

Chapter 251 - The Green Ruins Sword

Even with that being the case, the Steel Plate corpses still caused Li Qingshan quite the trouble. It was a pity that Xiao An was not here, or these Steel Plate corpses would be easily dealt with. Originally, he had Xiao An hide underground so that she could lead a coordinated attack with him at a critical moment and deal a crucial blow to the enemy.

However, after the violent collisions and the destruction from the Ox Demon Tramples, the caves in the pit had completely collapsed, now buried under thousands of tonnes of rock. It basically destroyed the starting point of the Herb Gathering ceremony for good. Xiao An was trapped below as well, so she was unable to provide any assistance for now.

The Lone Grave Elder also saw how the Steel Plate corpses could not be defeated by Li Qingshan immediately. A small, bone sceptre appeared in his hand; it had a small skull on the tip. He swung it around, and the eye sockets of the skull unleashed a streak of red light.

Li Qingshan felt a strong sense of danger. He did not want to experience the full-powered strike of a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but if he used the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell and let the zombie beneath him break free, the situation would only worsen. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

A Steel Plate corpse stood in front of Li Qingshan. It just happened to be in the path of the red light. Half of the Steel Plate corpse had melted away silently and instantly.

The Lone Grave Elder was surprised. All the Steel Plate corpses were under his control, so why did one appear out of nowhere?

A black hole had appeared in the ground at a certain time. The Steel Plate corpse had emerged from there.

Under Xiao An's command as the vice leader, the boulder viper had used its burrowing abilities to create a deep hole. However, getting the daemons to partake in this battle would be impossible.

Two skulls emerged and sprayed flames at Li Qingshan.

The Lone Grave Elder was surprised. He became even more confused whether the arriving person was an ally or an enemy.

Li Qingshan did not avoid it. Like taking a shower, he allowed the flames to wash over him. Wherever the flames passed by, the Steel Plate corpses all collapsed. The flames then extended towards the Ancient Bronze Corpse General below Li Qingshan's feet, but it was stopped by a layer of black corpse qi.

The Ancient Bronze Corpse General experienced a great sense of threat and struggled even more desperately.

The Lone Grave Elder sensed how his connection with all the Steel Plate corpses had been severed. His expression changed as he called out, "Where be the wretched daemon? Show your true form!"

Red light flashed through the eyes of the Steel Plate corpses, and they all stood up, turning around and lunging at the Lone Grave Elder.

A chill ran down the Lone Grave Elder's back. Through all the years he had spent cultivating, he had never seen such a strange sight before. If the zombies that had to be refined with so much effort could be stolen so easily, why would refining corpses still be a thing in the world? He wondered what the fire was, seeing how it was capable of something like this.

As the Lone Grave Elder retreated, scarlet light shot out from his sceptre and struck three Steel Plate corpses. Most of them immediately melted away, but fire immediately sprang up around the corpses, merging them into the skull.

The Lone Grave Elder was pained. Refining these Steel Plate corpses had not been easy. Never did he think there would be a day when he would have to destroy them with his own hands. Black mist surged beneath his feet and pulled him into the air. All the Steel Plate corpses missed him.

Kicking hard, they leapt high into the air and touched the black cloud, but they were unable to fly, so they fell back down.

At this moment, the two Skull Prayer Beads became even larger. They flew around and collected all the Steel Plate corpses before rushing towards the Lone Grave Elder. They were like two carrier ships.

Li Qingshan knew very well that just his and Xiao An's strength was definitely not enough to kill a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but all they needed to do was keep them busy and make time for Milliped to kill one of them. Afterwards, they could defeat the others one by one. Even if they could not kill all of them, at least they could leave easily.

Only a thin layer of withered wood remained around the Green Vine Elder. He called out, "Please save me!" This time, he was not talking to the Golden Pheasant Elder and the Lone Grave Elder.

"Daemons run amuck and bring strife to this world. Fu Qingjin of the Sword Collection palace has specially come to provide assistance, to purge and eliminate daemons."

A man's voice suddenly rang out in the sky, but it did not possess the elation and boldness that befitted it. Instead, it was rather indifferent and bored, as if purging daemons did not interest him at all.

Great streaks of green light fell from the sky, enveloping the entire pit.

Time seemed to freeze. An undefeatable power made Li Qingshan's heart shiver. He looked around and a ruined, abandoned structure grew from the ground, like an illusion yet also realistic.

A green streak of light tore through the sky, like a silent bolt of lightning, yet also like a vicious wound.

Milliped howled out in pain and fell from the air, falling into the ruins heavily. A huge wound appeared on his back as blood flowed out like a stream. Even the toughest part of him, the shell on his back, was unable to stop the power of the green light.

Above the green ruins in the sky, Fu Qingjin stood with his sword as his worn out, green robes ruffled in the wind.

The Green Vine Elder, who had narrowly escaped death, was still shaken. He bowed at the air. "Thank you for saving me, fellow." The Golden Pheasant Elder and the Lone Grave Elder bowed at him deeply too.

Fu Qingjin's indifferent gaze scanned past their faces, like a king looking at his useless subjects. The three of them felt like their faces had been stabbed with humiliation as they burnt up.

"This person is so powerful!" Hua Chenglu was overcome with amazement.

"It's you!" Yu Zijian exclaimed.

Fu Qingjin turned around, and his gaze immediately became much softer. He seemed to go from the lonely king back to that leisurely swordsman from before. However, he only nodded and said nothing more to her.

Instead, he said to Hua Chengzan, "You've already fulfilled your obligations, but no one can maintain peace in the world for long. With your talent, you will definitely have quite the accomplishments in the chaotic future if you're willing to resign from your position as the hawks and hounds of the empire."

He gently consoled Hua Chengzan over his failures, even showing much admiration, but he was like a senior directing a junior, even referring to the Hawkwolf Guard as hawks and hounds. Their ages were not particularly far apart either.

"What has the peace of the world got to do with me? You're more than welcome to do what you want to do, sir. Though, you'd better be careful or they'll escape again, and you'll humiliate yourself." Hua Chengzan recovered his tired and indolent attitude.

However, Hua Chenglu could feel that Hua Chengzan had lost his usual composure when he faced this person, which was why he was forced to use this attitude to mask himself.

"Yeah, what has it got to do with me?" Fu Qingjin was not annoyed either. He sighed gently, as if he was emotional. Suddenly, he jerked to his senses and cried out, "Each and every person has responsibility over the prosperity of the world! How can you shy away from your obligations?" He seemed like he was speaking to Hua Chengzan, yet it also seemed like he was speaking to himself.

With a flash of green light, Fu Qingjin vanished.

Hua Chenglu pointed at her head and stifled her voice. "Don't tell me there's something wrong with this person's head?"

Yu Zijian said, "He seemed to be in great pain."

Hua Chengzan asked, "You know him?"

Yu Zijian shook her head, but she felt like she had met him somewhere, not on the Green Vine mountain by the pond, but some time even further away than that.

Hua Chengzan lowered his head in thought. The Green Ruins sword had been drawn, just as expected. There was nothing for him to be surprised about with the strength Fu Qingjin possessed. He had already come up with guesses by himself. This matter was so significant that everyone involved had undergone no less than one heavenly tribulation, yet they sent him, a Qi Practitioner, to handle this. They probably

did not have the determination to stop this in the first place. Perhaps it was just a concession for what had happened with the Soaring Dragon Elder.

The appearance of the Green Ruins sword only verified this speculation further now.

Chapter 252 - A Hopeless Situation

In the Sword Collection palace was a divine mountain called Sword Collection. This mountain was not connected to the ground and hovered in the sky instead. It was covered in treasured swords. As long as a disciple of the Sword Collection palace had undergone their first heavenly tribulation and become a formal disciple, they could pull a sword out from there as their own, personal sword. On the day of their passing, the sword would return to the Sword Collection peak to await its next owner.

The cultivation methods of the Sword Collection palace were about becoming one with the sword. Cultivating was training the sword, while training the sword was also cultivating.

Even a piece of scrap metal could become a terrifyingly powerful weapon after being refined by several generations of masters, so the power of these swords was self-explanatory. Moreover, it was rumored that these swords contained the spirit and will of their past masters, so only when they came across suitable masters could they be drawn from the mountain. As a result, not only did the person choose the sword, but the sword chose the person too. All tricks were useless. It was completely up to luck.

Once a sword was drawn, it was like meeting a great mentor or a close friend. The benefits brought to the sword wielder would be far more than obtaining a powerful sword. This was where the foundation and legacy of the Sword Collection palace resided, as well as why the sect was called Sword Collection.

And, sword cultivators were stronger than regular cultivators in battle anyway. Accompanied by a treasured sword, it was like giving wings to a tiger, making them even stronger.

The many swords varied in power. Among them, there were ten swords renowned throughout the world—the Ten Renowned Swords. Any disciple who drew them would receive the full support and nurturing of the Sword Collection palace. Basically every single master of the Sword Collection palace wielded one of these Ten Renowned Swords. The Green Ruins sword happened to be one of them.

This was not as simple as giving wings to a tiger anymore. Instead, it was directly turning a tiger into a tiger daemon. It was as easy as cake to deal with these three old men. However, the strange part of it was that Fu Qingjin had only gone through his heavenly tribulation recently, so how did he grasp the Green Ruins sword so soon?

Originating from a powerful clan, Hua Chengzan was very intelligent. He possessed encyclopedic knowledge, probably knowing even more than the entire Book of All. He obviously knew about the histories and stories regarding the larger sects of the Green province too.

Suddenly, he remembered another reason why the Green Ruins sword was renowned. Among the Ten Renowned Swords, there was only one pair of male and female swords. Green Ruins was the female sword, while the male sword was Violet Clouds. It was even stronger than the Green Ruins sword. Once one sword had been drawn, the other would be drawn soon too.

Since Green Ruins had been drawn, where was Violet Clouds?

When he thought of that, he suddenly looked at Yu Zijian. She currently stared right ahead. Was she it?

Thinking back to how Fu Qingjin had looked at Yu Zijian earlier, his head immediately cleared up.

She was. With how large the Green province was, there was no need for Fu Qingjin to travel over five thousand kilometers to the Clear River prefecture to kill a Daemon General. With his strength, were there any Daemon Generals that could match him evenly? As it turned out, his objective was this.

Large sects definitely possessed figures skilled at divination and could peer into the heavenly secrets. Apart from seeking talented juniors to join the sect and learn their arts like regular sects, they had another special method, which was searching for "fated people". They rarely ever recruited anyone like that, but they could find a few figures with startling talent among the sea of people out there with this method.

These people were like uncut jade. Most of the time, they would not demonstrate any special cultivation talent. Cultivation should have had nothing to do with them for their entire lives. They would live their entire lives as regular people until their deaths. However, once they were given some guidance, stepping into the cultivation world, they would immediately be like dragons in the sea, completely in their element. They would rise up swiftly and abruptly.

If he had guessed correctly, then Chenglu would be the one benefiting from their tie of friendship, not Zijian. Although the Hua family had some power in the Clear River prefecture, they were nothing compared to the Sword Collection palace. His thoughts immediately extended to a very deep and far-reaching level, wanting to see how he could derive benefit for the Hua family using this piece of information. The battle below had instead stopped concerning him.

Victory had been predetermined anyway.

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Fu Qingjin appeared in the green ruins, standing on half a pillar, as if he was aloof from the world.

It would take several dozen people to hug the pillar given its circumference, so it was possible to imagine just how glorious the palace it once supported was.

"The Sword Collection palace!" Li Qingshan's eyes narrowed. Fu Qingjin overlapped with a certain figure in his memory. Although that person had been easily killed by the black ox, the impression of his sharp sword qi still lingered in his heart. He was not bold enough to forget about it.

"You've heard of it?" Fu Qingjin looked back and asked. He had just lifted the Green Ruins sword before stopping again.

Before Li Qingshan could answer him, the Ancient Bronze Corpse General finally broke free. Its rusted bronze armour was in a horrible shape, while a few of its bones had twisted and broken too. It roared furiously at Li Qingshan, about to lunge at him.

Fu Qingjin glanced at it, and the roar stopped. The Ancient Bronze Corpse General fled in a hurry, rushing back to the Lone Grave Elder like a frightened hound to its master.

The three elders gathered together and slowly pacified their spiritual energy. They no longer had any intention of fighting, as they knew that there was no need for them at all since he was already here.

When they thought back to how they had clashed on the Green Vine mountain, they could not help but sigh in amazement.

“Is there anything else you want to say? Forget it, it’s all pointless. You won’t get anything out of speaking more.” With the same resolve as the Soaring Dragon Elder in the past, Fu Qingjin swung down with his sword.

The light was like a streak, a deep green in colour. It seemed like a green eye had opened up in the air, projecting the complete state of mind of a certain person. It was filled with emptiness and melancholy, narrating the rises and falls through the ages and the great changes that time could bring.

No matter how glorious a civilisation was, there would be a day when it would wither away. No matter how powerful an empire was, it would not be able to escape the fate of destruction, only for future people to visit their ruins and ponder about the past. As for the measly people who lived among them, there was nothing.

Li Qingshan’s willpower was still as tough as ever, so he returned to his senses with a single jerk. He threw a punch as he retreated abruptly, using the Spirit Turtle’s Profound Shell at the same time. He basically completed all three tasks simultaneously.

Li Qingshan immediately retreated to over a hundred meters away. The streak of light landed on the Spirit Turtle’s Profound Shell, and his daemon qi depleted rapidly. The Spirit Turtle’s Profound Shell trembled violently, but it managed to hold up in the end.

His breathing had become slightly ragged while his scarlet pupils burned like fire. He was no longer the Li Qingshan of the past. He would not be slashed by someone again while being unable to react.

The three elders looked at one another. They could all see each other’s shock. What kind of daemon was this? Right now, they could accept the fact that Li Qingshan could block their attacks rather easily, but they had experienced Fu Qingjin’s strength first-hand, so they understood it extremely well.

“Oh?” Fu Qingjin was surprised as well. Originally, he planned on killing this weaker daemon with a casual slash before dealing with the Daemon General. Instead, he was slightly taken aback now. “Among the level of daemons, you can be regarded as rather impressive. You really are a hybrid after all. However, exactly because of this, it’s even more reason for me to kill you right now and eliminate you for good.”

Just when Fu Qingjin wanted to attack once again, a black shadow enveloped him. He turned his head slightly, and Milliped’s vicious mandibles were only inches away. His huge, gaping mouth was like the gates of hell.

Launching a sudden attack from so close, it was a little too late for Fu Qingjin to dodge even if he wanted to. The foul breath gushed into his face and kicked up his hair, but he remained unfazed.

With a great rumble, Milliped smashed the pillar with his head, but there was no delight on Li Qingshan’s face at all. He would never underestimate an opponent, while Fu Qingjin was an existence that he could not afford to underestimate. He took a powerful step forward and a crack rapidly stretched forwards. The pile of rubble exploded, but Fu Qingjin was not amongst it.

A green streak of light flew past his eyes, and afterwards, thousands of specks of light gathered together like fireflies, turning into Fu Qingjin.

Li Qingshan's eyes widened. Was this the power of the Green Ruins sword? Didn't that make him undefeatable?

Fu Qingjin casually tossed out the Green Ruins sword and wielded his finger like a sword. He used the most common sword controlling technique, but the Green Ruins sword twisted and turned, and the blade of the sword completely vanished. It wove out a complicated geometric shape that enveloped Milliped.

Milliped hissed in pain as blood spurted from everywhere. He twisted his body and tried to bite Fu Qingjin.

Fu Qingjin turned into green light and scattered again, condensing somewhere else. He stroked his chin as he muttered to himself, "You really are a carapaced Daemon General, aren't you? Your vitality is extraordinary. It looks like I need to behead you." His gaze landed on where Milliped's head connected to his body, and he raised his sword in a simple manner before swinging down.

Even a half-assed, third-rate swordsman like Yu Zijian knew that move, but in his hands, it had become an unstoppable killing move.

The surging daemon qi turned into a flood, which gushed towards Fu Qingjin. His swing cut through it all.

The two skulls descended from the ground. At the same time, the remaining Steel Plate corpses on them all lunged at Fu Qingjin together while roaring out. The sword qi turned into thousands of green strands, tearing the Steel Plate corpses to shreds.

Fu Qingjin suddenly became surprised. He turned around and unleashed a strike, colliding with a shiny, bone sword. He praised, "Impressive sword style!" The sword move and sword intent that had erupted instantly even surprised him to a certain degree. When he saw that the sword wielder was a skeleton, he became even more surprised.

Xiao An had remained hidden all this time, sacrificing all the Steel Plate corpses as bait to deal this full-powered attack, but all she earned from him were three words of praise.

The sword style transformed, sometimes light and nimble, sometimes heavy and dignified, sometimes without a single trace at all, completely unfathomable. Xiao An completely unleashed the sword style she had learnt from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy, merging all the various strokes into the sword. Combined with the fact that she had launched every move desperately with the intention of dragging him down with her, it only seemed even more fearsome.

Fu Qingjin did not use his sword controlling technique. He wielded the sword in one hand and used his own sword style, engaging in a sword fight with Xiao An. He wanted to see her sword technique.

Xiao An advanced, and the sword moves fluctuated drastically. Fu Qingjin retreated, swinging and slashing randomly, but he would be able to block Xiao An's moves every single time.

In a single moment, they had clashed over a thousand times, emitting a strange, prolonged thrum. Countless strands of sword qi, as thin as a strand of hair, peppered the ground. Dust filled the air wherever they passed by.

Along the way, a relatively complete building collapsed loudly. Its structure had been completely destroyed by the sword qi, collapsing under its own weight.

Countless cracks appeared on Xiao An's bone sword. She had only attacked, without defending at all. If she were in human form right now, her flesh and blood would have been ripped to pieces by the sword qi already.

Li Qingshan howled at Milliped, "Turn back quickly!" The advantage that came with his colossal body had completely evaporated. There was no chance for them to win this battle. They needed to flee.

However, everything around them had been replaced by the illusion. Let alone the caves, they could not even find the pit. If they wanted to escape, they had to break out of this illusion first, but that was easier said than done.

However, Milliped ignored him this time. With his trembling body, he charged at Fu Qingjin again. Every single movement of his was as swift and fierce as lightning, but these attacks were useless no matter how many times he tried them with Fu Qingjin's strange technique of turning into light.

As expected, Fu Qingjin turned into beams of light again, which gathered in the air. He shook his head. "Foolish!"

Having run out of power, Xiao An fell down from the air, and Li Qingshan caught her. No, this won't work. I have to come up with an idea!

Chapter 253 - A Thousand Years in an Instant

At this moment, Milliped opened his mouth, and a pink daemon core shot into the sky, cutting through the empty, dark world like a pink bolt of lightning.

Most of Fu Qingjin's body had already condensed together as he looked at the pink daemon core near his chest. This was originally his main target. The round daemon core began to twist and change shape, and his expression finally changed. There was some disbelief as well.

"Run!" Milliped glanced at Li Qingshan again. His gaze had never been so clear before. He had thought of the idea that Li Qingshan had failed to come up with.

Dazzling light shot into the air as the crystallization of centuries or even millenniums of effort was unleashed in a single instant. Even the sun seemed to dim.

The green ruins were torn apart, revealing the original pit. However, it had been forcefully expanded to ten times its original size from the violent explosion.

Only now did the sound of the explosion arrive. The circular shockwave flattened and destroyed all the vegetation within a hundred kilometers.

Li Qingshan roared out at the sky, but his voice was drowned out by the explosion.

Hua Chengzan pushed off the paper crane and rushed into the air with Yu Zijian and Hua Chenglu. The paper crane was immediately destroyed by the waves of heat.

The three elders unleashed their defensive techniques and spiritual artifacts in fright, but they were instantly swallowed by the light.

The light had already subsided, but the dark splotches in everyone's vision lingered, only vanishing after a very long time.

The ground had been completely flattened, while everyone had vanished.

Hua Chengzan remained stunned even after a very long while. The strength of the Sword Collection palace was not the only thing he had underestimated. He had also underestimated the resolve of this Daemon General.

Blowing up their daemon core was equivalent to suicide. To all daemons, survival was their most primary instinct. No matter how dangerous the situation was, there would always be a tiny sliver of a chance for them to emerge victorious or escape. Blowing up their daemon core was truly severing all hope.

The three elders emerged from the dust and soil. Their clothes had been reduced to rags as they each spat out a mouthful of blood. They collapsed on the ground, still in shock.

The Green Vine Elder called out, "Fellow Fu! Fellow Fu!"

A green streak of light descended from above. Fu Qingjin was covered in dust. The hair near his temples was slightly messy, and his face was pale. He had suffered internal injuries too.

Fu Qingjin looked at the basin produced by the explosion. He felt some admiration, as well as some surprise. For a carapaced daemon that completely acted on instincts to have such resolve was truly beyond his expectations.

"The daemon is already dead. It had emerged on the surface without any regard for the treaty, so it brought about its own doom. I hope the three fellows can serve as witnesses."

The three elders agreed in a hurry, and Fu Qingjin glanced at Hua Chengzan in the sky again.

Hua Chengzan asked, "Are those daemons really dead?"

Fu Qingjin said, "The two weaker daemons managed to escape, but it's no big deal."

Hua Chengzan said, "They didn't seem like regular daemons to me."

Fu Qingjin said, "They were quite capable. If they're willing to remain underground obediently and cultivate, then so be it. But if they're bold enough to come to the surface to make trouble again, then they must be eliminated. They must be killed."

Hua Chengzan sank into his thoughts. He knew Fu Qingjin had the confidence to back up what he said. The two daemons were powerful, but if they did not take that step, then they would not be able to threaten them at all. And, with how slowly daemons cultivated, taking that step might take centuries. By

then, who knew how much Fu Qingjin's strength would have grown by. Why would he be worried about revenge?

"Fu Qingjin, I will definitely kill you with my own hands, as well as you three old coots. Live on well. Wait for me."

At this moment, a voice boomed out from deep underground, passing through the thick layer of soil and clearly reaching their ears.

The voice was calm, but they could clearly hear how the owner of the voice had forcefully repressed his rage. It was bone-chilling.

The three elders all changed in expression. Even the Green Vine Elder, who was normally always so mild-mannered, yelled abruptly, "Reckless daemon!"

Only Fu Qingjin remained unfazed. He stabbed down with his sword, and a streak of light pierced the soil.

The three elders looked at Fu Qingjin together. He shook his head. "It has already left."

The three elders all became disappointed. Fu Qingjin frowned. "Don't tell me that you're afraid?"

The Golden Pheasant Elder cried out, "How's that possible?" The three of them looked at one another. None of them were willing to admit the fact that they felt a tinge of fear inside.

In the endless, gloomy depths, Li Qingshan ran as quickly as he could, without saying a single word. His eyes were wide open as he gritted his teeth firmly, enough for him to taste blood. He held Milliped in his hands, who had already shrunken to around a foot long, his original size. His body was in a horrible shape as he laid still.

Xiao An followed along quietly. She had no idea how she was supposed to console him. When the daemon core exploded, Milliped fell from the air and rapidly shrank, becoming like this.

Li Qingshan felt like his heart was on fire, scorching his body and making it burn and ache. He tried to force himself to calm down, but he was unable to achieve it no matter what. He was clearly hurrying along, but the cave before him constantly twisted and turned like an endless maze.

The sea of flowers sprawled out in the expansive cavern. The Blue Butterfly flowers bloomed gloriously, like balls of blue fire.

Li Qingshan crossed through the sea of flowers and placed Milliped onto the stone platform. This was his favourite bed. Perhaps the spiritual qi on there could help him. Then he took out all of the recovery pills in his hundred treasures pouch, feeding them to him or applying it on him externally. He used it all on Milliped without thinking.

However, Milliped continued to lay on the stone platform without moving at all. Li Qingshan's hopeful eyes gradually dimmed. He raised his head and let out a roar, but all he saw was the pitch-black ceiling. His voice resonated through the cavern for no one to hear.

He felt like he had returned to the Ice Sword cliff. He truly was naive to think that he could break out of this cycle. As it turned out, nothing had changed at all!

He stood before the stone platform with his head raised. His scarlet hair drooped down, covering his face. He was like a stone statue that had stood there for centuries.

After who knows how long, Xiao An's ice-cold bone hand touched Li Qingshan's face. His heart warmed up slightly as he said gloomily, "Xiao An, why am I so weak?"

"You're not. Your opponent was too powerful. You've only just begun cultivating. You will definitely be more powerful than everyone in the future."

At this moment, there was a flash from the stone platform, followed by a gentle hiss.

Under Li Qingshan's gaze of disbelief, Milliped rolled over and moved his legs, climbing up and raising the upper half of his body, waving his feelers at him like he was greeting him.

Li Qingshan scooped him up in a hurry and brought him to his face. "Y- you're still alive!"

Milliped nodded and used his remaining, feeble daemon qi to express, "Playing dead."

Li Qingshan's lips curled into a grin before drooping once again. He had no idea how to react, but his heart seemed to loosen. He fell back onto his bottom. "Oh you!"

Milliped then said, "I'm hungry."

Li Qingshan took out a pile of grain in a hurry and placed it before Milliped. Milliped immediately buried his head in it and began eating.

Heavy, noisy footsteps rang out in the surroundings. Before he knew it, the daemon soldiers had all gathered. They whispered among themselves.

"What's wrong with the great king?"

"He charged out mindlessly and fell into the human's trap."

"He won't do anymore. It looks like a new king will take over this place now."

Li Qingshan suddenly turned around, and the daemons immediately shut up.

Li Qingshan recovered his calm. After a moment of thought, he sat down on the stone platform and issued orders.

"The great king has only suffered some temporary, minor injuries. Now, present everything you collected. It's time to calculate your individual contribution."

The daemons handed over the hundred treasures pouches and the various spiritual artifacts and talismans.

Even after setting the various assortment of spiritual artifacts aside, the hundred treasures pouches still amounted to over a thousand. They formed a small hill. Even Li Qingshan had not been expecting this, so he asked them about it.

Only then did he find out that many human cultivators had ventured underground and died to these daemons even before the Herb Gathering ceremony this time. Their spiritual artifacts and hundred

treasures pouches all glowed, so the demons all took a liking to them. They had no idea what their effects were, but they still collected them, which grew to quite a sizable amount after all these years.

It was impossible for the other regions to have so many hundred treasures pouches either. The other Daemon Generals all managed their own territories properly, so rarely did any Qi Practitioners venture in there to seek death. It was exactly because of Milliped's negligence that this region had remained as a battlefield between humans and demons, and there would be a lot of spoils of battle.

However, these spoils did not serve any practical use to the demons, so they all brought them to exchange for delicious food. Even though most of them were the hundred treasures pouches of weaker Qi Practitioners, it was still a tremendous piece of wealth. It was exhilarating to Li Qingshan.

Thinking about things calmly, Milliped would have been lured to the surface, and he would probably die anyway even if he blew up his daemon core if Li Qingshan had not been there. At least, he had escaped with his life intact, which left behind limitless potential. He could make up for his lost cultivation, and he could have his revenge too.

While it would be very tough, not everything remained the same. He was inching closer and closer to his opponent, and he had saved his friend's life too. Moreover, he had only begun cultivating a little over a year ago. If he wanted to sulk and sigh any further, then would he still be a man?

Elder of the three mountains, Fu Qingjin, hmph. He suddenly clenched his fist. If I don't get revenge, I swear that I am not human, no, a daemon. These hundred treasures pouches would serve as the source of his energy!

At this moment, Milliped said, "I have some too."

Li Qingshan was stunned. He had never expected Milliped to possess hundred treasures pouches too. But thinking about it, how was it possible that no one had intruded upon this place across all these years? These Blue Butterfly flowers were a crucial component to refining True Spirit pills. They were worth a startling amount, enough for people to risk their lives.

Combined with Milliped's habit of hibernating, it only provided people with more opportunities to take the risk. As a matter of fact, many powerful Qi Practitioners had aimed for these Blue Butterfly flowers in the Herb Gathering ceremony this time.

Milliped stood up and used his body to point in a direction like a compass needle. Li Qingshan dug down in a corner of the cavern, and just as he had expected, he excavated a pile of hundred treasures pouches and a few shining spiritual artifacts. None of them were below mid grade.

If they wanted to snatch from the tiger's jaws, they needed strength. Without strength, it was impossible to navigate through the dark caves and reach so deep underground. However, no matter how strong they were, they would still be Qi Practitioners.

Those who were unlucky would run into Milliped when he was half-awake. Seeing an intruder barge around in his own home and stealing his food, Milliped would just catch them and fill his belly with them. The items owned by these people obviously could not be eaten, so he would just dig a hole and bury it before going back to sleep.

As promised, Li Qingshan took out all the food and allocated it among the daemons according to their respective contributions before making them disperse.

Li Qingshan took out the items in the hundred treasures pouches. It was so plentiful that it had truly exceeded his imaginations. Apart from commonplace talismans and spiritual stones, there was a myriad selection of strange spiritual artifacts, pills, puppets, and cultivation methods. It broadened his horizons.

Chapter 254 - A Despicable Woman

Li Qingshan could not be bothered with sorting the items carefully. He glanced through them quickly, enough for him to gain a rough idea of what he now possessed. At this moment, he opened a strange-looking hundred treasures pouch. He discovered that it was not for items like spiritual artifacts and spiritual stones. Instead, it contained many poisonous bugs like scorpions and centipedes.

Apart from controlling ghosts and refining corpses, there were plenty of cultivators who wielded insects or used gu. However, regular hundred treasures pouches were unable to hold anything living. For example, the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain used special bronze bangles for controlling corpses, while this was a rare bug pouch.

TL: Most of you might have heard about gu before, but for those who don't know, it's basically a method of refining poison where multiple poisonous bugs, which can include centipedes, snakes, scorpions, spiders and so on, are sealed within a container and left to devour one another, until only one remains. The remaining bug is believed to have absorbed the poisons and venoms of the other bugs, making it the most potent, which can be used to poison and kill people.

Li Qingshan released a venomous scorpion from the pouch. The scorpion was a reddish brown, and it was huge, the size of an adult man. It surprised Li Qingshan.

The huge scorpion waved its huge pincers menacingly. It suddenly spotted Milliped and immediately shirked away, wanting to escape. Milliped's body scrunched up before shooting off like an arrow. He burrowed into the huge scorpion, and the scorpion struggled a little before falling on its side and dying.

Milliped devoured all of the scorpion's flesh, only leaving behind an empty shell, before emerging once again. His mandibles twitched and clicked. He was very happy with it.

Suddenly, Li Qingshan came up with an idea and released all the poisonous bugs. There was a huge assortment, some flying, some crawling, and some leaping. Milliped released a pink gas and enveloped all the poisonous bugs. They fell to the ground before Milliped ate them all.

If the arts of nurturing gu really did exist, then Milliped was the king of gu. These poisonous bugs were nowhere close to him. Even when weakened, Milliped was still a Daemon General after all. All he needed was time, and he would definitely be able to recover his original strength.

Li Qingshan finally made up his mind. Afterwards, he began to catch the butterflies in the dark cavern.

Three days later, just as Li Qingshan was scooping up the plants in the water, he suddenly heard a daemon soldier report, "Leader, there's bad news. The Daemon General to the west is killing his way over."

Following that, another daemon soldier rushed over. "The east too!"

“And the south.” “The north is no different.”

Li Qingshan straightened himself up calmly. It was so soon.

The dens of these daemons were located near the boundary between Milliped’s territory and the other Daemon Generals’. They had been on the constant look out for the activity of the surrounding Daemon Generals recently.

What happened to Milliped obviously could not be hidden from his neighbours. There was no law or order underground. Only strength was respected. Now that Milliped had been weakened, these Daemon Generals would definitely come to fight for the territory. Probably even Daemon Commanders would not be able to change this principle.

Li Qingshan hauled up the last handful of aquatic plants and returned to Milliped’s dwelling. A lot of the fluttering, blue butterflies were now missing, and the beautiful sea of flowers was now dimmer.

He had already picked all of the mature Blue Butterfly flowers that could be used for refining pills and stored them in a jade box in his hundred treasures pouch. Or more accurately, he and Xiao An had already swept through and collected all the mature spiritual herbs in the territory.

Collecting these spiritual herbs had not been as simple as he imagined it to be. Many of them required special tools and placed emphasis on how they were collected. For example, the Blue Butterfly flowers would definitely lose their efficacy if they were directly picked by hand. They required a special set of gold, silk gloves to be worn. Fortunately, there were plenty of tools in these hundred treasures pouches.

The daemon soldiers had all gathered before the stone platform now. Every single one of them was nervous and uneasy. Although they were afraid of disobeying Li Qingshan’s orders as the leader, fighting other daemons was different from fighting humans. This matter involved Daemon Generals. They did not possess a Daemon General, so defeat was basically guaranteed.

Li Qingshan glanced past the daemons and the restless group settled down, quietly waiting for his command. Through the various trials, Li Qingshan had gradually developed a heavy, composed bearing like a mountain. Gradually, he no longer led the daemons through just his own strength and the benefits that he could provide to them.

“Everyone, we are currently under attack from Daemon Generals in all directions. They’ve come to take this land. Great king Milliped is injured, while I don’t possess the power to stop them. The vice leader and I will be temporarily leaving with great king Milliped, heading for somewhere where he can heal in peace.”

He did not hide it, nor did he lie. Li Qingshan was honest, speaking his mind.

“Croak, croak. Leader, where are you going? What are we supposed to do?” asked the ice frog as it leapt around.

“All you have to do is wait here for their demands to surrender. Though, you have to remember to stay united. No matter who takes over this territory, they will all require your strength.”

There were principles among the underground daemons too. As long as they did not revolt out of desperation, Daemon Generals would not kill daemons. However, the encroaching forces would

definitely affect the benefits that they could derive from the land. However, as long as they could remain united, they would be important figures that could affect how the territory would be divided up later.

The daemons had already tasted the benefits of unity. As it turned out, they would often hear about a few daemons being slaughtered in their dens every Herb Gathering ceremony, but this time, only a few weaker daemoniac beasts had died. There was even delicious food for them. They became rather reluctant to see Li Qingshan leave.

Li Qingshan made his way out of the cavern with Xiao An. The daemons parted to form a path for him.

Milliped was sleeping in the bug pouch. After losing his daemon core, his instincts gained a greater grip over him. He could still eat and sleep like before, and he was not mentally affected at all. If Li Qingshan had suddenly lost his daemon core instead, resulting in a plummet in strength, he would definitely become overcome with dismay. He could only sigh over how a foolish daemon had a fool's luck.

"Are you going to return?"

When Li Qingshan reached the entrance of the cave, the boulder viper could not help but ask. This was also the question that the daemons all wanted to know.

"Of course. Very soon. Just wait."

Li Qingshan waved his hand without looking back, alarming a blue light butterfly that fluttered before him gently. It was slightly dim, but still so dreamily beautiful.

Li Qingshan had only collected the more mature spiritual herbs. He did not touch the younger ones, and most of the time, he only harvested them, without touching their roots, as he would return sooner or later. He would claim this territory for Milliped and for himself.

The roars and growls of daemons rang out from a cavern extremely far away. It was time to leave.

Within the Boundless mountains, under an inconspicuous hill.

Li Qingshan swept aside the withered vines and emerged from there. The chilly winds buffeted his face, bringing him great satisfaction. Expansive clouds stretched over the sky. A few stars managed to make it through the layer, twinkling coldly.

The spirit turtle's daemon core shone resplendently.

Li Qingshan gradually shrank, turning back to his original appearance. He touched his face, and there seemed to be some whiskers now. Checking himself in the mirror, all he saw was an unfamiliar young man staring back coldly. He forced out a smile, but he only seemed even more malicious.

He was not pretty, nor was he ugly. He was like a hard, stubborn rock, where his corners would only grow sharper the more they were polished.

It was said that a person's appearance was a reflection of their heart. He believed it now.

In the past few months, he had transformed into a daemon, faced countless dangers, killed countless people, and even swore to never rest until he got revenge. He naturally developed a sense of brutality. Even as a human, he bore resemblance to a daemon.

Li Qingshan did not care about this either. After confirming that his appearance had returned, he casually took out a set of clothes before hanging the glazed mirror on his waist. After channelling true qi into it, his surroundings twisted and distorted, making him vanish.

This was an extremely interesting spiritual artifact that Li Qingshan had found in the many hundred treasures pouches. They could turn the user invisible, or even evade various forms of detection. It was an extremely rare auxiliary high grade spiritual artifact. He called it the Mirror of Invisibility.

He had found this glazed mirror in the hole that Milliped had dug. Clearly, there had been a Qi Practitioner in the past who had tried to use this to hide from Milliped so that he could collect the spiritual herbs freely. But clearly, he had failed.

Li Qingshan guessed that while the Mirror of Invisibility could turn people completely invisible, it was very difficult for cultivators to hide the aura that they naturally gave off. However, this did not bother him at all. He was extremely good at concealing his aura, so it was basically a perfect combination with the Mirror of Invisibility. It immediately turned him into a super assassin.

Prepared, Li Qingshan rushed off in the direction of the Green Vine mountain. However, there was still a small grievance he needed to settle before he left.

Arriving below the Green Vine mountain, Li Qingshan looked at the Town of Flowing Clouds from afar, but he saw a startling sight.

The Town of Flowing Clouds was shrinking. Among the mechanical clink and clunks, the Hundred Flavours restaurant collapsed and folded up, like building blocks or folding paper, turning into tiny modules in the end. This occurred everywhere. The Town of Flowing Clouds had already shrunk to half its size.

As it turned out, the entire town was a huge, mechanical structure.

The lanterns in the town dimmed. Only the store of Miscellaneous Goods at the very centre continued to blaze with light, but even it seemed rather powerless.

In the past Herb Gathering ceremonies, now would be when it was the liveliest. Cultivators would return here with the spiritual herbs they had risked their lives for to exchange, but this time, all of the cultivators left without returning.

The store of Miscellaneous Goods was bubbling with activity. The quiet main lobby was now filled with cultivators. Most of them were store owners in the town, who currently huddled together in conversation.

Little Zhang, who sold weapons in the Arsenal of Arms, said, "They've actually been annihilated this time. Only a few people managed to escape. Fortunately, I had no interest in trying my luck. These daemons sure are vicious."

Lu Zifei of the Tranquil teahouse said, "If daemons aren't vicious, can you still call them daemons? If you're in a risky line of work, there's no guarantee that you'll be safe no matter how skilled you are. They all go on about purging daemons. What's the point in purging them? Dying in there was just a matter of time. Let's just hope no trouble arises. Let's drink tea! Old Sun, why do you seem so heavy-hearted?"

As it turned out, Sun Fubai also happened to be among them. He was thinking about Li Qingshan, or should you say, Niu Juxia. He was worried. Although they had only met briefly, he had a very good impression of him. They had almost become friends across generations. He sipped some tea. "I'm worried about the safety of a young friend of mine. I wonder how he's doing."

Little Zhang was the cleverest among them, so he smiled. "You must be talking about Niu Juxia!"

Sun Fubai was surprised. "How did you know?"

Lu Ziyu said, "Is there anything within this town that can escape those donkey ears of his?"

"You're too kind, elder Lu. Recently, he caused the death of the first senior brother of the Pheasant's Grace mountain, so news has constantly reached my ears. Even if I don't want to know about it, I can't. He even drank a few cups of tea at your place. I can still remember him even now. He's quite the figure!"

"Hmph, I think he's probably done for!"

Everyone turned around and saw Liu Ruping attending to the table with her eyes filled with malice. Ever since she heard how the first senior brother of the Pheasant's Grace mountain had died at Niu Juxia's hands and how he also managed to escape from the Golden Pheasant Elder, she began to feel uneasy. She was afraid that he would find out about her role in it all and come back for revenge. Over time, this actually developed into a fear towards him. Why didn't you just die? Can you still call yourself a man for running as soon as you face a master?

Little Zhang was surprised. "Ruping, how did he offend you?"

Liu Ruping immediately had nothing to say. Not only had Niu Juxia not offended her, but he had even allowed her to make a lot of money easily.

Sun Fubai placed his tea cup on the table heavily and said in displeasure, "It's just like what they say, only women and the despicable are difficult to deal with!"

Chapter 255 - Returning to Jiaping

Liu Ruping's expression changed slightly, but she was afraid of retorting at Sun Fubai. She turned away to another table.

Li Qingshan made Xiao An wait outside as he moved through the town alone. The ancient structures in the surroundings folded up and transformed like the futuristic technology in movies; it was as if they had suddenly sprung alive.

He arrived outside the store of Miscellaneous Goods. He opened the door and light flooded out, landing on the dark street outside.

Li Qingshan heard a few familiar voices, and he also heard Liu Ruping. He raised an eyebrow, but he did not feel anything like intense hatred. All he did was find an obscure corner and wait quietly. The opportunity arrived sooner than he had imagined.

A few hours later, the entire town had collapsed down, with only the store of Miscellaneous Goods standing alone. Afterwards, it began to transform too.

The cultivators all emerged from the store. The last one to walk out was a plump, old madam, who also happened to be the owner of this store of Miscellaneous Goods, Shi Peipei.

As it turned out, there would be a gathering whenever the town closed up shop, but no one was in the mood for it anymore with the misfortune that had occurred.

In the end, the entire Town of Flowing Clouds collapsed into a small, wooden cube, landing in Shi Peipei's hands. She returned it to her hundred treasures pouch before fishing out a small wooden ship. She tossed it into the air, and it expanded to a hundred times its size, hovering in the sky.

"I'm returning to the Clear River city to report back to the master of the school about what happened here. If you want to go to the Clear River city, please board the ship. If you have other matters you need to attend to, please take care of them yourself. Forgive me for being unable to see you off. The next time the Town of Flowing Clouds will be open for business will be in the warm third month, when the Academy of the Hundred Schools holds their entrance exams. Please don't miss it."

With a white sail on display, the winds surged, and the flying ship took off into the night sky like a gentle leaf. Just a while later, it became as small as a mustard seed. The ship sailed through a cloud and vanished.

Only a little over a dozen people watched the ship sail off with their heads raised on the open ground. They all lowered their heads again and bid farewell to each other.

Li Qingshan happened to be among them. Although he had already witnessed many wonders and miracles in this world, he was still amazed every time he saw a new one.

He lowered his head again and looked in the direction that Liu Ruping had travelled off in. Like a wild beast, he prowled through the night.

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In the depths underground, the daemons formed a single group, colliding and roaring at each other. They brandished their claws and fangs, trying to frighten off their foes.

If they were humans, this would definitely evolve into a chaotic battle with a field littered with corpses. After all, they were creatures who could go from taking offence from a single glance to cursing aloud to stabbing each other to death.

Daemons were not intelligent enough for them to develop a complicated thought like pride, while anger was worth nothing before survival. If a great battle unfolded, the winning side would lose at least half of their daemon soldiers, no matter who won. Even the lives of the leaders could be under threat.

What kind of idiot was stupid enough to declare war? Humans? As a result, the four Daemon Generals chose to negotiate. However, their method of negotiation seemed very primitive and barbarous in the eyes of humans. There would be quite a lot of body collisions and brandishing of fangs and claws.

Among the daemons, the four Daemon Generals of varying appearances rapidly increased their daemon qi. Suddenly, a daemon soldier from a certain side came up to report a matter frantically.

“Great king, from below, she’s from below!”

Before he had even finished talking, eight lantern-sized eyes suddenly lit up in the dark cave. Each eye was filled with unimaginable cruelty and viciousness.

Under the gaze of those eyes, the daemons all trembled. Many of the large daemons who had originally been brandishing their fangs and claws now lay there, whimpering. Even the powerful Daemon Generals, enough to serve as nightmares to Qi Practitioners, showed fear. This was their nightmare.

However, what emerged from the darkness was a frosty but beautiful madam who dragged her bright, red dress along. Her scarlet lips parted slightly as she said icily, “Where’s Milliped?”

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Liu Ruping grumbled inside about how Shi Peipei had refused to let her onto the ship. Otherwise, who knows how glorious it would have been if she returned to her clan in this great ship.

She sat on a silken carpet. The corners of the carpet shone with glyphs as it flew along the ground. Although it flew at a very low altitude, the treacherous terrain no longer posed a problem to her.

Just as she was wondering about what kind of greeting she would receive when she returned to the clan, a wild gust of wind suddenly blew over. Before she had even understood what had happened, a huge, invisible hand wrapped around her neck, lifting her into the air.

Li Qingshan appeared. He gripped the Whale’s Ingestion of Water and asked, “Do you recognise this blade?”

How could she not recognise it? Liu Ruping’s gaze immediately became filled with fear and pleas. Suddenly, she felt the grip around her neck loosen. “Y- you’re Niu Juxia? Thank the heavens that you’re fine. I heard the people of the Pheasant’s Grace mountain were hunting for you. It made me so worried that I couldn’t even sleep for several days.”

“Do you still plan on denying it after everything that has happened so far?” If Li Qingshan had not heard what she had uttered earlier in the lobby, he might have actually been fooled by her.

“Those are just their one-sided statements. Why would I do that?” Liu Ruping quibbled. She seemed completely reasonable, and she shed some tears as a beauty too. It was an indescribably moving sight.

Li Qingshan began to falter. Originally, he wanted her to die convinced, but he never expected her to deny it all. Apart from the single statement from the masked man, he did not have any evidence that proved Liu Ruping had backstabbed him.

Liu Ruping said, “As long as you spare me, I’ll do whatever you want.”

Li Qingshan suddenly mocked himself. "I'm not the court, so why would I need any evidence? Since you want me to die, then I'll send you off first!" He raised his blade, and there was a splash of blood, but before it had even reached the ground, it had melded into Xiao An's flames. All traces of her were removed.

The more beautiful a creature was, the more thrilling it was to destroy them. Probably only humans could understand such a complicated thought. Far too many connotations would always be attaching to killing. Daemons were much simpler. Most of the time, it was just a single word, eat.

Li Qingshan did not want to become a deviant. Although he tried his best to make himself simpler, of course, he did not plan on eating.

As the east brightened, Li Qingshan stopped and gazed at the grand city that stood near the mountains and by the river in the distance. After several months, he had finally returned to Jiaping city once again.

Li Qingshan changed into the Black Wolf uniform and equipped his Wind-entwining blade, while Xiao An reverted to human form and put on a new set of clothes.

Li Qingshan held Xiao An's hand and walked over to Jiaping city.

After all these months, he slowed down for the first time. He strolled leisurely. The snow on the sides of the path had yet to melt, while the structures on the two sides gradually became denser and taller. There were decorations everywhere.

It made Li Qingshan suddenly remember that it was the new year. Calculating the time, he had abandoned his old age. He had grown another year older. He was seventeen.

The crows of roosters rose and fell as smoke began to rise from chimneys into the sky. The entire city became enveloped in a grey haze.

What was he doing when he was seventeen in his previous life? He was still studying at school, living the dull, monotonous life of a high school student. Yet right now, he had already claimed the lives of several thousand people. He had to admit that the latter lifestyle was a little more interesting.

Perhaps some people would sigh sorrowfully that being ordinary was reality, or perhaps they would miss the peaceful lives of their past. However, Li Qingshan had none of these feelings. He was willing to undertake even greater danger, abandon even more ethics, just in exchange for how interesting it was.

At the foot of the mountain, Li Qingshan looked at the hawk forged from metal and climbed up the steps.

Chapter 256 - Spider Queen Lolth

In the gloomy depths underground, the atmosphere was frozen like ice. The ice frog leapt around and explained the entire story. The atmosphere did have something to do with the coldness he naturally gave off.

From the beginning till the end, the madam in red maintained the same expression. Her beautiful face seemed like a delicate mask, while viciousness flashed through her beautiful eyes. It was chilling.

After hearing the entire story, she turned around and left, with her scarlet dress dragging behind her.

A large, dark-skinned man with a long, hard beard called out, "Ma'am, how will we be splitting the territory?"

"I'll allocate it later. It'll be up to your performance." When she said that, her lips curled up, forming an indescribably beautiful smile on her cold face. However, it also seemed like brightly-coloured venom.

The four Daemon Generals shivered inside. They immediately decided to finish up with the negotiations of the territory and stop bickering over the minor details. Otherwise, depending on this madam's mood, their peaceful negotiation would definitely turn into a bloody slaughter, not because of any special reason, but purely because she liked it. Not only had her preference for bloodshed and brutality exceeded the survival instincts of daemons, but even humans paled in comparison.

The ice frog said, "Croak, croak. Great king Milliped isn't dead. The leader said he would return."

"He's dead," she said without any doubt at all. She scanned past all the daemons, as if she wanted to engrave these two words into their hearts as a decree.

A Daemon General who had lost his daemon core was no different from a dead one. She felt no sorrow towards this useless idiot at all. Instead, she saw an opportunity.

"I will avenge him." The smile that was as brightly-coloured as venom appeared on her face again, and she melded into the darkness.

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On the Green Vine mountain, all was quiet in the main hall.

Fu Qingjin sat with his legs crossed in the main entrance, atop the stairs. Under the moonlight, he gazed at the mountains in the distance. The Green Ruins sword was placed across his legs, quiet and still.

He was quietly waiting for the news of the Herb Gathering ceremony to spread everywhere and ferment.

The three elders sat close behind him. They were slightly uneasy within the dark hall.

The Green Vine Elder said, "Fellow Fu, will daemons really come for revenge?"

The Golden Pheasant Elder rebuked, "Why would those wretched daemons dare to? It was clearly them who broke the treaty and came to the surface to make trouble."

The Green Vine Elder asked, "Should we take a step back and avoid them while their morale is high?"

The Lone Grave Elder said, "Yep!"

When they calmed down from the anger due to the deaths of their disciples, fear began to overwhelm them. If the daemons really did come for revenge, they would definitely unleash a large-scale attack. They had already grown very old. They had begun to fear death.

Fu Qingjin sat with his back to them as his lips curled into a mocking smile. However, he explained patiently, "I'm remaining here exactly to take precautions against those situations. Look at the Daemon Suppression tablets in your hands. How can we cultivators shirk away in the face of threats from daemons?"

The three elders were surprised. They lowered their heads and looked at the tiny tablet in their hands. It seemed to be made of gold, but also jade; it shone with a dim glow. Two words, Daemon Suppression, were carved on them, which made them think about three days ago.

As soon as the battle had ended, Fu Qingjin had produced these three tablets and invited them to join the Daemon Suppression alliance. With the Sword Collection palace as the leader, they united several large orthodox sects and recruited human cultivators with lofty ambitions to purge and eliminate daemons together. Preparations were still being made for the establishment of this alliance, so the three of them would be founding members.

The three of them happened to be experiencing extreme hatred toward the daemons, and there were many benefits that came with joining the alliance, like the Sword Collection palace sharing high level cultivation methods and secret information. And, if they did well in the daemon suppression operation, there would be spiritual artifacts and pills as rewards. Fu Qingjin had agreed to ask his higher ups to reward them for their service so far when he returned, and this reward would include rebuilding their sect. As a result, the three of them agreed immediately and accepted the tablet.

Afterwards, Fu Qingjin just began waiting for the revenge of the daemons, while the three of them became more and more uneasy. When they clashed with Milliped, they had witnessed the terrifying strength of daemons. They did not possess the same power as Fu Qingjin. If any Daemon General blew up their daemon cores without any regard for the consequences, it would cost them their lives.

And, why would the underground be stupid enough to send another Daemon General over just to die? Even if they came, it would be a whole group of them, which might even include stronger daemons. By then, they would not even know how they died.

But it was already too late for regret. After joining the Daemon Suppression alliance, they would obviously be ordered about by the Daemon Suppression alliance. If they wanted to leave now, were they really planning on treating the Sword Collection palace as a joke? Before the daemons could even come for revenge, Fu Qingjin could destroy them right now. As a result, the Daemon Suppression tablet became more and more troublesome to them.

“The reinforcements of our Sword Collection palace are already on the way.” Fu Qingjin’s next words made the three elders ease up slightly. They looked at one another and could see each other’s bitterness. They could only go with this now.

But there were no reinforcements coming at all.

Fu Qingjin nodded. Those who wanted to achieve great things knew how to protect themselves, while those who focused on their interests alone would likely become blinded by small benefits and lose their lives in the process. There was no point in carving rotten wood.

He remained here so that these three pieces of rotten wood could give off their remaining heat and light. With the Green Ruins sword in hand, he was confident that he could slip away even if a Daemon Commander personally appeared.

Not only had the daemons brutally massacred the disciples of the three mountains underground, but they had also broken the treaty and emerged on the surface, making trouble and letting a massacre unfold. In the end, they were suppressed and slain by him, but this would still not be enough. Those

frenzied daemons would come again very soon for revenge. They would kill the sect masters of the three mountains, while he himself would desperately flee for his life. His patience right now was mostly patience he had for people who were about to die, patience for these three “martyrs” and “victims”.

This was the play that the Sword Collection palace had arranged to happen. Fu Qingjin was just the absentminded main character.

Just like grandmasters playing chess, every single move they took possessed multiple objectives, and it would definitely be hiding a continuous string of possible reactions and responses.

At this moment, Fu Qingjin suddenly raised his head and frowned.

Hua Chengzan climbed up the stairs with Hua Chenglu and Yu Zijian beside him.

Fu Qingjin asked, “You haven’t left yet?”

Hua Chengzan smiled. “Why would I leave? The town below has closed up, so I have nowhere to go. I just happen to be planning on loitering around on the Green Vine mountain for a day or two.”

“You still shouldn’t have come here, especially with the two of them.” Fu Qingjin only looked at Yu Zijian. He wanted to take her back to the Sword Collections palace once this was over, just in case something went wrong again. It was easy for him to slip away, but it would become extremely difficult if he had to protect a weaker Qi Practitioner in the process. He needed her to leave the mountain.

Hua Chengzan observed Fu Qingjin’s expression the entire time and became even more confident about his conjecture. He smiled. “Don’t worry, what you’re worried about won’t happen.”

“What?”

“She’s already here.” Hua Chengsan pointed at the sky.

Fu Qingjin raised his head, but all he saw were clouds, the moon, and stars. However, he already understood what he was talking about. The Ruyi commandery was her territory. He should have known that none of this would unfold so easily.

She moved through the caves, and the space before her suddenly lit up. It had been quite some time since she last saw moonlight, but it was right in front of her now. However, she could not help but stop. Under the moonlight, a woman in white leaned against the rocks with her hands in her sleeves.

“Gu Yanying!” She frowned.

“A’Luo, long time no see!” Gu Yanying greeted her with a smile, as relaxed as running across her next-door neighbour in the morning.

Seeing her frown without replying, Gu Yanying continued to smile. “I’m already at your door, so won’t you invite me into your home? Or do I need to refer to you as madam Daemon Commander Spider Queen Lolth?”

Chapter 257 - The Ink Dragon Talisman

“Don’t block my path.” The long, scarlet dress began to dance. It turned into a smear of red as Lolth directly charged out of the cave.

With a white flash, Gu Yanying appeared right in front of her, with a few strands of her hair drifting through the air. "I'm afraid I can't oblige."

Lolth immediately turned away. In a single instant, she changed directions several hundred times, but she was blocked by the white shadow every time.

In that instant, a smear of red light filled the cave, constantly hovering and lingering around a certain spot. However, a white shadow seemed to appear in every part of the cave at the same time, forming an impenetrable wall.

In the blink of an eye, the two of them returned to where they were before, as if they had never moved away in the first place.

Lolth opened her scarlet lips and spat out a strand of spider silk. It turned into a huge web in the air, enveloping Gu Yanying.

Gu Yanying did not move at all. A miniature whirlwind rose up beside her, causing her clothes to flutter. Even to regular people, the whirlwind did not seem to be special. At most, it could just blow a few fallen leaves around.

However, the spider silk that was a hundred times tougher than steel was silently ripped to shreds when it came into contact with the wind.

"Atmospheric wind!" Lolth's eyes narrowed, and she became even more furious. With a strange, sharp hiss, she began to undergo a startling transformation. Her long dress lifted up, and the lower half of her body turned into a black spider with sharp, long legs and a large abdomen covered in brightly-coloured streaks. It extended to the upper half of her body, and her snow-white skin darkened too as her pupils shone.

She said with a sharp, hiss-like voice, "Are you going to move or not? Don't forget, half of your blood is daemon!"

Gu Yanying said, "It's exactly because I'm half-daemon that I'm stopping you. This is the dragon king's orders."

"The dragon king! Are you trying to frighten me with the dragon king?" Lolth lowered her body, such that her face was only inches away from Gu Yanying's. The two faces of absolute beauty were almost pressed together. One was bewitching and magnificent, while the other was graceful and composed.

"Everyone knows that the Hawk God and dragon king completely oppose one another!"

"The Hawk God is the Hawk God, while I'm me. You know, daemons really should get along with each other. Oh right, he also gave me this thing." Gu Yanying took out an item. It was a black, coiled dragon made of unknown material, brandishing its claws and fangs in a glorious manner.

"The Ink Dragon talisman!"

"What an unsophisticated name." Gu Yanying curled her lip. "But he did say that whoever sees this is equivalent to seeing him in person. All daemons of the Green province must obey the wielder."

Lolth said in disbelief, "That's impossible. How is it possible for the great dragon king to give the Ink Dragon talisman to you, a hal-"

"Lolth, back off." The Ink Dragon talisman suddenly sprang to life. It coiled around, and a dignified voice rang out, giving an order.

Lolth shuddered and gradually shrank, turning back into human form. She lowered herself and said politely, "Yes, dragon king." She glanced at Gu Yanying with reluctance before turning around and vanishing into the darkness.

Gu Yanying flicked the Ink Dragon talisman. "Uncle, are you going to continue to put up with it silently?"

The Ink Dragon talisman fell silent. It did not move. As a matter of fact, it just closed its eyes.

Gu Yanying said, "Fair enough." With a flash, she vanished.

On the top of the Green Vine mountain, Gu Yanying descended from the sky and landed on the top of the hall silently. Her hawk-like gaze landed on Fu Qingjin's back brilliantly.

Fu Qingjin let out a long sigh and stood up. He turned around and clasped his hands. "I've troubled you, commander Gu." There was not the slightest displeasure in his voice at all.

"Green Vine, Golden Pheasant, and Lone Grave greets ma'am Gu." The three elders eased up and greeted her in a hurry. They dared not take advantage of their seniority when it came to her.

Yu Zijian exclaimed, "So beautiful!"

Hua Chenglu raised her head and thought obstinately, I'd like to see just what this Gu Yanying looks like. All she saw was a woman under the brilliant moonlight, her clothes whiter than snow, her wide sleeves fluttering in the wind. Her appearance was enough to bring the world to its knees. As a woman, she could not help but sigh in amazement, but if this was all there was about her, there would be nothing impressive about her.

Who knows just how many beauties Hua Chenglu had seen while growing up. They just had their own different merits. She had also heard how there were divine physicians who could change a person's appearance so that they could become as beautiful as they wanted to be. However, no one could match her bearing.

Turning around, she saw Hua Chengzan with his head raised, just as expected. She suddenly remembered what he had once said, "If you see her yourself, you might be able to understand me!" Whilst Hua Chenglu was unwilling to admit it, she could begin to understand why he would still be infatuated over her even if her appearance was nothing special!

"Little Hua, this must be your sister!" Gu Yanying hovered down and studied Hua Chenglu.

Her smile was as pleasant as the spring breeze. It was difficult for Hua Chenglu to feel ill will towards her. "Greetings from Chenglu, ma'am Gu. My elder brother has mentioned you many times."

"Knowing by repute is better than meeting face to face!" Gu Yanying poked fun at her.

Hua Chenglu reddened and lowered her head. "It's the other way around."

Hua Chengzan smiled silently. "It's all the same."

Gu Yanying said, "You're Zijian."

"You know my name, ma'am?"

"I've also heard little Hua mention you." Gu Yanying studied Yu Zijian carefully. Her gaze seemed to be able to see through her completely. Yu Zijian could only be considered as somewhat talented, but she was nowhere close to being a genius. However, Gu Yanying did not doubt Hua Chengzan's judgement. Her understanding of the Sword Collection palace was much deeper than Hua Chengzan's. Her sharp instincts told her that this child would be the next master of the Violet Clouds sword.

Gu Yanying only spoke with them, brushing aside Fu Qingjin and the three elders.

The three elders turned red, but they were not bold enough to become angry.

Fu Qingjin smiled by himself and lowered his hands. He did not feel awkward. Being brushed aside was a given if he made trouble for someone else.

Gu Yanying suddenly turned her head and said to Fu Qingjin, "You're not going?"

"I'm going right now."

"If you're going to go, then go quickly. Just seeing that sword gives me a headache."

"Umm." Yu Zijian was powerless.

"Be good. I'm not talking about you."

"Before I came here, the master of the palace told me to pass on a message to commander Gu. The territory of humans and daemons only exists on a whim. You're on your own, commander, so please take care." As Fu Qingjin said that, his bearing changed. His gloominess vanished, and his gaze became as sharp as a sword, giving off a stern and dignified bearing, as if he had not just passed on the master of the Sword Collection palace's message, but also his bearing.

"Help me pass on a message too. If you want to make trouble, please find somewhere else. The Green province is very large. For each day the Treaty of Kings remains in place, I will uphold it for another day. As for the matters of the future, that's something to decide on later." Gu Yanying's smile vanished. Her gaze was like a hawk's as she held him off sharply.

Although neither of them had used any spiritual energy, the people in the surroundings all felt pressured.

Fu Qingjin's expression loosened up, and he turned back to normal. "I really can't imitate the palace master. I will definitely pass on your word, commander Gu." Afterwards, he said to Yu Zijian, "Lady Yu, your destiny is closely linked to the sword. Are you willing to return to the Sword Collection palace with me to practise and study the path of the sword?"

His gaze was serious as he said sincerely, "I came here this time not because of anything else. Just for you."

With that, the three elders were all shocked. Being a person with a destiny closely linked to the Sword Collection palace was no longer just a pie in the sky. It was basically a staircase that led to the very top in the sky. Even they were filled with envy.

Yu Zijian, who had originally been the most inconspicuous and weakest person present, immediately became the centre of attention. She was rather flustered as her face reddened. "Sorry, but I already promised Chenglu to attend the Academy of the- mmmph!"

"Are you stupid?" Hua Chenglu, who had been stunned the entire time, returned to her senses. She covered Yu Zijian's mouth. "That's the Sword Collection palace, for heaven's sake!"

PS: Almost a new volume. Li Qingshan will truly climb on stage and begin his journey, throwing himself into this vast xianxia world. The set-up earlier does seem a little long, but the fascinating parts are starting very soon. I have complete confidence in it, but in order to achieve what I'm expecting, I need to spend some extra time thinking about it. If my releases fall behind, please forgive me and understand. There will be a satisfying answer in the end, for you and for me.

Chapter 258 - A Whim

In the eyes of the three elders, she was not just stupid. She was as foolish as they came.

Every year, there would be an endless stream of people who would visit the Sword Collection palace, wishing to join them. Often, there would be people who would kneel outside the palace without eating or drinking to express their devotion. As a matter of fact, there had even been people who had knelt to their deaths without being accepted by the palace.

The Green Vine Elder added a word of advice and said, "Zijian, you've stayed on my Green Vine mountain for so long, so you can say that there has been some destiny between us. I originally wanted to teach you the secret techniques of the Green Vine mountain and groom you into the future sect master. Today, I wish to advise you from the bottom of my heart. Go to the Sword Collection palace. Both you and your family will derive endless benefits from it. Once you miss this opportunity, you'll probably regret it for the rest of your life."

He was more polite and much kinder when he said that to Yu Zijian. While he did find Yu Zijian's talent to be impressive, grooming her into the sect master had never crossed his mind. He had only said that to develop a positive relationship with her, but he was not completely lying either. Now that basically all the disciples of the Green Vine mountain had been slaughtered, he really would have given her his utmost attention if it were not for Fu Qingjin.

Fu Qingjin said nothing. He only looked at Yu Zijian silently. He naturally gave off a dignified aura where he would order people around, or he would not have convinced the three elders so easily. It was rare of him to show such sincerity, which made him even more difficult to turn down.

Yu Zijian lowered her head and pinched the hem of her clothing until her knuckles whitened. She was not good at rejecting the kind intentions of others. It was not that she could not see the benefits. Being able to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages was human nature. She was not slow-witted or obstinate either, where she had to go to the Academy of the Hundred Schools with Hua Chenglu just because she had promised her.

Probably no one could have guessed her true thoughts. The fate of that stalwart figure who had saved her from danger repeatedly was still unknown, so how could she just leave here and plan ahead for her future? Even if staying in the Clear River prefecture would make no difference to his situation, at least there was a chance for her to see him again. This thought was rooted deeply in her heart.

“I support your choice!” Gu Yanying patted Yu Zijian’s shoulder and smiled.

Fu Qingjin’s eyes narrowed. Finally, he showed displeasure for the first time.

“The path of cultivation is about your conscience. You can’t insist on anything, and whether there is any destiny or not is not for them to decide. As a Hawkwolf guard, I uphold the laws of Great Xia. Even the Sword Collection palace cannot abduct people in my face!”

Yu Zijian said in a hurry, “It’s not abduction. I- I-”

Fu Qingjin looked at her deeply before raising his head and sighing. “Forget it. The time must not be right. You can stay here for now. However, I do believe there will be a day when you come to the Sword Collection palace and do what you must do.”

Then he bowed towards Gu Yanying. “Please take good care of her, commander Gu. Please don’t let anyone hurt her.” He glanced past everyone else. “If even a part of what happened here gets divulged, my sword won’t be showing any mercy.”

The Green Ruins sword thrummed within the sheath as a feeling of desolation filled the surroundings.

The Sword Collection palace was not without enemies. Those who could serve as enemies to the Sword Collection palace would definitely be the most terrifying enemies to have. If they discovered that the next successor of the Violet Clouds sword was here, they would definitely kill her while she was still sprouting.

The three elders were slightly dissatisfied with this. They were three Foundation Establishment cultivators, yet in Fu Qingjin’s eyes, they were not even as important as a girl. However, in the long run, they truly were not as important as this girl.

Gu Yanying smiled easily. “That I can guarantee.”

Fu Qingjin clasped his hands again before turning into a green streak of light and taking off into the air. He vanished completely in the blink of an eye. He was never sloppy when he handled matters. He was extremely decisive.

Gu Yanying bid farewell as well. Before she left, she said to the three elders, “I can see some deathly aura on your faces. It’s best if you are a little more careful in the future.”

The faces of the three elders twisted. The Golden Pheasant Elder let out a dry laugh. “Ma’am, do you happen to know face reading?”

Gu Yanying smiled. “I don’t. I’m just speaking casually. There’s no need to pay any heed to it.”

The four of them passed through the formation on the waist of the mountain. Cold air swept in from all directions, ruffling their clothes.

Yu Zijian and Hua Chenglu held hands and walked at the front, while Gu Yanying and Hua Chengzan fell behind. The only thing audible was how Hua Chenglu constantly scolded Yu Zijian as an idiot and a dumbass, while Yu Zijian argued back.

Gu Yanying and Hua Chengzan looked at each other and smiled. Gu Yanying said, "I'll leave these children in your care once they go to Clear River city."

Hua Chengzan looked down. "Don't worry, commander. I know how to handle them."

Gu Yanying smiled. "You know, it's rude to speak without looking at the person."

Hua Chengzan raised his head in a hurry. There were a few rare slivers of fluster in his clear pupils. Gu Yanying did not directly take off, so he knew that she had something to say to him.

However, Gu Yanying had already directed her gaze at the sky, at an obscure location that he was unable to gauge. That was where the stars existed. "Fu Qingjin, heh. Just his decisiveness alone makes him worthy of being the successor of the Green Ruins sword. Out of the eighteen commanders under me, your cultivation is the lowest, but in terms of resourcefulness and meticulousness, no one can surpass you. Obviously, I don't have to worry about you, but you do lack this decisiveness. Throughout history, all people who accomplish great things possess some decisiveness."

Hua Chengsan said, "I don't wish to accomplish great things."

Gu Yanying sighed.

"Today, apart from that millipede, there were two other daemons that were extraordinary. If Fu Qingjin had not interfered, the three old men would have almost been finished off."

As soon as Gu Yanying had arrived, she had only heard a simple story from Hua Chengzan about how it all unfolded. After that, she directly went to stop the Spider Queen's revenge. Hua Chengzan had already written up an extremely detailed report on what had happened during the Herb Gathering ceremony of the three mountains, but he had yet to submit it. He used it to change the topic of the conversation.

"Oh, how were they?" Gu Yanying did not care, but she still went along with the flow.

"One was extremely large, humanoid but with ox horns on his head, ox hooves on his feet, a tiger tail on his back, and scarlet hair and pupils. It should have been a hybrid among daemons. The other one was a tiny skeleton. For some reason, it demonstrated extraordinary sword techniques after entering the Green Ruins illusion."

Gu Yanying raised an eyebrow. She naturally thought of the figure that roared out in the snowstorm atop the Ice Sword cliff. Her impression of Li Qingshan was quite deep.

Just what method did they use to contend against Foundation Establishment cultivators? According to her memory, Li Qingshan was still a daemon that had not even condensed a daemon core a year ago. It was impossible for him to be able to threaten Foundation Establishment cultivators.

Hua Chengzan saw how it interested Gu Yanying, so he told her everything that he saw. He was skilled at talking, describing what he saw back then in vivid detail. Even the two others who had directly watched

it unfold, Hua Chenglu and Yu Zijian, could not help but stop and listen in. They would even interrupt him at times and add to what he said.

Gu Yanying thought, He sure has made rapid progress. In just a single year, he has reached a level like this. In other words, the annihilation of the Qi Practitioners underground was probably due to his plan. The fact that he had managed to take this step so quickly surprised her even more than his cultivation speed.

The master of the Sword Collection palace was right. The territory of humans and daemons only existed on a whim. However, just how many people could easily and decisively go ahead with this?

Gu Yanying said, "Do you remember what happened outside Qingyang city last year?"

As if the chatterbox within him had been set off, he appeared as if he had to stop his thought processes, and he went with Gu Yanying's question, speaking endlessly, "Of course, I remember. Old Wang invited us to drinks. Oh right, the kid you gave a drink to is called Li Qingshan. He actually went and joined the Hawkwolf Guard..."

Gu Yanying immediately became surprised. Originally, she thought that Li Qingshan had completely fallen into the world of daemons. She had not forgotten about the minor interaction she had with him, but she never expected it to yield something. Her expression remained the same on the surface as she listened to Hua Chengzan.

With that, it only gave Hua Chenglu even more authority to speak. She could not help but follow up on what her brother had said, going off on a great speech about what she saw when she met Li Qingshan on the Island of Cherishing Flowers.

He's actually practising qi. Just what is this kid thinking? Gu Yanying's interest was piqued.

Li Qingshan wanted to go to the Academy of the Hundred Schools, the headquarters of cultivators in the Clear River province. Only there could he continue to delve deeper into the world of human cultivators. Only there could he convert the thousand or so hundred treasures pouches worth of items currently in his possession into resources that he needed. Only there would he have an opportunity to refine the spiritual herbs he had collected into pills.

He needed to do all of this using the identity of Li Qingshan. He needed a recommendation from Zhou Wenbin.

Of course, this would not be entirely risk free. He would not be able to avoid an investigation from the Hawkwolf Guard, but according to the information he had received from Qian Rongzhi, the Hawkwolf Guard had never treated him as a criminal and put out an order for his capture. In other words, there was a very good chance that he could fool them all.

And, the worst-case scenario would just be a Foundation Establishment cultivator trying to kill him. Having reached the second layer of the tiger demon, he was confident that he could face off against a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Even if he was not their opponent, he could escape, and if it really came to that, he could just dive underground and find a hidden place to cultivate in seclusion for a couple of years.

He was not very far off from Daemon General now. Combined with all the resources in the hundred treasures pouches, he would be able to touch on that realm within two decades at most.

Two decades was nothing to daemons. As a matter of fact, it could be regarded as startlingly fast.

However, he did not want to wait for twenty years. Who knew what would happen in the world after two decades. Even when disregarding everything else, the elders of the three mountains might end up dying from old age. And, just what level would Fu Qingjin's cultivation reach with the support of the Sword Collection palace?

Li Qingshan was confident he could outlive that bastard, but there was no way he could comfort himself with that and convince himself that he had beaten him. He had to find shortcuts and advance valiantly. Many of the dangers involved were not even worth mentioning.

Thinking up to this point, Li Qingshan finally set foot on the top of the mountain. After several months, he had returned here, but he felt like an entire lifetime had passed already. He repressed these thoughts and feelings as he strode towards his original residence to find Qian Rongzhi.

Knocking on the door, Qian Rongzhi saw Li Qingshan and blanked out slightly, but she was not surprised. She said gently and cheerfully, "You're back." She was like a wife awaiting the return of her husband from a long journey, both gentle and warm. They had not been apart for a very long time, so there was not a lot of excitement, but it had not been short either. Though, they were clearly accustomed to it.

Li Qingshan said, "It looks like the cultivation method of the Sect of Clouds and Rain suits you very much."

Their eyes met, and they could sense each other's changes. One had become gentler, while the other had become even calmer and sharper as they walked along their paths of survival silently.

"It's so-so!" Qian Rongzhi turned to her side and let Li Qingshan into the house. Seeing Xiao An behind Li Qingshan, her gaze became even gentler. "Xiao An is back too."

Xiao An produced a soft interjection of agreement, which caused Qian Rongzhi to blank out once again. She let out a smile from the bottom of her heart.

Chapter 259 - A Tiger's Dignity

Qian Rongzhi listened to Li Qingshan's plan and asked, "Won't you just be walking into a trap? The greatest parlour of the Sect of Clouds and Rain is located in Clear River city. They won't spare you, nor will they spare Xiao An, unless you have Xiao An enter the Academy of the Hundred Schools too."

"That's what I intend to do. The sect might be strong, but they won't be able to directly touch me in the academy." Li Qingshan rubbed Xiao An's head. With her talent, entering the Academy of the Hundred Schools should not be difficult.

Qian Rongzhi said, "The Academy of the Hundred Schools is the foundation of the empire, so it's the last place where they'll let sects interfere. The most dangerous place also happens to be the safest. There are still a few days until the academy begins to accept students, so what are you planning to do?"

"Secluded cultivation," Li Qingshan said calmly. He needed to use the resources in his possession to break through to a higher level. In this world, only strength served as the greatest safeguard.

“That’s clever. There are special dwellings for secluded cultivation on the mountain. As long as you don’t leave the mountain, the Sect of Clouds and Rain won’t be able to do anything to you.”

This was another reason why Li Qingshan chose to return to the Hawkwolf Guard. The human world was different from the daemon world, and the laws were much more complicated. Having lost Milliped’s protection, the Hawkwolf Guard would be much safer than underground.

It was completely possible for Li Qingshan to go from somewhere safe to another safe place and avoid conflict with the Sect of Clouds and Rain altogether until he possessed enough power. However, that was only if he could gain a footing on the mountain.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. “Leave that up to me. I’m technically a commander right now, after all!”

Temporarily leaving Xiao An in the residence, Qian Rongzhi tidied herself slightly in front of the mirror. Without putting on any cosmetics, she took Li Qingshan to see the current Black Hawk commander.

Li Qingshan felt that Qian Rongzhi’s transformation was no smaller than his own. She had completely lost her flirtatiousness, as well as the arrogant temperament of a young miss she displayed when he first met her. It was as if she had ascended from vulgarity, becoming dignified and simple but elegant.

However, calling this transformation an internal change would be taking it too far. It was more like putting on a new disguise to adapt to the new environment. Because of the Method of Clouds and Rain, this disguise had become even more difficult to see through, and her thoughts were now hidden deeper too. In her hands, she had managed to completely unleash the value of the arts of charm. It was nowhere near as simple as seducing men.

However, Li Qingshan bore in mind that this woman was definitely not a good person. Regular bad people might have been able to repent on their ways and become a saint, but only the cleverest and dumbest would remain stubborn in their ways. Regular people could all be captivated and led astray, becoming indecisive and uncertain. Only the cleverest and the dumbest people would persist with what they believed in and remain the same.

While he disliked this woman, he had to admit that she was basically one of “the cleverest”. Once a person like that had believed in something, it was basically impossible for them to change their minds.

It just happened to be early in the morning right now. A few Hawkwolf guards emerged from their residences to go eat breakfast.

Li Qingshan discovered that he was familiar with most of them. Qian Rongzhi introduced, “After you left, we held another large-scale recruitment process to fill in the empty spaces. It was very intense, so it is a pity that you couldn’t see it for yourself. Though, it’s not like you lack spectacles like that.”

“Good morning, commander!” Some of the newcomers greeted Qian Rongzhi enthusiastically when they saw her. Seeing Li Qingshan beside her, they were all rather surprised. This young man was also a Black Wolf guard, so why had they never seen him before? What was his relationship with the commander?

On the other hand, the few who did recognise Li Qingshan reacted much more violently. Their eyes widened as their mouths dropped. The two commanders of Jiaping city, along with a group of elite Hawkwolf guards, had basically been annihilated, and it all traced back to Li Qingshan.

“Good morning,” Qian Rongzhi replied with a smile. She was gentle like an elder sister of the neighbourhood, such that she gave off a good impression as soon as people saw her. They could not help but develop some respect for her.

Li Qingshan felt like even if he told these people about Qian Rongzhi’s viciousness, none of them would believe it. It made him think of a saying. People who actually hid their thoughts well would never appear like they were good at hiding their thoughts. As a matter of fact, they would appear to be even gentler than regular people.

Zhuo Zhibo completely paled in comparison to her in this aspect. When a venomous snake hid its venomous fangs, or even the fact that it was a venomous snake, it would be when it was the most terrifying.

“Commander, who’s this kid?”

At this moment, a group of four or five Black Wolf guards blocked the way. They were brimming with hostility. The leader was a fifth layer Qi Practitioner, around thirty years of age. He had a fearsome appearance and was extremely ugly. He studied Li Qingshan curiously.

Qian Rongzhi said, “This is your senior.”

“Hah. He’s still wet behind the ears, and he’s my senior? We sure have a lot of seniors, including a woman and a child. The position befitting women is beneath men!”

The ugly man and the Black Wolf guards around him roared with laughter.

Li Qingshan originally thought they had nothing better to do and were just trying to fight for Qian Rongzhi’s favour, but at a closer glance, he realised that they had come for Qian Rongzhi. The ugly leader was also a fifth layer Qi Practitioner, so he probably was not particularly happy with Qian Rongzhi as his commanding officer.

Li Qingshan had guessed correctly. In order to fill up the ranks of the Hawkwolf Guard quickly, they had loosened the standard in the recruitment process this time. They accepted all sorts of people, so it was impossible to avoid both the good and the bad. This ugly man was not an easy nut to crack. He originated from a tiny sect and gathered a group of his seniors and juniors who specially targeted Qi Practitioners to kill. They never touched regular people, which was why they had not made it onto the blacklist.

He was a fifth layer Qi Practitioner just like Qian Rongzhi. He personally believed he had spent plenty of time and effort on cultivation, and he had the support of his seniors and juniors too, so why would he be willing to remain below Qian Rongzhi? As a result, he provoked her many times to disrupt her authority.

Qian Rongzhi frowned slightly. She seemed both pitiful and helpless. The Black Wolf guards who walked passed all showed displeasure, but they were afraid of speaking up. They all sighed inside over how she was just too soft-hearted.

Li Qingshan glanced at her. “Looks like you haven’t managed to win everyone over with the recruitment this time.”

If a person was just too good at enduring abuse and disguising their emotions, some people would find them weak and also an easy target. Nothing could be done about this.

The ugly man pointed at Li Qingshan. "Kid, you hang with us!" Originally, he planned on recruiting people as soon as he joined the Hawkwolf Guard; he wanted to pull all the newcomers to his side. However, while this damn woman was weak, she knew how to win over people, so a lot of people ended up detesting him instead. He had to do her properly sooner or later.

Suddenly, he saw how Li Qingshan was quite powerful, a fourth layer Qi Practitioner. Moreover, he was young, so he was easy to control. As such, he wanted to rope him in.

Li Qingshan said, "Piss off."

"Brother, this kid doesn't know how to appreciate kindness."

"You're looking to die!"

The ugly man lost his temper too. He spat out a few threats before suddenly meeting Li Qingshan's eyes. The blazing anger in his heart suddenly cooled off. What kind of eyes were they? As they looked at him, it did not seem like they were looking at something alive. He began to perspire for some reason.

Who knew how many Qi Practitioners below the sixth layer Li Qingshan had killed. When he was underground, he even broke his own limit and started a massacre. Looking at these people now, they seemed no different from livestock. If he were in the wilderness, he would not even bother with telling them to piss off. He would just kill them all.

There was no need for him to purposefully display his murderousness. This aura arose naturally, stunning and frightening the enemy.

Qian Rongzhi was extremely skilled at observing and reading the minds of people. She trembled slightly. He was becoming more and more terrifying. She had to be even more careful in the future. Just what had he gone through in the past few months?

This was the dignity of a tiger.

Chapter 260 - Reunion of the Three

From the instincts he had developed through many years of killing and robbing, he could feel that this young man was a difficult person to deal with. Seeing how his senior and junior brothers still howled on around him, even rubbing their fists wanting to get a piece of the action, he growled, "All of you shut up!" He asked cautiously, "May I be honoured to know your name, sir?"

"Let's go!" Li Qingshan said to Qian Rongzhi before directly striding away, acting like they did not exist. The ugly man's expression changed a few times. When Li Qingshan almost walked into him, he dodged to the side and just watched as Qian Rongzhi left with him. He quietly gulped.

"Big brother!"

"Don't provoke him. This person is very dangerous." The ugly man looked at Li Qingshan's back. If this young man was the Black Wolf commander, he would never even consider challenging him. Now that this woman had obtained a helper like him, she would be difficult to deal with.

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In the main office, Fang Enshang pushed aside the curtains, tidied his desk, and prepared some water for his ink. He was about to get to work. He was still full of enthusiasm towards this job. Hearing the footsteps, he raised his head. "Oh Rongzhi, you're here. Who's this?"

This was the second time Li Qingshan had met Fang Enshang. Back then in the Quiet Spring valley, a slaughter would have definitely unfolded if it had not been for Fang Enshang's mediation. He had quite a good impression of him.

Qian Rongzhi introduced them to each other. Li Qingshan clasped his hands. "Greetings to the commander from your subordinate, Li Qingshan!"

"So you're Li Qingshan." Fang Enshang looked at this young man who stood tall. He studied him up and down, as if he did not believe that this was the Tiger Butcher who had killed countless. He could not help but ask what he was wondering, "Where have you been during this period of time?"

Li Qingshan stated the excuse that he had already prepared patiently. Most of it was true, but there were some lies as well. He admitted to the fact that Zhuo Zhibo had been scheming against him, which forced him to flee underground. As he fled for his life, he alarmed a powerful daemon underground, and Zhuo Zhibo's entire group was wiped out. Only he managed to escape.

Apart from the fact that Li Qingshan was the daemon, there were basically no lies in that story.

Qian Rongzhi would chime in and add to his story whenever it was suitable. With how crafty and resourceful she was, she had been on extremely harmonious terms with Fang Enshang over the past few months. She also gained a deep understanding of his character, which she would cleverly use to control his thoughts.

As expected, Fang Enshang fumed over the injustice. "To think there would actually be a commander who would work with criminals in order to deal with his own subordinate! He truly deserved death! Then what about the previous Black Wolf commander, Lao Xishan?"

Li Qingshan said, "I parted ways there with the vice commander. The vice commander might not have believed me and ventured underground as well."

"Then why have you only just returned?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "That's actually something everyone knows about. Because of the child by his side, Li Qingshan offended the Sect of Clouds and Rain. For this matter, the vice sect master and four grannies of the Sect of Clouds and Rain had all come to Jiaping city. If I hadn't contacted him in time to tell him to flee, he would be dead already."

Fang Enshang slammed the table. "How dare they!"

Li Qingshan said, "I know the Sect of Clouds and Rain is powerful. I've returned this time because I want to enter secluded cultivation on the mountain for a period of time. Thanks to district magistrate Zhou's good graces, he agreed to give me a recommendation to the Academy of the Hundred Schools. As long as I go to the academy, even the Sect of Clouds and Rain should have second thoughts about touching me!"

Fang Enshang patted Li Qingshan's shoulder. "Don't worry. As long as you remain in the Hawkwolf Guard here, no one will be able to touch you. Once you make it to the Academy of the Hundred Schools, it's even more impossible for these sects to act as they please. Our Hawkwolf Guard is not one for others to walk all over!"

He was so sincere that he made Li Qingshan feel rather embarrassed about lying to him. In the end, Li Qingshan handed over the Zombie Daoist's head and completed the mission, earning him over ten thousand points of contribution.

The Qi Gathering pills or spiritual stones that could be exchanged for using the contribution no longer interested Li Qingshan. However, using the dwellings on the mountain for seclusion also cost contribution, and it was not cheap either. A single day was fifty points of contribution.

Qian Rongzhi brought Li Qingshan to the place for secluded cultivation, which was a large, stone cave dug out from the mountain.

Li Qingshan could sense that the spiritual qi inside was denser than outside, just as expected. There was no furniture inside, just a huge formation carved into the ground.

Qian Rongzhi said, "This is a Spirit Gathering formation, but activating it will cost you additional spiritual stones."

Li Qingshan looked at the formation. Sure enough, there were several grooves. He nodded and thought, What a clever design.

Qian Rongzhi placed her hand on a round disc on the wall, channelling in true qi and turning it gently. A huge piece of rock slid over loudly.

"Once this stone door is sealed, you can only open it from the inside. If you want to open it from the outside, you'd need to tear it open forcefully. I think even the sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain isn't bold enough to do something like that."

Li Qingshan nodded. The entire Hawkwolf Guard would never allow something like that to occur. He took out a pill from his hundred treasures pouch and passed it to Qian Rongzhi. "If anything unexpected happens outside while I'm in seclusion, I'll have to trouble you with handling it. If there are any dangers, I'll have to trouble you with reminding me too."

While those lies were enough to fool Fang Enshang, Fang Enshang was not the one to make any decisions with regard to the deaths of the two commanders and a group of Hawkwolf guards. He would have to report this to his higher-ups. Although there should not be any major issues according to Qian Rongzhi's analysis, he just was taking precautions with this.

"A Sea of Qi pill!" Qian Rongzhi's eyes lit up.

Sea of Qi pills were crucial pills for Qi Practitioners to break through to the sixth layer. It could assist the Qi Practitioner in condensing a sea of qi, so it truly was quite precious. However, Li Qingshan had found almost a hundred of them from all the hundred treasures pouches in his possession, so giving one away was nothing to him.

“I’ve already gotten my hands on one. With this one, it’ll increase my chances by thirty percent.” Qian Rongzhi accepted the pill, but she did not speak any words of gratitude.

This was their relationship. It was clear cut, where neither of them owed each other anything. They simply made use of one another without any efforts to hide their intentions. There were no meaningless interactions. They would not even say an additional word to each other when there was no need to.

At this moment, there was a thump, and the huge, stone door closed, plunging the cave into darkness.

Qian Rongzhi became extremely relaxed too. In this space that was sealed off from the world, her expression and bearing underwent a wondrous transformation. Her gentleness and kindness vanished, while a bone-chilling sensation filled Li Qingshan once again.

She was like a snake about to eat a person. Dim, cold light flashed through her eyes as she pursed her lips. She smiled. “Looks I can use the medicinal enhancers I’ve kept around now.”

The ugly man and his companions were the medicinal enhancers she had prepared for her breakthrough to the sixth layer. They could provide large quantities of true qi at crucial times.

Li Qingshan frowned. He turned the mechanism. As the stone door opened again and light landed on her face, it was like magic. Wherever the light reached, her expression would change slightly, and when the light engulfed her completely, she had recovered her image as a gentle and kind elder sister.

Li Qingshan felt that compared to him, she was more like those demons and daemons of the legends.

The light cast a long shadow in the cave. Li Qingshan looked at the owner of the shadow. “Diao Fei?”

Diao Fei faltered. “I heard that you’ve returned.” His cultivation had already reached the fourth layer. Although he had not improved as quickly as Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi after they had joined the Hawkwolf Guard, he had not been wasting his time either.

The three people that had once joined the Hawkwolf Guard together were reunited once again.