

### Chapter 291 - Within the Anāsravā? Temple

“The brat has joined the school of Novels?” Wang Pushi was taken aback in surprise, doubting his ears.

Hua Chengzan told him the entire story with a bitter smile. Gu Yanying originally wanted him to take care of him, yet he ended up in the school of Novels under his care. Hua Chengzan had no idea how to explain this to her the next time he met her.

Wang Pushi let out a sigh. “Zhou Tong has gone too far this time. Whatever, he reaps what he sows. Tell the brat that if he copies Liu Chuanfeng and writes those dirty novels, I’ll expel him from the Hawkwolf Guard.”

Hua Chengzan said, “School leader Liu has already invited all the school leaders to Contention island to discuss this. You’d better go too!”

After Wang Pushi left, Hua Chengzan turned around and made his way through the door. Almost a hundred new disciples of legalism sat straight in the hall.

Hua Chengzan made a gesture for everyone to settle down. “Don’t be nervous, everyone. This isn’t the school of Confucianism. There aren’t so many customs and rules. We’ll all be seniors and juniors in the future. I’ll be your first senior brother, Hua Chengzan.” He bowed slightly in an easy-going and graceful manner, enough for people to admire him.

Everyone returned the gesture in a hurry. They felt much more relaxed now. Hua Chenglu’s eyes even lit up. Now this was her elder brother.

Then Hua Chengzan said sternly, “The school of Legalism may not focus on so many unnecessary and overcomplicated gestures of mere courtesy, but we do have rules, and these rules are the law. If your actions in the school of Confucianism defy etiquette, then you will be criticized and be forced to correct yourself. But here, there is only punishment!”

“There’s no point in hiding this from you. I’ve tried a few of the punishments of the school of Legalism. There are floggings, beatings, whippings, lashings, as well as water prisons, darkness prisons, fire prisons, and so on. They don’t feel too bad. Among them, I sincerely recommend whippings. If there are female disciples that must be punished, I’ll consider personally carrying out the punishment myself.”

Hua Chengzan wiggled his eyebrows with a smirk, leading to a hall of laughter. The nervous atmosphere vanished completely. The men smiled with understanding, while the women became slightly furious from embarrassment. However, who could help the fact that this renowned young master Hua was a handsome romantic?

The primary disciples played an extremely important role within each school. Many of the times, they would serve as representatives of the school leader.

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Li Qingshan descended on his cloud and arrived outside the stūpas. Two monks in grey robes appeared in a flash. “Who are you? What brings you here?”

Li Qingshan stated his origins and his intentions.

However, when he said that he was the primary disciple of the school of Novels, the two monks glanced at one another before looking back at him. They looked at him like he was a rare creature as they smiled strangely.

Only when they heard Xiao An's name did they grow serious. They had not left Anāsravā? island, but they had heard about what had happened on Contention island from the new disciples. This junior sister Xiao An of theirs definitely held a significant position in their master's heart. Probably even their first senior brother paled in comparison.

"Please come with me, sir." said the older monk on the left with his palms brought together.

The monk brought Li Qingshan through the stūpas, arriving outside an independent monastery. He had Li Qingshan wait outside as he went into the monastery, whispering in front of the meditation room.

"First senior brother, a person called Li Qingshan has come. He claims to be the primary disciple of the school of Novels. He has come to see junior sister Xiao An."

No matter how poor of a reputation the school of Novels had, he could not just give the cold shoulder to a primary disciple. Apart from the One Thought master, the only person that had the right to receive him was the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism.

The main door to the meditation room opened up, and a fat monk emerged, smiling from ear to ear like a smiling buddha. However, when he heard Xiao An's name, a cold light flashed through his eyes. He ignored the monk and made his way out of the monastery by himself. He saw Li Qingshan waiting at the entrance and asked, "Are you Li Qingshan?"

Li Qingshan bowed. "That's me. May I ask for your dharma name, senior brother?"

Enlightened Mind studied Li Qingshan and saw how he was only at the sixth layer, so he showed much contempt. You say that you're a primary disciple with just this measly cultivation, wanting to stand on equal footing with me? He said indifferently, "Enlightened Mind."

Li Qingshan frowned slightly. He was at a loss as for how he had offended him, but he asked patiently, "May I ask where Xiao An is? Please lead me to her, senior brother."

"Master has gone to Contention island to meet with the other school leaders. Before he left, he told me that junior sister Xiao An is currently in seclusion and that no one should disturb her, so please go back, sir!" When he heard Xiao An's name, fury rose up in his chest once more. He became ruder as well.

Last night, he had heard how the One Thought master had given her the supreme grade spiritual artifact, the Guardian King's pearl. Moreover, he had personally passed the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual to her. Mind Enlightenment found this rather difficult to accept. He had been looking forward to the Guardian King's pearl for quite some time now. Even he, the primary disciple, had yet to possess a supreme grade spiritual artifact, while within the school of Buddhism, only he had the right to practise the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual in the past as the primary disciple. He felt threatened by her.

As a result, he could not help but ask the One Thought master about this, but he was met with a scolding. The One Thought master told him to uphold his duty as the first senior brother to serve as a model to others, not to rely on material objects or develop jealousy.

He was not bold enough to argue back. He put on an act that he deeply regretted his actions, punishing himself by reflecting on his actions in front of a wall. Only then did he earn the One Thought master's recognition. However, it only made him even more furious. He knew he could not get back at Xiao An, or his master would never spare him. Now that Li Qingshan had come knocking, and he seemed very familiar with Xiao An, he obviously would not let this opportunity slip considering he was also under his master's orders. He would properly vent his anger.

"If you won't take me to her, then I'll go find her myself." Li Qingshan could not be bothered with dealing with him. No matter how busy or occupied Xiao An was, she would still see him. Even if she was in seclusion, she would still notify him.

Enlightened Mind's face sank. He blocked Li Qingshan's path with a flash. "Didn't you hear what I said? How can I allow you to trespass on the peaceful land of buddhism?"

Li Qingshan said in irritation, "As a primary disciple, I can move about freely even if I'm on other islands, so how is it trespassing? Baldy, I'm showing you some respect for the One Thought master's sake. Don't take it too far!"

Enlightened Mind had yet to see a new disciple argue back against him. As the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism, he possessed great status and authority. He was on the same footing as Hua Chengzan, so how could he allow such disobedience from someone weaker than him? Let alone the primary disciple of the school of Novels, but even if the leader of the school of Novels, Liu Chuanfeng, was here in person, he would still look down on them.

"I've never heard of a person like you in the academy. Who knows if you've just stolen your set of clothes, wanting to hatch a plot against our school of Buddhism. As the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism, I must follow my master's orders and protect junior sister Xiao An. If you want to see her, you'd better get through me first!"

He drew a shining monk's spade and held it before him.

TL: A monk's spade:

Apart from the school of the Military in the Hundred Schools of Thought, the school of Buddhism had many methods for Body Practitioners too. Those who practised both qi and the body were known as warrior monks. His posture was extremely proper, while his bearing was powerful. The monk's spade kicked up a gust of wind, causing the leaves on the tree to fall down.

Li Qingshan immediately felt a powerful pressure. It even surpassed Wei Zhongyuan's. While buddhism was about benevolence and sympathy, they had plenty of techniques to purge demons and daemons. He was also a tenth layer Qi Practitioner, but he could not be compared to someone from a sect that did not focus on combat like the Sect of Clouds and Rain.

However, the last thing that Li Qingshan feared was pressure. He raised an eyebrow, about to let loose, but he soon remembered the fact that this was still the territory of the school of Buddhism after all. Xiao

An would still have to cultivate here, so offending this primary disciple would probably be detrimental to her. As a result, he withdrew his true qi.

Mind Enlightenment saw how Li Qingshan was afraid, so he showed even more contempt. And I had thought you were actually going to clash with me. Turns out you're just a coward putting on a front. "The pure land of buddhism is not a place where you, a dirty novelist, can run amok. If you have your wits about you, you'd better leave quickly. Don't come back."

Li Qingshan gritted his teeth. He raised his hand and tapped the thumb ring gently. "Xiao An, where are you?"

Xiao An's delighted voice immediately rang out from there. The two of them conversed a little. As it turned out, Xiao An was not in the Anāsraṃā? temple; this temple was where monks cultivated. To the south of Anāsraṃā? temple was the Pure Moon nunnery. An old nun who worked as a professor in the academy served as the abbess, responsible for guiding the female nuns.

Li Qingshan said, "If you want to cultivate, then just cultivate. I'll just come a few days later."

All Xiao An said was, "Wait for me."

Li Qingshan said to Mind Enlightenment, "You're not letting me go find her, so surely there's nothing you can say now that she's coming to find me!"

Mind Enlightenment furrowed and raised his eyebrows. His plump face immediately became slightly fierce. He swung down heavily with the hefty monk's spade in his hand. "Begone, vile being!"

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The various school leaders all set aside their matters at hand and gathered once more on Contention island to discuss the matter of the school of Novels. It was the same room as last time. It seemed even darker in there, while the atmosphere was slightly heavy too.

Liu Zhangqing was the most annoyed. The school of Confucianism pursued cultivating the body, managing the family, administering the empire, and bringing peace to the world. Normally, all the Academies of the Hundred Schools, no matter where they were, would basically accept the leader of the school of Confucianism to manage the various matters. Back then, he had led the movement to jointly abolish the school of Novels too.

Liu Wenchuan's disgraceful, obscene novels had already crossed his bottom line a long time ago. Obviously, he had also played a role in the decline of the school of Novels to a point where they did not even have a primary disciple. He believed that the school of Novels would definitely be abolished after this entrance exam, but who would have imagined this to happen?

He had already promised the Cloudwisp island to someone else, along with the identity of the leader of the school of Painting. The future leader of the school of Painting had already promised him many benefits that interested him, but now, all of his plans had fallen apart. He felt indescribably annoyed, so he could not help but grumble about the slovenly daoist priest a little.

The various school leaders had grown unhappy with the slovenly daoist priest's behaviour a long time ago, so they used this opportunity to erupt. They all blamed him.

The slovenly daoist priest would never just sit back and accept the blame. He immediately cursed each and every one of them individually, turning the meeting into a mess. He ended up becoming carried away, placing a foot on the table and rolling up his sleeves. "Come, come, come. If any of you don't like what you're hearing, you can come at me together. If this lowly priest is afraid of you all, then call me a bald ass."

"Amitābha, I haven't said anything this whole time, ox nose, so quit taking digs at this lowly monk." This time, the One Thought master had said nothing in this meeting. He did not care about the fate of the school of Novels. All he cared about right now was Xiao An.

At this exact moment, a message rang out from the tablet on the One Thought master's waist. "Oh no, they've begun fighting, abbot."

"Who has begun fighting with who?"

"First senior brother and Li Qingshan."

When the school masters heard Li Qingshan's name, they all gathered their focus. Right now, he was the source of all their problems, as well as the key to dealing with the issue of the school of Novels.

### **Chapter 292 - Guardian Kings Subdue Demons**

Liu Zhangqing immediately fished out the Watermirror disc, which conjured an image. The monk's spade in Mind Enlightenment's hand was imbued with true qi, turning into a startling wave that forced Li Qingshan back. However, Li Qingshan was like a small boat in the storm, rising and falling with the wave without capsizing.

Wang Pushi frowned. "This brat really is a troublemaker."

After hearing the whole story, the One Thought master became displeased too. "Xiao An is currently practising the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual, so no one should disturb her. Li Qingshan is far too insensible."

As an esoteric cultivation method of buddhism, originally only the primary disciple, Mind Enlightenment, could practise the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. This was not because the One Thought master was unfair and favoured Mind Enlightenment. Instead, it was because the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual possessed far too much depth. It required a very firm foundation and a very high level of understanding for a cultivator to practise it.

This was beyond what talent alone could achieve. It required an extremely deep foundation in cultivation and a great understanding of buddhist philosophies. It was not something that a new disciple could practise. There were plenty of buddhist disciples who would take quite a few years despite their cultivation foundation to practise this cultivation method.

The reason why the One Thought master had arranged for this to happen was to separate Li Qingshan and Xiao An, especially after he learnt that she had only known Li Qingshan for around a year, and they were not connected by blood. This was for Xiao An's sake too. As a buddhist disciple, too many distracting thoughts would affect her cultivation. As long as he separated them for a while, time would naturally erode away everything.

His other objective was to eliminate Xiao An's arrogance so that she could learn her flaws before this wondrous method of buddhism that even she was unable to practise. No matter how great of a genius she was, there was nothing she could do if she did not comprehend the essence of buddhism, cut off her worldly ties, and cultivate in peace.

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Nightfall yesterday, outside the Anāsravā? temple, in the Pure Moon nunnery.

Xiao An changed into a set of grey monk robes and knelt quietly before the buddha.

The One Thought Master picked up his razor, personally performing tonsure and completing this ancient ceremony for her.

When the shiny tonsure razor reached towards her long, dark hair, the abbess of the nunnery, the One Leaf abbess, despite personally believing her mind had already achieved a stillness akin to an ancient well, actually found this slightly regretful. With that, she would serve as a buddhist monk for the rest of her life, cutting off her worldly ties.

Xiao An raised her head and avoided the razor. She looked at the jade buddha in the niche.

The One Leaf abbess discovered that her dark eyes were even more akin to an ancient well than her own heart before smiling self-deprecatingly. She was just a child. Were there any girls who were willing to cut the beautiful long hair they had grown themselves? Because of her unbelievable talent, didn't that make her mind unsettled too?

She brought her palms together and stated, "A head of black hair is akin to three thousand strands of afflictions. Shaving away your hair is ending these afflictions. Don't be so reluctant to give it up. Only with loss comes gain."

However, little did she know that losing her hair meant nothing to Xiao An. Even losing her body meant nothing. It was all just an illusion, just like how even the greatest beauty would be reduced to a pile of white bones someday. She had never cared about it in the first place. Whether it was a head of black hair or three thousand strands of afflictions, it was all for him, so how could she shave it away so easily?

The One Thought master said, "Tonsure is a crucial ceremony for joining the school of Buddhism. It represents cutting away all your concerns so that you can wholeheartedly cultivate. If you don't go through with this, you won't be able to become a disciple of the school of Buddhism."

Xiao An said nothing. She took out the Guardian King's pearl and placed it before the buddha.

There was no need for anyone to say anything to her. Even a supreme grade spiritual artifact was not enough for her to go through with this.

The One Thought master remained in silence for quite a while before letting out a long sigh. He allowed her to cultivate in the Pure Moon nunnery without going through tonsure, but it only made him even more determined. He could not allow a mere Li Qingshan to affect this rare, supreme genius of his school of Buddhism.

Benevolent be the buddha. Perhaps she was supposed to suffer a little so that she would know when to take a step back in the face of difficulties.

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In the blink of an eye, Mind Enlightenment had already forced Li Qingshan down the cliff. He was encased in the wrathful, glaring, golden avatar of a guardian king, which swung down with the golden, half-transparent monk's spade in his hand.

There was a great clang.

Li Qingshan parried with the Wind-entwining blade and stopped the monk's spade, but his arms shuddered, and the webbing between his thumb and index finger ached. The power from Mind Enlightenment had completely exceeded anything that a Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings could provide.

A notch immediately appeared on the Wind-entwining blade. Under the force of the monk's spade, it let out a painful groan as it twisted and changed shape.

There was a flash of blue light, and the Clear Stream sword shot out from Li Qingshan's sleeve, stabbing towards Mind Enlightenment's forehead. There was a clink, and it was sent flying. It failed to harm the golden avatar at all.

"Like an ant trying to shake a tree! Why don't you piss off!" Mind Enlightenment crushed down with the monk's spade.

Li Qingshan was secretly amazed by the power of buddhist cultivation methods. If he did not transform, he would have to use the Cursive Sword Calligraphy if he wanted to get through this golden avatar.

Suddenly, his vision lit up, and he smiled. Looks like there was no longer any need for that. A petite figure rushed over by leaping roof to roof, her black hair dancing in the air. He did not think too much. He just felt that she still looked better with hair.

The One Thought master saw this too. He immediately questioned the One Leaf abbess, "Junior sister, didn't I say that she's forbidden from leaving seclusion if she didn't complete the first layer of the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual? Why did you let her out?"

He had placed down restrictive formations at the location where Xiao An cultivated. Not only were others forbidden from entering or disturbing her, but even Xiao An herself could not leave until she reached the first layer of the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. Apart from him, the only person who could let her out was the One Leaf abbess. He had left plenty of food in there for her, along with precious pills. They were enough to sustain her cultivation for quite a while.

Before the wide open doors, the One Leaf abbess stood in a daze. She did not answer him. All she muttered was, "That's impossible!"

The One Thought master understood the reason very soon. Within the Watermirror disc, Xiao An's aura had already reached an impressive sixth layer.

With her own vitality and the pills left behind by the One Thought master, she had used a single afternoon and a night to push her cultivation up by three layers. As for condensing a sea of qi that was enough for countless Qi Practitioners to pain over, she had no idea what the difficulty was. It was just like when she had taught Li Qingshan in the past.

When she saw Mind Enlightenment, a rare sliver of fury appeared on her tiny, expressionless face, and she erupted with golden light.

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

Raising its vajra high into the air, it transformed and turned into a huge, golden sword in the end. It cleaved down towards Mind Enlightenment's back.

If the One Thought master still had any doubts earlier, then he would finally be convinced now. She had truly reached the first layer with the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. Just the Guardian King's pearl alone could not create such a realistic avatar.

Mind Enlightenment experienced a feeling of danger. He swept backwards with his monk's spade and the two tremendous forces collided, producing another deafening boom.

Mind Enlightenment gazed at the guardian king's avatar behind him in disbelief. He staggered backwards and collided into the cliff face behind him.

The cliff trembled and pieces of rock fell down.

Using the attack, Xiao An leapt backwards and nullified the force.

The two guardian kings confronted one another with furious glares. Although Xiao An's guardian king avatar was slightly smaller, it was no less consolidated than Mind Enlightenment's with the support of the Guardian King's pearl.

The onlooking monks were all dumbfounded. Was this really their junior sister Xiao An?

It was not just them. Even the One Thought master felt the same. This was the first time in his entire life that he did not feel joy for his disciple's improvements. Instead, he felt a sliver of mixed fear. This was talent that could strike fear within people.

The Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual, an esoteric buddhist cultivation method that the One Thought master believed Xiao An would struggle to comprehend, was absolutely nothing before the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, a supreme ability that went from buddhism to the demonic, turning the cultivator into an embodiment of the White Bone Bodhisattva.

Yet, under the black ox's guidance, she had forcefully learnt this ability despite being still in the state of a ghost. After that, she had never stopped studying the buddhist scriptures, rapidly deepening her understanding and comprehension.

The Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual was no different from the buddhist scriptures she had seen in the past. They were all for the sake of deepening her understanding of the essence of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. And, it began to lead to a mysterious transformation. Even buddhas could become demons, so what were guardian kings supposed to be?

For the first time too, the slovenly daoist priest, Zhou Tong, felt like having a disciple like that would not necessarily be good news either, as perhaps he would enter seclusion for a few months, only to discover that his disciple had already become more powerful than him after he emerged. As for having Yu Zijian exceed Xiao An, he no longer held any hope in that anymore.



Actually, if Xiao An joined the school of Daoism instead, her cultivation speed would just be startling at most, despite her supreme talent.

The One Thought master was right. She did have a destiny with the buddha, but not as a disciple of buddhism, but as an enemy of buddhism. There was a saying in the world, "Your enemy is the person who knows you the best." What she wanted to become was the "nemesis of buddhism". Just her objective alone had surpassed all regular monks.

The room fell utterly silent. All of the school leaders were knowledgeable. They had quite a deep understanding of the Guardian King's Method of Demon Subdual. Even if their shock failed to match the One Thought master's, it would not be far off.

The slovenly daoist priest asked the One Thought master, "How long did you take to reach the first layer of the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual?"

The One Thought master said, "I became a monk when I was seven, practising qi while studying the dharma and teachings of buddhism. When I was twenty-five, I reached the ninth layer and gained the recognition of my master, who was also the previous school leader, the Ziming master. After which, I switched to the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. I comprehended it a year later, reaching the first layer."

"And how long did she take?"

The One Thought master said hoarsely, "A single night!" And, he had switched to the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual as a ninth layer Qi Practitioner. Compared to that, it was far more difficult for Xiao An, at the third layer with only the foundation from the Innate Method of Practising Qi.

This had already exceeded the boundary of geniuses. She was a deviant, a monster.

The slovenly daoist priest patted the One Thought master's shoulder.

Liu Zhangqing sighed gently. Originally, he wanted to pull some strings and force Li Qingshan to leave the school of Novels. Of course, he would not be able to switch to other schools either. He would be breaking the rules if he remained in the academy, so he would give him some benefits and recommend him to go elsewhere.

As the ruler of an entire prefecture, this did not cause him any mental burden at all. Those who wanted to achieve great things could not afford to scruple over small details. However, he had to reconsider this plan now. At the very least, he needed to go from "force" to "convince".

Li Qingshan clearly held an extremely important position within this child's heart. Even though time could wear away everything, it would not take her too long to reach his current level. He did not want to bear the hostility from a person like that, and it was not like he had given any thought to it in the first place.

In the Anāsraṃvā? temple, Xiao An clashed with Mind Enlightenment. The vajra sword and monk's spade constantly collided together and produced tremors such that the huge, nearby bells began resonating too.

Even the old monks in the temple had never witnessed something so extraordinary before.

## Chapter 293 - Mentally Devastated

Xiao An could not expose her powers from the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, so originally, it should have been impossible for her to contend against a tenth layer Qi Practitioner like Mind Enlightenment. The Guardian King's pearl that the One Thought master had bestowed upon her played a critical role right now.

Supreme grade spiritual artifacts were not items that Qi Practitioners could completely control. Only Foundation Establishment cultivators could unleash their true power. However, Xiao An could use the Guardian King's pearl the moment it entered her hands. When she reached the first layer with the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual, she could unleash its full power. It no longer paled in comparison to when the One Thought master used it.

In Li Qingshan's hands, even the Cursive Sword Calligraphy that could barely be regarded as a supreme grade spiritual artifact already possessed so much power even without being refined. On the other hand, all of the power of a true supreme grade spiritual artifact was being unleashed right now.

And, the huge vajra sword was like an embroidery needle in Xiao An's hands, swinging downwards, thrusting forwards, flicking downwards, swinging upwards, sweeping high, and sweeping low.

When she swung down, it was enough to cleave mountains in two. Li Qingshan could not help but think about the heavy, inky vertical stroke in the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. When she swept low, it was similar to the light and nonchalant horizontal stroke. She had completely digested and absorbed all the sword intent within the three fragments of the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. The vajra sword turned into a flurry of golden light.

Many of the school leaders had a thorough understanding of the sword, and Liu Zhangqing was one of the best among them. He carried a sword on his waist right now. It was not an ornament, but an actual weapon for killing.

The Confucian disciples of this world were not those pedantic, physically weak scholars. Apart from being educated in literature and etiquette, swordsmanship was a core subject too. On many formal occasions, carrying a sword with them was the norm.

He stared at the Watermirror disc and subconsciously gripped the hilt of his sword. The sword intent that was as light as clouds yet as powerful as dragons startled him. Suddenly, he noticed how all the school leaders were looking at him and realised he had lost his composure. He smiled bitterly. "This isn't the swordsmanship a child should possess."

She was only ten years old, so just how did she comprehend and achieve something so profound with the sword? Even if she was a genius of the sword, how was she supposed to explain the startling, heavy, and fierce aura of slaughter?

Mind Enlightenment was skilled with martial arts, but how was he supposed to rival her? His combat experience was nowhere near as rich as hers. Against Xiao An, who had a much lower cultivation than him, he actually failed to gain the upper hand at all. Instead, he became more startled as he fought.

Why? Why? What is going on? Namó Amitābha. Namó Amitābha. Something must be wrong, right?

Originally, Li Qingshan wanted to assist Xiao An, but he stopped worrying when he saw this. He just stood aside and watched on.

In the battle of the past when he worked with Xiao An, she played the role of an assassin most of the time. He was responsible for attracting the attention of the enemy and creating an opportunity, while she was responsible for grasping this opportunity to deal a killing strike. If she bided her time, then she bided her time, but once she struck, she would definitely be able to heavily injure the opponent. Rarely had she ever engaged in a fair, one-on-one battle like this. This was quite a rare opportunity for her to practise her swordsmanship.

Without Li Qingshan, Xiao An naturally adapted her battle tactics, no longer striving for a single killing strike where she unleashed everything that she had. Instead, she was like a renowned calligraphist practising calligraphy, wielding the sword in an orderly manner. She did not halt at all. She would form a character with a few strokes, and a hundred characters would form a piece of literature.

Even Li Qingshan felt surprised over how much Xiao An had improved. Aside from his joy for her, he sighed slightly too. He felt like even if the ox demon, tiger demon, and spiritual turtle were combined, they did not seem to be as impressive as the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty.

Sure, his cultivation might have been low, unable to unleash the power of these three cultivation methods, but Xiao An had not even reached the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. Right now, she had barely mastered the basics and was still fumbling around. Her room for future improvements was unimaginable.

As it seemed, he really had to work hard on cultivation once he got back. He could not fall behind her. Perhaps it was due to his fragile pride as a man, but he wanted to possess the power to take care of her at all times.

Just what did brother ox have in mind? He had no idea. Perhaps he would only get an answer the moment he opened the sumeru ring.

“The child’s sword is about to triumph. Mind Enlightenment is going to lose,” said Han Anjun. His understanding of the path of the sword might not have been as deep as Liu Zhangqing, but he had extremely sharp senses over the tides of war.

Yes, the tides of war. In his eyes, the clash between two people was like the clash between two armies.

The army led by Mind Enlightenment possessed a vast number of soldiers, but their morale was unstable, and their movements were disorderly. On the other hand, Xiao An’s army advanced step by step. With the scheming waves of storming, sneak attacks, and ambushes, their morale increased, while Mind Enlightenment's army gradually became exhausted...

It was a different perspective, but they saw the same outcome in the end. Once the piece of literature was complete, it would be ambushes from all directions, resulting in certain death.

Xiao An raised her hand, but the vajra sword slowed down, as if it had suddenly become a thousand tonnes heavier. It would pause with every inch it moved.

Every single movement would leave behind a clear image visible to the naked eye. She completely pushed the power of the Guardian King's Method of Demon Subdual and the Cursive Sword Calligraphy to the limit.

It seemed extremely slow, yet Mind Enlightenment felt he was stuck in a hopeless situation with nowhere to escape to. Before so many monks, he would never accept an outcome like this, so he roared out in a hurry, and the guardian king avatar roared out too.

As the bells in the temple boomed, the monk's spade rippled with layers of golden light. This was the first time he had used the powers of the spiritual artifact itself. It suddenly moved several times faster, cleaving down diagonally. "I'll kill you, you monster!"

Li Qingshan suddenly stood up. He never imagined the counterattack of the primary disciple would be so startling.

The One Thought master called out, "Oh no!" He vanished.

However, neither of them could intercept in time. Xiao An's body halted slightly from the tremor. Just when she was unable to dodge the attack, she remained unfazed, but the expression on her guardian king avatar underwent a slight change. It abruptly gave off indescribable fury and hatred.

The furious glares of guardian kings were for purging demons, a dignified fury of righteousness. However, the fury on Xiao An's guardian king avatar was much deeper and more terrifying, as if it wanted to slaughter all living creatures.

Just what kind of fury was enough for an eminent monk of buddhism who had almost attained the fruit of bodhisattva to create the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, swearing to slaughter all living creatures and slay buddhas? This was the first time she had sensed a fraction of it.

The light on the vajra sword sank, undergoing a change that no one managed to notice.

Under this boundless fury, it swung upwards from below.

Clang! There was a sharp sound within the roaring sounds of bells. The vajra monk's spade had been forcefully chopped in half, dispersing as light. Mind Enlightenment stared at it in a daze, wondering whether he was dreaming or not. How was it possible for the vajra monk's spade he had condensed off the basis of a high grade spiritual artifact to be chopped in half unless his master was here in person?

He could not help but look around, searching for the One Thought master's figure. However, all he saw before him was the guardian king avatar with the sun behind its back, seemingly shining with golden radiance, wielding the vajra sword with two hands and raising it high into the air.

Xiao An said gently, "Die."

The guardian king roared, "Die!"

The golden radiance condensed on the sword, falling towards Mind Enlightenment's forehead.

The One Thought master had already arrived above Anāsravā? temple. Originally, he had come to save Xiao An, but for some reason, his first disciple, the primary disciple, had fallen into dire straits instead in

just a split second. He wanted to save him, but it was already too late. He called out in the air, "Stop, Xiao An!"

However, how could his voice move faster than the vajra sword? Even if Xiao An heard him, she could not stop. She was filled with the tremendous fury of the eminent monk from the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty.

There was a flash of golden light. All the monks were stunned. Time seemed to stop. The entire temple fell silent.

This lasted until the appearance of a crack. From the tip of the vajra sword, it extended to over a hundred meters away, forming a terrifying, black crack. Mind Enlightenment's courtyard that sat on the crack had been chopped in half, while the central cultivation hall stood for a while longer before collapsing loudly.

Mind Enlightenment collapsed to one side. The avatar around him had already vanished. His plump face was filled with fear as he stared at Li Qingshan. At that critical moment, Li Qingshan had kicked him aside, which was why he had managed to survive. Otherwise, his fate would be the same as the cultivation hall.

The One Thought master descended from above. "Xiao An, you..." However, he was at a loss as for what to say.

Xiao An dispersed the avatar and smiled sweetly at Li Qingshan. "You've come."

Li Qingshan gave her a thumbs up. "Impressive!"

The surroundings were dead silent. The new disciple could contend against the primary disciple just on the second day of joining. This alone had already exceeded the imaginations of the monk. And, she had actually defeated the primary disciple. This made them all blank out as they wondered whether they were dreaming or not.

The One Thought master said furiously, "Mind Enlightenment, what's this all about? Tell me everything."

Li Qingshan frowned. He was afraid that this baldy would lie again.

Mind Enlightenment climbed up from the ground and knelt before the One Thought master. With three thumps, he prostrated himself three times and said, "Please understand, master. I was completely in the wrong about this. I became jealous of the care that master showed to junior sister Xiao An, so I purposefully made trouble for sir Li Qingshan, and I also broke the precept of anger, lashing out against sir Li Qingshan first. Please punish me, master."

Originally, Li Qingshan thought that Mind Enlightenment would want to complain against him, so he prepared a rebuttal. He was immediately left speechless now.

The One Thought master was stunned too. "Mind Enlightenment, you...?"

"I'm willing to relinquish my position as primary disciple to junior sister Xiao An. Please forgive me, junior sister." Then Mind Enlightenment said to Li Qingshan, "Thank you for saving my life, sir!"

Mind Enlightenment was pale, and his eyes were dull, but he no longer possessed any hatred anymore. He definitely was not hiding anything or biding his time. No matter how powerful the opponent was, he would always undergo self-imposed hardships to strengthen his resolve for revenge. He would be confident that there would be a day when he got his revenge. But now, the opponent he faced was a child, a child who began practising qi yesterday and defeated him today.

To be able to make it to the position of primary disciple, he clearly was a clever and capable person, but it was exactly because he was clever enough that he felt despair. Although Xiao An's attack had failed to land, it had shattered his arrogance, jealousy, and anger. He was forced into achieving instantaneous comprehension.

Mind Enlightenment said, "I want to face the walls of Cliff Inscription cavern and reflect on myself for three years. Please give me permission, master."

### **Chapter 294 - Till Death Do Us Part**

Wall facing was both a cultivation method of buddhism and a method of punishment. Three years of wall facing was akin to three years of house arrest. During those three years, he could not communicate with others, move around freely, or enjoy any form of entertainment. It was even more terrifying than prison. The level of monotony was enough to drive a regular person crazy. To a disciple of buddhism, it was a great test of their temperament.

Rather restless disciples with impressive talent had always been the One Thought master's favourite disciples. If this were in the past, the One Thought master would definitely be delighted with how Mind Enlightenment volunteered to face the walls of the Cliff Inscription cavern, but right now, he was afraid that he had given up all hope. The more of a genius a person was, the easier it was for them to become dejected and downhearted once they faced a setback.

"Have you thought it through properly?"

"Yes!" Mind Enlightenment buried his head deeply into the ground. He looked back through all the years he spent in the Anāsraṃā? temple. All of his pride and status had vanished with that single word he uttered. He felt extremely dejected. Sorrow welled up inside and tears began to run down his face like rain. He broke into sobs.

The One Thought master rubbed his head. "Don't cry, don't cry. This might be good news to you."

"Master, I've embarrassed you!" Mind Enlightenment hugged the One Thought master's leg; he was like a pitiful child, having returned to the time when he initially joined the Anāsraṃā? temple as a little acolyte.

"You haven't. You will always be my best disciple. You need to pull yourself together!" The rim of One Thought master's eyes reddened involuntarily.

The monks in the temple all shed tears too. Although there were many flaws in their first senior brother, he still took good care of them. They too felt pained now that he would be gone for three years.

Li Qingshan rubbed his nose and thought, Why do I feel like Xiao An and I are the bad guys?

After crying, Mind Enlightenment seemed to have become much more relaxed. He made his way around his master and his junior brothers, making his way to the Cliff Inscription cavern to cultivate. From the beginning till the end, he did not even glance at Xiao An at all. This child made him feel fear. This kind of fear did not originate from the strike that Xiao An had almost killed him with, but from the strike when she cut through the vajra monk's spade.

It was only a short instant, but the bone-chilling coldness suppressed all of his power and thoughts. His indestructible vajra monk's spade had broken under that exact power, or should you say thought.

The One Thought master watched Mind Enlightenment leave. He turned around and faced Xiao An. He opened his mouth, but he had no idea on what to say. Was he supposed to scold her? Or praise her? Regardless of what he did, none of it seemed right. There was only one thing he was certain about. He would not serve as the master of this child for too long. "Have you completed the first layer of the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual?"

"Yes, master."

The surroundings were thrown into an uproar. The monks all looked at one another, seeing an exact reflection of the current expression that they had. Within a prefectural Academy of the Hundred Schools, the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual could be regarded as a powerful cultivation method that was rarely passed onto anyone. Cultivating till the very end could result in the condensation of a Vajra *ṛāra*, which was on par with the Golden Cores of the school of Daoism.

Xiao An suddenly asked, "Master, are you afraid?"

The corner of the One Thought master's eye twitched. He uttered the buddha's name constantly. After quite a while, he placed the primary disciple's waist tablet in Xiao An's hand. "From today onwards, you are my school of Buddhism's primary disciple. To be able to hold this position, just martial prowess is not enough. You also must have a deep understanding of the buddhist dharma, such that you can answer your junior's queries."

Xiao An said, "Yes, master."

The One Thought master wanted to give her a few more words of advice, but he ended up sighing gently instead. "Don't forget about the purpose of buddhism. You should get along with your fellow students. You should not have used that attack against your fellow student."

He was reluctant for Xiao An to take up the position of primary disciple, but in the Anāsraṃvā temple right now, just who had the ability to replace Mind Enlightenment? Even if they could replace him, how long could they hold the position for? Would it be half a year or just three months?

As a result, Xiao An became the youngest primary disciple throughout the history of the Clear River prefecture's Academy of the Hundred Thought. If it were not for Li Qingshan, she would be the primary disciple with the lowest cultivation throughout history too.

Xiao An wanted to rebuke him, but Li Qingshan pressed down on her shoulder and shot a glance towards her. "The One Thought master is right. Why don't you thank your master?"

Xiao An said obediently, "Thank you, master."

The One Thought master frowned. He said sternly, “Li Qingshan, before Xiao An has reached the first layer with the Guardian King’s Scripture of Demon Subdual, no one is allowed to disturb her. That was my order. Why part of it did you not understand?”

His beloved disciple had given up his position as primary disciple, placing himself under house arrest to go wall facing, so why wouldn’t he be annoyed? He was unable to vent it on Xiao An, so he obviously used the ‘troublemaker’ Li Qingshan instead.

“One Thought master, the disciples of the academy are of the same breath and branch, standing together through thick and thin. What’s wrong with him coming to Anāsraṃvā? island to meet someone?”

Before Li Qingshan had said anything, a voice rang out from the direction of the stūpas. Turning around, Li Qingshan saw Liu Chuanfeng gliding over on a huge, white crane. After holding hands and shedding a few tears with Sun Fubai, they even took out some wine and dishes and drank a few cups together. After receiving the news, Liu Chuanfeng paled in fright and rushed over. Right now, Li Qingshan was his prized possession. If he let anything happen to him, the school of Novels would be doomed to abolishment. By then, he would not even have a place to cry at.

“Master, Mind Enlightenment insulted my school of Novels in the face of the public, damaging the bond between the schools. He wanted to hurt people over the slightest disagreement, so why must you say that we are in the wrong instead?” Liu Chuanfeng leapt off the white crane and landed before Li Qingshan, clasping his hands.

Li Qingshan saw how his clothes swayed in the breeze. He really did seem slightly graceful. This was the first time his impression of him had improved slightly.

The One Thought master just happened to have some anger to vent, yet the jittery Liu Chuanfeng had actually come to make noise right in his face. He widened his eyes into a glare. Even without the guardian king avatar, a heavy pressure crushed down on Liu Chuanfeng.

Liu Chuanfeng bowed deeply. “Sorry. We’re completely in the wrong. It’s all my school of Novel’s fault, so please forgive us, master. You unruly disciple, why don’t you apologise to the master?”

Li Qingshan grinned. He held back his urge to slap him across the face. With a school leader like this, why wouldn’t the school of Novels be abolished?

In the end, the matter remained unsettled.

Li Qingshan brought Xiao An back to Cloudwisp island with him to show her around. Along the way, there were several times when Liu Chuanfeng wanted to approach him, but he avoided him every single time. He did not want Xiao An to be influenced by him.

Returning to Cloudwisp island, he saw someone waiting for him in the courtyard within the bamboo forest.

The leader of the school of Confucianism, Liu Zhangqing, stood with his arms behind his back, listening to the sound of the bamboo swaying in the breeze with his eyes shut. He only opened his eyes a while later. “It has been several years since I’ve been here. The scenery here is still so beautiful. It’s just a pity.”



Liu Chuanfeng obviously understood what he was referring to by pity. All he could do was smile dryly and bow. "School leader Liu, long time no see."

However, Liu Zhangqing completely ignored him. He was straightforward "Li Qingshan, just what are your conditions for you to leave the school of Novels? Let's hear them."

He did not treat Liu Chuanfeng like he existed at all. Liu Chuanfeng's smile froze, but he dared not show any displeasure. He looked at Li Qingshan for help. He almost seemed like he was pleading with him.

However, Li Qingshan did not look at him. He replied to Liu Zhangqing politely, but not overly so. "Sir Liu, can I join other schools if I leave the school of Novels?"

Liu Chuanfeng was ashen.

Liu Zhangqing shook his head. "No. If you leave the school of Novels, you leave the academy. However, I can recommend you to a very impressive sect to cultivate. The Pine Sough academy of the Heavenly Lake mountain is rather renowned throughout the entire Green province. The head of the academy is a Golden Core cultivator who has already undergone two heavenly tribulations. You'll have a much better future there than the Academy of the Hundred Schools of the Clear River prefecture."

Liu Chuanfeng had already given up hope. No one would ever decline such a great offer.

Li Qingshan replied, "Apologies. Thank you for your kind intentions, school leader, but I'm afraid I can't accept your offer."

Liu Zhangqing frowned. "What conditions do you have in mind? Please let me know."

Li Qingshan smiled at Xiao An and held her hand. "I won't accept any conditions, no matter what they are. We're not separating."

Liu Zhangqing said, "Do you know this saying? Instead of sticking together against the odds, why not just separate and wander off freely? There are no never-ending banquets in the world. Separation is only a matter of time. If you remain here, you will be thrown behind very quickly with her cultivation speed. By then, what are you supposed to do? If you go to the Pine Sough academy, there might be a chance you meet again in the future. Or, are you trying to use her to procure some benefits for yourself?"

Whether it was the kind advice or the goading, clever words, every single thing that Liu Zhangqing said hit the point.

Li Qingshan was unable to maintain his smile anymore. In the end, he sighed slightly. "Perhaps you're right."

Xiao An's heart tightened. Liu Zhangqing smiled.

"But, I've already heard too much of the general principles of the world, of what is right and wrong. Right now, all I want to do is follow my heart. My heart tells me I want to be with her. To be honest, I don't believe in eternity either, but the longer, the better."

He shrugged easily. "Till death do us part."

The wind whistled, the bamboo swayed, and the light flickered.

Liu Zhangqing had already left. He personally believed he was giving insightful advice, but when a man like that said something like that, it meant his mind was made. His will was as firm as rock, utterly immovable.

Liu Chuanfeng said emotionally, "Thank you! Thank you!" The school of Novels had dodged a bullet.

Li Qingshan said, "I didn't do it for you."

Liu Chuanfeng said, "Thank you anyway. I'll go prepare lunch to celebrate your formal entry to the school of Novels."

Li Qingshan said, "It's still morning!" However, Liu Chuanfeng had already drifted off into the bamboo building as he hummed to himself, while Li Qingshan saw tears pool up in Xiao An's large eyes.

"What're you being all emotional for? I'm doing it all for myself. Haven't you heard them? I'm using you, you idiot!" Li Qingshan rubbed Xiao An's little head.

Xiao An wiped away her tears and took out a pill glistening with golden light from her hundred treasures pouch, passing it to Li Qingshan. This was a buddhist spiritual medicine that the One Thought master had given to Xiao An. It might not have been on par with the Virtue Accumulation pill, but it was not far from it.

Li Qingshan smiled bitterly. "I'm just saying. You'd better keep it for yourself!"

Xiao An insisted, as if she would cry if he turned her down.

Li Qingshan rubbed his nose, with no other choice but to accept it. He felt strange inside. He tossed these thoughts aside. "Come, I'll show you a nice place."

In the depths of the courtyard, in the corridor on the lake.

The rocking chair swayed gently as Li Qingshan held her in his arms. He sniffed her faint fragrance of sandalwood, gently caressed her silk-like hair, and looked at the lake.

She had her eyes closed, like she was asleep.

"I'm doing it all for myself." He was not lying when he said that. What existed in his mind were not just noble thoughts of taking care of her and protecting her. With her by his side, he finally would not have to be lonely anymore.

### **Chapter 295 - Seeing Hao Pingyang Again**

A flying shuttle shot across the surface of the Lake of Dragons and Snakes, arriving on Cloudwisp island.

Out of the three people who disembarked, the leader was a burly man with a full beard, and there was a young man with darker skin to his left, and a young man with a long face and slightly swollen eyelids to his right.

They wore deep, blue robes, and their waist tablets were all inscribed with a single word, "Mohism." They were the trio who had entered the Zombie cave with Li Qingshan in the past to kill the Zombie Daoist, Hao Qingyang, Zhang Lanqing, and He Yishi.

Hao Pingyang stowed the flying shuttle away and studied the island that was so quiet that it seemed deserted. He asked with furrowed brows, "Are you sure he joined the school of Novels?"

Zhang Lanqing said, "It can't be wrong. It's here. He has already made a name for himself in the academy."

He Yishi said, "He has made a name for himself for being an idiot. He's actually bold enough to insult the leader of the school of Daoism. He must be tired of living."

Hao Pingyang shot a glare at him, while Zhang Lanqing said in a hurry, "Yishi, how can you say that? Qingshan saved us in the past after all!"

He Yishi said with his swollen eyelids, "He was just using us to complete his mission. If it weren't for him, we wouldn't have ventured underground, and Jin Yuan and Jin Bao would not have died either."

"Then why are you here? Why don't you piss off instead?" Hao Pingyang growled. Ever since he had returned from the Zombie cave, he found He Yishi to be quite a despicable person, so he began to alienate him. This time, it was all because of Zhang Lanqing's persuasions, reminiscing the fact that the three of them had once risked their lives together. As such, they had called him to come with them.

He Yishi turned his head away and no longer said anything, but he stuck to what he said.

Hao Pingyang snorted coldly and strode away. Zhang Lanqing sighed and followed behind him.

He Yishi moved his feet too. He did not come here to thank Li Qingshan for saving his life. Instead, he had come to see Li Qingshan's miserable condition. The school of Novels? What a joke.

"Qingshan! Qingshan!"

The familiar roars penetrated the bamboo forest with true qi, reaching Li Qingshan's ears.

Li Qingshan emerged from the courtyard. Hao Pingyang happened to be walking through the bamboo, so when he saw Li Qingshan, his face lit up with joy. He rushed over and patted Li Qingshan's shoulder heavily and said happily, "You really are here."

Li Qingshan said, "Brother Hao, long time no see! There's brother Zhang and brother Yi too."

"Hmm? The sixth layer? Just how did you cultivate? It hasn't even been a year!" Hao Pingyang's current cultivation was the same as the past, still at the sixth layer. The later four meridians of the eight extraordinary meridians were extremely difficult and slow to open. When he heard Li Qingshan had joined the school of Novels on Cloudwisp island, he had rushed over to find him, but he did not know he had already reached the sixth layer.

Zhang Lanqing was surprised too. He was also the same as before, still at the fifth layer. He was currently preparing to condense his sea of qi and break through to the sixth layer. Li Qingshan's cultivation speed was just far too startling.

However, the most surprised was He Yishi. After returning from the Zombie cave, he made a breakthrough with his cultivation and reached the fifth layer. When he came to see Li Qingshan, he was filled with confidence too, ready to savour his dejected look from above and find some peace inside.

However, he never thought that the weak second layer Qi Practitioner of the past would break through four times and reach the sixth layer in under a year. He felt more and more uneasy instead.

Hao Pingyang shifted his gaze and saw Xiao An standing quietly under the eaves of the building. He had quite a deep impression of this beautiful child. "Isn't that... Xiao An?" His eyes were not lying to him, right? How had Xiao An reached the sixth layer too?

Zhang Lanqing said, "Senior brother, were you really that busy building cannons in the workshop that you haven't even heard of this? Xiao An is a Heavenly Meridians prodigy. She cultivated to the third layer in four hours, and when her elemental affinity was being tested, the school leaders even showed up to contend for her... Though, she's at the sixth layer now. Is the rumor wrong?"

Li Qingshan gave a short explanation of what had happened. Hao Pingyang and Zhang Lanqing had no idea on what to say. She had completed the first layer of the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual in a single night, defeating the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism, Mind Enlightenment. If it were not for the fact that Li Qingshan was personally telling them this, they never would have believed it. They studied Xiao An in surprise and doubt, and sure enough, they saw the tablet of the school of Buddhism's primary disciple on her waist.

Hao Pingyang grinned. "I feel like I've gotten to know someone extraordinary. Are we supposed to bow?" When regular disciples saw primary disciples, they all had to bow out of respect and call them senior brother or sister, not to mention the fact that she came from a major school, the school of Buddhism.

In Zhang Lanqing's memory, the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism, the Mind Enlightenment monk, was an extremely haughty figure. He was unable to connect the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism to Xiao An right in front of him.

Li Qingshan said, "That's a funny joke, brother Hao. Don't just stand here. Come on in!"

Arriving in the guest room, the three of them sat down, and Xiao An went off automatically to find a tea set, bringing tea over. The three of them stood up in a hurry again and accepted it. This was tea from the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism. Hao Pingyang was not too perturbed with how he never focused on the minor details of courtesy, but Zhang Lanqing and He Yishi basically felt flattered. They looked at Li Qingshan again, but they saw how he was at ease. After serving the tea, Xiao An sat down beside him obediently, just like in the past.

He Yishi was completely dejected inside. Whether it be Li Qingshan or Xiao An, they had both reached a higher domain than him. He was filled with jealousy. The heavens were unfair! He had cultivated painstakingly for all these years, yet it could not even rival a year from Li Qingshan, or a day and night from Xiao An.

After a slight conversation, Zhang Lanqing could not help but sigh. "If it's the school of Buddhism, then so be it. It's a good place to join. However, with your talent, Qingshan, joining the school of Novels really is quite a pity."

Li Qingshan took a sip of tea and said without minding, "The school of Novels is not all bad."

Hao Pingyang said, "Yeah, it's not all bad. This environment is suited for cultivation. Joining the school of Novels doesn't mean you have to learn their arts. With your talent, Qingshan, you'll definitely be able to reach Foundation Establishment in the future. By then, there'll be plenty of good cultivation methods available to you."

"Just as brother Hao has said." Li Qingshan smiled. Hao Pingyang seemed like an unsophisticated person, but he was extremely sharp-witted, and his concern and encouragement moved him too. Zhang Lanqing was a prudent, honest person who did not want to offend anyone as well. Only He Yishi was rather strange, glaring at him. Who knew what he was thinking.

Hao Pingyang changed the topic. "Have you chosen your subjects?"

Li Qingshan said, "I haven't yet. I heard there are quite a lot of subjects. I don't even know where to start right now."

Within the academy, from Contention island to the various other islands, they all had subjects, ranging from forging artifacts and alchemy to philosophy and literature. They covered everything, and disciples from other schools could listen in too. However, regular new disciples would primarily focus on the arts of their own schools once they joined the academy. Since Li Qingshan was reluctant to learn the arts of the school of Novels, these subjects were extremely important to him. They were also one of the reasons why he had joined the academy in the first place.

Hao Pingyang said, "Then that's perfect. We'll choose them for you. There's quite a lot you need to know when it comes to choosing. Lanqing, you've brought a list of subjects, right?"

"I have." Zhang Lanqing pulled out a piece of paper from his hundred treasures pouch in a hurry. It was covered in tiny words. Every single line was neat and uniform in size. Clearly, it had come from a printer and was not hand-written.

Li Qingshan lowered his head and read through them carefully—"Divinations and Symbols", "Identifying Spiritual Herbs", "Explanations for the Yi Wood Method of Living Qi" and so on. According to the timetabling, there were over a dozen days of classes. On the back of the paper were the times and locations for the classes, as well as the names of the instructors and professors. Apart from subjects that were directly related to cultivation, there were also subjects on literature and etiquette, or even appreciating music. There was everything.

This was all knowledge that Li Qingshan required the most. It would assist him in understanding everything about cultivation. He was rather impatient to learn as well, but if he really was supposed to choose from all these subjects, he really would be left at a loss. And, he noticed that there was a price at the end of a few subjects, such as a few subjects from the school of Music. They could only be taken at the cost of a few spiritual stones.

Hao Pingyang explained, "Some subjects can cover highly important and secretive aspects to certain schools, so they obviously won't just teach it to anybody for free. Moreover, the professors need money too. However, as a primary disciple, it'll all be easy. You can take any of these subjects for free."

"Do the subjects of the school of Music also cover highly secretive subjectives? They actually want spiritual stones too." Li Qingshan remarked in surprise.

Hao Pingyang smiled. "That's because most of the disciples of the school of Music are females. If they don't charge spiritual stones, there'll be a great group of men mucking around in each subject." He wiggled his eyebrows with a smirk at Li Qingshan. "If you have spare time, you should check it out too. Perhaps you'll find a good match for you! It's free to you anyway. There are a lot of people who would be jealous of you if they found out."

Li Qingshan smiled. "How are Qi Practitioners lacking women? Can't they just go looking outside? I've come to the academy for cultivation, not match-making."

Hao Pingyang said, "Now you can't say that. How can regular women rival the charm of female cultivators?"

Li Qingshan could not help but think of Gu Yanying, and he discovered that Hao Pingyang was right. Everyone was born the same way. There were only so many different combinations of facial features. Gu Yanying was not exactly any fairer than a regular woman either, but every twinkle in her eyes and every smile she gave was just so breath-taking.

This had nothing to do with the arts of charm. Just like how flaws of the inside would show themselves externally, "bearing" was no longer a mere concept. At the very least, she truly did possess the word "qi".

However, Li Qingshan disagreed with Hao Pingyang's suggestion. "Can you still be regarded as a qualified cultivator if you spend all your time thinking about a woman?"

Hao Pingyang said, "The path of cultivation is boundless. If you walk alone, won't it be lonely? If you have a partner for dual cultivation, it'll be like a combination of the qin zither and se zither, a complementary match. It'll bring you great joy, and perhaps, you might even make it a little further. There are many people with companions like this in the academy, like him beside you."

TL: A qin zither is a plucked seven-stringed Chinese instrument, while a se zither is a plucked twenty-five to fifty stringed Chinese instrument. It's said that a combination between the two creates great music, which makes them a great pairing.

Li Qingshan looked at Zhang Lanqing in surprise. He never thought he would have a partner too. Zhang Lanqing's darker face reddened slightly in embarrassment.

Hao Pingyang said, "Whenever we go out for some fun, he never comes with us. That's the exact aspect that she fancies about him. Heh, honest people never suffer."

"Don't you have someone too, brother Hao?" Li Qingshan asked with a smile. The idea of bearing suited men too. Hao Pingyang was not handsome, but he was frank and generous. He could be regarded as quite charming too.

Zhang Lanqing immediately said, "Originally, there were people who took a fancy towards senior brother, but he spends all his spare time in the workshop, and whenever he leaves the academy, he indulges himself in women and alcohol. There's no one who can put up with that."

Hao Pingyang chuckled. "My hands are full already, so why would I have the time to deal with them?"

“And yet you’re advising me?” Li Qingshan broke into laughter. The Academy of the Hundred Schools was quite similar to the universities of his past life, but with even more freedom. Here, it did not matter even if there was a class you did not want to attend. All you needed to do was give the school leader some notice, and no one would care even if you went out travelling for a few months. You could do whatever you wanted as long as you paid the fees every year.

However, these disciples of the academy could not be compared with the abundant university students from his past life. They were true prodigies.

### **Chapter 296 - Choosing Subjects and Missions**

Hao Pingyang said, “Even if you’re uninterested, listening to their music is still quite a rare treat.”

“I’m definitely not going to let that opportunity slip by. If there’s the chance, it might actually turn out like what you said.” Li Qingshan licked his lips. The two men looked at one another and smiled.

Zhang Lanqing said, “You guys should stop. There’s still a child here. You’d better choose your subjects instead! Have you already decided on your cultivation method?”

Li Qingshan nodded. “Yep, I’m sticking with the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi.”

“Good. Do you have any interests? Talismans, formations, alchemy, or forging artifacts, which one do you want to learn?”

“I want to gain an understanding of all of them. What would you recommend, brother Zhang?” Li Qingshan saw how there were over a dozen subjects related to alchemy on the list, and the professor for each subject was different. Just how was he supposed to choose?

Hao Pingyang said, “You found the right person for that question. Lanqing has basically taken all these subjects before. He’s known for his diligence and studiousness.”

Zhang Lanqing smiled modestly. “All I know is a little bit of everything. However, you should understand them all a little. They might not be very relevant, but dabbling around in other areas can benefit your cultivation too. Though, don’t become overly distracted. It’s best if you focus on a single subject, or two at most. If there are too many, it won’t turn out well.”

“If it’s possible, I do want to try them all, but I’m in no hurry either. Right now, I primarily want to learn alchemy, with formations or forging artifacts on the side.” Li Qingshan smiled. He still had a long path ahead of him, so he obviously had to make ample preparation.

Zhang Lanqing agreed. “Alchemy is indeed the best. Basically all the schools have subjects for alchemy, varying in depth and focus. Though, the best professors are still the ones from the school of Daoism and the school of Medicine. Do you have any foundation in alchemy, Qingshan?”

Li Qingshan answered honestly, “I’ve only made a cauldron full of Qi Condensing pills under someone’s guidance before, and the results were only average.”

Zhang Lanqing said, “Looks like it’s still best if you start with the basics. It’s perfect timing with how the entrance examination has just finished. They’ve opened up a lot of classes recently.”

Afterwards, Zhang Lanqing recommended a few subjects regarding alchemy to Li Qingshan, giving a detailed introduction to the aspects that they excelled at and their flaws. He even mentioned which professors were more impatient and taught extremely quickly, how it would be difficult to follow along if he was slow-witted, and which professors were much more patient, preferring to waste time and so on.

In the end, he decided on a subject taught by the school of Medicine. It was called “Rudimentary Alchemy”. There were classes every few days, and it would go on for a few months.

This was exactly what Li Qingshan wanted. He had just fallen out with the leader of the school of Daoism. If he wanted to study there, the slovenly daoist priest’s disciples would probably make trouble for him even if the daoist priest himself allowed it. All he wanted was to cultivate in peace in the academy and increase his cultivation, not clash with others.

Zhang Lanqing chose a few other subjects for understanding talismans, formations, and forging artifacts for Li Qingshan. They were all for learning the history and common knowledge of a few general techniques within the arts, which Li Qingshan could use to decide what he was interested in. Out of them, Hao Pingyang specially recommended an artifact forging subject by the school of Mohism. He said he wanted to show Li Qingshan around on the Divine Mechanism island when he came for class.

After choosing these core subjects, Li Qingshan discovered that he still had a lot of time on hand. He was welcomed to choose a few interesting subjects to fill up the space, such as going to the school of Music to listen to some performances and so on.

“Apart from these, is there anything else to take note of?”

Zhang Lanqing said, “Next is choosing missions.”

“Missions?”

Hao Pingyang said, “When we went to kill the Zombie Daoist last time, that was a mission. When we returned, we received quite a lot of spiritual stones as a reward.”

As it turned out, the disciples themselves had to find ways to provide the basic necessities of living in the academy. Apart from a handful of outstanding disciples, they all had to find ways to procure cultivation pills by themselves. The process was not as simple as cultivating in a sect, but the academy would not order disciples around like sects either. Instead, it was similar to the Hawkwolf Guard, directly marking out the rewards for the missions. The willing could obtain spiritual stones and pills.

“I’m not lacking in spiritual stones or pills right now.” Li Qingshan had only used up a small fraction of the resources he had obtained underground. There was no need for him to waste time on this.

Zhang Lanqing shook his head. “These missions are closely linked to your cultivation. They’re not just for making spiritual stones.”

“What do you mean?”

“For example, the most common alchemy missions, which you can accept as long as you can refine Qi Condensing pills. The academy will prepare the materials for you, and all you need to do is turn in a specific number of Qi Gathering pills within a certain time frame to complete the mission.”



"I see." Li Qingshan immediately understood. If he was good at alchemy, he could even earn some additional pills with these missions, but if he was bad at alchemy, he would basically be working for free. It might even end up costing him spiritual stones instead. As a new alchemist, there was quite a high chance that these missions would cost him.

But even if it came at a cost to him, he could still gain a large quantity of experience in alchemy within a short time frame. After all, just collecting these random spiritual herbs would take quite some time. He could not help but admire the people who came up with these missions. Their methods of exploitation were just too brilliant.

Zhang Lanqing said, "Another example would be our mission last time. It provided us with actual combat experience. There are even some missions that test your ability at using techniques. You should familiarise yourself with the academy first, and afterwards, you can take a look in the Missions hall on Contention island."

The three of them chatted, and time passed extremely quickly. Before they knew it, the sun had already risen to the middle of the sky.

He Yishi did not say a single word the entire time. He just sat there, glancing at Li Qingshan from time to time. Who knew what he was thinking.

Suddenly, Li Qingshan stopped talking. He glanced at the bamboo forest outside the courtyard. Originally, he thought that Liu Chuanfeng had returned, but instead, he saw a handsome man in black clothes walking through the forest, making his way over to the courtyard.

Hao Pingyan grew serious. It was the primary disciple of another school. He was Hua Chengzan.

Why has he come here? Zhang Lanqing thought, but he suddenly remembered Li Qingshan's identity as a Hawkwolf guard. Surely he hadn't come here to speak out against Li Qingshan, right? Li Qingshan had joined the school of Novels after all. Despite becoming the primary disciple, it was still not a glorious piece of news.

He Yishi immediately smiled from ear to ear on his faded face.

The three of them were afraid to slight this renowned figure of the academy. They bowed. "Greetings, senior brother."

Hua Chengzan nodded back at them, basically returning the gesture. His gaze landed on Xiao An, who sat beside Li Qingshan. He was extremely well-informed, so he already knew about what happened on Anāsraṃā? island. If he had not heard it personally from Wang Pushi, he almost would not have believed it. Now that he saw she was at the sixth layer, he sighed emotionally inside. Anyone still bold enough to claim that they were a genius before her would be as shameless as they came.

He cut right to the chase and said, "You turned down prefect Liu's offer?"

Li Qingshan said, "I did."

Hua Chengzan sighed with a smile. "Well, what can you do now? Though, old Wang has told me to pass a message onto you."

"What message?"

Hua Chengzan looked back and saw Liu Chuanfeng carrying a food box, descending from the air on his white crane. He said, "I'll tell you later."

Li Qingshan immediately understood. Clearly, the message had something to do with Liu Chuanfeng, and it was not positive either. However, he truly was an exceptional man to maintain such a demeanour even when he faced Liu Chuanfeng, someone who was despised by all.

"Qingshan, I've returned." The white crane vanished as soon as it landed. Liu Chuanfeng halted, becoming slightly surprised when he saw so many people here. He saw Hua Chengzan standing there and bowed automatically. "So it's commander Hua who has come. It truly is an honour for my humble abode. Please forgive me for failing to welcome you."

The two of them were both at the tenth layer, while Liu Chuanfeng was even a school leader, but their statuses were on completely different levels.

The mohist trio, on the other hand, bowed politely. The school of Novels might have been despicable, but a tenth layer Qi Practitioner was not someone they could look down on.

Hua Chengzan returned the gesture with a bow. He did not show any disdain, nor did he put on any fake act of respect. He looked around. "With how peaceful this place is, even I'm tempted to move in here."

Liu Chuanfeng said, "As long as the commander is willing. I welcome you to move in at any time. There are plenty of rooms."

The two of them chatted slightly. Liu Chuanfeng said, "It's quite late now, so get ready to eat. Today, I've asked the Hundred Flavours restaurant to put in a lot of work. They've made me a whole feast. Hold on, my senior brother is heading over right now. You've met him before, Qingshan."

Hua Chengzan said, "Is it elder Sun? If that's the case, I'd better sit in too." He glanced at Li Qingshan. "You can also say it's a celebration for your entry into the school of Novels, Qingshan."

Li Qingshan smiled. Just as he had expected, Sun Fubai was also a disciple of the school of Novels. With how even Hua Chengzan called him elder Sun, it only proved that as long as there was nothing wrong with their conduct, they could all earn respect, even if they were disciples of the school of Novels.

Liu Chuanfeng casually invited the mohist trio to stay behind. He Yishi was rather interested. Not only would it be a free feast, but he could also familiarise himself with the primary disciple of the school of Legalism. An opportunity as great as this never presented itself.

However, Hao Pingyang declined. Their identities differed by far too much, so it would be quite uncomfortable to eat together. "We still have some matters to attend to, so we won't disturb you any longer. Qingshan, if you have time, let's go drinking. It'll be on me."

Li Qingshan paced over and caught up to them. He passed a Sea of Qi pill to Zhang Lanqing. "Thank you for your troubles, brother Zhang."

Zhang Lanqing declined in a hurry. "How can I accept that?"

Hao Pingyang said, "If he's giving it to you, then just accept it! Where's mine?"

Li Qingshan said, "It's not like you need to condense a sea of qi. It'll be on me if we go drinking."

“Haha, I’m kidding. If I said it’s on me, then it’s on me!”

Zhang Lanqing thanked him sincerely. Right now, what he needed the most were Sea of Qi pills. An additional Sea of Qi pill would increase his chances of condensing a sea of qi by thirty percent. It was basically giving him exactly what he needed at the right time.

He Yishi was filled with jealousy as he watched on. He was also at the fifth layer now, so he clearly wanted this Sea of Qi pill too. Unfortunately, Li Qingshan did not even glance at him.

After they left, Hua Chengzan asked, “Was the tall, skinny fellow from earlier He Yishi?”

Li Qingshan asked, “How did you know?”

“I’ll tell you later.” Hua Chengzan would never go out of his way to investigate this petty matter, but he did know that there was someone called He Yishi out of the mohist disciples Li Qingshan knew, and he was hostile to Li Qingshan. He could guess who He Yishi was from simply glancing at their demeanours.

Li Qingshan said, “Acting all mysterious.”

At this moment, a few women suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the courtyard. Every single one of them were first-class beauties, with delicate faces and wonderful curves. They took out the dishes from the food box and placed them on the table. The clothing they wore were very revealing too. They could catch glimpses of certain body parts too as they moved around.

“The arts of the school of Novels sure are useful.” Hua Chengzan smiled, carefully hiding the contempt in his eyes.

### **Chapter 297 - Two Ants**

“It’s all just a lesser path of cultivation, a lesser path I say.” Liu Chuanfeng failed to notice it. Instead, he spoke rather proudly. He even glanced at Li Qingshan and noticed his amazement as he carefully studied these beauties. It only made Liu Chuanfeng even happier. His objective was to lead Li Qingshan down the school of Novel’s... greater path of no return.

It was true. Li Qingshan was studying these conjured women. Their plump, milky-white buttocks could suck in the attention of all men, but he did not just look at that. While these women were smiling, their eyes were hollow, without the slightest liveliness at all. They were like the beauties on game posters generated by computers in his past life, or some kind of detailed blow-up doll.

Of course, they were much more realistic than those. They were probably characters from Liu Chuanfeng’s smut novels. Perhaps, their performance in bed would be very impressive too!

However, what was the point of that? He would be much better off by going for an easy session in a brothel. At the very least, it would be with a living person.

Li Qingshan felt deep sorrow from this. No wonder so many people looked down on the school of Novels. He spent all day using his abilities from the school of Novels to do something so degrading. It was so bad that even the primary disciple from his own school of Novels wanted to beat him up, not to mention the fact that Xiao An was still watching curiously from one side.

Li Qingshan’s voice sank. “Liu Chuanfeng, you’d better know when enough is enough!”

Liu Chuanfeng was annoyed. He was actually treating him so rudely before an outsider. Did he really think his position as a school leader meant nothing? However, when he met Li Qingshan's furious eyes, he immediately thought of the knifehand strike he had swung down with earlier this morning. His straightened chest shrunk back again, and he said awkwardly, "We're all intellectuals, right? So can't we just talk over this? Look at you and what you've become. You've embarrassed yourself in front of commander Hua! Let's eat!"

Li Qingshan had already grown accustomed to fighting over the slightest disagreement. Combined with Liu Chuanfeng's behaviour, he found it all very difficult to adjust to, as if he had done something wrong. He fought the strong, not the weak. There really were not a lot of tenth layer Qi Practitioners as weak-willed as Liu Chuanfeng.

Hua Chengzan shook his head. It really was uncommon for a school leader for god's sake to end up like this.

Sun Fubai just happened to walk in at this moment. As soon as he saw the conjured women, he frowned too. "Junior brother, what are you doing?"

Liu Chuanfeng opened his mouth. "I'm..."

"You're screwing around! Why don't you hurry up and stop the technique?" Sun Fubai's snowy-white eyebrows had almost scrunched up together. His junior brother was quite a talent when it came to cultivation. It was already very impressive of him to have reached the tenth layer despite how much the school of Novels had declined, but sometimes, he was not particularly clever. He did not know how to handle situations.

Liu Chuanfeng dispersed the women in a hurry. With a clatter, the bowls and chopsticks in their hands fell to the ground. He picked them up in a hurry, conjuring a stream of water to clean them. He set up the table himself with a frown and a pout, like a young wife who had been wronged.

Hua Chengzan clasped his hands. "Elder Sun, long time no see." There was an additional sense of closeness and sincerity in his voice now.

"What elder Sun? Just call me Fubai." Sun Fubai grabbed Li Qingshan's hand. "Young man, we meet again. I never thought you'd actually come here."

"I didn't think you'd be a person of the school of Novels either, Fubai." Li Qingshan hinted at something else. This old man's plans sure ran deep.

Sun Fubai said, "Sigh, you've seen the situation for yourself. The school of Novels isn't going through a very optimistic situation right now. Surely you don't blame me when I made you fill in those three words!"

Li Qingshan asked, "Why would I? If it weren't for you, Fubai, I'd have nowhere to go right now. Although it's a bit below standard here, it's quiet, so it's good for cultivation."

"You can eat now," Liu Chuanfeng said quietly.

Sun Fubai raised a hand. "Please!"

At the feast, they exchanged toasts and poured alcohol for one another. Xiao An said nothing, and Liu Chuanfeng could not butt in either, but with Hua Chengzan and Sun Fubai's presence, there was plenty of talking. Combined with the beautiful scenery of the bamboo, it was possible to say that everyone was delighted.

In the afternoon, Li Qingshan arrived by the edge of the lake with Hua Chengzan.

The expansive mist stretched as far as the eye could see.

Hua Chengzan thought about how he would say it before telling Wang Pushi's warning to Li Qingshan euphemistically. There was so much euphemism that if Li Qingshan had not been listening carefully, he would have believed that Wang Pushi was giving him words of encouragement.

Li Qingshan said, "Even if he didn't warn me, I wouldn't waste my time on something like that. Oh right, what's going on with He Yishi?"

Hua Chengzan told him the entire truth, about how He Yishi had hinted at Li Qingshan being the murderer in his statement to the Hawkwolf Guard.

Li Qingshan was furious. "What a scoundrel! I saved his life time and time again, yet not only does he not know to show any gratitude, but he has actually stabbed me in the back instead. It's no wonder why he was afraid to talk to me earlier." He was not a generous and forgiving person. Letting his enemies go without exacting revenge was not in his blood. He would definitely find an opportunity to teach He Yishi a proper lesson and get his revenge.

Hua Chengzan reminded him. "Killing is forbidden in the academy. If you kill someone here, no one will be able to protect you."

Li Qingshan said, "I'll just throw a sack over his head and give him a beating."

"If you're going to do it, do it cleanly. Don't leave behind any evidence." Hua Chengzan smiled.

Li Qingshan smiled too. "I don't think that's something a disciple of legalism should say."

"Li Qingshan, as the Scarlet Wolf commander of the Clear River prefecture, I hereby declare your arrest! Prepare to be punished under the laws of the empire!" Hua Chengzan suddenly grew stern before smiling again, "Is that more like it?"

The changes in his expression were like going from winter to spring. The ice on the lake cracked, and the water spring's water gushed out, melting the ice unknowingly and turning it into a lake of warm water.

Li Qingshan could not help but think about a saying from his past life. "There are no women in the world who can resist a smile from Jiang Feng, nor are there any heroes who can resist a gentle strike from Yan Nantian." Hua Chengzan possessed Jiang Feng's charms from the legends, while he probably could only develop his strength like Yan Nantian.

"Tsktsk, there probably aren't a lot of women in the world who can resist your charm. It's no wonder that sect master Qiu is so infatuated with you."

Hua Chengzan smiled. "We're just friends."

Li Qingshan said, "It doesn't matter if you're friends or not. If she's interested in me, I would never turn her down."

Hua Chengzan said, "If it's not mutual, yet you stay together, it'll only make you lonelier."

Li Qingshan said, "I think you just have nothing better to do."

Hua Chengzan smiled. "You can say that."

Li Qingshan was helpless over how unperturbed he was. He thought of something and made fun of him. "Though, don't tell me you have some special interests with how you went as far as to offend your friends to help me?"

Hua Chengzan replied seriously, "You overestimate yourself."

Li Qingshan snickered. He studied him and said, "Surely I'm passable."

Hua Chengzan could no longer stand it anymore either. "Someone told me to take care of you."

Li Qingshan said, "You're finally telling the truth. It's Gu Yanying, isn't it?"

Hua Chengzan was slightly stunned, or even rather irritated, by how he had suddenly called her by name. However, he had great control over himself, so he showed none of it on the surface. All he did was ask, "How did you know?"

Li Qingshan said, "I might not be the cleverest, but I do have some wits about me. It's impossible for boss Wang to get you to take care of me. He utterly loathes me. The commander loathes me, yet you still need to take care of me. That means that the person's status is even higher than boss Wang, such that even boss Wang has to listen to them. The only person I've seen who is as important as that is Gu Yanying."

Hua Chengzan said, "Smart. Your analysis is impressive."

Li Qingshan became carried away. "And, I'm confident enough to say that you're interested in her."

"Oh? How come?"

Li Qingshan said, "You're not even fazed when someone as fantastic as sect master Qiu takes a liking to you, and you don't like men either, so that can only mean you have someone else you like. Even I have only seen a single woman who completely surpasses sect master Qiu in terms of charm. Great commander Gu probably doesn't treat me with any importance at all, so she probably just told you to take care of me without proper thought. Just a single careless word from her is enough for you to uphold it like strict orders, even going as far as to offend your friends for me. You can't just call that loyalty to your commanding officer anymore."

Hua Chengzan said, "You're far too modest. You don't just have your wits about you. You're the cleverest."

Li Qingshan said, "Then you really shouldn't take care of me."

"Why?"

Li Qingshan grinned. "Because we're rivals."

Even Hua Chengzan was left surprised for quite a while before erupting in laughter, laughing so hard that he had to lean on his knees.

"Alright you, Li Qingshan. It has been quite a while since I've laughed so hard. Pfft, rivals. Hahahaha! This is just too interesting."

Li Qingshan looked at him with a smile. He was as firm as a rock excavated from a ravine. Clearly, he was not joking.

Hua Chengzan stopped laughing, but he continued to smile, "Do you know what we look like?"

"What?"

"We look like two ants fighting over a mountain. Oi, go away, this is my territory. But we can't even move a single rock."

Li Qingshan said, "Even if we're ants, as long as we climb as hard as we can, there'll be a day when we climb to the top of the mountain."

"Climb? Don't you understand? The mountain is rapidly growing taller. By the time you take a tiny step, it has already grown ten times higher. Wake up!"

Li Qingshan said confidently, "You underestimate me."

Hua Chengzan said, "Alright. Then I'll definitely have to take even better care of you and see just how long you can climb for."

Li Qingshan was instead surprised. "I'm obviously going to climb until I die. Don't tell me you've turned pursuing a woman into everything there is in life?"

He had set himself a distant goal, and he would be doing all that he could to strive towards it, but he did not treat the goal as his absolute meaning of existence. Whether it was Gu Yanying or venturing beyond the Nine Heavens, if he died half way, killed off by someone, then all he would do was shrug and apologise to brother ox.

This was both an imprint from his past life and a deep impression he had gained from this life. The hunger and cold in the cowshed filled the boy cowherd's mind with only wearing cotton clothes and eating meat. Right now, his goals were only equivalent to larger cotton clothes and more delicious meat. He understood the value of these two items more than anyone else. The warmth of cotton clothes to warm a person's heart, and the delicious taste of meat surpassed all pills and medicines. They were not divine. He could strive towards them with his own two hands.

"I have nothing better to do, but you won't understand this feeling." Hua Chengzan smiled.

## **Chapter 298 - The Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots**

Li Qingshan said seriously, "You'll regret it when the time comes."

Hua Chengzan stared at Li Qingshan. Gradually, the corner of his lips curled up uncontrollably, and he broke out in laughter again.

Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow. "Have you laughed enough?"

Hua Chengzan used Li Qingshan's shoulder to support himself. "Sorry, sorry. I really couldn't help myself." After laughing for a while longer, he said, "I'm willing to take care of you not just because of what she said. You're far too interesting. If you were a little more delicate in terms of appearance, you really might be passable."

A chill ran down Li Qingshan's spine as he was filled with disgust now that Hua Chengzan had quipped him with the exact same remark.

Hua Chengzan took off in the wind as he laughed aloud, flying off into the sky. His smile gradually vanished as he muttered to himself, "Is it regret?"

Li Qingshan turned around and returned to the courtyard. He saw Liu Chuanfeng hugging the jar of alcohol, directly pouring it into his mouth. Sun Fubai seemed to be trying to calm him down on the side.

Liu Chuanfeng ignored him. He placed down the jar of alcohol heavily and said, "In order to prepare these dishes, I had to pay out of my own pocket. When other school leaders eat in the Hundred Flavours restaurant, the owner personally comes out to welcome them. They can eat whatever they want, and it won't even cost them a single spiritual stone. Yet, I just have to pay like everyone else. If I try to haggle the price, I get people rolling their eyes at me. What's all this for? All of this is so you'll recognise the school of Novels and learn the arts of the school!"

Sun Fubai said, "Junior brother, you should stop saying all of this!"

"Xiao An, let's go." As Li Qingshan said that, he brushed past Liu Chuanfeng, acting like he was not even there.

Xiao An leapt up and made her way into the depths of the bamboo building with him.

Liu Chuanfeng was taken aback. Suddenly, he smashed the jar of alcohol on the ground. "Go, just go. You're all the same. You all look down on me."

Li Qingshan abruptly stopped. He said without looking back, "Liu Chuanfeng, please have some dignity, and perhaps you'll earn some of my respect. However, if acting and complaining like a madman just because you've had a little to drink is all that you know, you truly don't deserve any respect at all. Why don't you think about the reason why the school of Novels has declined to its current state!"

Liu Chuanfeng was speechless.

"Well said!" A man with a long hat walked over slowly. His appearance was thin and simple. He was the leader of the school of Yin-yang, Ma Buyi.

Sun Fubai thought, The Cloudwisp island really hasn't been so lively before. It's him who has brought in this new breath of life, but how long can it last for?

Li Qingshan said, "Greetings, school leader. May I ask what has brought you here, sir?"

Sure enough, Ma Buyi's gaze landed on Xiao An. His eyes were filled with amazement and eagerness, "I've come for Xiao An. Have you heard of the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots?"



Li Qingshan shook his head. Sun Fubai instead exclaimed, "Is it the ultimate esoteric technique of the school of Yin-yang, the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots?"

Sun Fubai gave an explanation, and Li Qingshan learned that the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots was originally an ancient cultivation method passed down through the ages. It was worth even more than the school of Buddhism's Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual, and it was extremely difficult to practise too. Not only did it require extremely sharp senses for yin, yang, and the five elements, it also required the person to be able to wield yin, yang, and the five elements freely. Even in ancient times, not a lot of people could practise it.

However, once they achieved success with it, they would be able to unleash extraordinary power. As long as they were interested in learning, they basically could use all the techniques of the various elements of the present day. And, the most powerful aspect of the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots was not even in battle, but in divination. They would be able to conduct divination with seven lots, allowing them to know about the past and future and forecast any good or ill omens.

"Xiao An is the most suitable successor for this esoteric technique." Ma Buyi's eyes lit up. He was eager to see the effects of this esoteric technique of the school of Yin-yang once Xiao An learnt it.

Li Qingshan said, "Xiao An is still a disciple of the school of Buddhism after all. I'm afraid this isn't something we can decide on."

Ma Buyi said, "I've already discussed it with the One Thought master. He has agreed for her to learn it."

"Wouldn't the two different cultivation methods clash?" Li Qingshan was rather surprised. He never expected the One Thought master to be so generous, allowing his own primary disciples to spend time and effort on the cultivation methods of other schools.

"You have no idea. There are many differences that exist among ancient cultivation methods and cultivation methods of the present day. In particular, it differs tremendously with buddhist cultivation methods. It won't clash with the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual."

"But she'll definitely end up slowing down with her cultivation." Li Qingshan immediately hit the main issue.

The reason why the One Thought master had agreed to Ma Buyi's request was because Xiao An cultivated just too quickly, which made him rather afraid for some reason. He did not know about the encompassing vows recorded within the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. All of it was just a monk's hunch.

"That's true, but I think it's worth it. As a Heavenly Meridians prodigy, it might be smooth sailing for Xiao An as a Qi Practitioner, without any obstructions at all, but once she reaches Foundation Establishment, she won't have this advantage anymore. And, if she continues onwards, each step will only become even more difficult to take. Clearly, a foundation is extremely important, so why not use this period of advantage to make her foundation even firmer?"

Li Qingshan found it to be quite reasonable. He asked Xiao An, "What do you think?"

Like an adult, Xiao An lowered her head and pondered for a while. She glanced at Li Qingshan before nodding in agreement.

With Xiao An's agreement, Ma Buyi let out a smile. He was an extremely clever and observant person. Looking at the circumstances, he thought, Li Qingshan really is very important to her. Does she want to slow down her cultivation and wait for him?

However, that was not Xiao An's objective. It was unlike what the One Thought master and the other school leaders were predicting either. As a matter of fact, it was the exact opposite. She was worried that they would separate and end up in different worlds, but she was afraid that she would be the one to fall behind.

In the past, the black ox had once told her, "His path will be extremely dangerous. You'll need to do everything you can to keep up with his footsteps. If you don't think you can persevere, just give up on the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty!"

But how was it possible for her to give up? Whether it be the Guardian King's Method of Demon Subdual or the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots, it was all like comparing a rock to a mountain before the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty.

Her cultivation speed was not actually that fast. Once Li Qingshan transformed, her cultivation would even be slightly lower than his, as the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty was simply too profound. Even with her comprehension, each step was extremely difficult to take. All she did before was use the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty as a foundation before disguising herself as a regular person, which was why she managed to achieve the miracle of reaching the sixth layer in a single day and night.

This body condensed by the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty might have been an amazing Heavenly Meridians prodigy to others, but to her, it was just an empty beauty, no different from the illusionary reflection of the moon in water.

Compared to Li Qingshan's dual cultivation as a human and daemon, it might seem like there were two sides to her too, but there was actually just a single path in front of her, the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. Of course, she could discard that path and only focus on the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. With the advantage brought on by the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, it would be nothing difficult for her to reach Foundation Establishment or even higher.

However, the requirements that the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty placed on the cultivator were not just talent and comprehension, but willpower and disposition too. If her pursuit of great beauty surpassed her nature of white bones, if she treated the buddhist dharma with more importance than this cultivation method, then this supernatural ability would become much more difficult if she ever wanted to return to it.

At the very least, there was no one in this world who could overcome this fact. Even with Xiao An's talent and comprehension, she was unable to reopen a closed door. She still wanted to accompany Li Qingshan to beyond the Nine Heavens, so how could she give up on a mountain for the sake of a rock?

On the Ice Sword cliff, she too had witnessed the moment when the black ox struck out. She was no less shaken up by it than Li Qingshan. If the black ox was looking forward to a day when Li Qingshan could stand beside someone like that, just what was she supposed to do to remain by his side? The Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual or the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots? Quit joking.

The Path of White Bone and Great Beauty was her only choice.

As a result, even without Ma Buyi, she would still slow down her cultivation. This just happened to provide her with a good excuse. Moreover, polishing a rock could assist her in understanding the mountain too.

She was quite interested in the divination techniques of the ancient cultivations, as while the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty did include techniques like that, her cultivation was still too low right now. It was beyond her reach. Right now, all she could do was start with the simple stuff and gain a prior understanding as some preparation for the future.

Ma Buyi said, "This isn't a place for me to pass this onto you. Come back to Antiquity island with me!"

Xiao An glanced at Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan smiled. "Go and cultivate properly with school leader Ma. I just happen to be planning to cultivate in the afternoon."

After seeing off Xiao An, Li Qingshan was about to return to his room to cultivate with some pills.

Liu Chuanfeng suddenly stood up. "I- I have a good place for cultivation here."

"Oh?"

Liu Chuanfeng brought Li Qingshan into the depths of the courtyard. There was an empty space around the centre of the huge courtyard. The surroundings were all sealed up. Li Qingshan had not discovered this place during the morning.

There was a formation engraved on the empty ground. It was very similar to the Spirit Gathering formation Li Qingshan had once seen in the seclusion room in the Hawkwolf Guard, but it was much larger and more complicated. The grooves had already been filled with spiritual stones too, and they seemed different from regular, inferior spiritual stones.

Li Qingshan wanted to extend his hand over, but he was immediately forced back by a great power. He was unable to take a single step towards the formation. He could feel that even if he transformed, he would not be able to smash through this power.

Liu Chuanfeng took out his waist tablet. The waist tablets of school leaders were different from those of regular disciples. They were extremely detailed. Half of it depicted clouds, but various figures, plants, and beasts were conjured within the clouds. Every single one of them were as small as a mustard seed, yet they were also depicted in minute detail.

Liu Chuanfeng raised the tablet, and the formation flashed gently, producing a thrum. It was like some kind of mechanism had been activated. Liu Chuanfeng invited Li Qingshan to enter.

Li Qingshan made his way into the formation. This time, nothing obstructed him.

As soon as he set foot in the formation, Li Qingshan felt an extremely pure and tremendous energy. It was much more powerful than the energy in the Hawkwolf Guard's seclusion room.

And, he could even sense that the formation did not just gather the spiritual qi of the world. There was also some kind of huge, complicated system that resonated with it.

Li Qingshan was right. It was the tremendous formation that enveloped the entire academy. The formation on Cloudwisp island was one of its components.

To be chosen by the Academy of the Hundred Schools, the Lake of Dragons and Snakes had always been a rare blessed land, while the islands chosen by the nine standard schools were blessed lands among blessed lands. Spiritual veins crossed through below each island, while the place where they chose to build the formations were on the openings of the spiritual veins.

Gathered through the formation, the spiritual qi had reached an unbelievable density. It was quite a rare holy land for cultivation. However, only the various school leaders had the right to cultivate there. Even the primary disciples did not have the right.

However, with how much the school of Novels had already declined, the various rules only existed in name now. Liu Chuanfeng had witnessed Li Qingshan's wealth before too, so he was unable to think of anything aside from this that could interest him.

Standing in the formation, Li Qingshan gained a deeper understanding of the importance of "environment" out of the four crucial elements to cultivation—wealth, companionship, method, and environment. If he cultivated here, it would be countless times more effective even if Qi Practitioners were unable to absorb the spiritual qi of the world.

And, he could absorb the spiritual qi of the world. His cultivation as a Qi Practitioner was about to take a qualitative leap forward.

He was unable to completely understand the value of this formation, but he knew that he had to pay spiritual stones whenever he used any facilities according to the rules of the academy. He was just about to ask.

Liu Chuanfeng said, "Cultivate well." before turning around and leaving. Originally, he wanted to use his drunkenness to speak a few words of truth and touch Li Qingshan, but he never expected it to achieve the exact opposite effect. He was completely dejected now. He had already given up on hope. If a person like him practised the arts of the school of Novels, it truly would be a waste!

Looking at Liu Chuanfeng's rather lonely figure, Li Qingshan said, "Hold on."

Liu Chuanfeng turned around, and Li Qingshan said sincerely, "Thank you!"

Liu Chuanfeng forced out a smile. "You're welcome. You're the only disciple of our school of Novels after all."

"But I'm very sorry." Li Qingshan kept clear tabs on his debts of kindness. He had to pay him back, but he could not waste his precious time on a futureless cultivation method as a form of payback.

Liu Chuanfeng said, "There's no need to say anything. I understand. I won't try to force you into it anymore."

Li Qingshan said, "Why must you write those kinds of books?"

Liu Chuanfeng lowered his head and clenched his fist. "I don't want to write that stuff either. You know that the novels I write are, are trash. But no one is willing to read what I write seriously. If no one reads my novels, I can't gather any power of belief."

“Then why don’t you just abandon the cultivation method of the school of Novels? With your cultivation at the tenth layer, all you need to do is put in a bit of work, and there’s a great chance that you’ll reach Foundation Establishment.”

“If I do that, I’ll just be a regular cultivator, and the path of the school of Novels will really end for good. The previous school leader, who was also my master, held my hand before he passed away, telling me to continue the legacy of the school of Novels. You might look down on me, but regardless of what you think of me, I’m a novelist!”

With that, a great burden seemed to be lifted from Liu Chuanfeng’s shoulders. He raised his head and murmured, “Master, I’ve done everything I can.”

“Revitalising the school of Novels is not necessarily impossible,” Li Qingshan suddenly said at this moment.

Liu Chuanfeng turned around in a hurry. “You’re willing to practise the arts of my school of Novels?”

Li Qingshan said, “I never said that.”

“Then...?”

“However, I might be able to help you. Though, I do have one condition. Recall and destroy all of those... novels.”

Liu Chuanfeng wanted to object instinctually. Those pieces of trash were all the treasure he had left.

“There’s no need to panic. Time is not scarce, whether it’s for you or for me. You have plenty of time to think about it. Whether it’s ten days or a hundred days, I await your answer.” With that, Li Qingshan entered the centre of the formation. He crossed his legs and sat down, closing his eyes and meditating.

### **Chapter 299 - The Night of the Rise of the School of Novels**

Li Qingshan roused from his meditative state. By then, the moon had already risen to the centre of the sky, illuminating the ground with a silver glow.

The moonlight carved up the rows upon rows of bamboo structures into light and shadows.

On the ground, a pillar of light rose up into the air, complementing the moonlight.

Suddenly, he realised that he was in the pillar of light. It was the light gathered by the formation.

Within his sea of qi, his true qi became even more plentiful. Under the suppression of the spirit turtle and the purification of the sumeru ring, it was like a clear, boundless lake, sitting still without the slightest ripple. However, as long as he needed to, he could create great waves in it and destroy everything before him.

Li Qingshan smiled. With the assistance of this formation, there were no longer any obstacles to him as a Qi Practitioner. He made his way out of the formation and followed the crisscrossing corridors, returning to his residence, a bamboo building by the lake.

After he had chosen it in the morning, he did not even have the time to tidy through it.

He was about to stay for a very long time in the academy, so he had to tidy and clean it properly.

Lantern light shimmered in the bamboo structure, along with a few soft voices. Li Qingshan smiled and entered through the door.

Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai currently sat before one another. They turned their heads together. "Qingshan."

Li Qingshan made his way over to the table and sat down. He asked nonchalantly, "Have you decided?"

"I have." Liu Chuanfeng's eyes were red as if he had cried earlier. Agreeing to Li Qingshan's condition was equivalent to casting aside all of his hard work in the past. It also meant that all the characters he had created one by one would leave him forever, never to appear in this world again.

Even if they were all fake, without the slightest sense of liveliness, they had accompanied him through countless days and nights after all. If it were not for Sun Fubai's persuasions, he would have never decided in such a short amount of time.

Sun Fubai said, "When the sun rises, I'll order people to recall and destroy those novels."

Li Qingshan said, "Then there's no need for that. You can just let them fade away by themselves."

"Huh?" Liu Chuanfeng widened his eyes.

Li Qingshan said, "All I need is your determination. I hate people who don't want to sacrifice anything and just want to sit there, waiting for someone else to come save them. Fortunately, you're not one of them."

As if he had been saved from a hopeless situation, Liu Chuanfeng grabbed Li Qingshan's hands and thanked him incessantly.

After he calmed down, Li Qingshan said, "Then let's begin!"

"How do we begin?" Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai looked at one another.

Li Qingshan shrugged. "By teaching me the cultivation method of the school of Novels of course."

"Y- you're willing to learn?" Liu Chuanfeng asked in disbelief. Li Qingshan had been quite firm with his attitude originally.

"Not necessarily. I need to understand it first, but there's a possibility that I'll learn it. I'm not the saviour of the world. It's not like I can save the school of Novels without even understanding the predicament it's in," Li Qingshan said obviously. The principle he followed was going all the way, or not even starting.

Liu Chuanfeng was emotional, but Sun Fubai was slightly worried. Could it still be revived when fresh, new blood was channeled into this old, rotting body? Or would the blood just go to waste along with it?

But regardless of all that, the school of Novels that had halted for many years began to advance forwards once again.

"Senior brother, you tell him!"

Sun Fubai cleared his throat and began the lesson.

The cultivation method of the school of Novels was not difficult to practise. As a matter of fact, there was not even the need to practise a different cultivation method. Just using the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi as a foundation was enough. All that was needed was to condense a divine talisman within the body.

Divine talismans could be regarded as a type of spiritual talisman, but it was no ordinary spiritual talisman. Spiritual talismans were documents of the world. Cultivators could use them to connect with the world. However, divine talismans could connect with another special power, which was the power of belief that came from the minds of living beings.

Cultivators with divine talismans would possess special characteristics that regular people believed belonged to gods. The name of the divine talisman was the Talisman of Great Creation.

In the distant past, the ancient cultivator copied the twisted shape of the underground spiritual vein. That was the basic form of the Talisman of Great Creation. The first step for a disciple of novels was to condense this divine talisman.

This was not anything difficult to Li Qingshan. He estimated that he could complete it within ten days at most. His high jia affinity for water played a crucial role here.

However, this was only the most simple step to a disciple of novels. Gathering the power of belief and strengthening this divine talisman was the hardest part.

Writing a legendary novel was anything but easy, but in Li Qingshan's past life, he had witnessed many people achieve a feat like that! He had personally witnessed the birth of many legendary characters. With the existence of the Divine Talisman of Great Creation, they would definitely be able to appear in this world alive.

Then, what was he supposed to do right now? Which book was he supposed to copy?

Seeing how Li Qingshan was now willing to learn the cultivation method of the school of Novels and that there was no need for him to destroy his novels anymore, Liu Chuanfeng recovered mentally. He said proudly, "You might look down on me, but writing novels really isn't easy. In terms of writing novels, you probably can't match me."

Li Qingshan agreed deeply. He had never been someone who could sit down and write novels. He could not recall all those words from his past life, but even if he did, could it change anything at all?

Those stories that catered to modern tastes would probably fail to conform to the norms of people of the current age. In the end, they would just be written off as a madman's spoutings. Even if he managed to create a legendary classic through plagiarism, just how many years would it take before it took off? Even if he succeeded in the end, against all odds, it would all just be about him. It was not saving the school of Novels.

Sun Fubai had thought of this problem a long time ago. He sighed with worry. "It's not that easy!"

Li Qingshan said confidently, "I think you've been missing the most critical issue!"

"What?"

“Whether it’s novels or the divine talisman, they’re just components to the process. The most critical aspect is the medium!”

“What does medium mean?” This new vocabulary left Sun Fubai and Liu Chuanfeng rather perplexed.

Li Qingshan gave a slight explanation. “It’s the same as the channels of distribution. Even if you can write the novels, it’s useless if no one reads them.”

Liu Chuanfeng still did not understand. “If you think that’s the issue, then you’re completely underestimating us.”

Only then did Li Qingshan learn that Sun Fubai possessed an extremely large business within the world of regular people. All the major publishing houses of the Clear River prefecture were under his name. As long as Liu Chuanfeng wrote something, no matter how unimpressive the content was, it could be printed in mass quantity using the printers created by the school of Mohism. Then, it would be distributed to the book stores in various places. Every single book could be sold for a low price, or even given away for free, but it was all useless.

Li Qingshan smiled. “Is that it?”

“How else are you supposed to do it?” Liu Chuanfeng asked.

Li Qingshan said, “I was born in a tiny mountain village. There was not a single bookstore there. I went over a dozen years without reading a single book. You could count the number of people who can read there on a single hand.”

“So what?” Liu Chuanfeng was confused. It was very normal for those ignorant people of mountain villages to be unable to read. Even regular scholars looked down on these people, let alone mighty Qi Practitioners.

However, Sun Fubai seemed to pick up on something.

Then Li Qingshan said, “You said earlier that the officials who rule over a region from the school of Confucianism also condense a divine talisman in their bodies, right?”

“Yeah, the divine talisman is called the Talisman of Great Virtue. It’s actually just the school of Daoism’s original Talisman of Merit.”

Merit was an extremely important concept to ancient cultivators. The difficulty of cultivation and the threats of daemons and monsters forced them to use all the power available to them.

These two divine talismans used completely different powers from the minds of people. One was belief, while the other was gratitude. After doing good, people would often establish memorial tablets and tend to it daily out of gratitude towards their benefactors.

Although Talismans of Merit could not turn fiction into reality like the Talisman of Great Creation, it did build up good fortune and could nullify calamities.

In that chaotic age when daemons ran amuck, luck was even more important than power. Cultivators would often face awkward situations like running into a dog after taking a turn, only for it to be a



Daemon General. No matter how talented you were, the only fate that awaited you was becoming a snack.

What, you're a Foundation Establishment cultivator? Do you really think Daemon Commanders won't be strolling around? If not them, what about powerful members of the otherfolk and terrifying demonic cultivators?

The power of the individual was just too miniscule. Even if they hid for their entire lives and cultivated in seclusion, bad luck would still be unavoidable.

As a result, learning divination and building up merit became crucial aspects to cultivators. Being able to forecast these situations or being in possession of some additional luck to avoid these situations were critical.

But in this day and age, there was no need to worry about those situations anymore. Although cultivators still contended and competed against one another, all of it seemed extremely gentle and cute before daemons, otherfolk, and demons.

As a result, devoting effort into accumulating merit was not particularly useful anymore. Only the worthless disciples of the school of Confucianism would take the path of officialdom, which made quite a lot of cultivators lament over the collapse of virtue and how people were not like how they used to be anymore.

Sun Fubai asked, "Qingshan, you mean?"

Li Qingshan said, "I mean you've mistaken your identities right from the very beginning. The school of Novels is not about how to write stories, but like the officials from the school of Confucianism, to manage this land that stretches fifteen hundred kilometers and get as many people as possible to become disseminators of the stories."

"You might think that these people are very ignorant, but since when did we need clever people? Isn't it exactly the ignorant who believed in ghosts and monsters, which made them real? To be honest, I hold no prejudice against you for writing those things. I just dislike it, but just because I dislike it, it doesn't mean that everyone dislikes it."

"I believe they don't have any particularly high requirements for stories. As a matter of fact, I think they would much prefer those stories that you write to those poems and lyrics written by great Confucian scholars. An audience for the literarily supreme can never surpass an audience for the good and simple."

Liu Wenchuan's eyes lit up. If he really managed to achieve that, breaking through to Foundation Establishment would become anything but difficult. However, he was still distressed. "But they can't read!" Surely he could not spend a few years teaching old farmers how to read!

"This is just the most long-term plan and strategy. We might not be able to teach old farmers how to read, but can't we just teach children? It's not like we lack money. All we need to do is establish a few hundred or a few thousand private institutions... of hope and teach children how to read for free. There'll be a day when they become the footstone of the school of Novels."

Sun Fubai was also stunned by Li Qingshan's plan. His insight had completely exceeded their imaginations. Even the school of Confucianism that focused on education without discrimination and

enriching the public had never thought of setting up these private institutions... of hope, hoping they would never learn to read and just continue their peaceful lives as simple people.

This plan just seemed so logical. They had only ever thought about how to write touching novels, not how to nurture readers, much less from these ignorant farmers who stood at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Perhaps, it was exactly because he came from a mountain village that he could come up with this idea!

The idea of private institutions of hope was utterly fantastic. They could even use novels as materials for education, but obviously not with what Liu Chuanfeng wrote. After all, he was the one who was determined for Liu Chuanfeng to destroy these books in the first place. They felt like a light bulb had lit up before them, and as they thought about it, the light bulb turned into a scorching sun very soon.

Li Qingshan gave them time to digest the ideas. Then he said, "If we look closer, it's not just written words that can spread stories!"

In the day and age he originally came from, there still were not a lot of people who were willing to sit down and read. However, through the various mediums available, they still managed to create more "gods" within the past twenty years than the past two thousand years.

Sun Fubai's mind had been opened. "Do you mean?"

"We need storytellers, singers, actors, everyone and anyone who can disseminate our stories. Afterwards, we'll band them together and form- form an association, called the Cloudwisp association." Li Qingshan extended his right hand; he suddenly closed it before swinging it. "We'll get them to travel to every corner of the Clear River prefecture to spread the stories we write."

These people were truly of the bottom class in this world. They were despised wherever they went. Their statuses were even lower than farmers. Who knew how many worlds separated Qi Practitioners from them, yet they needed to use their power right now. Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai would have never even thought of this, but with further thought, they found it very reasonable.

When Li Qingshan originally said he could save the school of Novels, they were not completely convinced. They were thinking about just trying whatever he said for the moment. But now, they were completely convinced. This idea could definitely work. If they went with Li Qingshan's ideas, the school of Novels had a future.

"Stop bending over your desk and writing. Go outside and build all of this. It might take some time, but as long as you succeed, there'll be quite a lot of people who'll believe you even if you say the world will end next year. What kind of power will we have then? The power to end the world?" Li Qingshan said jokingly.

Sun Fubai and Liu Chuanfeng had never been so excited before. There was only a single thought in their heads—the school of Novels could be saved!

"Fubai, this will be very troublesome to achieve, so you'll need to use your forces among regular people. We'll need to recruit as many helpers as we can to achieve this bit by bit."

Sun Fubai smiled and waved his hand. "It won't be troublesome; it won't be troublesome at all." With his age, his cultivation had halted a long time ago. There was no longer a lot of meaning in continuing

with it. However, if he really succeeded with this, it would be possible for his cultivation to advance even further and reach a realm he had never even imagined originally.

The power gathered by the divine talisman was a power that surpassed the conventions of cultivation in the first place. Whether it was for the school of Novels or for himself, he had to do his best.

On this night with a bright moon, the reason for the rise of the school of Novels was planted.

### **Chapter 300 - A New Beginning**

In a plaza, an old man in an old set of clothes stood before a square table on a tall platform, eloquently telling the story of how the founding emperor conquered the tribes of the west. While the passers-by all knew about this piece of history, he managed to tell it with cadence, so it was still enough to captivate the entire teahouse full of customers such that they even forgot to eat the snacks before them.

Sun Shuping was originally a scholar, but just like most other scholars, he failed to make a name for himself through studying. There was a saying that the most useless existence was a scholar. Once any hope of scholarly or official posts were lost, those who did well would become aides or private advisors, while those who did poorly would start up a private institution and serve as a teacher. Of course, there were people who ended up as beggars on the streets too.

He did neither well nor poorly. Because of his nimble tongue, he managed to study under an old storyteller, which allowed him to become a storyteller himself. Combined with the fact that he was literate and had read extensively, he surpassed his master in this area. Before he knew it, a few decades had already passed, and he had basically made a small name for himself.

A series of harsh bird cries rang out. Sun Shuping's mouth did not stop, but he looked over with a frown. He saw a swollen man in silks enter the plaza with a birdcage. He pushed his way to the front boldly, sitting down right in front of the platform.

As if it were frightened, the bird's caws were even sharper now, which garnered furious gazes from everyone. However, they also seemed to be afraid of the fatty's authority, so they dared not say anything.

Sun Shuping could not help but stop. He smiled at the fatty. "Sir, you can't bring birds into the plaza, so please hang your birdcage outside?"

The fatty rolled his eyes. "Hang it outside? Do you know how much my bird is worth? If I lose it, are you supposed to compensate me? You tell your stories, and it'll caw by itself. Let's see which one is more pleasant. Don't worry, you won't be missing out on any money from me at all. It'll be much more than these penniless people."

Sun Shuping's frown grew even wider now. With a smack, he slapped the table. "To be continued! Be sure to not miss out!" He ended with this iconic phrase that never changed, leaving with an exaggerated swing of his arm.

Praises rang out in the plaza. Clearly, it was not just because of the story that he told, but also because of the quality of the storytelling. They tossed many copper coins onto the platform.

His disciple, Li'l Rock, scurried onto the platform, picking up the money while claspng his hands and bowing. He looked just like a little monkey, which led to a roar of laughter.

"Ouch!" Li'l Rock exclaimed and fell to the ground. His forehead began to bleed as a bloody silver coin fell down on the platform.

Sun Shuping helped up his disciple in a hurry and exclaimed while pointing at the fatty. "You!"

"Keep going. Tell me some more. I have plenty of money!" The fatty sneered as he tossed a handful of silver pieces up and down in his hand. "If I support you, then you're something, but if I don't, you're just a damned storyteller. How dare you turn against me? Don't you know who I am? I'll pelt you to death with money."

A golden streak of light flew up from below, striking the fatty's head before bouncing onto the platform. It was a gold piece.

The fatty's head had already become covered in blood. He had directly fainted.

"Mister Sun? Our boss invites you to meet him." A burly man flashed somehow and arrived right in front of Sun Shuping.

Li'l Rock saw the gold piece and rushed over while holding his head. He picked up the gold piece and bit it. He cried out in joy. "Master, it's real gold! And what a big piece it is!" His head no longer hurt anymore. He had never touched gold before in his entire life.

Children that grew up in the plaza were not particularly precious. Sun Shuping felt rather pained instead. Storytelling was a lowly trade. Anyone could curse them if they wished. He had been through plenty of that in the past, but he did not want this child to suffer his entire life with him. He made up his mind to make him change his future profession.

As he thought about these miscellaneous things, he arrived before a private room on the second floor. He lifted up the bamboo curtain and saw an old man in glowing health seated there. The clothes on him were not particularly fancy, but he could tell with a single glance that they were made out of the best, most comfortable material. He did not give off an air of arrogance either. However, just by sitting there calmly, he stood out.

With the insight he had developed over many years, he could tell that the "noble" before him was not a person who would come to a place like this to listen to stories. It was more likely that he was a cultivator, which made him even more afraid of disrespecting him. He bowed politely. "This junior is Sun Shuping. Thank you for your assistance, sir."

Sun Fubai studied this storyteller who was renowned in the local region of a hundred kilometers. He nodded slightly. He was satisfied with him, which only affirmed Li Qingshan's idea. Through this storyteller, stories could become much more vivid and fascinating no matter how ordinary they were!

"Brother, have you heard of the Cloudwisp association?"

"I haven't."

“Well, now you have. This isn’t a place for us to speak. Come with me.” Sun Fubai directly stood up and made his way out the door. Li’l Rock just happened to be rubbing his head with one hand while holding the gold in the other, craning his neck in to peer around.

“But all I know is how to tell stories!” Sun Shuping was dumbfounded. He struggled to imagine just why a “noble” like him who casually tossed gold pieces at people, a legendary cultivator, would be looking for him, a storyteller.

“Then that’s more than enough.” Sun Fubai rubbed Li’l Rock’s head. “There’ll be plenty of gold.”

Li’l Rock immediately discovered that his head had stopped aching, and he had stopped bleeding too.

After leaving the Academy of the Hundred Schools, Sun Fubai immediately gathered the managers of the major publishing houses to give an announcement that they were recruiting people in the various cities and districts of the entire prefecture. At the same time, he personally visited the few most famous storytellers and bards within the prefecture.

According to Li Qingshan’s plan, the greatest use of these people were not as storytellers and bards, but as teachers. They could impart others with the experiences they had gathered throughout their lives, becoming the very core of the Cloudwisp association.

At the same time, in a corner of the prefecture, he had also found a manor to serve as the headquarters of the association. Propelled by absolute power and absolute wealth, the Cloudwisp association that Li Qingshan envisioned was established and built up rapidly. However, they were still uncertain about just when it could come into play and how great of an impact it could make.

As Sun Fubai ran around everywhere, Li Qingshan arrived on the school of Mohism’s Divine Mechanism island, ready for his first class in the academy.

He arrived below the huge, arched doors that were symbolic of the island. Hao Pingyang and Zhang Lanqing were waiting for him there. The island was covered in various strange machines and tall structures. A group of wooden horse puppets galloped past, filled with a strange sense of vitality.

They entered a majestic, spiral-shaped structure, which unfortunately seemed more like a turd in Li Qingshan’s eyes; inside, it also swirled upwards. They basically stopped at around the height of the second or third storey and entered the room in the centre of the swirls.

The circular room was like an upside down conch. Quite a lot of people were already sitting in the stepped seating area, discussing with one another in small groups. Apart from the mohist disciples in navy blue, there were also many disciples from other schools in uniforms of different colours and designs.

Li Qingshan’s bluish-green of bamboo was unique compared to all of them, but he did not stand out in the crowd. However, all Qi Practitioners were people with sharp senses, so when they glanced over, the topic of their conversations changed silently.

“Oh? Isn’t this the primary disciple of the school of Novels, Li Qingshan?”