelief, so he scooped a ladle of his own water and placed it in the jar. Before long, the water in the ladle had actually frozen.

"It can't be wrong, it can't be wrong! This is Ice Condensate water!"

Li Qingshan never thought the water he had retrieved from the underground spring would actually be capable of this either. "How is it? Is it better than your water?"

The tea brewer was defeated. "It's Ice Condensate water, ranked fifty-second. Of course it's better than Sky spring water. I've misjudged you. I never thought that you, sir, would have managed to make it into the Icehorse palace!"

“I’ve never heard of some Icehorse palace before. As I’ve said before, it’s impossible for a single guide to include all the springs the world has to offer. I must thank you for your treat then, senior.” Li Qingshan was about to stow the jar away as he said that.

“Hold on!” The tea brewer stopped Li Qingshan in a hurry.

“What, do you plan on changing your mind?” Li Qingshan asked.

“It’s just a pot of tea. I can afford that. I’m Lu Ziyu. How many spiritual stones would you like for this jar of water?” Lu Ziyu’s eyes shone as he looked at Li Qingshan eagerly, or more specifically, the jar of Ice Condensate water he held.

The disciples from the Green Vine mountains struggled to believe what had just happened. This Niu Juxia had actually managed to take out water that surpassed the Sky spring water, and not only would the extravagant pot of tea cost him nothing, but he was even in for a profit.

Mu Zhicong said in surprise, “Are you perhaps senior Lu?”

Although Lu Ziyu’s cultivation was not exactly powerful, he was skilled with tea. He was rather renowned among Qi Practitioners. It was said that he had once brewed tea for quite a few Foundation Establishment cultivators, who treated him as an esteemed guest. They never thought he would actually appear here, in charge of this Tranquil teahouse.

Lu Ziyu nodded in a reserved manner.

Mu Zhicong refused to relent. “I’ve heard that Ice Condensate water is suited for forging artifacts, but I’ve never heard that it’s suited for brewing tea.”

Lu Ziyu said, “That’s because you’re ignorant! Ice Condensate water has an extremely low temperature, so regular people believe that it’s unsuited for brewing tea. However, little do they know that the only way to unleash the very limits of flavour in tea is to combine ice and fire, but it requires the brewer to possess extremely great mastery.” He was obviously a brewer who possessed extremely great mastery. Now that he had suddenly come across such fantastic water, he would never let this opportunity slip.

Mu Zhicong’s face darkened and reddened, but he was no longer able to say anything.

Li Qingshan said, “Please give me an offer, senior!”

Lu Ziyu said, “Thirty spiritual stones.”

Cheng Jiali cried out slightly. This jar of water was actually worth even more than the pot of tea from earlier. Thirty spiritual stones was a huge sum to a weaker Qi Practitioner like her.

Li Qingshan said, “I think senior isn’t one to rip me off with your moral character. Then thirty spiritual stones it is!”

Lu Ziyu never expected that Li Qingshan would not even try bargaining with him. He secretly rejoiced and stroked his beard while nodding. “This kid is promising!”

“But, I do have a small request!”

“What is it?”

“Please use this water to brew me a pot of Worriless tea, senior!”

Lu Ziyu’s eyes widened as he shot him a furious glance. “Don’t get too greedy, kid!” That would cost him his water and his tea leaves. A pot of Worriless tea made with the Ice Condensate water would be worth fifty spiritual stones at the very least.

Li Qingshan said, “I’ll come clean, senior. I have more than just the jar on me.” He paused slightly. “I also want to witness senior’s profound understanding of tea. If you won’t agree, I’ll have to keep the water for myself to drink then.” He sighed, about to stow the water away.

“Wait! I’m itching to try my skills today, so I’ll satisfy that small request of yours,” Lu Ziyu agreed with gritted teeth. If he only looked at his expenses, the price was barely acceptable.

He could understand what Li Qingshan was implying. Not only was there a jar of water, but he even seemed to know where the spring was located as well. If he could supply him with Ice Condensate water in the long term, it would definitely bring great benefit to his path of tea.

Lu Ziyu got brewing eagerly. Every single movement of his was refined and elegant. He did not use an open flame, heating the teapot in his hand instead. He used his true qi to brew the tea, controlling the heat with great precision. He could see nothing else apart from the teapot.

A while later, Lu Ziyu exhaled gently and opened the teapot lid. A strange fragrance rose up and permeated the surroundings. It was much stronger than the Worriless tea from earlier. The customers behind the curtains suddenly stopped what they were doing and looked over.

A few Qi Practitioners on the street stopped and sniffed gently. “What is this smell? It’s so fragrant!”

Under the eager gazes of the disciples of the Green Vine mountain, Li Qingshan stowed the purple sand teapot into his hundred treasures pouch. “You can give me this teapot too!” He was obviously saving this pot of tea for Xiao An.

Chapter 216 - Testing for the Five Elements

Lu Ziyu lifted up the jar of Ice Condensate water without any regard for anything else. “If you have more, you have to deliver it to me!”

Li Qingshan agreed to him carelessly and indifferently before leaving through the door. He never thought that the water he had found underground could fetch such a great price. He was still a beginner when it came to exploiting the resources from underground.

“Old man Lu, why have you been hiding such great tea from us?” A man lifted the curtain and called out.

“Coming up!” Lu Ziyu removed the bamboo sign from the wall and brushed past it with his hand, increasing the price by twenty spiritual stones.

“Zijian, are there any places that sell cultivation methods here?” Li Qingshan could see how Yu Zijian still had to give some thought to the matter. He was in no hurry either. It was rare of him to come across a market that specially served cultivators, so he obviously had to stroll around and buy some things he needed.

Mu Zhicong and the others became even more certain of his identity as an independent cultivator. Only independent cultivators would have to buy cultivation methods. Yu Zijian was troubled. "I'm not too sure..."

Mu Zhicong said, "There's a store on the corner up ahead. Fellow Niu, it's quite late now, so we need to return to the Green Vine mountain. We'll have to bid farewell to you here!"

"Alright. Zijian, consider it carefully. I'll probably stay for a few more days here. If you've made up your mind, just come down and let me know," Li Qingshan said happily. Since Yu Zijian was safe and sound, there was no reason for him to worry now. Even if she decided to join the Green Vine mountain, there was nothing wrong with that. However, he was almost about to fall out with Mu Zhicong, so there was no point in sticking around them any longer.

Mu Zhicong was rather surprised by how willing Li Qingshan was to part with them. For a moment, he was left at a loss as to whether he was actually interested in Yu Zijian or not.

Unbeknownst to him, Li Qingshan's ambitions were beyond the Nine Heavens. While he would still be interested when he saw cute and pretty women, such that he would adore them and develop a desire to protect them, he would never become too involved with matters between men and women. He would just go with the flow.

Yu Zijian said, "Thank you, Niu Juxia. I've already made up my mind."

Li Qingshan was surprised. "Really? It's rare of you to be so resolute. Are you staying or leaving?"

"I've decided I want to go to the Academy of the Hundred Schools," Yu Zijian said calmly, which was quite a contrast to her usual indecisiveness.

Mu Zhicong's face reddened. "Zijian, you have to think about it carefully. Our Green Vine mountain is no worse than any of the schools that the Academy of the Hundred Schools has to offer..."

Yu Zijian said earnestly, "Thank you for the care and concern you've shown me in the past few days, senior brother Mu, but I've already promised Chenglu to study in the Academy of the Hundred Schools with her. I also need to return the favour of the Innate pill." Then she smiled at Li Qingshan. "Niu Juxia, this is what you taught me when it came to decisions, right?"

Li Qingshan clapped his hands and praised, "Exactly! It's not like you're a disciple of the Green Vine mountain anyway. You can leave with me right now!"

Mu Zhicong became frantic. "Don't you even think about it! Without my master's permission..."

Yu Zijian shook her head. "I'm not leaving right now. Chenglu has received my letter, so she'll definitely come looking for me. If I leave right now, I'll basically be standing her up. And I can't just leave like this!"

"It has already been a month. That friend of yours might not necessarily come." Li Qingshan expressed his doubt over the friendship between the two young girls.

"Chenglu will definitely come." Yu Zijian was extremely certain.

"Hopefully she won't let down the trust you've vested in her, or it'll be her loss." Li Qingshan smiled. Who said the meek could not persevere? Being able to trust was an impressive ability as well. If Hua

Chenglu really did come and resolved this issue in a legitimate manner, it would obviously be for the best.

“I’m still going to stay here for a few days. If you change your mind, come down the mountain and find me!” Li Qingshan glanced at Mu Zhicong. It probably would be rather difficult for her to leave the mountain by then. It was impossible for him to charge up the Green Vine mountain either and face a Foundation Establishment cultivator as well, trying to save some damsel in distress. Everyone had to bear the responsibilities of their choices. Even kind-hearted, cute girls had to understand that.

Li Qingshan clasped his hands and left. Yu Zijian watched on as his huge figure merged into the crowd. She said extremely softly, “Thank you.” She thanked him for respecting her decision.

Li Qingshan took out the pot of Worryless tea from his hundred treasures pouch and shoved it into the bamboo basket on his back. A tender, white hand accepted it.

Xiao An leaned against the pillow leisurely with a leg crossed over the other. She held a buddhist scripture in one hand and the purple sand teapot in the other, drinking straight from the spout as she read.

Li Qingshan was slightly relieved as well. At the end of the day, he still disliked handling these random people. He was a tiger who strolled through the forest. He had already grown accustomed to moving alone.

As he strolled through the streets, he saw stalls and stores on the two sides filled with a dazzling variety of items. Not only were there regular spiritual artifacts and pills, but there were also fragments of secret books and manuals left behind by some great cultivator, or treasure maps leading to some mysterious dwelling.

Most of it was just trash, but it might actually hide treasure from time to time, which would be obtained by someone lucky, allowing them to rise up. This kind of story urged on every Qi Practitioner. However, those who wanted to find treasure here required either extremely great insight or luck.

Insight obviously was not Li Qingshan’s forte. He really was a bumpkin in the cultivation world. He did not like to rely on luck either. He skimmed through everything quickly before arriving at the bookstore that Mu Zhicong had mentioned. He was eager.

What he needed the most right now was a method of practising qi. He never thought he would find a place like that here. Good people really were rewarded for their efforts!

There were two large words written on the simple, blackboard—Book Mountain.

When he entered, he basically wondered if he had entered another teahouse, as there were no bookshelves or books in there at all. The only book happened to be in the shopkeeper’s withered hands.

An old man currently sat in a rocking chair with a pot of tea on the small table to his side. He turned the page before placing the book down and asking slowly, “What kind of book are you looking for, sir?”

Li Qingshan said, “Uncle, I want to buy a cultivation method. Do you have any here?”

The old man smiled. "If I didn't, why would I still be running this store?" He fished out a scroll of bamboo slips from his hundred treasures pouch and tossed it to Li Qingshan. "The cultivation methods are all on there. Take your time!" Afterwards, he returned to his book.

Li Qingshan unfurled the bamboo slips doubtfully and channeled his true qi into it. A few inky words naturally appeared on the jade slips. "Body Practitioner, Qi Practitioner." He tried focusing on Qi Practitioner, and the ink seemed to dissolve. It condensed together into seven new words. "Yin, Yang, Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, Earth."

He chose fire carelessly, and over a dozen cultivation methods appeared, and that was only the first page. In total, there were probably a hundred of them. Apart from the Bing Fire Method of Burning Qi, he had not heard any of them before.

After choosing the Bing Fire Method of Burning Qi, various types of information appeared on the bamboo slips regarding the cultivation method, from the ease of cultivation to how effective it was in combat. It covered everything. Even someone as inexperienced as Li Qingshan could basically guess the advantages and disadvantages of this cultivation method.

The scroll of bamboo slips contained the entire catalogue of cultivation methods available at this store. No wonder there were no books around.

Li Qingshan sought guidance with an open mind. "Uncle, I'm an independent cultivator. I don't know what cultivation method suits me. Could you give me a recommendation?"

The old man smiled. "That'll depend on what suits your constitution. Do you know your element?"

"I don't, but I think I'm water."

The old man said, "I can check your constitution for you for one spiritual stone. Would you like to get it checked?"

Li Qingshan happily coughed up a spiritual stone. The old man fished out a scroll from his hundred treasures pouch and unfurled it. It was inscribed with many profound glyphs. The twisted, winding lines created a simple formation.

The old man shook his hand conveniently, and the scroll became seven feet in length and width. He spread it out on the ground. "Sit on there and focus your mind."

Li Qingshan placed down the bamboo basket gently before sitting at the centre of the formation. He closed his eyes and focused his mind.

"Let's test for yin and yang first!" The old man touched the scroll, and the formation immediately lit up, illuminating Li Qingshan. An extremely small shadow appeared above his head.

The old man shook his head. "Fellow, you're just naturally unsuited for any yin element cultivation methods. It'll be extremely difficult for you to condense Profound Yin true qi. But don't worry. From your physique and face, I can tell that you fall into the category of yang."

It was very late already, but the streets were still full. Suddenly, the bookstore lit up with dazzling light. The passersby covered their eyes and cried out, "What's going on?" "Is this the birth of some treasure?"

A Qi Practitioner squinted his eyes and looked at the bookstore. “You all know nothing. They’re testing for the yin and yang element.”

“What? When I was tested in the past, the light was only the size of a fist.”

A few Qi Practitioners entered the bookstore and saw a head-sized ball of scorching, white light above Li Qingshan.

The old man praised, “You possess extremely great talent for the path of Profound Yang. Cultivating Profound Yang true qi will definitely yield quick results for you.”

Li Qingshan said, “What recommendations do you have then, uncle?”

“Don’t fret. Let’s test the five elements now! Although cultivation methods derived from yin and yang span everything, they’re quite difficult to practise. They need guidance from masters. I wouldn’t recommend it to independent cultivators.”

As the old man said that, he tested for Li Qingshan’s five elements.

When he tested for wood, only a tiny blade of grass appeared above Li Qingshan’s head. The old man shook his head. This is even worse than regular Qi Practitioners.

When he tested for metal, a tiny sword appeared above Li Qingshan’s head. Only then did the old man nod.

When he tested for earth, a boulder appeared above Li Qingshan’s head. The old man’s eyes lit up, and he nodded even more. His earth element even surpasses his yang element. The Wu Earth Method of Unyielding Qi will do.

When he tested for fire, a small ball of flames appeared above Li Qingshan’s head. The old man sighed in pity secretly. His fire element is extremely mediocre as well. If it were as great as his earth element, then he could practise both the yang and fire elements. The True Yang Method of Scorching Fire would basically be made for him. However, he was also slightly perplexed. Normally, people with a powerful yang element would have quite a strong fire element as well.

Perhaps? The old man immediately thought of how the five elements promoted and counteracted each other. Water and fire counteracted one another, just like yin and yang. If one was strong, then the other would be weak. With that being the case, this child’s water element should have been pretty impressive.

Because Li Qingshan felt like he was oriented towards the water element, the old man tested for the water element last.

Blue light flooded the bookstore. Even with the old man’s knowledge and insight, he was shocked.

Chapter 217 - Choosing a Cultivation Method

Li Qingshan closed his eyes and thought nothing. He seemed to have returned to the black water again, during those three days and nights he chased the blackwater salamander.

His heart was like water. Before him, behind him, to the left and to the right, everything was flowing water.

Ebbs of realistic waves rapidly gushed into the surroundings. The Qi Practitioners in the store all retreated subconsciously and circulated their true qi to protect themselves. Only when the wave passed through them did they discover that it was just an illusion composed of blue light.

The waves even rushed out of the store and onto the streets. The passing Qi Practitioners were all dumbstruck as they looked at one another in shock.

“What’s going on? How can such a powerful illusion appear when testing for the five elements?”

“Who knows how many talented prodigies there are in the world that you and I can only be envious of. Let’s stop wasting time. Let’s buy our pills and get ready for seclusion. We have to stand out in the Herb Gathering ceremony this time.” The Qi Practitioner by his side glanced at the bookshelf again before pulling away his companion.

The old man said slowly, “You can stand up now, fellow cultivator.”

Li Qingshan stood up and asked politely, “How’s it, uncle? Which cultivation method suits me?”

To cultivators, picking a suitable cultivation method was basically ten times more important than a regular person picking a suitable wife. If a regular person married the wrong wife, they could divorce, and if that did not work, they just had to endure a few decades at most. However, if a cultivator chose the wrong cultivation method, that could potentially cost them a few hundred years of additional life, or it could cost them their lives in battle.

Li Qingshan was extremely careful about this too. His knowledge was lacking, so he obviously had to ask a professional.

The old man stowed the scroll away slowly and said, “I’ve tested numerous constitutions for independent cultivators across all these years, but there have only been a handful who have demonstrated the same amount of talent as you! If you choose to cultivate Gui Water true qi, you’ll definitely make rapid progress, and the water elemented techniques you use will be much more powerful than others too!”

Li Qingshan knew that he was not some outstanding prodigy. It was probably due to the Spirit Turtle’s Method of Sea Suppression. When he practised the ability of a daemon, he seemed to gain the nature of the corresponding daemon. The spirit turtle was a divine beast of the water that could control the ocean as easily as a child playing in a bathtub.

Li Qingshan might have only been tainted with a sliver of the spirit turtle’s nature, but talent like this would no longer be surprising anymore. His talent for metal and earth probably originated from the ox demon and the tiger demon.

No one would believe him if he told them. Apart from a select few spiritual herbs, never had they heard that practising a certain cultivation method could alter someone’s talent. Talent was something bestowed to a person by the heavens. Although hard work could make up for a lack of talent, it could not increase talent. However, the abilities that the black ox had taught Li Qingshan had completely changed his body and race. In comparison, talent only seemed insignificant.

“I only know of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi out of the water cultivation methods. Do you have any better cultivation methods to recommend, uncle?” Everyone wanted an ultimate cultivation method that was stronger than the generic one.

Thoughts flickered through the old man’s eyes. “Actually, with your talent, joining a sect or finding a master that specialises in Gui Water true qi won’t be difficult at all. You don’t have to buy a cultivation method from me. For example, one of the schools in the Academy of the Hundred Schools specially requires their disciples to practise Gui Water true qi. I just happen to know the leader of the school...”

Li Qingshan said in admiration, “You truly are a wise and kind man, uncle, an intellectual I say. However, I’m used to my freedom. I don’t want to be tied down.” He lowered his head and studied the scroll of bamboo slips again. With a thought, various water elemented cultivation methods were listed before him.

These cultivation methods were not too expensive. Even the more expensive ones were just a few dozen spiritual stones, while the cheaper ones went for around just a dozen or so spiritual stones. The spiritual stones he had earned from selling the water earlier were enough for him to buy a copy of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi.

Qi Practitioners were still at the primary stage of the cultivation world after all. The cultivation methods for practising qi were not some divine arts or secret manuals. They obviously would not be excessively expensive. And, to someone who had grown rich overnight like Li Qingshan, he did not find a few dozen spiritual stones to be particularly expensive. Who knows just how many years regular independent cultivators needed in order to save up that much.

There were a few other prices on all of the cultivation methods, breaking them up into sections. For example, the first three layers of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi only cost five spiritual stones.

The Qi Practitioners in the store looked at one another and whispered among themselves.

“If that’s the case, let me think about it. You can take a look first!” The old man looked down, as if he was disappointed by how Li Qingshan insisted on buying his cultivation methods. However, he seemed to ease up as well. He stroked his beard in thought. A fine piece of jade like him would have a limitless future awaiting him with the correct cultivation method.

Li Qingshan was wealthy, so he immediately looked at the most expensive one. Although the priciest would not always be the best, it would never be too bad either.

“Arts of the Boundless Ocean. One hundred and ten spiritual stones. High demand on talent. Must conjure waves at the very least when testing for the five elements, and it is extremely difficult to practise. However, upon success, the true qi becomes fierce like the tide, utterly boundless.”

However, it was labelled as incomplete at the end, but even though it was incomplete, it could still be practised until mid Foundation Establishment. This cultivation method was not longer just a method for practising qi, which was why it was so expensive. No, it was a steal at this price.

Li Qingshan thought, If I practise the Spirit Turtle’s Method of Sea Suppression as a daemon and the Arts of the Boundless Ocean as a human, it’ll be a perfect combination!

“Uncle, what do you think about practising the Arts of the Boundless Ocean?”

“The Arts of the Boundless Ocean was originally a core cultivation method of the Ocean sect. Upon reaching the ninth layer, it can condense an Ocean pearl within your body, which is akin to the golden cores of daoism and the ?arīras of buddhism...”

Li Qingshan’s eyes shone even brighter. People who made it past the second heavenly tribulation were basically great masters in this world. Perhaps they could not run wild, but they could at least run around freely. He never thought he would come across a cultivation method like that in a tiny bookstore like this one. This kind of luck was like buying a divine artifact from a stall, or finding a divine beast by the side of the road.

“However, I wouldn’t recommend you to practise this cultivation method.”

Li Qingshan was surprised. “Why?” Even though it was incomplete, he could find ways to assemble the whole cultivation method. Once he reached Foundation Establishment, he would definitely become even stronger with his daemon cultivation. He refused to believe he could not get his hands on the second half of this cultivation method, whether he had to steal secretly or openly rob.

The old man seemed to read Li Qingshan’s thoughts. He sighed. “The Ocean sect was annihilated from the cultivation world a millennium ago. Otherwise, why would I be bold enough to sell the secret manual of another sect?”

“Annihilated? Why was it destroyed?”

“Instead of saying that it was destroyed, you might as well say that they failed to recruit suitable disciples, and their legacy was broken. The person who sold me this half of the cultivation method was a descendant of the sect. Even he did not have the talent to practise this cultivation method, nor did he know where the other half of it was. I’ve specially investigated this over the years, but I’ve found nothing. Otherwise, this book would be worth more than ten times its current price.”

Li Qingshan immediately became disappointed. Even the old man who specially sold books said that, then wouldn’t it be like trying to find a needle in a haystack if he tried searching for it? However, he was still hopeful. “Perhaps I can try with this incomplete cultivation method first. When I reach Foundation Establishment, I can just switch to another cultivation method.” The power of the cultivation method truly interested him.

At his moment, a middle-aged man in vermillion robes with rosy cheeks among the Qi Practitioners said, “Sir, you may not know, but even if we ignore how difficult it is to reach Foundation Establishment, stronger cultivation methods result in more unique true qi. When that really happens, it’ll be difficult for you to switch to other cultivation methods.”

Li Qingshan was no fool. He immediately understood what he was trying to say. They were all water, whether it was water from the ocean or water from the clouds, but just like how a tree had many branches, the further up they were, the further they were from each other. Trying to leap from a branch to another would become more and more difficult as a result. It was just like how it was all Profound Yin true qi, but if the grannies of the Sect of Clouds and Rain wanted to learn corpse refining techniques, they would basically be asking for trouble.

“Thank you for your reminder. May I ask for your esteemed name?”

The rosy-cheeked man said, "I wouldn't say my name is esteemed in any way. You should pick your cultivation method first. I just want to invite you to some alcohol later. I hope you can accept my offer."

Li Qingshan nodded. The old man said the same, "Exactly, and the more profound a cultivation method is, the greater the need you have for the guidance of a senior. You don't seem to be someone who lacks spiritual stones. I have a recommendation." The old man took the catalogue from Li Qingshan's hands and chose a cultivation method for him.

Li Qingshan looked at it and could not help but smile bitterly. It was actually still the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi, but at a closer glance, it was actually priced at ninety-five spiritual stones, more than three times the price of the regular Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. It was labelled with "Complete with Comprehensions". He could not help but raise his head and look at the old man.

The old man said, "The Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi has been improved and modified by countless people. It's basically the orthodox cultivation method. Not only is it easy to practise, but the Gui Water true qi it produces is the most balanced and mild too. If you can cultivate this to a high level, you can basically switch to any high level water cultivation method with that as a foundation."

"And, you're an independent cultivator, so you don't have the guidance of a master, so that's like a natural disadvantage. This Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi is recorded with the cultivation experiences and understandings of many cultivators. It'll definitely be of great help to you."

Li Qingshan nodded. As it turned out, not only was it a cultivation method, but it also included notes for cultivation. Walking down a beaten path was obviously much easier than finding your own. It was also much safer. And, the old man considered very far into the future too. If Li Qingshan could reach the highest level of this cultivation method, he would not be restricted to this tiny store anymore. There was a chance for him to come across even more high level cultivation methods.

"Though, this price is just a little too high."

The rosy-cheeked man agreed, "Yeah. Who would ever buy a cultivation method so expensive?" Even if he and his companions poured their funds together, they could not gather so many spiritual stones.

The old man smiled. "Knowledge is priceless, right? And, the cultivation method comes with seven additional water elemented techniques compared to the regular Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. They're extremely useful, whether it be for gathering herbs or fighting against others."

Chapter 218 - The Book of All

The rosy-cheeked man shook his head. "Learning too many techniques will instead serve as a distraction. It's not beneficial for cultivation."

The old man said, "That's true for regular people, but with this fellow's talent for water cultivation, it'll be much easier for him to grasp these techniques than regular people. Of course, that'll depend on his choice. I also have a version without these techniques for only sixty spiritual stones. If you don't want the notes, just thirty spiritual stones will be enough."

The rosy-cheeked man immediately stopped talking. Geniuses truly could not be compared with ordinary people.

After a while of thought, Li Qingshan made up his mind. "Alright, I'll take this one then. I'm buying it!"

He immediately counted out ninety-five spiritual stones and handed it to the old man. It was not like he lacked spiritual stones, and the cultivation method directly affected his future developments. There was no need for him to be stingy over something like this.

The rosy-cheeked man and his companions were stunned. He had coughed up almost a hundred spiritual stones like it was nothing. His reaction was nothing like an independent cultivator's. No, even for disciples of sects, rarely were there any who could spend so extravagantly. His gaze towards Li Qingshan became even more enthusiastic. He was determined to become acquainted with him now.

The old man smiled as well. He took out a jade slip from his hundred treasures pouch and gave it to Li Qingshan. All shopkeepers liked straightforward customers. All the time and effort he spent on explaining everything had not gone to waste.

The jade slip was white with a hint of yellow. There were many complicated glyphs on it. Even though it was just a single slip, it felt rather hefty in his hand.

Li Qingshan tried focusing his mind on it, and the mental cultivation method for all ten layers of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi appeared, corresponding to the ten layers of Qi Practitioner.

Among them, the first layer laid a foundation for people who directly practised the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. The contents were almost like a simplified version of the Innate Method of Practising Qi. The actual cultivation method laid within the latter nine layers, which corresponded to the eight extraordinary meridians and twelve standard meridians of the human body.

He skimmed through it quickly. The Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi was truly much more complicated than the Innate Method of Practising Qi. His power of understanding was average, and he was not particularly educated either. Without these notes, it really would be rather difficult for him to comprehend the mysteries it dictated. He had made the correct decision.

"Not bad. This is exactly what I wanted. Thank you for your recommendation, uncle." Li Qingshan stowed the jade slip away first. He wanted to compare it to the notes left behind by the various cultivators after he returned; he would slowly try to understand it.

"You're far too polite, sir." The old man was extremely satisfied as well. He thought of something. "Not only does my store have cultivation methods, but it also has various other books and collections. I even have a few mental maps. You definitely should take a look. If you plan on going travelling or adventuring, you'll need a mental map."

With his future cultivation method chosen, Li Qingshan's mind settled down as well. He could think about other matters now. After hearing the old man's words, he asked, "Do you have a mental map of the Green province?"

The old man was slightly surprised. He smiled. "You sure are ambitious, aren't you? I only have a map of the Clear River city here. These are normally enough for Qi Practitioners. Qi Practitioners normally don't need such large mental maps."

“Since you don’t have it, forget about it then.” Li Qingshan wanted to ask around to find out how much the mental map that Gu Yanying had given him was worth so that he could have an idea about how much he would have to pay back. He did not like owing anyone anything, no matter what it was.

The old man said in a hurry, “If you need a larger one, you can stick around for a few days. I can find a way to get my hands on a mental map of the Ruyi commandery, but the price...”

Li Qingshan smiled. “There’s no need for that.” He had already thought it through; that entire matter might have been of no importance at all to Gu Yangying. She had probably forgotten all about it by now. Even if he wanted to return the favour, was he supposed to pay her back in spiritual stones? He would only be looked down upon if he did that.

Thinking back to it now, Gu Yanying had specially handed a bag of spiritual stones to Wang Pushi outside Qingyang city. That definitely was not a bag of inferior spiritual stones. It was something that managed to make a Foundation Establishment cultivator extremely excited, such that they were even afraid of accepting. It was probably worth much more than everything Li Qingshan had on him right now.

However, there would be a day when he would stand before her. In the eyes of regular cultivators, this was a distant objective beyond their reach, but he did not feel discouraged at all. Instead, it filled him with ambition.

At the very least, he had taken another firm step forward. Li Qingshan said, “I’m still inexperienced, so I don’t know much about the matters regarding cultivation, such as some rankings about spiritual springs. Do you have any books that specially cover this area of knowledge so that independent cultivators can patch up what they know?”

Li Qingshan realised that he had a severe lack of understanding in this area through the time he had spent here so far. The Spiritual Springs guide was just an example of lesser significance. Out of all the spiritual herbs underground, he could not even recognise any of them. He did not even know their value, or how to use them. He obviously had to make up for this aspect properly now that such a good opportunity was presented before him.

The old man smiled. “You’ve come to the right person for that.”

He took out another scroll of bamboo slips and passed it to Li Qingshan. It was also a catalogue. Apart from the Spiritual Springs guide, there was a Spiritual Artifacts guide, as well as a Daemons and Beasts guide, which truly enlightened Li Qingshan. One of them was a book that recorded the appearances and effects of spiritual herbs called the Classic of Herbal Medicines, which was what Li Qingshan needed desperately. To him, the importance of this knowledge was no less than a cultivation method.

However, these books were even more diverse than cultivation methods. Just the books that detailed spiritual herbs numbered in the dozens. Each book was by a different author, and some of them even had conflicting information.

“What would you recommend, uncle? I’m looking for a complete collection or an encyclopedia.”

“Definitely!”

As a result, Li Qingshan spent almost another hundred spiritual stones to purchase a jade slip. The name of the jade slip was the Book of All.

Apart from introducing various spiritual herbs and spiritual artifacts, the book also recorded knowledge regarding culture and geography, the detailed history of the Great Xia empire, the information of various famous people and stories, and even miscellaneous gossip like rankings of beauties. It truly contained everything.

With a book in hand, Li Qingshan felt like his future had only become clearer and clearer.

The other Qi Practitioners became even more shocked. The rosy-cheeked man said, "What extravagance, sir!" He had managed to cough up two hundred spiritual stones without even being fazed. Was he really an independent cultivator?

The old man's smile grew even wider. It was not often that he would have such a great transaction. As it seemed, coming to the Green Vine mountain really had been the right decision. "Is there anything else you require, sir? Though, I really can't think of anything else I could sell to you."

Li Qingshan said, "Do you have any books on the classics and scriptures of buddhism?"

"I do!" The old man immediately pulled out a jade slip from his hundred treasures pouch. "This book is called the Canon Depository. It's a compilation of all the buddhist scriptures and classics in the world, compiled by the masters of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga. I'll give it to you for free!"

"Thank you then, uncle!" Li Qingshan accepted the jade slip and was about to take his leave. The old man suddenly grabbed Li Qingshan by his sleeve and shoved a paper book into his hand.

Li Qingshan wanted to say something, but the old man cut him off, "Don't ask anything. Look at it once you get back!" His expression was slightly unnatural.

Li Qingshan's eyes lit up, and he stowed the book into his hundred treasures pouch.

PS: My brain is close to crashing. Clearly, strong afternoon tea isn't as effective as coffee, though the taste is much better!

Chapter 219 - Treaty of Kings

Li Qingshan ignored the curious gazes of the Qi Practitioners. All he asked was, "What are you looking for? Please let me know!"

The rosy-cheeked man was clever enough to not ask too much. He waved his hand in a generous manner. "Here's not a place to talk. Let's go to a teahouse instead!"

"Drinking tea is boring. Is there any place where we can drink alcohol? I'll play the host today." Li Qingshan happened to be in a good mood, having just resolved a few matters on his mind.

The rosy-cheeked man smiled. "I prefer alcohol more as well. There's the Hundred Flavours restaurant just up ahead, though you mustn't try competing with me over who plays the host today."

Li Qingshan held the jade slip to the Book of All and an assortment of information regarding the Hundred Flavours restaurant immediately filled his head. This was an extremely renowned restaurant within the cultivation world of the Clear River province. Even the chefs were Qi Practitioners. They made food similar to how Lu Ziyu brewed tea. They all used techniques that only Qi Practitioners could use to create food that regular people would never be able to taste.

Li Qingshan smiled. This sure was useful. It was like several dozen encyclopedias all gathered in a thin jade slip. It was exactly what he needed as an independent cultivator who had just begun cultivating.

However, while it was not exactly rare for independent cultivators to be willing to spend almost a hundred spiritual stones for this, it was still extremely uncommon. Disciples from sects, on the other hand, all had masters who taught them the common knowledge regarding the cultivation world, so there was even less of a need for them to spend so much money on such items.

They sat down around a long table by the window in the Hundred Flavours restaurant. The rosy-cheeked man said, "I'm Han Xiong. These are my friends." He introduced them to Li Qingshan one by one, and the Qi Practitioners all greeted him.

Li Qingshan nodded to return the gesture. He gave a self-introduction, "I'm Niu Juxia. May I ask why fellow Han has invited me here?" He had thought about it too and found that calling himself Niu'er was a little inappropriate, so he just went with what Yu Zijian had said. He called himself Niu Juxia.

"Are you sir perhaps that Niu Juxia who defeated the inner disciple Song Ming of the Pheasant's Grace mountain in a single strike?" Han Xiong became stern and could not help but refer to him with an honorific.

Li Qingshan had never thought that he would have already made a name for himself. He said modestly, "It was pure luck."

The three other Qi Practitioners became rather surprised and puzzled instead. They were not as well-informed as Han Xiong. They asked, "Brother Xiong, what's this all about? Are you talking about the Golden Pheasant playboy, Song Ming?"

Li Qingshan almost broke into laughter. What Golden Pheasant playboy? That's even worse than the Descended Tiger.

Han Xin explained the matter for his companions.

It was inappropriate for Li Qingshan to chip in, so he studied the restaurant. The restaurant was similar to the other structures in the small town, completely built out of wood. It gave off a fragrance that only timber possessed.

The decor was not extravagant. Instead, it was extremely simple. There was not a single painting or piece of calligraphy, which made Li Qingshan feel like he had only come here to eat and drink. Clearly, this restaurant placed absolute confidence in its culinary arts.

At this moment, a waiter walked past with a serving plate. He wore a square hat on his head with a white towel over his shoulder as he placed down a jug of alcohol and various exquisite dishes that went with the drinking. His voice was filled with enthusiasm, introducing the names and origins of these dishes. His movements and speech were perfect, but they were rather mechanical.

Only with a closer glance did Li Qingshan discover that there were no waiters here at all. They were all just puppets, but they were designed to great detail, and they wore the clothing of waiters. Their exposed skin had been painted by some kind of dye. As such, it seemed exactly the same as real skin. Clearly, they were not a model used for combat.

Evidently, it was because this market did not allow the entry of regular people, but Qi Practitioners would never be willing to work as waiters, so they had to specially order these waiter puppets from mohists.

By now, Han Xiong had finished explaining Li Qingshan's glorious achievements in battle. The Qi Practitioners all looked at Li Qingshan with respect as well. Among them, the strongest was Han Xiong, who was only a fifth layer Qi Practitioner. Even if they worked together, they were not the opponent of any internal disciple of the three mountains. They originally thought that Li Qingshan was a little Qi Practitioner who had only just begun his path of cultivation, but never did they imagine that he would be such a powerful figure.

Han Xiong stood up and poured alcohol for Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan sat right where he was. He lifted his cup and nodded at Han Xiong before drinking all of it. He smiled, "You can tell me what you're looking for now, right, fellow Han?"

Han Xiong drank his alcohol in a hurry. "We're all members of the Truth-seeking society. We sincerely invite you to join us, fellow Niu!"

Was the Truth-seeking society a sect? Li Qingshan checked the Book of All in a hurry, but he found nothing.

Han Xiong said, "Don't worry too much, fellow Niu. The Truth-seeking society is just an association created by independent cultivators. It's not some major sect, so the Book of All won't have any records of it."

"An association of independent cultivators?" This was the first time Li Qingshan had heard of an organisation like that. He asked curiously, "Actually, I've never really understood what counts as an independent cultivator."

"Now that's something you might not know, fellow Niu. Independent cultivators don't just refer to cultivators who move about independently. As long as you don't come from a clan or sect, you're an independent cultivator."

Li Qingshan said, "With your cultivation at the fifth layer, fellow Han, it's more than enough for you to create your own clan or sect."

Han Xiong smiled bitterly. "Without my own heritage and legacies, how can I claim to lead a clan or sect? Normally, if a clan or sect doesn't have a Foundation Establishment cultivator, they're still independent cultivators even if they have countless Qi Practitioners gathered together. You won't be recognised by the cultivation world. To be honest, my Han family is basically like the local king in the Smooth Sailing city two hundred and fifty kilometers north-east of here."

"However, they're nothing in the cultivation world. They're often pushed aside and harassed by disciples of sects. That's why we created this association; it is so that we can protect one another."

Li Qingshan asked, "With your strength at the fifth layer, can't you join a sect?" He pointed at the towering mountain outside the window. "Such as the Green Vine mountain."

Han Xiong sighed, "I'm old, and I'm not as talented as brother Niu, so which sect would accept me? I can only rely on myself to fumble around and hopefully make some progress. So how is it? Would you like to check out our Truth-seeking society, Niu Juxia?"

It made sense to Li Qingshan. All of the sect disciples he had seen so far were young and around the fifth or sixth layer in strength. In comparison, Han Xiong seemed to be in his forties or fifties at the very least. His talent definitely was not fantastic.

Suddenly, he remembered what Zhou Wenbin had said in the past. Sects usually only recruited young disciples who would grow up in the mountains under the guidance of their master and with the care and concern of their seniors. These various ties would result in a sense of recognition and belonging. That was the foundation of a sect's existence.

Li Qingshan deliberated over Han Xiong's invitation. "I'm afraid I don't have the time. And, I might also join a sect in the future..."

Seeing how Li Qingshan did not openly turn him down, Han Xiong became even more enthusiastic. "The Truth-seeking society is not a sect. You don't have to do anything for the society at all. All we do is gather from time to time and discuss our understanding of cultivation or exchange some resources. It definitely won't take up any time at all."

The three Qi Practitioners by his side added, "Yeah, yeah. Everyone just talks and drinks when we're together. It's fantastic!"

"Last year, we even organised a group to enter the Boundless mountains, and we came across a few hundred kilograms of black iron essence."

Li Qingshan gained a deeper understanding towards the nature of this Truth-seeking society.

Han Xiong said, "How about this? We have a gathering in Quiet Spring valley coming up. You can come along with us. If you don't like it, we won't force you into anything."

"I'll consider it!" Li Qingshan lifted his cup and said nothing more. Han Xiong looked at his companions and none of them said anything more either. "Come, let's drink!"

Li Qingshan looked out of the window, at the streets blazing with lanterns and the Qi Practitioners who flowed endlessly. He asked in wonder, "Is it always so lively here?"

Han Xiong said, "How would that be possible? It's all because the once-a-decade Herb Gathering ceremony of the three mountains is drawing near, which is why so many Qi Practitioners have been drawn here. They're all preparing for that!"

Li Qingshan was puzzled. "The Herb Gathering ceremony of the three mountains? What's it got to do with independent cultivators?"

Han Xiong said, "The disciples of the three mountains are stronger. When they go out to pick herbs, they can draw the attention of daemonic beasts, and we independent cultivators might be able to take advantage of the situation and get lucky."

"Aren't we just being used by the three mountains to serve as bait for the daemonic beasts as well?"

Li Qingshan turned around. He saw the speaker, the fourth layer Qi Practitioner Zhou Wei, sneer from ear to ear.

Han Xiong said, "Anyways, it's always safer if there are more people."

"Safer? I don't think so. Countless Qi Practitioners die underground at every gathering. How many of them die to the mouths of daemonic beasts?"

"Underground? Isn't it the Boundless mountains?" Surprised, Li Qingshan placed down his cup.

Han Xiao smiled. "Brother Niu, you really don't know anything. The spiritual herbs in and around the Boundless mountains have basically all been picked already. If you venture any further, you can easily attract the attention of a Daemon General, which would annihilate any group of Qi Practitioners. Who would be bold enough to venture into the depths?"

Li Qingshan felt a rather ill omen. He continued to ask, "Aren't there any daemons and Daemon Generals underground?"

Han Xiong said, "Of course there are. Speaking of which, some parts underground are more dangerous than the Boundless mountains. However, travelling east and west when you're underground will be much safer."

Isn't that Milliped's territory? Li Qingshan asked in a hurry, "How come?" He already had an inkling to the answer of that question.

Han Xiong showed off his knowledge. "If you asked someone else, they might not be able to answer you, but the leader of our association happens to have a friend who is a core disciple of the Burial Mound mountain, which is why I know!"

"If you try gathering herbs elsewhere, killing daemons and collecting their daemon cores, you'll definitely end up drawing over a Daemon General. You'll be lucky if even a single person returns alive from a group of ten. However, the Daemon General rarely ever appears in that area, and the Herb Gathering ceremony only truly begins in a month or two. Do you know why?"

"Why?"

"That's because they have to wait for the coldest time of the year. It's said that the Daemon General will go into hibernation around that time, so it's the perfect opportunity for killing daemonic beasts and gathering spiritual herbs. Even if we make a complete mess underground, it won't matter."

Li Qingshan suddenly felt speechless. He knew what Milliped loved the most was eating and sleeping. Even if it was not winter, he probably spent most of his time on the stone platform asleep, giving the Qi Practitioners a window of opportunity.

However, why had he only heard Milliped mention the oppression from other Daemon Generals and not the threat from above ground?

"Why do we have to be afraid of Daemon Generals? Aren't the sect masters of the three mountains all Foundation Establishment cultivators? As long as they work together, they can even kill Daemon Generals!"

Han Xiong's eyes widened. "Fellow Niu, don't you even know about the Treaty of Kings?" He had suddenly exclaimed that, which alarmed Qi Practitioners from neighbouring tables. They all looked over at Li Qingshan with surprise and contempt.

It was as if Li Qingshan was not ignorant about the Treaty of Kings, but ignorant about the fact that the sun was round.

Zhou Wei said, "You've only just begun cultivation, so there's nothing strange about being ignorant of it. The Book of All must have an extremely detailed account on this. Why don't you take a look?"

Li Qingshan held the jade slip and focused on it. Immediately, he obtained all the information on the Treaty of Kings. The information was extremely complicated. If he read through it bit by bit, probably even three days and nights would not be enough for him to go through all of it.

However, he skimmed through it and gained a rough understanding. He understood why these Qi Practitioners had been so surprised. Qi Practitioners who were ignorant of this could truly be considered as still wet behind the ears.

The Treaty of Kings originated from the founding emperor of Great Xia. Legends had it that he possessed the bloodline of daemons, and when he waged war across the world, he only managed to found the Great Xia empire with the assistance of many powerful daemons.

After founding the Great Xia empire, he divided up the world. The most important and most illustrious titles of nobility went to the human kings of the eight provinces and the ten Daemon Kings.

Under the host of the founding empire, the kings converged, and after a hundred days of negotiation, they signed a treaty, dividing the domains of daemons and humans, preventing the two races from ever infringing on one another again.

The thing that prevented Milliped from taking a step above ground was not the Daemon Commander above him. It was not even the Green province's Dragon King of Ink Sea. Instead, it was this treaty that had lasted for several thousands of years.

However, low level daemonic beasts had limited intelligence, and there were just too many Qi Practitioners, making it difficult to restrain them. As a result, whether it be daemonic beasts rushing onto the surface or Qi Practitioners venturing underground, it was all within the boundaries that could be tolerated and was secretly permitted. Of course, they would just be killed by the other party, so that was no different from seeking death.

The individuals that the treaty truly restricted were humans and daemons that had survived the first heavenly tribulation, whether it be Foundation Establishment cultivators venturing underground to kill daemons, or Daemon Generals coming above ground to kill humans.

The best outcome when the treaty was broken would be both races teaming up to hunt down the violators, while the worst was reigniting the flames of war, sucking in all humans and daemons.

Today, three Foundation Establishment cultivators ventured underground to kill a Daemon General, while tomorrow, it was possible for a Daemon Commander to appear and slaughter all the Qi Practitioners within the Green Vine mountain and this small town.

Even with Li Qingshan's recklessness, he shivered at that thought.

However, he also relaxed slightly when he heard how Foundation Establishment cultivators would not venture underground. However, he also thought of a multitude of things in the process. As the leader of the daemon soldiers, the daemons and daemoniac beasts were all his subordinates, so he could not just let them be slaughtered. And, he was supposed to possess absolute control over the various resources underground. He would never just hand it all over on a silver platter.

If he were purely a daemon, he would obviously return underground immediately and gather the daemons to set up traps so that he could slaughter all the intruders. He would end up with a lot of hundred treasures pouches instead.

However, at the end of the day, he had mutated into a daemon from a human, so the decision was no longer so easy to make. For a moment, he even lost interest in the food.

He forced himself to calm down and asked Han Xiong many things about the Herb Gathering ceremony before bidding farewell and leaving.

Han Xiong could tell that Li Qingshan had lost interest now, so he did not force him to stay. However, he did try to persuade him to come visit the Quiet Spring valley in the future again.

After learning the time and location, he agreed in the end. This was no longer for the sake of broadening his knowledge. The Quiet Spring valley was close to here, and they would converge before the Herb Gathering ceremony. No matter what his decision was, he had to keep an eye out for the situation here constantly.

Arriving downstairs, Li Qingshan ordered another table of dishes and drinks, storing it into his hundred treasures pouch before leaving.

It was late. Li Qingshan found an inn to rest for the night. He spent five spiritual stones for their best room. Under the guidance of the boss, he opened the antiquated door and discovered that the space inside was much larger than he had expected it to be. He knew that they must have used some kind of formation to increase the space inside.

Although it was winter, the room was toasty. A thick thick, silken rug covered the ground. The patterns of the rug did not just seem to be patterns, but some kind of formation as well, making the spiritual qi in the room slightly denser than outside.

A detailed beauty was embroidered on a jade screen as she played a pipa. The boss knocked the screen, and the sound of traditional instruments began to play.

There was a cushion in the room that was said to gather the spiritual qi of the world and was said to be very beneficial to cultivation.

There was even a huge bathing pool in the room. Not only could it gather water by itself, but there were even two glyphs that could be used to control the temperature of the water.

These were all small gadgets that various Qi Practitioners had come up with. Not only had Li Qingshan never seen them before, but he had not even thought of them before. It was not exactly a technological miracle, but it could definitely bring great comfort to people.

Just when the boss was about to leave, he suddenly stopped and revealed a smile that all men understood. "If you feel lonely and find it difficult to fall asleep, I happen to know a few young, pretty female cultivators. All you need is a few spiritual stones..." He treated Li Qingshan as an ignorant but wealthy customer who was liberal with money.

Li Qingshan was immediately left at a loss as for how to react. He felt like he had been put in someone else's shoes for some reason. He really wondered whether there would be police, no, Hawkwolf guards who would come and inspect the rooms. He waved his hand in a hurry and declined sternly, "No need. I'm going to rest now!"

The boss felt that it was quite the pity. He refused to relent. "There are Communication talismans in the room. If you have any needs, feel free to call me!"

Li Qingshan closed the door and exhaled, placing down the bamboo basket and opening it. "You can come out now!"

Xiao An extended her hands towards him. Li Qingshan asked, "Can't you get out by yourself?" However, he still lifted her out. He placed the dishes on the table. "Time to eat!"

He sat to one side and watched Xiao An eat as he leaned on his elbow. However, his mind wandered off somewhere. He was not even in the mood to look at the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi.

Xiao An asked with her childish voice, "Aren't you eating?"

Li Qingshan said, "I've already eaten." However, Xiao An had already brought a piece of fish to his mouth.

"You really are getting more and more naughty." Li Qingshan said before eating the fish. "What do you think I should do?"

Xiao An asked in confusion, "What?"

Li Qingshan, "That damned Herb Gathering ceremony obviously."

Xiao An was astounded. "Aren't we killing them all?"

Li Qingshan was taken aback. "Since when did I say that. It's not like I know them, nor are they coming directly for me. It's not a good idea to massacre everyone like this, right?"

Xiao An lowered her head, "But I don't know them either!" To her, that reason was enough. No, more correctly, she did not even need a reason. Apart from the man right before her, everyone else could go and die.

Strangely enough, because of each other's existence, neither of them could become great fiends who did whatever they wanted.

Chapter 220 - Smut

Li Qingshan rubbed her cheek and said seriously, "Look, just because you don't know them, doesn't mean that you can kill them!" When he said that, he immediately felt like he had ascended. He felt like he had completed his duty as an educator. As it turns out, I'm such a kind-hearted person!

Xiao An blinked her eyes. Who knows whether she had understood that or not.

However, Li Qingshan had already come up with a plan, so he no longer felt troubled. He arrived behind the screen and took off all of his clothes, revealing his healthy body that seemed to be chiseled from rock. He stretched his shoulders before leaping into the swimming-pool-like bath with a plunk.

Hot water spilled over the edge of the bathing pool and reached up to his chest. Li Qingshan undid his hair and leaned comfortably against the edge of the pool. He took out the jade slip for the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi and studied it closely.

The first layer was a simplified version of the Innate Method of Practising Qi, so he glanced through it and knew that he did not have to spend too much time on it. However, it became rather difficult when he began on the second layer. Originally, he believed that he only needed to convert his true qi into Gui Water true qi, but upon studying it closer, he discovered that it was not that simple.

It was also about cultivating the Yang Heel meridian, but the requirements were not as simple as opening the meridian. The five organs corresponded to the five elements, and the kidneys primarily focused on water. The Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi needed to resonate with the kidneys, allowing him to feel and draw out the essence of Gui water.

However, just how he was supposed to make it resonate and how he was supposed to draw it out was hidden within a passage of profound, archaic text. If it were not for the foundation that the Innate Method of Practising Qi had established for him, he would have absolutely no idea where to begin. Although it was slightly better now, he still found it to be extremely obscure and difficult to understand. Fortunately, he had bought the version with explanations. The notes and comprehensions from the past seniors made it much easier to understand. At the very least, he could make some progress as he fumbled about.

However, the contents of the notes were ten times more complicated than the mental cultivation method of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. After looking at it for a while, he felt rather dizzy. He had to admit that talent and intelligence had nothing to do with him.

He plunged his head into the water and bobbed up and down in the ripples. His heart calmed down as a result. He thought of something. His ability to understand might have been lacklustre, but wasn't there a child prodigy right beside him that even the black ox praised?

Li Qingshan said, "Xiao An, are you done with eating? Come take a bath!" From drinking tea to eating, no matter what the enjoyment was, he would never forget about her.

Xiao An immediately arrived before him. She took off her clothes and leapt into the water too.

Li Qingshan passed the jade slip to her. "Help me take a look." Afterwards, he took out the book that the shopkeeper uncle had given to him so carefully. He had taken it in a hurry back then. As such, he did not even have the time to see the name of the book.

He was rather eager. Just what could it be, seeing how the uncle had given it to him so carefully? Could it be some unique cultivation method or a secret manual that the uncle had specially given to him without accepting a single spiritual stone because he saw his outstanding talent and knew that he would have to bear the heavy burden of saving the world?

The binding of the book was extremely meticulous, held together by thread perfectly. It gave off the faint fragrance of ink. The paper used for it was the best of the best as well. It felt rather weighty in his hand. However, it was a little too new for it to be some divine arts or secret manual.

Whatever. I'll take a look first. On the smooth, vermillion cover were three elegant, refined words—A Flower's Slumber. The name seemed a little different from the names of secret manuals in Li Qingshan's imagination.

He flipped a page and saw at the very top. "Chapter One, Hua Sanniang Mistakes her Lover." Following that was a poem. The poem said, "Life never goes to plan. Endless longing begins with a moment of hatred. Who is willing to die for love? Enemies at first, only to convene later."

TL: This is a parody of a novel written in the late Ming dynasty, Love-Hate. The poem is the same as the poem for chapter 1 of the actual novel.

"The fuck is this?" Li Qingshan was taken aback. The book that the uncle had shoved to him in such a secretive and careful manner was actually a novel. He refused to believe it was just that, so he patiently read on. However, it was only a very boring story. If it were just boring, then so be it, but the further he read, the more he felt that something was amiss. The novel's description of the matters in the bedroom were particularly bold.

Of course, to a transmigrator like Li Qingshan, the white steamed buns, purple violet meats or whatever was not stimulating at all. However, it did stand out like a sore thumb in the day and age he was currently in!

Flipping a dozen pages forward, basically all of the male characters in the novel "went at it" with all the female characters, but it did not make the novel any less boring. When he flipped to the fifteenth page, an exquisitely-drawn image was presented boldly before Li Qingshan.

Not only was the linework of the image meticulous, but even their expressions were life-like. Even for the well-experienced Li Qingshan, he found it to be a rather impressive piece of art. Afterwards, he lost the patience to go through it page by page. Flipping through it casually, he found many more images like that later on in the novel.

Li Qingshan was finally convinced. In his hand was actually smut.

But that made no sense! Why would the old man who seemed very well-respected, who treated people amiably, carefully give him smut?

Even the weakest cultivator possessed absolute authority among regular people. Instead of reading something like this, they could just go find a courtesan in a brothel instead. Wouldn't it be much simpler and more straightforward?

Perhaps the old man was a book lover and appreciated some cultural aspects in the novel, which was why he wanted to share it with him, but maybe he was afraid that Li Qingshan would look down on the book due to its contents?

That was the only explanation that made sense. However, the contents of the book just happened to be extremely clumsy. There was not even a drop of cultural value to speak of.

Li Qingshan was utterly bewildered. He felt ten times more confused than when he read the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi earlier. There was definitely something amiss. There must have been a secret hidden within all of this. It was just purposely hidden with a trashy book.

As a result, Li Qingshan felt up the book. Nothing was hidden in there. He channeled true qi into it. There was no reaction. He brought it near a fire. No image appeared. He doused it in water. It became wet.

He looked through it inside out and tried various different methods, but it was just an ordinary book. Perhaps the contents of the book were hiding some kind of code? But even if it did, there was no chance for him to find it.

He would find Xiao An whenever he lacked the intelligence for something. He glanced at Xiao An and saw how she was focusing all of her attention on the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. Then he looked at the book in his hands. If she discovered he read something like that, it would be utterly humiliating.

He immediately gave up on that idea. If it were not for the fact that Xiao An was beside him, he probably would have tried all the poses depicted in the images to see whether they were some method for circulating qi.

“What are you looking at?” Xiao An suddenly leaned over. Her damp, wet hair draped on her pale shoulders and floated on the water. It made them seem even more like a certain aquatic plant.

Smash! Li Qingshan slapped the book close and said unnaturally, “Nothing. Ah, you’ve finished studying it?” For some reason, he thought of the expression that the old man had when he gave it to him.

Xiao An glanced at the book in Li Qingshan’s hands curiously. She had already understood the entirety of the second layer of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi, so she explained it to Li Qingshan using language that could not be any plainer.

Li Qingshan immediately felt enlightened. He pecked her and praised, “How clever. Why didn’t I think of this earlier?”

Xiao An blushed, vaguely revealing a hint of the great beauty that she should not have possessed yet through the steam.

Only then did Li Qingshan suddenly remember the difference in their genders. He smiled. “Once you get a little older, we can’t wash together anymore.”

Xiao An raised her head. “Then I’ll never grow older.”

“That’s nonsense? How can there be a person who never grows older?”

“I’m not a person.”

Li Qingshan did not take something so childish to heart. “Yep, yep. Neither of us are people. However, children will still grow up.”

Xiao An pouted.

Li Qingshan said, "You've said so much, but you seem to have forgotten the most important part. How do I convert true qi into Gui Water true qi?"

Xiao An said, "Can't you just directly absorb the spiritual qi of the world?"

Li Qingshan scratched his head. "I'm really not that bright, am I?" His daemon core was of the water element. He could cultivate Gui Water true qi the same way he cultivated his daemon core. All he needed was the boundless world. Why did he have to be fixated on just himself?

He was not stupid. His mind had just been entrenched. He treated the cultivation method as all there was. The recommendations from the seniors who penned the notes were all directed at regular Qi Practitioners. They never would have thought that a Qi Practitioner who could absorb the spiritual qi of the world would actually exist.

Li Qingshan said, "Oh right, the uncle gave me a book. I feel like it's definitely hiding something, but I just can't find it."

Xiao An asked curiously, "Was it the one just then?"

"Yes!"

"Can't I take a look?"

"Absolutely not." Li Qingshan shook his head.

Xiao An said in disappointment, "Then can't you just go and ask him tomorrow?"

Li Qingshan was stunned again. It was not like the bookstore would grow legs and run away. I can just pay a visit tomorrow.

"Why have I suddenly become so dumb today? It must be this damned book. It has impacted my intelligence!"

Xiao An faltered. She wanted to say, "But you didn't read the book earlier," but she managed to hold it back.

Li Qingshan said, "Oh right, this is for you." He passed the jade slip called the Canon Depository to Xiao An.

Xiao An accepted it happily and bashfully. Li Qingshan took out the Book of All as well and looked up the information of a few spiritual herbs according to his memory. Just as he had expected, every single one of them could be used to refine pills. Out of them, the one worth the most were the flowers that turned into butterflies in Milliped's dwelling. They were called Blue Butterfly flowers, and they were a crucial component for refining a precious type of pill.

The name of this precious pill was the True Spirit pill.

Li Qingshan then looked up the information regarding the True Spirit pill. He found it to be rather familiar, and he suddenly thought of something. Wasn't the True Spirit pill the two unknown pills he had obtained from the two grannies of the Sect of Clouds and Rain?

The effect of the True Spirit pill was extremely simple. It converted true qi into spiritual qi. It was something crucial for Qi Practitioners when they tried to break through to Foundation Establishment. The two grannies must have set them aside carefully so that they could ingest them when they reached the peak of Qi Practitioner, but it ended up as easy pickings for Li Qingshan.

As for the value of the spiritual herb that Milliped described to be disgusting, it went without saying. Unfortunately, the Book of All only gave a simple introduction to the effects of the True Spirit pill, as well as how to use it, but it did not detail the formula or method to refine it. Information that actually possessed value would not appear in widespread books like this.