

Chapter 341 - Return

In the sky, Li Qingshan sat on a cloud with his legs crossed. He could sense that the power of belief was gathering much faster in his Divine Talisman of Great Creation.

If belief was a power, then the people in the city below gradually began to believe in the existence of a fictitious being.

“Let’s go. To the next stop!”

Li Qingshan travelled around. He had carefully chosen all of these missions. He had accepted many, covering a large range, but they were extremely simple too. He basically only hunted down people of the jianghu.

This was not because he could not complete harder missions. There were probably no Qi Practitioners that he and Xiao An could not beat. However, the main reason for all this was for the character he had written to stand out. Various issues would arise once Qi Practitioners became involved, and it would no longer be within the domain of regular people either.

Even if he cut down the master of the Sword Collection palace right now, the common people would not know who he was! Beating up those local tyrants and aristocrats who ran amuck and abused the common people were what regular people loved to see.

Gradually, the image of a teenage hero was established in the extensive hearts of the common people.

Yes, a teenager. Li Qingshan had originally decided on a half-grown child, but the child would grow with the rumors. He would be different every time he conjured him, appearing in this world in a form that lived up to everyone’s expectations.

He was mentioned within every household, and the patches on the teenager’s clothes either multiplied or lessened as a result. The colour of his waistband would vary too. The brush in his right hand would always remain, but sometimes he would be holding a reed flute or a gourd in his left hand.

His final form was determined by thousands of thoughts of belief and faith.

At the same time, the power of belief within the Divine Talisman of Great Creation multiplied. The teenage hero became more realistic, more vivid, and stronger.

His eyes even twinkled with a light that was no different from a living person’s, which left Li Qingshan secretly amazed over the wonders of the art from the school of Novels.

Of course, he still lacked the ability of independent thought, so he was not a living person. All he could do was behave like a machine and utter some predetermined phrases. At times that mattered, Li Qingshan would have to secretly control him like a wooden puppet.

However, Li Qingshan could sense what limited him was no longer the quantity of power of belief, but the level of his Divine Talisman of Great Creation.

And, the level of the Divine Talisman of Great Creation was limited by his cultivation as a Qi Practitioner. Only when he underwent the heavenly tribulation and converted his true qi into spiritual qi could he reestablish the Divine Talisman of Great Creation, granting it even greater power. By then, perhaps he really could conjure something like a living child that could communicate with others.

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On the top of the highest building in the city, Zhao Lingshu stood with his arms crossed, staring coldly at a figure that rode away on a tiger. He leapt down, and a pair of metal wings unfolded on his back, gliding through the air in pursuit.

With a whoosh, he kicked up a great gust of wind and descended from the sky, landing before the young man.

“Who are you? Why are you blocking my path?” said the teenager in an exaggerated manner; it was like he was acting out a show.

Zhao Lingshu said coldly, “Which painter do you study under, copying others by trying to uphold justice and eliminate the crooked? Your tricks can fool regular people, but they can’t fool me.”

“Who are you? Why are you blocking my path?” said the teenager in the same exaggerated manner like he was acting out a show.

“Do you know what the people you killed on Jade Altar mountain are to me?” Zhao Lingshu furrowed his brows. He was born in a bandit’s nest. His father and brothers were all bandits. Due to his talent of being able to practise qi, he was chosen by the leader of the Six Directions association, a renowned gang within the Clear River prefecture. He was taken in as a disciple. After many years of arduous cultivation, he had reached the seventh layer, but he never expected he would discover all his relatives dead, without a single trace left, when he returned home triumphantly.

“Who are you? Why are you blocking my path?” The teenager repeated his words once again in an exaggerated manner like he was acting out a show.

If Zhao Lingshu had played video games before, he would definitely find this sight extremely familiar. Unfortunately, while the teenager seemed no different from a real person, and he could unleash many powerful moves, he was still not a person at the end of the day.

It was exactly because he had never played them before that Zhao Lingshu lost his temper. “The people you killed were all my family! I want you to die!”

Shwing! He drew the sword on his back, and it swept over to the teenager’s neck like a bolt of lightning, like a dragon swimming through the air.

Zhao Lingshu could already see the moment when the young man was beheaded. He had not come for revenge out of hot-headedness. Instead, he had secretly undertaken quite a lot of investigation. The teenager possessed the abilities of the school of Painting, but the paintings he produced were at the third or fourth layer at most. There was no reason for him to fear.

Sure enough, the teenager remained in a daze as he watched the sword fly over. He did not react at all.

Just when he was about to exact his revenge. Zhao Lingshi instead felt a certain loneliness of being aloof from the world. As a cultivator, he was destined to walk a path of solitude. Farewell, father. Farewell, brothers. Please bless me in the afterlife!

However, the flying sword ended up stabbing nothing. The teenager had vanished into thin air, and the huge tiger was squashed into a thin piece of paper, flying into the air. Zhao Lingshu was taken aback.

“Oi, what’s wrong with you?”

A man in black descended from the sky on a white cloud with a child as he called out at Zhao Lingshu.

Li Qingshan had just been distracted for a moment as he conversed with Xiao An, yet as soon as he looked back, he saw a sword flying over. He immediately dispersed the power of belief and recalled the huge tiger.

Zhao Lingshu said coldly, “So you were secretly behind everything?”

Xiao An had always been alert, so she told Li Qingshan what had happened.

“I was wondering why the sh*tty bandits of Jade Altar mountain were so arrogant. As it turns out, you’re backing them.” Only now did Li Qingshan understand the full story, which made him furious. He had quite an impression of the place, as he saved over a dozen women from the bandit’s nest. All of them had been toyed with to a point where they almost bore no human resemblance. Some of them had even lost their minds.

He had yet to see any of those legendary heroic outlaws who upheld justice and fought for righteousness.

“Regular people are no different from ants. They can’t escape their fate of being toyed with and slaughtered. Since you’ve admitted to it, you can go die!” Zhao Lingshu controlled the sword with his fingers, and it shot over with lightning speed.

The aura Li Qingshan gave off was only at the seventh layer, and the child beside him was just a mortal. He had absolute confidence in slaughtering the two of them then and there. Although the entire matter had surprised him slightly, everything was still within his control. When he saw how Li Qingshan tried to catch his sword with his hand, he even sneered.

“Chop through it!”

Li Qingshan casually caught the flying sword. “I think you’re no different from an ant too!”

Zhao Lingshu urged the sword on, and the flying sword thrummed, but it did not even budge in Li Qingshan’s hand. He was shocked. He understood he had run into a powerful opponent now, and he was actually an uncommon Body Practitioner. With a flap of his metal wings, he took flight. Fortunately, he still had this pair of mohist Dual Metal wings that his master had bestowed to him. He could fly through the air freely, allowing him to remain invincible.

However, in the blink of an eye, Li Qingshan had leapt into the air too. He moved even faster than the flying sword, which made Zhao Lingshu pale in fright.

As Zhao Lingshu pulled back in a hurry, he said, "Why must we go at each other's throats over some regular people? I've already thought it through. Ever since I've embarked on a path of cultivation, I should cut off these feelings of attachment to the mundane world. I shouldn't have any connection to them anymore. I have to thank you for helping me sever this tie. I'm Zhao Lingshu of the Six Directions society. May I ask for your esteemed name?"

"Die, ant!"

Li Qingshan used the Wave Treading Form and suddenly sped up. He arrived before Zhao Lingshu in the blink of an eye. He formed a tiger's claw with his right hand and easily pierced his protective true qi, clawing through his skin and ribs and gripping his warm heart before conveniently plucking it out.

It was quite a sensation to use the Tiger Demon Digs out the Heart on cultivators.

I'm actually going to die here! Zhao Lingshu's eyes suddenly dilated. My path of cultivation has only just begun...

He used his final bit of strength to crush a talisman for requesting help.

He was given to Xiao An as a snack, and there were a few useful items in his hundred treasures pouch, with this pair of metal wings in particular. They were quite interesting.

As for Zhao Lingshu's request for help, Li Qingshan was not bothered by it at all. During the year he spent in the Academy of the Hundred Thoughts, he gained an understanding of all the renowned sects in the Clear River prefecture.

The Six Directions society was a gang similar to the Iron Fist school in nature. He had even forgotten whether their leader was a ninth or tenth layer Qi Practitioner, but what mattered was he definitely was not a Foundation Establishment cultivator. In the eyes of people of the jianghu, they were a terrifying titan, but to Li Qingshan and Xiao An, they were just a group of self-propelled hundred treasures pouches and an express family meal delivery service. The only thing they would fear would be if they did not end up coming.

Li Qingshan even considered whether to watch over this place and wait for them to deliver themselves to him. However, who knew whether this would succeed or not and proper business took priority after all. He was still in a hurry to head back and go on a date with Han Qiongzhi!

He leapt up and rode off on a cloud.

Two hours later, an old man arrived in this region of wilderness and looked around. He was the leader of the Six Directions association. His cultivation had already reached the ninth layer, almost reaching the peak of Qi Practitioners.

If Li Qingshan had known he would come so quickly, he would probably regret not waiting here for a while.

Their hearts were connected as master and disciple. The old man could sense that Zhao Lingshu was probably already done for. He became furious. His most talented disciple had actually died here! All his years of nurturing had gone to waste.

As for revenge? He would be better off forgetting about it! There were no traces of fighting on the ground. A person who could silently kill Zhao Lingshu was not someone he could afford to provoke.

Gangs like his seemed glorious, able to obtain all the riches and women of the mundane world, but throughout the entire cultivation world, they were truly bottom dwellers. They could not afford to offend either disciples of sects or the Academy of the Hundred Thoughts without good reason. The slightest carelessness could lead to the destruction of their entire gang. He took pity on his disciple for possessing wild ambitions, but horrendous luck.

A month later, the Divine Talisman of Great Creation shone brilliantly. The light blurred the glyphs on there such that it seemed like a blue sun, illuminating his entire sea of qi.

Li Qingshan smiled in satisfaction, but just this was still not enough. However, he had already scattered his seeds in the ground, so he only needed to wait for it to bloom and fruit. He still had around three months, so it should be enough.

Li Qingshan stood before the bustling Hawkwolf Guard and raised his head to look at the vice commander's room below the hawk. He smiled resplendently. "Qiongzhi, I'm here!"

He actually felt slightly excited. This was after all the first time he had gone on a date in the eighteen years after reincarnating. Xiao An had returned to Anāsravā? island with the painting of corpses, giving him plenty of time.

On the Lake of Dragons and Snakes rippling with blue waves, it was a bright and beautiful spring day. Li Qingshan laid back under a cabin leisurely with a beauty beside him. Her eyes were filled with tenderness, and her valiant demeanour was replaced with gentleness too. Her smooth, rosy lips seemed tender and almost juicy. They opened and closed a few times, letting out a gentle and melodious voice.

"If Gu Yanying and I were in danger at the same time, who would you save first?"

Chapter 342 - Date

Li Qingshan suddenly sat up and shook his head, as if he had yet to wake up from his dream from earlier. He found her question to be startlingly familiar.

"Don't play dumb! Tell me!" Han Qiongzhi's face was red as she pinched Li Qingshan's cheek with a fuming expression.

This question, compared to the original version, was obviously much easier to answer. Li Qingshan said, "I'd obviously save you. If there's danger that even she can't resolve, what am I supposed to be able to do?"

Originally, he thought his quip would displease Han Qiongzhi, but he never thought she would smile and say, "That's more like it."

Her slender finger stroked past his cheek, leading to a gentle itch. The small boat rocked gently, producing ripples that radiated away from them. The warm spring breeze filled the sail. Her sweet smile deeply infected him too. He felt fortunate that he could be here.

Under his smiling gaze, she suddenly felt this was rather improper of her. After all, this was the first time they had gone on a date together, yet she just found all of this so familiar, having been anticipating this for the longest time.

She had a fiery character. If she were uninterested, she could even ignore a handsome man like Hua Chengzan. However, if she were interested, then her feelings would erupt like a volcano and she would be completely hopeless, unable to remain particularly reserved. However, she still managed to melt away the firmness of Li Qingshan's heart.

"If it's just you, then you won't even be able to get close to her even in your next ten lives, so don't have those wild thoughts like little Hua!" Han Qiongzhi pinched her nose. She could look down on Qiu Haitang's irresistible charm, but even she felt rather powerless before Gu Yanying.

Not only was Gu Yanying the main commander of the entire Hawkwolf Guard of the Ruyi commandery, but she was also something akin to an idol. It was not just Hua Chengzan. There were countless people who were enchanted by her. Even the Marquis of Ruyi was no different, let alone others.

Li Qingshan smiled confidently. "Hah, just you wait. I'll marry her too and turn the two of you into sisters."

"Don't you even think about it! Who agreed to marry you anyway?!" Han Qiongzhi said in irritation. Her gentle touch immediately turned into a firm pinch.

Li Qingshan said, "You'd best hurry up then. If you're a little slow, you'll have to be the younger sister."

Han Qiongzhi leaned on him heavily and grabbed him by the collar. The small boat rocked as a result. They were outside the Formation of Dragons and Snakes, on the Lake of Dragons and Snakes that seemed to stretch on endlessly. There were within a large patch of yellow reeds, which was sheltered and serene.

A clear and melodious voice alarmed a few water birds.

"Li Qingshan, let me tell you! You'll have to listen to me in the future!"

"Why must I?" Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow. Surely there was no such thing where men had to cede to women in this world! Though, from this perspective, there sure were a few rising and falling peaks. He wondered what they felt like.

"Because I'm your senior sister and your senior!" Noticing Li Qingshan's gaze, Han Qiongzhi's face reddened slightly, but she held her chest high proudly.

"Then I need to work hard and get promoted soon so that I can try out the position of commander." Li Qingshan conveniently placed his hand around her waist. Her thin, spring dress wrapped around her tightly, smooth to the touch.

Han Qiongzhi trembled slightly, but she let his hand remain there. She moved off him and threatened viciously, "From today onwards, I am the only person you're allowed to touch. If you cheat on me, I'll-I'll..."

"What'll you do?"

“I’ll cut it off.” Even Han Qiongzhi struggled to hold back her laughter.

“Sigh, but it’s still brand-new! Surely you have to use it first!” Li Qingshan’s hand conveniently slid down to her bottom.

Han Qiongzhi leapt up. She became bright red at first before suddenly laughing aloud. She rubbed Li Qingshan’s head and said, “So you’re still a... How pitiful. If you behave well, I’ll show you pity and let you try the taste of a woman.” She recovered her usual boldness. As she looked at Li Qingshan, she seemed to be looking at something that was hers, completely content with him.

Sometimes, she would suddenly remember that he was actually a few years younger than her. Of course, a difference of a few years was not the end of the world to cultivators who lived for centuries. However, she would often forget about this, as the feeling he gave off had always been mature and composed, so she felt like she was the younger one instead.

Li Qingshan rolled his eyes. “Then I’ll have to trouble the experienced big sister Han in guiding me.”

“What’re you saying? I’m obviously a...” Han Qiongzhi said furiously.

“A what?” Li Qingshan snickered.

Only then did Han Qiongzhi realise he was teasing her. She prodded his forehead firmly. “You’ll know in the future!”

Li Qingshan studied her up and down. His gaze seemed to have penetrated her clothes already, taking in all of her delicate, perfectly proportioned body and imagining matters of the future.

Han Qiongzhi readjusted her posture slightly unnaturally. If other men ever stared at her like this, she would roar at them, “I’ll dig out your eyes if you keep looking!” Many of the times, she was not saying this just for show. Neither the school of the Military or the school of Legalism taught their disciples to be soft-hearted.

Li Qingshan suddenly shook his head. He opened the cabin and made his way out from under it. He looked at the endless reeds and said, “I want many wives and consorts. I want all the beauties of the world to be my wives and consorts. How can I just stop here?”

“Why don’t you keep going?” Han Qiongzhi lunged over and wrapped her arm around his neck firmly.

However, it would be difficult for her to cause Li Qingshan any discomfort with her physical strength. Instead, she seemed like she was hanging off him, with her chest pressing firmly against his back. It was quite the sensation for Li Qingshan, who only smiled. “I’m just talking from the bottom of my heart.”

“You just love bullying me because I like you. You’re only spending time with me because you want to take advantage of me!” Han Qiongzhi suddenly released him and backed away to one side.

Li Qingshan turned around, but what he saw was that her eye rims had already reddened as she glared at him. It was true. Whenever he saw how brusque and simple-minded she was, he could not help but bully her. He went up and wrapped his arms around her waist, saying gently, “Qiongzhi.”

“What?” She spoke viciously, but her heart softened.

“Nothing. I just find you even more adorable than before.”

“Do you really think you can- you can...” Han Qiongzhi’s face was flushed, but her complaints had already vanished into thin air.

“Just you is enough.” This truly came from the bottom of Li Qingshan’s heart. Although he always said he wanted all the beauties in the world, she had already taken up all his attention whenever he spent time beside her. Yes, she possessed the charm.

And, a person’s time and energy would be limited at the end of the day. He had to spend time with Xiao An, he had to cultivate, and he had to learn alchemy too. Even if he could obtain everything, he would not have the time to enjoy them all! Was he supposed to waste away all of his time in the arms of women? There were still a lot of things he wanted to do!

Even Han Qiongzhi’s gaze became lost. She was filled with utter joy. So this was what reciprocation between two lovers felt. Just a single word from the significant other was enough to elate them.

She had once looked down on these feelings of love and attachment, but she deeply understood their wonders now. She raised her head. “That’s what you’re promising!”

“That’s what I’m promising. It’s quite late now. I need to go learn alchemy, and you still need to return to the school of Legalism to handle official business!” Li Qingshan let go of her waist at the cost of tremendous willpower and took a step back, separating from her warm, enchanting body.

“Are you going to go find Ru Xin?” Han Qiongzhi could not help but wonder whether Ru Xin and he got along like how they were just then. Combined with her reluctance to part with him, a strange feeling filled her heart.

“Yeah. I’m going to go learn alchemy. Trusting your man is a woman’s duty!” Li Qingshan caressed her hair. Although he was tempted to spend an entire day here with her, it would probably only worsen Han Anjun’s impression of him. Since he wanted to be with her, he had to consider what his future father-in-law thought about him.

Han Qiongzhi heard his explanation and felt warm and at peace inside. She bit her lip and agreed with his saying about men and women through silence. She had never been a fussy woman. This had just been her first encounter with love, so she had lost her usual composure.

“Alright, you should go back then. I’ll come find you on Cloudwisp island at night.”

“A lone man and woman spending the night together doesn’t sound like a particularly good idea!” Li Qingshan knew that the culture of this world was still quite conservative. If they were both from ordinary backgrounds, then no one could say anything if they decided between themselves to get married. However, Han Qiongzhi was the young lady of an aristocratic clan after all. Although she was quite casual most of the time, she still cared about her reputation at the end of the day.

“What’s so wrong about that? It’s decided then.” As Han Qiongzhi said that, she made her way over to the nose of the boat and took off ahead of Li Qingshan.

The small boat rocked for quite a while longer. Only then did Li Qingshan think it through. She was probably afraid he would spend a night alone with Ru Xin instead! It was quite rare of her to think of a

tactic like this. Sure enough, those dramas about power struggles within the imperial harem were not for show. If he really did end up with multiple wives and consorts, it would probably drive him crazy.

What was this tactic supposed to be? Sating the tiger with your own body? Li Qingshan could not help but look forward to it. He stowed the exquisite boat into his hundred treasures pouch and leapt off as well.

On Benevolence island in Ru Xin's alchemy room, a huge pill cauldron stood in the centre. It stood on three legs, surrounded by a design of cranes with unfurled wings. It was called the Three Cranes cauldron. It was completely snowy-white, standing elegantly and delicately, just like her.

Ru Xin sat before the cauldron in white clothes. Her hair levitated in the air; the few strands of hair that drooped down were simple and elegant, contrasting against the pill cauldron.

As soon as she saw Li Qingshan, she let out her usual, warm smile. "Your face is glowing, and your time for marriage is approaching. Qingshan, are you expecting?"

Li Qingshan sat down on the cushion beside her and said sternly, "Oh right. Ru Xin, from today onwards, don't tease me anymore. It's impossible for anything to happen between us. You'd better just stick to teaching me alchemy!"

She tried playing cute and let out a slight grumble, but it sounded like a cat's meow. She turned her head away and glanced at Li Qingshan. Just her soft glance was enough to drive men crazy. She was basically purposely destroying the usual, elegant image she had cultivated, but she still gave off a different form of attractiveness.

"Quit it!" Li Qingshan rolled his eyes. He had gotten to know her from the time they spent together. This woman basically had no limits with how far she could go with her jokes, but he could not help but admit she was extremely enchanting.

Ru Xin frowned sadly. "My darling Li, you really would forget about the old when you have someone new." She shivered. "Urgh, that's sickening. I feel like I'm the one who's suffering here. Alright, the joke ends here. Today, I'll go through the gentle and fierce flames for alchemy."

The effects of spiritual herbs, the manipulation of the pill cauldron, and the control over time were all explained through her crimson lips, allowing Li Qingshan to learn exactly how much detail alchemy involved. If he were off by just a short moment, the effects of the pills would be worlds apart.

There were plenty of snide comments and remarks during the process. The greatest benefit of learning from her was that it would never be boring.

However, they never made anymore bodily contact, and it was not because Li Qingshan had reformed himself and decided to be a good, faithful man.

Instead, it was Ru Xin who smiled. "If you lay another finger on me, I'll tell first young miss Han."

"How did you know it was her?" Li Qingshan was taken aback.

"Apart from her, who else would take a fancy to a man like you? You're not graceful, charming, or honest. You're only slightly stronger when it comes to fighting, which is barely a virtue."

Li Qingshan raised his index finger and waggled it around gently. "Ru Xin, oh Ru Xin. That's what you call sour grapes. That's no good."

"Huh?"

"And, fighting is where the souls of men lie. Aren't you captivated too when you watch me fight?"

"Huh?"

"There's no need to say anything more. I understand. Sorry, but I can't reciprocate your feelings. Maybe in another lif-"

Ru Xin interrupted him with a roar, "Acting all sentimental! You'd better stop where you should!"

Li Qingshan laughed aloud. Ru Xin was all stern in the beginning before beginning to laugh as well. Perhaps she did have other men who she could talk and joke around with, but he was the only one who treated her so nonchalantly without any ulterior motives. Just like the joke earlier, she could only say something like that to him. Intentionally or otherwise, was she trying to probe him out too?

The conclusion she reached was that he truly was stubborn. Once he had decided on something, he would do everything he could to achieve it. On the contrary, once he deemed something to be off-limits, he would cut himself off from it without the slightest hesitation. He was truly a person who could pick things up or drop them at a whim. When a man like that fell in love, his feelings would blaze like fire, but when he grew cold, he would be quite terrifying. This was his charm!

"You really are very special."

"Huh?"

"Let's refine pills, refine pills!"

Around dusk, Li Qingshan sensed something and pushed open the door to the alchemy room. He saw Han Qiongzhi pacing around on the shore nearby. "Qiongzhi, what brought you here?"

"Nothing. I've just come to see you," Han Qiongzhi said in a hurry, but she became rather helpless before Li Qingshan's smile that seemed to see through her.

Ru Xin walked out and smiled. "We'll stop here for today!" She did not act up anymore, which brought Li Qingshan a breath of relief.

They returned to Cloudwisp island together and discovered that many places had been cleared out, with various crops planted in their place.

Liu Chuanfeng rushed out from inside. "Qingshan, how are you?" He had heard that Li Qingshan would be returning, so he purposefully waited here. However, he leapt in fright the moment he saw Han Qiongzhi. "H- Han Qiongzhi!"

Li Qingshan asked, "What's wrong?"

As it turned out, Liu Chuanfeng had not just been looked down on by men for writing smut in the past. As a woman, Han Qiongzhi's impression of the matter was self-explanatory. She had once cursed him

publicly in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, and ever since then, Liu Chuanfeng would avoid her whenever he saw her. But now, it was unavoidable.

“School leader Liu, long time no see.” Han Qiongzhi bowed casually. She still had to show some respect for Li Qingshan’s sake.

“Yeah, yeah!” Liu Chuanfeng studied them up and down before quickly pulling Li Qingshan to one side. “The two of you?” He clenched his fists and wiggled his thumbs, hinting at their relationship.

Li Qingshan nodded. “Yep!”

Liu Chuanfeng patted Li Qingshan’s shoulder in great admiration. Originally, he had thought it was all a rumor, but he never expected it to be true. Whether it was her appearance, figure, cultivation, or background, she was perfect, but her personality was a little too over-the-top. Whenever she lost her temper, she would always act fearlessly and recklessly. It was not something regular people could put up with.

There had been quite a few people who had once thought it would not be an issue as long as they could establish ties with the Han family, but they all ended up suffering disastrous defeat, humiliating themselves. There had even been rumors on the streets that she preferred women (actually, they came from Liu Chuanfeng after he had been cursed in public). Never did he think she would actually fall in love with Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan asked, “What brought you back here?”

Liu Chuanfeng said, “I’m worried for you. In another two or three months, you’ll have to fight Chu Danqing. To think you’re still in the mood to go out and complete missions. How’s your collection of power of belief going?”

“It’s going alright.” Li Qingshan glanced at the Divine Talisman of Great Creation again. In just a single day, it had grown by almost ten percent.

This was the benefit of divine talismans. He could sit at home, doing nothing, and it would still grow constantly. This was the effects of exponential growth, allowing it to grow by compounding upon itself. The seeds he had planted had already begun to sprout.

Of course, there was definitely a limit to this growth. It was restricted to the region of the Clear River prefecture, but the benefits would linger for a very long time. At the very least, they would not be going anywhere within the next century.

“Are you absolutely confident you’ll win?”

“I can’t say that I’m absolutely confident, but I never fight a battle unprepared.”

“I don’t have to worry if that’s how you’re putting it. We can’t let other people take Cloudwisp island. Oh right, did you tell that agriculture disciple Li Long to use our land?”

Li Qingshan replied, “Yeah I did. It’s fine, right? Don’t worry, you have a share in this too!”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. If you can win your battle, it’s fine even if you cut down all the bamboo on the island!” Liu Chuanfeng had considered this idea in the past too, but back then, just who wanted to have anything

to do with the school of Novels? There had been a few agriculture disciples who were interested too, but when they returned, earth elder Huang replied to their request indifferently, "You'd better tend to your own plot of land properly first!"

Ever since then, no more agriculture disciples were bold enough to mention this. Only a new disciple like Li Long would be unaware of this incident. Perhaps it was because of the reformed reputation of the school of Novels, or perhaps Li Long's hard work had earned earth elder Huang's recognition, so the elder deemed him to have already tended to his plot of land properly. Regardless, he did not encounter any obstructions at all. He asked for help from a few seniors and juniors he was familiar with, and they began planting very soon.

"Is there anything else?" Li Qingshan asked impatiently. Just what was a lovers' world supposed to be when there was an obscene, middle-aged man in the mix?

Liu Chuanfeng glanced at Han Qiongzhi again and muttered, "You got a woman, so you've forgotten about your master now."

After Liu Chuanfeng left, Han Qiongzhi asked, "You haven't copied him, right?"

Li Qingshan asked, "Copied what?"

"I heard he uses his power of belief to conjure women from his novels before going at it with them. What a deviant," Han Qiongzhi said in disgust.

"Of course not. The level of my Divine Talisman of Great Creation is far too low. The characters I conjure aren't realistic. There's nothing interesting about something like that either. I'll think about it after I reach Foundation Establishment," Li Qingshan said in contemplation, leading to a displeased gaze from Han Qiongzhi. He smiled. "I'm kidding, I'm kidding!"

Though, if they really were like real people, wouldn't that mean he could make many of his wild wishes from his past life come true? It would be a portable harem. A temptation like that really would be difficult to resist. Surely that was not betrayal, right? Men would always have some little secrets of their own!

Han Qiongzhi said, "I'm not joking with you. If I find out you have, I'll cut..."

"Stop!" Li Qingshan glanced at the depths of the bamboo forest. "What're you standing there for? Why don't you come over?"

Only now did Han Qiongzhi discover that Xiao An was standing silently in the forest nearby. Under the moonlight, she seemed perfect, but her expressionless face seemed slightly terrifying.

Xiao An walked over and asked curiously, "Cut what?"

Li Qingshan said, "Cut watermelon."

Han Qiongzhi knew that this child was extremely important to Li Qingshan, and her talent and strength was not something she could ignore. She greeted her as amicably as she could.

Xiao An glanced at Li Qingshan. Under his suggestion, she called her big sister Han.

Their world of two became a world of three. Li Qingshan was not really affected by this. Out of the two of them, one was family, while the other would become his family. There was nothing wrong with having them familiarise with each other.

Han Qiongzhi, however, felt very uncomfortable. This child was just too strange. She had tried to get close to her, but the child's gaze towards her remained cold, like a delicate doll. Only when she spoke to Li Qingshan did she suddenly seem to spring alive with a hint of liveliness. She found it strange that Li Qingshan did not find this weird at all.

As the sky gradually darkened, all Han Qiongzhi could do was bid farewell. She did not find tonight to be as great as she had imagined it to be in the afternoon.

Passing over the small, serene path through the bamboo forest, Li Qingshan accompanied her to the shore. He said, "Xiao An just isn't particularly friendly with people she's unfamiliar with. Please forgive her."

Han Qiongzhi said in dejection, "I don't care about what she thinks, but I just feel like I'm the outsider when you're with her." Every time they exchanged glances, it seemed to be hiding a message that was indecipherable to outsiders, as if they could read each other's minds.

Li Qingshan smiled. "It's not like we were like that from the first time we met. We went through many, many things together." He embraced her gently, patting her back as if he was trying to comfort her. "We'll start right now. In the future, we'll be like that too."

Han Qiongzhi agreed to that. She smiled. "It's good that she's here. You can't just take advantage of me so easily anymore."

"How can you call that taking advantage of when it's with my own woman?" Just like what Ru Xin thought, he was indeed stubborn from a certain perspective. If he wanted to give up on them, he would let them go willingly, but if he wanted to possess them, he would grasp them firmly in his hand.

Han Qiongzhi could sense his resolve from his words, and her heart eased up as a result. She bit her lip and placed her hands on her chest. "I will do my best."

With her hands behind her back, she walked backwards. Stepping onto the surface of the lake, she produced a series of ripples under her feet. She said gently, "I'll see you tomorrow." She turned around gracefully and walked off into the distance. Her steps were as spry as a child's.

As he watched her travel away, Li Qingshan said quietly, "I will do the same." He truly wished there would be a day when he could tell her all his secrets.

Returning to the bamboo building, Li Qingshan said, "What do you think of her?"

Xiao An said, "She's worth two hundred people."

Li Qingshan smacked her head and joked in a furious manner, "Is doubling the number supposed to be a sign of respect? It's too late if you want to regret it now."

Xiao An rubbed her head and pouted. "I regret nothing!" How could that woman keep up with his steps and accompany him to beyond the Nine Heavens?

.....

Spring rain fell endlessly. Within the Main Martial Arts stadium of the school of the Military.

Having been invited over once again, Li Qingshan said to the military disciples who stood in formation nearby, "This time, there's no chance for you to win."

Han Qiongzhi stood out behind him as she cheered him on. She waved her fist. "Qingshan, beat them up!"

The military disciples were absolutely devastated by this. They felt like their most important position had already collapsed before the battle had even begun. As the school with the strictest supervision, such that they did not even permit their disciples to leave the island without good reason, the school of Military never had any female cultivators who were bored enough to come and watch the military disciples abuse themselves.

Only Han Qiongzhi would visit here frequently, appreciating their hard work and being able to get along with them. She was the standard dream lover to the military disciples.

Now, their dream had shattered, and their love rival was standing right before them. With a furious roar, they poured their strength together in unison.

Chapter 343 - Alchemy Success

"Fall into formation!" With an explosive bellow, a huge snake raised its head within the military formation. Compared to last time, it was even more consolidated. Clearly, their past few months of effort had not gone to waste.

Li Qingshan bent over slightly, like a huge bow being slowly drawn. The invisible bowstring was drawn to the limit, and at the same time, a wave formed below his feet.

Thrum! It was like the sound of a bow's release.

Li Qingshan vanished from his location. He turned into a black shadow and passed through the densely-packed rain droplets, carving out a temporary gap. He arrived almost a hundred meters in the air before slowing down.

However, he immediately took a step backwards, stepping through the illusionary wave. With a bang, it turned into a gust of wind that blew away the rain, pulling him even higher up. As if there was an invisible flight of stairs below his feet, he quickly turned into a black speck in the grey sky.

What was he trying to do? The military disciples all thought of the same question, Is he running away?

No, they immediately dismissed this thought. Li Qingshan was wretched, but he was not a coward!

After calming down from their joy from their last victory last time, no one needed any explanation to understand that it should have been impossible for them to win. They developed even more respect towards Li Qingshan. This guy was truly a courageous one, an opponent worthy of respect. It was not a coincidence that he had managed to steal senior sister Han's heart.

However, exactly because of this, they needed to defeat him fair and square. They could not embarrass the school of the Military. They could not embarrass the Han family. The huge snake raised its head and flicked its tongue.

Behind the formation, Han Tieyi stood with his hands behind his back, gazing at Han Qiongzhi from afar. He could see her clenching her fists and gazing at the sky, her face rosy and beaming. She seemed like a completely different person. She had gained a hint of feminine beauty.

He subsequently looked at the sky too and said quietly, "Well done."

Ru Xin shielded her eyes and gazed into the distance. What a stupid idea!

The wind whistled fiercely. Li Qingshan had already arrived at an extremely high altitude, so high that he could even see all the islands of the academy below. The scattered islands were like huge vessels that floated on the deep blue lake.

Suddenly, he pivoted his body and up and down reversed instantly. The grey clouds became the vast ground below his feet, while above him, the green clouds drifted through the deep, blue sky. He began to climb once again.

"He's coming!" someone called out. Everyone raised their heads, and all they saw was the tiny, black speck among the grey clouds rapidly growing larger and clearer. It was a blue ball of light.

A ball of water spinning rapidly wrapped around Li Qingshan firmly. Its surface was turbulent, forming a suction force. It drew in all the drizzle in the air, allowing it to rapidly expand.

Ocean Wielding—The Vortex Form.

This was the only move capable of defence within Ocean Wielding. The method of defence differed drastically from the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell. It did not create an indestructible structure. Instead, it could deflect and nullify the attacks of enemies like a vortex.

Water had to move, whether it was for attacking or defending, and the faster, the better. This move was similar to the Wave Treading Form. It required an extremely high control over true qi, but it did not place a particularly great focus on true qi quantity, which was why Li Qingshan could use it.

With the Wave Treading Form, he accelerated again and again, like a blue comet falling towards the sky. Without skewing away at all, it fell towards the snake head.

Whistling and roars filled his ears. The ball of water had become extremely large now. As it fell from the sky, it was an utterly shocking sight.

All the military disciples were fearless. They circulated their true qi as hard as they could and produced a combined roar.

The snake head and the water ball collided instantly. The water ball collapsed and revealed Li Qingshan in the very centre, who was surrounded by blue eddies of true qi. The snake head was unscathed, only dimming slightly. The collision had missed by a millimeter.

The actual collision happened in the next moment. Like a drill, Li Qingshan bore deeply into the snake's head, spinning and drilling down.

Boom!

The ground shook and shockwaves sent soil sweeping out in all directions. The huge snake that had been pierced slowly dispersed.

Li Qingshan had finally struck the ground as he had wished. However, he only felt like he had touched the greyish-yellow sky and that he was light-headed. If it were not for the protection of the true qi vortex, if it were not for reaching the third layer of the ox demon, which pushed the toughness of his body to a whole new level, he definitely would have ended up heavily injured from this.

Li Qingshan stood up as he tried to regain his footing. He discovered that he was standing in a huge pit, and his true qi had been depleted without a drop left once again. He would be forced to receive the enemy with his body alone again. He emerged from the pit.

He discovered the military disciples were all unconscious on the ground. None of them were still standing. As it turned out, the huge snake conjured by the military formation was an aggregation of their true qi and wills. Forceful dispersion would lead to a backlash. As the ground shook and the wave of earth rose, they had all fainted.

Ru Xin clapped her hands gently. Here comes business! Whether it was the backlash of true qi or the mental backlash, all of it could be easily treated with her school of Medicine around.

Li Qingshan stood beside the pit and laughed aloud. Now this is the satisfying way to defeat you all!

Han Qiongzhi flew over from the platform and directly hugged Li Qingshan. After over a month of spending time together, they had already become extremely close to one another. Li Qingshan was like dry timber to Han Qiongzhi's blazing flames. He began raging with her before he knew it.

The nine core disciples who had stood aside under Han Tieyi's orders were all furious. They were tempted to approach him right now and challenge him. However, none of them were confident they could achieve victory. He was just too strong, unreasonably strong. If Li Qingshan had ripped apart the military formation, it would have been easier for them to accept it, but destroying it head on like this was simply beyond imagination. Was he really still a seventh layer Qi Practitioner?

His unbelievably tough body and unbelievably pure true qi had been combined together by the immeasurably ingenious battle skill. Powered by his natural talent for battle, he had managed to achieve something so startling.

Under everyone's gazes, Han Qiongzhi's face still reddened despite how bold of a person she was. She had become utterly enchanted by Li Qingshan earlier. With no other choice, she released Li Qingshan in a hurry, but she never expected Li Qingshan to have wrapped his hand around her waist already, pulling her towards him as she became helpless once again. She wanted to resist, but when she was met with his resplendent smile, her heart melted away. She just let him be.

Li Qingshan looked around. Was he not completing the great oath he had sworn in the past bit by bit?

Han Tieyi said to the core disciples around him, "Next time, prepare for battle!"

Time flew by, and it was already the height of summer.

Li Qingshan sat within an alchemy room. A bronze pill cauldron stood before him, with handles shaped like dragons and tigers. This was the most common Cauldron of Dragons and Tigers among pill cauldrons. It copied the design of the actual Cauldron of Dragons and Tigers, and they were all produced to a certain standard.

This was obviously one of the many items Li Qingshan had collected from underground. It was just a mid grade spiritual artifact, but it had already reached the highest possible level for mid grade artifacts. The most difficult artifacts to forge were alchemy cauldrons, followed by artifact forges.

If he were forging a flying sword, there was room for mistakes for its various properties. However, when it came to alchemy cauldrons, the slightest instability or inaccuracy could destroy a whole batch of pills. When it was severe, there might even be the danger of cauldron explosions. This was a great test of the artifact smith's abilities.

A good cauldron or forge could drastically increase a cultivator's success rate given they were skilled in this aspect in the first place. They were basically like cornucopias, so they held quite the significance. As a result, the price of cauldrons and forges would always be extremely high. The value of a mid grade spiritual artifact cauldron and forge could rival regular supreme grade spiritual artifacts.

Li Qingshan had already been very lucky to be able to find a mid grade spiritual artifact cauldron from over a thousand hundred treasures pouches.

A few days ago when he was about to formally begin refining pills, he saw a high grade spiritual artifact cauldron being sold in the school of Miscellany. It managed to reach a sum of five digits. All he could do was sigh as he looked at it.

That might have been fine in the past, but now, he had exchanged all his spiritual stones for pills already. Even if he exchanged all his merit in the Hawkwolf Guard for spiritual stones, he would be able to reach three digits at most. He would not even come close to four digits.

"Stop letting your mind wander. Focus on the pill cauldron!" Ru Xin barked.

Li Qingshan dismissed his thoughts. He had already refined the cauldron of pills before him for three days and nights now. If everything fell apart at the final moment, all of this would have been a waste.

And, he had collected the spiritual herbs for the pills from the academy. He had to hand in this batch of pills for the mission. If he messed it up, his three digits worth of spiritual stones would probably end up shrinking to two digits. If it were not for an alchemy expert like Ru Xin agreeing to watch over him, he would have never been bold enough to accept such a difficult alchemy mission.

Li Qingshan raised his head in some confusion. "Didn't you say I'm basically all done now that I've reached this step, and all I have to do is wait to open the cauldron?"

Ru Xin smiled. "Yep. I just wanted to scold you a little."

Li Qingshan was tempted to choke her again. He had always been a man who did what he wanted, so he spread his fingers and reached out viciously—towards her ankle. He couldn't help it. He was sitting, while she was standing, and he had to watch over the cauldron too. There was no way he could go higher.

Ru Xin said, "How dare you!"

Li Qingshan reconsidered and pulled his hand back. If he really did grab her, this woman probably possessed the nerve to rat him out to Han Qiongzi. She was a fantastic girlfriend, but once she became caught up in jealousy, she would be beyond reason.

A while back, they had visited the school of Miscellany, and there were female cultivators who received them warmly. He joked with them a little—okay fine, perhaps he had gone a little too far—and she almost blew it in the end. When they went back, it took him quite the effort to calm her down. If Ru Xin ratted him out now, the volcano would actually end up erupting.

"Actually, even if you do grab me, I won't tell her anything. I'm not that evil. Come, you want to give it a try?" Ru Xin purposefully lifted her dress and exposed her slender ankle, taking a step towards Li Qingshan.

"I don't want to." Li Qingshan glanced at it, completely unfazed.

Ru Xin patted Li Qingshan's head gently. "What a good boy!"

Li Qingshan curled his lip and just let the matter slide. They had already become very good friends, or why else would she watch him refine pills for three whole days?

Although she had struck him with an exorbitant price, demanding a thousand spiritual stones right off the bat, it ended up being a free service after joking around a little. If it were not for her timely warnings, he would have almost destroyed the batch many times.

They waited for another fifteen minutes. The pill cauldron flashed, and the lid slowly opened. White steam hissed out, enveloping the two of them and filling the entire room. It was filled with an intoxicating herbal fragrance.

Before the steam had even dispersed, Li Qingshan made his way over to the pill cauldron eagerly. He saw that all the herbs had merged to form a white paste, laying at the bottom of the cauldron. There was not the slightest impurity at all; it was as pure as the thick steam.

Success!

Chapter 344 - Deep Feelings

Li Qingshan brought his hand over the mixture. It shone with blue light, and the white paste began to twist and surge. In the end, they became round pills that followed the standard.

He did not know how to forge artifacts, but moulding the shape of objects was nothing difficult.

Ru Xin personally split the newly-refined pills into two portions, amounting to sixty in total. She smiled. "This is for the mission. Extend your hand." Afterwards, she picked up a single Qi Condensing pill and placed it into Li Qingshan's hand. "This is yours!"

Li Qingshan stared at the fruits of his labour from going three days and nights without a wink of sleep before raising his head and looking at the smiling Ru Xin. He felt deep spite. She just loved to see him in a bad mood.

There were no additional rewards to the alchemy mission. It purely depended on the person's mastery over alchemy. As a new alchemist, the only reason he had managed to finish this without costing himself was all thanks to the mid grade spiritual artifact cauldron and Ru Xin.

Ru Xin appreciated Li Qingshan's expression in satisfaction. She felt like her three days of labour had finally bore fruit.

Only afterwards did she say, "Your ability for splitting pills is absolutely horrid." She brought her hand over the sixty Qi Condensing pills. White light surged out, and some of the white paste was pulled away, forming another three Qi Condensing pills, while the remaining pills were completely the same size, reaching the standard of the mission perfectly, no more, no less.

Li Qingshan casually thanked her before lowering his head and stowing the sixty Qi Condensing pills into an embroidered box. As for the four remaining Qi Condensing pills, he directly tossed them into his mouth.

Ru Xin had already grown accustomed to this. "Your battle with the school of Painting is coming up in a few days. The school of Miscellany has already begun taking bets. Tell me some of that insider information. Do you think I should bet on your defeat or your victory?"

Li Qingshan rolled his eyes at her. "Whatever you want."

"Alright then. I'll bet on your victory. Though, if I end up losing, you'll have to compensate me for my losses!"

"Keep dreaming." Li Qingshan left through the door. He saw the blazing clouds in the west that had been dyed red by the setting sun reflected in the lake. It was absolutely beautiful. Sure enough, Han Qiongzhi was standing right in front of the background of the setting sun. Looking over, she seemed like a beautiful silhouette. Seeing Li Qingshan, she smiled resplendently and rushed over.

Before Li Qingshan could even speak, Ru Xin smiled. "Junior sister Han, your man tried to touch my foot earlier. You'd better keep an eye on him."

Han Qiongzhi stopped and glared at Li Qingshan. She said in exasperation, "Understood!"

Li Qingshan's gaze landed on Ru Xin's white, slender neck. He became very serious.

Ru Xin raised her hand to shield her neck, as if she was afraid, but she continued to smile.

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A small boat floated across the lake freely. The water and sky merged as one as both waterfowl and the glow of the setting sun filled the air.

Han Qiongzhi sat diagonally to the nose of the boat, looking over quietly. The breeze of a midsummer's night ruffled her clothes.

Li Qingshan broke the silence. "Don't listen to her. You know that she loves spinning lies the most."

Han Qiongzhi looked over. "How dare you say you haven't?"

"I absolutely haven't!" Li Qingshan said seriously.

Han Qiongzhi smiled. "It's not like I'm angry. What're you so nervous for?"

Li Qingshan frowned. "Who are you? What did you do to Qiongzhi?"

Han Qiongzhi was taken aback. She grabbed him by the ear and said in irritation, "Am I really that mean?"

Li Qingshan smiled. He conveniently pulled her into his arms. "Yep, our Qiongzhi is very forgiving." His other hand had already landed on her proud chest. Through the thin summer dress, it seemed to tremble in his hand.

"Don't move about!" Han Qiongzhi grabbed his hand, but she allowed it to remain there.

After a few months together, this level of closeness had already become normalised. As she would describe it, I'll let you take some advantage of me seeing how pitiful you are.

"I'm just curious." Li Qingshan was bewildered. Ru Xin was definitely much more charming than that female cultivator of the school of Miscellany from the other day!

Han Qiongzhi said, "Senior sister Ru Xin is a very proud person." The female disciples of the school of Miscellany all possessed mediocre talent. Their heads were filled with material gain. All they wanted to find was a strong male to depend on. They were not worthy of being called cultivators. Ru Xin, however, was different. She was a true cultivator.

Li Qingshan said, "Proud? How come that's not what I feel?"

"Because you're even prouder!" Han Qiongzhi propped herself up. She wrapped her arms around his neck and gazed deeply at this man she loved. The closer she was to him, the more she was drawn to him by his charm, and she began to wonder why she had actually failed to notice this the first time she had seen him. And, the aspect of him that enchanted her the most was the deep sense of pride hidden within his heart.

It was as if he possessed the determination to climb and traverse mountains no matter how precipitous they were, the courage to challenge enemies no matter how strong they were.

"I have even less of an impression of that!" Li Qingshan placed his hands on her waist. The curve of her body would suddenly pull in there, forming a thin, straight waist. He could not help but become glued to her plump, red lips. Even the pale gully that sometimes peeked out from her clothes were unable to make him shift his attention. He could not help but move his head towards them.

Han Qiongzhi tilted her head and avoided him. She hugged him firmly, kissing his ear firmly and apologising, "Not yet." Although they had already grown so close that many places were no longer forbidden, she still refused to accept a relatively normal kiss like that.

The woman in Li Qingshan's arms right now had already become his beloved, so he obviously had to respect and protect this peculiar tendency of hers.

"I want to wait- wait until we're married. If I let you kiss me right now, I'm afraid that I won't be able to hold back and end up giving you e- everything!" Han Qiongzhi stuttered shyly. Originally, she had never taken the business between man and woman so seriously. Wasn't it just stripping themselves naked, embracing each other, and going at it?

When she carried out missions alone in the past, she had even secretly broken into houses and peeped on people out of curiosity. Apart from being slightly embarrassed in the beginning, she grew bored of it very quickly. What were those groans and moans all supposed to mean? As cultivators, it was impossible for them to be engrossed by carnal pleasures. It was impossible for their immovable wills to waver over something like this. Otherwise, she would have never been able to put up with the pain of being slowly torn apart in Altar Lord Black Lotus' formation back then.

Only when it was actually time for her to go through with all of this did she realise it was not so simple. Every instance of contact was imbued with another meaning, enough to bring her joy or make her tremble, as her heart would be affected too.

What else could Li Qingshan say? He held her enchanting figure firmly. "I might as well just propose the marriage tomorrow. Your father has quite a good impression of me."

It was not like this was some sh*tty story where a poor scholar was abducting a wealthy young miss. There obviously would not be too many obstacles. With the talent, strength, and desire to advance he had displayed, he believed no one could find any issues with him. This had always been his reason for maintaining a high profile. If he constantly tried acting modest and discreet, let alone any disapproval from father-in-law Han, even the entire academy would object. But right now, was there still anyone who could say that he was not worthy of her?

"Don't be so hasty. Wait a little longer." Han Qiongzhi suddenly changed the topic. "Little Hua hasn't emerged yet, has he?"

Li Qingshan said, "He hasn't. Why did you mention him all of a sudden?"

Han Qiongzhi smiled. "I just thought of something."

Li Qingshan said, "Let me hear about it." Han Qiongzhi originally refused to tell him, but under Li Qingshan's "interrogation", she gave in.

As it turned out, when Hua Chengzan was infatuated with Gu Yanying in the past, Han Qiongzhi was the one who found it most deplorable as a good friend of his. She scolded him fiercely, "She's just a woman. Do you have to be like this?" Back then, she did not treat herself as a woman.

However, he said, "You just haven't met someone who can steal your heart. Otherwise, you'd definitely marry yourself off eagerly."

Li Qingshan held her chin. "Then are you eager right now?"

Han Qiongzhi said stubbornly, "Not at all. Though, I can understand him a little now." Although they had still been very unfamiliar with one another a few months ago, she could no longer imagine how she would be without him.

Gazing at her eyes that were deeply in love, Li Qingshan felt like his heart had melted into water. Even Gu Yanying no longer seemed important. That was just half of an obscure dream, yet right now, there was a real lover in his arms.

"You're much luckier than him. You met me early enough."

Han Qiongzhi said, "How come I beg to differ? You should cultivate faster. We'll see after your cultivation surpasses me. I wouldn't want to marry a man who's not even as great as me."

However, the posture they were currently in made that seem utterly unconvincing. Back then, she had just said she would give him the opportunity to pursue her if his cultivation surpassed her, yet right now, she was in his arms. He was taking full advantage of her.

"Well I'm eager." Li Qingshan bent over. He could not kiss her on the lips, but it was fine elsewhere. He kissed her slender neck firmly. The corner of his lips curled into a smile, and he licked her gently.

"Are you a dog?" Han Qiongzhi trembled as she said with gritted teeth. Once her mental defences were gone, her senses for everything were much finer and sharper than regular people.

"How dare you call your man a dog! You need to be punished!" Li Qingshan raised his hands and placed them on her breasts, kneading them.

In the past, she would probably cry out in surprise and stop him from going overboard. But this time, she kept her arms around his neck, without reacting at all.

Li Qingshan was surprised. His smile grew wider, and his hands moved slower. His fingers dug deeply into the two tender breasts, moulding them as he wished. Han Qiongzhi's breathing became slightly ragged. Her eyes were as clear as water as she allowed him to continue.

Li Qingshan searched for two small nodules. He pinched them between his fingers gently and fiddled with them.

Han Qiongzhi suddenly embraced him firmly, and Li Qingshan stopped. He gently kissed her neck, caressing her back. Only a while later did she let go of him, allowing him to continue enjoying the wonders of her body that no one else had ever touched.

Only when Li Qingshan had completely imprinted their exact size in his head did he let go reluctantly.

Before they knew it, the sky had already darkened. Stars stretched across the sky.

Han Qiongzhi grumbled with a flushed face, "Satisfied now?" She already knew he was fixated on this part of her body, so she just gave him what he wanted for once today.

"I'm not." As he said that, Li Qingshan had already extended his hand past her undergarment, making contact with her soft, tender skin.

Han Qiongzhi grabbed his hand in a hurry and prodded his forehead. She scolded, "Be patient." At that moment, she seemed like the older one. Actually, it would not even matter if she gave it to him. Love between a man and woman was ordinary. She did not care about her so-called purity as much as those regular women. She was just afraid that she would give it away too easily, such that he would not treasure it. She had to make sure to keep this measly man around her.

"It'll be mine anyway." Li Qingshan was in no hurry.

"It'll be yours right now, it'll be yours forever."

The next few days passed by in a blur. In the blink of an eye, the battle with Chu Danqing of the school of Painting had arrived.

Chapter 345 - The Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms

In a dim painting studio, a streak of light poured in from the skylight. Dust floated through the air, and one could vaguely make out the floor to be covered in paintings.

The paintings depicted various forms and images of evil spirits and fiends. A single glance at it was enough to overwhelm a person with vileness.

However, none of these images were complete, as if the painter had lost interest in them after painting them half-way.

Chu Danqing lay on the paintings with his limbs spread out. His face was pale, and he seemed to have grown thinner. His eyes were wide open, still stricken with fear.

"Danqing, are you ready?" An old voice rang out. It came from Chu Shidao.

"Yes, master," Chu Danqing said feebly and supported himself back to his feet, arriving before the painting; this was the only clean space of the entire room. All the painting strokes had been washed away, and all the colours were placed neatly.

The water he used to wash the brushes reeked of blood.

A painting was placed in the centre.

Chu Danqing shifted his gaze downwards, doing his best to avoid looking at the painting. He rolled up the mounted painting bit by bit, and only then did he let out a sigh of relief.

He behaved as if this was not a painting he had painted himself, but a vicious beast that could bite.

The door parted and dazzling sunlight poured in.

Chu Danqing used his hand to shield his eyes. He gradually made out a figure and bowed in a hurry. "Master."

Chu Shidao also felt pained as he looked at his disciple's shape. The Jade Blood of Vermillion and Black had granted him unbelievable talent, allowing him to produce works beyond his cultivation level, but it came at an extremely great cost. It truly took painstaking effort, or blood in other words.

"Let's go."

"To where?" Chu Danqing was rather lost. Submerged in the world of painting, he had almost forgotten about the battle.

"Cloudwisp island."

Chu Danqing suddenly jerked to his senses, and he remembered how Li Qingshan had gotten him drunk a few months ago. He could not help but redden slightly.

It was exactly after that day that he began to seclude himself from the world to paint. He had not left this studio for almost six months now.

His horrible behaviour after falling drunk must have been spread through the academy already. They were enemies after all, so this would be unavoidable. He just regretted that he had been too careless. As he gripped the painting firmly, he poured all of his humiliation and pent-up emotions into there. He had to teach Li Qingshan a vicious lesson.

Ah, how embarrassing! I hope everyone has already forgotten about this after so long. Li Qingshan, I'll never spare you!

Uneasy, Chu Danqing followed Chu Shidao to Cloudwisp island. They discovered a large part of the bamboo forest had been cut down, transformed into fields or orchards. A few agriculture disciples were currently tending to them.

"What wasteful misuse." Chu Danqing snorted coldly. The serene, refined environment was originally very suited for painting. Unfortunately, it had fallen into the hands of a vulgar man like Liu Chuanfeng.

Passing through the bamboo forest on the path, they arrived before the bamboo loft. Liu Zhangqing sat on the porch, drinking tea. He raised his cup and nodded with a smile. Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai were currently seated beside him.

However, none of these people managed to capture Chu Danqing's attention, as the wretched Li Qingshan had strode over. A sunny, confident smile was plastered across his face as he greeted them with composure, "Master Chu, fellow Chu, you're finally here."

Chu Shidao nodded. He said to Liu Zhangqing, "Fellow Liu, here isn't a place to battle, so why did you call us here?" This was about to become his school of Painting's island. He did not wish to see it destroyed.

Liu Zhangqing said, "You'll be fighting in the school of the Military's Main Martial Arts stadium. The school of Novels has some objections to this gamble, which is why I've invited you both here to discuss it."

Chu Danqing shot a glance at Li Qingshan. "What, you want to run away now?"

"Of course not." Li Qingshan smiled and glanced back at Liu Chuanfeng. Only after obtaining a nod from this school leader who was technically in charge of the school of Novels did he say, "I just feel that this battle is very unfair!"

Chu Danqing said, "You personally agreed to it back then. What's unfair about it?"

Li Qingshan said fervently, "Cloudwisp island is the foundation of our school of Novels. If we lose, we'll obviously be left with absolutely nothing, and even if we win, we'll just be keeping something that's ours anyway. Master Chu, do you find that fair?"

"We only agreed to this in the first place because we had no other choice. If the school of Painting cannot produce a wager of equivalent value, then please cancel this battle, school leader Liu."

"You can't just cancel it because you want to now. What wager do you want? Mind if you tell me?" Chu Shidao stared at Li Qingshan as his eyes flickered.

It was true. He had never thought about a wager at all. He believed there was no chance for the school of Novels to win. There was absolutely no need for him to wager anything.

Right now, the kid clearly knew he was going to lose, so he put on a bravado to get out of this gamble. If he insisted for this to go forward, Liu Zhangqing obviously would not cancel it for him. However, he was afraid that the kid would refuse to participate and label the school of Painting as ones who were abusing their greater strength.

Since you want a wager, I'll give you a wager. So what?

Li Qingshan said, "I don't know either if there's anything that can rival the value of Cloudwisp island, so why don't you tell me instead, master Chu?"

"I'm just a poor painter. I don't have anything of value, just a few measly paintings. This painting was my final work before retirement. If you think it's appropriate, then I'll wager that. If you don't, then just forfeit!" Chu Danqing casually pulled out a painting as he spoke proudly.

Liu Zhangqing blurted out, "Is it the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms!?"

Throughout Chu Shidao's life, he was best at painting beauties. Not only were the beauties he painted absolutely life-like, but their expressions and emotions were no different from actual people, and they lacked the various flaws of actual people too. The beauty within his paintings had already surpassed the beauties the world could offer.

As a result, the saying of "Even three thousand beautiful women are unable to rival a painting from Shidao" appeared. Across all nine prefectures of the Ruyi commandery, he was renowned.

The Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms was his final work before retirement. It was rumored that before he had painted it, his hair was grizzled, but it all turned grey over a single night after completing it.

When the Marquis of Ruyi saw it, he became utterly attached to it. He was willing to pay a tremendous sum for it, but Chu Shidao said, "This is my disciple's wife. I can't just give it away to someone."

If a bystander had heard that, they would have probably treated it as an excuse, but Chu Shidao had spent his entire life married to a painting. Even Chu Danqing had to call the beauty who emerged from the painting mistress whenever he saw her.

This Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms was a heavenly maiden of fate he had left for Chu Danqing.

When the Marquis of Ruyi heard that, he could only give up on it. He said he had to respect that.

The painting was unfurled, and all the men present became stunned. The painting was rolled up once more.

They could not even recall the face of the heavenly maiden. All they remembered were her drifting clothes, the falling flowers, and their beautiful fragrance. The smell of the flowers still lingered clearly in their nose. The appearance of the heavenly maiden gradually consolidated, but it was the most beautiful appearance in their minds.

Liu Zhangqing's thoughts returned to several decades ago all of a sudden. Back then, he was still studying, and it was the season for falling flowers. A young girl swung around on a swing, letting out laughter no different from silver chimes; she was the youngest daughter of his teacher.

Afterwards, they went their own ways. He had seen plenty of beauties before, even supporting countless beautiful consorts. Her appearance was not even beautiful, but the impression she left could not be replaced by any beauty, not even herself.

Time slipped by before he knew it, and the feeling from back then had already blurred. Now that he saw this painting, it suddenly cleared up once more; it was like it was yesterday, like it was this very moment. A glance back and a smile from her might not have been enough to lead kingdoms or cities to ruin, but it was enough to steal his heart. Even if it came at a price of thousands or tens of thousands of spiritual stones, it would be worth it.

Li Qingshan returned to his senses and checked on Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai. They were no different, thrown back into the past by a single glance of the painting.

Only Chu Danqing stood there in a stupid daze. His master had already said he would save this painting for him as a wife, but to shield him from distractions, he had never seen it in person. He held extremely great hopes for it originally. Now that he saw it, he did not even find it as enchanting as the beauties his master had painted in the past. Yet, everyone who saw the painting would all praise how great it was, which left him in a bewildered daze.

Chu Shidao was secretly complacent. This painting was the amalgamation of all his efforts throughout his life. It had completely defied his original painting style. In the past, he painted expectations. When cultivators offered him spiritual stones, he would paint the most beautiful woman to them.

This painting, however, was memories. It could easily breach the sturdy lines of defence in a cultivator's mind and touch their softest spot, rousing their most beautiful memory. Expectations might have changed with varying identities and statuses, but memories would never fade away. They were like a jar of aged alcohol, growing more delicious the older it was.

What truly touched you would always be yourself.

Only when he noticed his disciple's expression did Chu Shidao realise he had miscalculated.

Eleven years ago, Chu Danqing was just a little beggar. The only thing he thought about was eating steamed buns. Even eating meat seemed too extravagant to him. And right now, although he could understand the concept of love, this just seemed like a piece of blank paper to him. He had no memories whatsoever.

If Chu Shidao devoted the same amount of effort into painting a plate of hot, steaming huge buns instead, he definitely would have been able to rouse him to a point where he drooled.

"Alright, I agree," said Li Qingshan, but he did not do this under the urgings of lust or memories. Instead, the aura the painting gave off had completely exceeded the level of spiritual artifacts, but it was not exactly an arcane artifact either. Perhaps it was not an artifact at all, but a powerful creature sealed within the painting.

If he were supposed to fight the heavenly maiden in the painting, there was no chance for him to win even if he personally got involved and did not rely on his abilities as a novelist. Anyhow, it was definitely something good.

And, all Li Qingshan wanted to do was maximise his benefits. If Chu Shidao really offered nothing at all, he still would not have given up on the battle. He was already satisfied with this result.

Liu Zhangqing said, "Alright, then let's complete the deal. No one is allowed to change their minds anymore!"

The rising and falling platforms around the Main Martial Arts island on Great War island were already jostling with people. When they saw a group arrive, discussions immediately arose.

"Qingshan." Han Qiongzi rushed over to receive him, having waited for quite some time already. She wanted to hug him, but looking around, she bit her lip and was unable to bring herself to do so due to embarrassment.

Li Qingshan's eyes lit up. Today, she was wearing a large, red, imperial dress. The corners of her dress were embroidered with magnificent peonies. If any other woman wore this, they would probably seem a little too gaudy. Only she could pull it off with her confident, loud personality and her enchanting elegance. She seemed like a ball of scorching fire, speechlessly beautiful.

Her elegant, noble demeanour originally hidden beneath her boldness gradually revealed itself. It was absolutely captivating. She seemed to have become better at dressing herself ever since the date. Her shoulder-length hair had already begun to flow down her back before they knew it.

Chapter 346 - Come Out! Magic Brush Ma Liang!

Liu Chuanfeng was taken aback. Is this still Han Qiongzi? How come I don't remember her ever being so beautiful? He became filled with even greater admiration towards Li Qingshan.

Sun Fubai tugged his sleeve, and Liu Chuanfeng returned to his senses, walking away in a hurry.

Chu Danqing glanced at her and was unable to look at her again. With his sharp eyes as a painter, he recognised her with a single glance. She was the woman who had said she would drink with Li Qingshan after he had fallen drunk. Chu Danqing had almost passed her by with his face covered, afraid she would recognise him.

However, there was no one else in Han Qiongzi's eyes right now.

Li Qingshan held Han Qiongzi's hand and smiled. "Once I win, we'll travel across the Clear River prefecture together!" Although it was easier for him to take advantage of her when they went boating, bustling, noisy places suited her personality better!

Han Qiongzi's face reddened slightly. "If you win, I'll give you a gift as a reward."

Li Qingshan could not help but study her up and down. Her thin waist that was wrapped in a brocade waistband, her tall, firm breasts that almost burst out from her clothing, and her perky bottom that held up her dress swept him away in his fantasies. Don't tell me the gift is...

Han Qiongzi reprimanded him, "Don't become lost in your fantasies. It's just a gift."

"Let's just go boating instead then!" Li Qingshan whispered in her ear. If he did not pull her in and dote on her recklessly, it would have been a waste.

“Don’t you even think about it.” Han Qiongzhi shot a glance at him and pushed him away. Go!

All the disciples on the platforms saw this. The news that Li Qingshan and Han Qiongzhi had become a couple was no longer a secret, but they still could not help but gasp when they saw it in person.

“Second senior sister has basically become a whole different person recently. She’s even wearing clothes like that. Just what has Li Qingshan done to deserve all this?” A legalist disciple sighed. In the past, Han Qiongzhi had never cared about what she wore.

“Stop envying him. At least we can feast our eyes on her. Before, she really was fier-”

“What about before?”

The two people raised their heads. Before they knew it, Han Qiongzhi had already appeared before them, staring at them. Their hearts shuddered, and they bowed in a hurry. “Second senior sister.”

“Hmph, I’ll teach you a lesson after I get back!” Han Qiongzhi was not angry at all. She saw Wang Pushi wave at her and gently stepped onto the higher platform, arriving beside Wang Pushi.

The two legalist disciples exchanged glances and sighed in relief simultaneously. Their second senior sister had really been in a fantastic mood recently.

At this moment, Li Qingshan stepped into the arena, leading to a series of cheers. Li Qingshan, who had come from an ordinary background, seemed quite like a hero of the common people.

Two long tables were placed on the two sides of the Main Martial Arts stadium. Li Qingshan and Chu Danqing each stood behind a table, looking at one another from afar. Their eyes locked and sparks flew.

Liu Zhangqing announced the rules of the match and declared the agreed wagers from the two sides. “Primary disciples, please prepare yourselves!”

“The Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms!” Han Qiongzhi frowned.

“What’s that?” Wang Pushi was clueless. His cultivation was much higher than Han Qiongzhi’s, but his knowledge of amusing rumors and stories paled in comparison to these aristocratic descendants. Han Qiongzhi had even purposefully investigated Chu Shidao because of Li Qingshan, so she was obviously familiar with this renowned painting.

After hearing Han Qiongzhi’s explanation, Wang Pushi smiled. “Looks like the kid’s about to win a love rival. You better be careful, Qiongzhi.”

Han Qiongzhi said, “Even the commander is making fun of me. I refuse to believe that I’ll lose to a painting!”

Wang Pushi laughed. “You never know.”

“If you want to keep talking about that, I’m not standing here anymore.” Han Qiongzhi stamped her foot. She too had heard there had been many cultivators who offered tremendous sums for the painting of a beauty from Chu Shidao so that they could hang it in their dwellings. They would summon and send them off at will, without causing them any trouble they had to worry about.

“Alright, alright, alright. I’ll stop. Look, it’s begun.”

Everyone was curious about this match between novels and painting. Just how would the two of them determine the victor?

Chu Danqing had already placed his painting on the table. He said loudly, “Li Qingshan, this painting is called Hellscape Rhapsody. I spent three months conceiving it and another three months painting it. It’s extremely terrifying. Even I wouldn’t want to create a painting like this unless I had no choice. If you’re clever, then it’s still not too late for you to forfeit. Otherwise, even you might end up injured later!”

Chu Shidao stood on the platform behind Chu Danqing. When he spotted the painting, he shivered all over. He smiled as he stroked his beard in great relief. Not only had Chu Danqing inherited his skill, but he would definitely exceed him in the future.

The outcome was already decided for this battle!

Li Qingshan took out a thin picture book and placed it on the table. “I spent two hours conceiving this book, a day to complete it, and a month to spread it. I have no idea how effective it is, so you better try it yourself!”

“Qingshan, you’ve grabbed the wrong book!” Liu Chuanfeng also stood on the platform behind Li Qingshan. He was worried.

Li Qingshan waved his hand without even looking back. “Don’t worry, it’s the right one!”

“Since you just won’t give up, I’ll let you experience the terrors of hell!” Chu Danqing brought his fingers together and pointed away. The painting rose with a flutter.

A blazing colour filled the entire paper, but there was only one colour—red!

Scarlet red, fiery red, blood red. The scarlet-red mountains stood strange and jagged; the boundless sea of fire blazed; the blood-red rivers surged.

Everyone who directed their attention towards this painting shuddered. A terrifying will of madness gushed into their faces. Just what kind of hellscape painting was this? There seemed to be countless fiends and evil spirits writhing in endless agony.

Gradually, fantasy became reality. Fiends leapt off the tall mountains one by one, emerging from the sea of fire and floating out from the rivers of blood, rushing out of the painting.

Their tall bodies, their scarlet-red skin, their twisted limbs, their hissing growls, and their empty eyes were all filled with endless hatred and resentment. One, two, several dozen fiends crawled out from the painting, as if they were crawling out of hell to seek revenge on the living people.

In that instant, a nightmare seemed to become real!

Screams rose up from the platforms. Many female cultivators even paled.

However, Han Qiongzhi was not afraid. Compared to what Altar Lord Black Lotus had unleashed to kill people back then in Ancient Wind city, a hell like this lacked an element of realism. She was just worried for Li Qingshan.

Wang Pushi smiled. "That's the aura from the Hell realm. This painting suits my school of Legalism very much. He really is something else for old man Chu to accept him as his final disciple and spend a decade nurturing him. Li Qingshan is in trouble."

Chu Danqing recalled what had happened when he first entered seclusion to produce this painting. Often, he would suddenly begin rolling around on the ground in regret as he painted, banging his head against the wall heavily in shame.

He had spent a whole decade cultivating arduously, and the moment he emerged, he had become a public laughingstock. No female cultivator would like him anymore. He was about to go crazy. He felt like he was standing in hell, being scorched by the flames.

In the end, he poured this madness of his into the painting, conceiving this Hellscape Rhapsody. He painted countless fiends in the limited space of the painting.

Li Qingshan, you asked for it!

Li Qingshan's smile remained. He said, "Oh right, I forgot to state the name of my book." Suddenly, he grew serious and waved his hand, calling out, "Come out, Magic Brush Ma Liang!"

The Divine Talisman of Great Creation suddenly erupted with extremely resplendent light. As Li Qingshan waved his hand, the faith, the power of belief of millions of people, gathered and condensed.

A teenager with a wide-brimmed straw hat and a brush in his hand appeared in the Main Martial Arts stadium. He had a pair of thick eyebrows and large eyes, radiating with solemn righteousness. He stood before the fiends flawlessly.

Han Qiongzhi called out in surprise, "This is!"

The surroundings fell silent. Chu Tian laughed madly. "Li Qingshan, are you trying to achieve victory through a kid? Don't tell me this kid was you from the past? I heard you came from a village."

Ever since Chu Tian suffered a defeat at Li Qingshan's hands, he had persevered and bided his time, undertaking self-imposed hardships and preparing for revenge at all times. The only reason why he decided to keep suffering in silence was out of consideration for how he could not reveal that item to the public. Now that he saw Li Qingshan failing, he was having the time of his life.

The other disciples would never mock Li Qingshan so openly, but they thought the same thing as Chu Tian. How could this regular teenager possess the strength to contend against fiends?

Compared to the terrors of Hellscape Rhapsody, what was Magic Brush Ma Liang supposed to be? It was truly a joke.

"Oh no, he's in trouble now!" Liu Chuanfeng paced around out of worry.

Sun Fubai said with composure, "Junior brother, you shouldn't worry. Qingshan knows what he's doing. Though recently, I heard about a rumor." A rumor regarding Magic Brush Ma Liang.

"Li Qingshan, you really are wretched!" Chu Danqing looked at the impoverished, half-grown Ma Liang and seemed to see his past self. He really was a little unwilling to get the fiends to slaughter him now.

“Wretched?” Li Qingshan was surprised, but he did not think about it too much.

With absolute focus, Ma Liang raised his magic brush and quickly drew in the air. The power of belief in the Divine Talisman of Great Creation was rapidly converted into his own power.

Under everyone’s astonished gazes, a golden shoe landed on the ground with a thump.

A deity clad in golden armour with a golden dagger-axe in his hand emerged from nowhere. He pointed his golden dagger-axe at the fiends.

The design of the armoured deity was simple and childish. He even had a pair of golden wings on his back, like some kind of divine soldier from heaven that a child had imagined. However, the aura he gave off was no less than the fiends. Chu Tian, who had been laughing aloud, suddenly shut his mouth.

Chu Danqing’s mouth hung agape instead. Wasn’t this the ability of their school of Painting? Why would a character conjured by a novelist possess this kind of ability?

Chu Shidao called out, “Danqing, what’re you waiting for?”

The armoured deity suddenly unfurled its wings and rushed into the sky, flying towards the sun that had just risen in the east. He dove back down as a golden streak of light and stabbed through a fiend with his golden dagger-axe. The fiend trembled as it dispersed.

Chu Danqing immediately returned to his senses. The fiends roared as they lunged towards the armoured deity, but the deity took off into the air once more. He circled around with the dagger-axe in his hand.

Liu Chuanfeng’s despair was immediately converted to joy. Han Qiongzhi called out, “Nice!”

On the other hand, Li Qingshan was rather pained by the power of belief he was depleting. This was not true qi. It was a consumable, where it would vanish with use. However, he could not care about that anymore. Before his girlfriend, he had to triumph in this match!

Ma Liang used the magic brush in his hand to draw a second armoured deity, who emerged from thin air.

“Chu Danqing, today I will use the ability of the school of Painting to defeat you. I’ll show you the power of our school of Novels!”

Chapter 347 - A Clash Between Novels and Paintings

The second armoured deity was even larger and mightier than the first. He was clad in heavy armour and stood tall and sturdy.

Looking over, he seemed like a ball. He clutched a golden octagonal mace in his hand; the weapon was the size of a water tank. With foot steps that sounded like war drums, he charged towards the fiends like a war chariot, tearing everything before him to shreds.

Several dozen fiends opened their huge mouths and roared out together. Strings of saliva hung from their jagged teeth, dripping onto the ground. It hissed like acid, giving off clouds of white smoke.

The armoured deity whirled his hand around, and the golden mace thrummed as it reached top speed. He let go and it flew out like a golden comet, smashing into the twisted face of a fiend. Another one vanished. However, even more fiends surged passed the fallen mace, moving towards the weaponless deity.

The armoured deity suddenly leapt into the air with unbelievable grace, like a black cloud that had suddenly risen into the air. Lunging forward, he fell onto the fiends.

Thump! With a heavy sound, the ground shook, and a shockwave spread out in all directions.

The armoured deity had directly crushed a fiend to death, but he fell into the encirclement of the fiends as a result.

The armoured deity who had been circling around in the air this entire time descended. The golden dagger-axe in his hand slid along a curved trajectory, sweeping past heads, throats, claws, and chests. It left behind a splash of red, and five fiends vanished as they howled out.

He returned to the sky soon after, shaking off the claws reaching towards him and waiting for another optimal opportunity.

The attack from him this time ripped open a gap in the tight encirclement. The armoured deity on the ground rolled over and grabbed his mace, returning to his feet. He lifted up the mace with both hands and swung it towards the heads of the incoming fiends.

Bang! As their heads shattered, they turned into a wisp of red mist that dispersed.

At this moment, a fiend lunged over from behind. Its mouth stretched all the way to its ears, and its jaw unhinged to an unbelievable angle. It bit down viciously on the armoured deity's neck guard with its razor-sharp teeth.

Several teeth shattered, but even more of them managed to penetrate the armour with a corrosive hiss.

The armoured deity spun around on the spot, wanting to shake off the assailant on his back. He swung his golden mace around, smashing away the fiends that lunged at him like mad dogs. A lot of gashes appeared on his armour, but he was unable to do anything to the fiend on his back.

The armoured deity who circled around in the air was only bold enough to kill fiends on the outskirts. He was not bold enough to charge into the encirclement and rescue his companion. Otherwise, he would immediately become trapped by countless claws, which would rip apart his thin, golden armour.

At this moment, a golden arrow the size of a spear spun and pierced the fiend's eye.

It left behind a golden streak and a momentary circular gap in the air. At the end of the streak and gap was a third armoured deity. He stood tall with a quiver on his back. The string of the golden bow in his hand still vibrated.

All of the cheering and cries from the platforms vanished. They all stared blankly as these huge creatures tried to kill one another.

Never had they thought that the school of Novels they had once mocked, the school of Painting that was rumored to only draw beautiful women, would actually possess such terrifying power.

Every single fiend present had the power to kill an eighth or even ninth layer Qi Practitioner. Their mad attacks made even Han Tiewi frown slightly.

But to the other side, the three armoured deities were even stronger. Under Li Qingshan's careful control, they killed the fiends without losing the upper hand.

This was no longer a match they were used to seeing, but a true battle to the death. The Main Martial Arts stadium had become the battlefield of a bloody slaughter.

Chu Tian was dumbfounded. Originally, he thought his cultivation had progressed tremendously after the recent period of arduous cultivation. He was prepared to challenge Li Qingshan again, but the sight before him caused him quite the shock. His chances at victory had not increased at all.

Han Qiongzhi clenched her fist and cheered out, breaking the silence. Now this was the man who had caught her eye!

Wang Pushi shook his head gently. He had never thought that even the arts of the school of Novels would become so powerful in his hands. He sure was worthy of the girl, Qiongzhi. Commander Gu's insight sure was outstanding!

Han Anjun remained silent, but he found this satisfying too. Li Qingshan's talent for battle had been perfectly unleashed through the small squad. He was almost in perfect control over the battlefield.

Liu Zhangqing sighed gently. This was probably the generation of the academy with the most geniuses! Even geniuses like Hua Chengzan and Han Tiewi, who originally stood out from everyone else, no longer seemed special before them. Was it because the world was about to be thrown into chaos that prodigies like him had appeared?

Despite the image of a school leader that he was supposed to maintain, Liu Chuanfeng stretched out his arms and called out happily. The emotions he had repressed for all these years were released. Do you see this? This is the power of the school of Novels!

The One Thought master glanced at Xiao An, but he failed to see any excitement from her face at all, as if she was certain he would win. All she did was lean on her hand and gaze at him from the crowd. Li Qingshan would smile at her from time to time too, as if the intense battle unfolding right before him was unable to scatter his attention towards her.

Recently, she had gone to find him much less frequently compared to before. The One Thought master even eased up slightly, but as it seemed, nothing had changed at all. He had finally confirmed that an invisible string tied them together. It was so-called fate!

As her senior brother, he had absolutely no confidence in guiding this talented junior sister who called herself One Will. Probably even his master had seen this, which was why he had directly accepted her as a disciple. He would leave everything up to fate!

Li Qingshan and Chu Danqing's gazes crossed through the battlefield and met.

Li Qingshan continued to smile like before. This battle was basically for him to bully Chu Danqing over his lack of experience with real time strategy games. Of course, the situation right now was inherently

different from games, but he was no longer the same person from his past life, but Li Qingshan who had gone through countless battles.

Chu Danqing, on the other hand, was rather flustered. His overall strength was clearly much greater than Li Qingshan's, but all he could do was watch as the fiends were slaughtered one by one. He was helpless.

"Danqing, you can only see the source of everything if you calm down!" Chu Shidao's voice rang out in Chu Danqing's mind.

"The source?" Chu Danqing immediately looked at the teenager with the straw hat, and he came to a realisation. All the armoured deities came from him. As long as he defeated the teenager, all his problems would be solved.

Chu Danqing swung his hand, and the remaining fiends abandoned the armoured deities, rushing towards Ma Liang as a frenzied wave.

The three armoured deities had managed to kill over twenty fiends under their ingenious teamwork, but they were unable to stop the charging army of fiends.

Li Qingshan stopped smiling. Have you finally discovered it? My greatest weakness!

The magic brush was impressive, but Ma Liang was just a regular teenager, and he was his most important medium too. Once he dispersed, the golden deities would immediately disperse as well.

By then, even if he could conjure him again, would Chu Danqing still give Ma Liang the opportunity to paint? He would probably be slain the moment he appeared, making it a waste of his power of belief.

At this moment, the real outcome of the match had been determined.

What was he supposed to do? Conjure a defensive armoured deity who used a shield? No, even if he managed to stop them, Ma Liang would be in no shape to paint anymore either. Moreover, the Hellscape Rhapsody had clearly yet to unleash its full strength. It would be a checkmate situation against him.

The only thing he could do right now was defend by attacking!

Ma Liang suddenly raised the brush and began swinging it around recklessly in the air!

Black strokes of ink hovered in the air as the power of belief in the Divine Talisman of Great Creation rapidly drained away.

A shadow engulfed Ma Liang. Countless claws and teeth were right before him. The scarlet red wave slammed down on Ma Liang viciously.

Compared to the fiends, his figure seemed pitifully small. Just like what all the children expected of him, he faced these fiends calmly and fearlessly. He poured his strength into finishing the final stroke.

The ink strokes in the air turned into strands of sword qi and shot off in all directions.

Compared to the sword qi, the fiends seemed to slow down. All they could do was watch as the sword qi pierced their bodies.

The scarlet wave came to a halt and immediately collapsed, disintegrating into countless pieces. They fell towards Ma Liang, but they dispersed in the air.

Cheers rang out. Li Qingshan said loudly, "Who's the one who's going to forfeit now?"

The three armoured deities stood in a battle formation right in front of Chu Danqing's Hellscape Rhapsody. They slaughtered the fiends as they emerged. They wanted to see just how many fiends Chu Danqing could summon.

Chu Danqing clenched his fist firmly. Although the Hellscape Rhapsody depicted countless fiends within a limited space, he could not actually summon fiends forever. And, even if he could, they would probably all be slain one by one.

"It's you!"

The Hellscape Rhapsody surged with scarlet light, almost lighting up the entire stadium. The rivers of blood in the painting suddenly began to flow slowly, and the endless sea of fire began to burn.

"Oh no!" Li Qingshan said.

The hellish sea of fire suddenly surged out of the painting. It was so fast that it swallowed the three armoured deities immediately. Their golden armour rapidly melted away in the flames, and in the blink of an eye, the three deities had been reduced to ash, following the footsteps of the fiends.

The air turned into waves of heat, twisting and distorting everything there. The rolling flames swept towards Li Qingshan, unstoppable and unavoidable.

On the brink of celebration, Liu Chuanfeng's face immediately twisted, as if he was the one being scorched by the flames of hell; this had already exceeded the limits of Qi Practitioners.

Chu Shidao's face was dyed red by the flames. Li Qingshan, take a look. This is the power of the Jade Blood of Vermillion and Black. You might be a genius, and it's great luck that the school of Novels possesses a disciple like you, but you still pale slightly in comparison to Danqing.

Victory was already determined!

For the first time, Han Anjun was no longer certain that Li Qingshan could emerge victoriously. This was touching on a difference in cultivation realms. It could not be made up with battle tactics or strategy.

Li Qingshan's face sank as his thoughts flitted. The flames had already arrived before him. Even if he tried getting Ma Liang to paint, it would be too late. Moreover, just what was he supposed to paint that could block the endless fire?

At this moment, Ma Liang suddenly collapsed. The fire did not touch him, but he was unable to endure the scorching heat of the flames.

Li Qingshan had been a cultivator for too long. He had overestimated what a regular teenager could withstand. It only made things worse.

Was this really it?

Chapter 348 - Fighting Fire with Water

Li Qingshan suddenly pointed at the picture book on the table. The pages turned hurriedly in a flutter, and the story passed by in a rush before it stopped on the final page.

This is all I can try now!

He did not use Ma Liang as a medium. Instead, he directly used the power of belief to summon this picture!

This was the end of a fairy tale story...

Ma Liang was captured and sent to the imperial palace. The emperor wanted him to paint a money tree, so Ma Liang painted an ocean. The emperor was very displeased by this and cursed, "I want you to paint a money tree, not an ocean!" Ma Liang then drew a small island in the ocean and a very tall, expansive tree on it. "Isn't this a money tree?"

The emperor immediately beamed. "Draw a ship quickly! I want to go and pick money from the tree in the ocean!" Ma Liang drew a very, very large wooden ship. The emperor boarded it with the empress, his princes, princesses, and many officials and generals. Ma Liang then drew some wind, and the ship set off.

The emperor felt that the ship was too slow, so he called out at the nose of the ship, "Make the wind bigger! Make it bigger!" Ma Liang added a few more strokes to the wind, and the wooden ship sped off into the ocean. Ma Liang added more strokes to the wind, and the ocean began to roar, swelling and surging with waves. The ship teetered about. The emperor became afraid and called out at Ma Liang, "The wind's big enough! It's big enough!" Ma Liang feigned ignorance and continued to add to the wind. The ocean unleashed its fury, and the waves surged towards the ship.

The ship slanted and everything onboard was thrown into a mess. The emperor clung onto the mast as he constantly called out, "The wind's too big! The ship's going to overturn! Stop painting!" Ma Liang ignored him and continued to add to the wind. The wind became even stronger, blowing over many thick, dark clouds. Lightning flashed and thunder boomed as torrential rain began to fall. The seawater stood like walls as they fell towards the ship...

Han Qiongzhi could not bear to watch on anymore. She was worried that Li Qingshan would be unable to endure the mental shock that came with defeat. She was thinking about how she would comfort him later without encroaching on his dignity. After all, he was such a proud man. He would definitely be happy if she gave him that. If that was not enough, she could just fulfil his wish from a few days ago at most.

Suddenly, she heard the sound of waves. The lake was very distant from here, so why was there the sound of waves? Subsequently, the smell of salt assaulted her nose. She raised her head abruptly.

A huge, wall-like wave stood before Li Qingshan.

"Boundlessness of the Ocean!"

Li Qingshan pushed his hand forward, and the huge wave fell. It swept towards the scorching fire and forcefully pushed it back from right before him.

The flickering tongues of fire and the splashing foam tried to collide, only to be reduced to steam. But at the same time, even more water and fire surged over.

An intense clash unfolded along the lengthy boundary. Steam surged into the air like smoke, forming a white wall before dispersing again due to the depletion of power of belief.

Within the hisses, water extinguished fire and fire vaporised water; this was a battle between water and fire.

But very soon, the huge wave ran out of force, completely evaporated away by the fire. The suppressed flames managed to surge over once more, only to encounter a second wave immediately.

Chu Danqing's face had been dyed bright red by the fire. It was slightly twisted and even his eyes flickered with red light. He was close to becoming demented as he constantly powered the Hell Rhapsody so that even more flames of hell surged out. He carried the expectations of his master, the hope of the school of Painting, and his wife in-name in the painting. He could not afford to lose this battle. He could not!

Li Qingshan had stopped caring about the depletion of his power of belief a long time ago, conjuring wave after wave. Cloudwisp island was a good place, so how could he let someone else just take it from him? If he lost, all the power of belief he depleted right now would go to waste. He smiled. And, he could not afford to embarrass himself before his future wife and father-in-law.

The circular stadium was split into two, dyed with a scarlet-red and a clear blue; this was a hell of fire and an ocean of water. A twisted boundary constantly advanced and receded, surging about with great intensity.

The burning of fire and the roaring of water was deafening.

Everyone was stunned by the earth-shaking clash of techniques. Originally, they thought they could never be surprised by a battle between Qi Practitioners again after witnessing the battle between Li Qingshan and Chu Tian.

If Li Qingshan and Chu Tian had only demonstrated the ability of Foundation Establishment cultivators every now and then during their battle back then, then Li Qingshan and Chu Danqing had completely exceeded the standard of Qi Practitioners now. They seemed no different from Foundation Establishment cultivators.

If it were just the school of Painting, then so be it. However, Li Qingshan was demonstrating the power of the school of Novels they had mocked all this time. And, Li Qingshan's cultivation was only at the seventh layer. Had they been underestimating the school of Novels the entire time?

Chu Shidao's eyebrows scrunched up firmly. He gazed at Chu Danqing's figure in worry as the latter gave it his all. Never did he think that Li Qingshan would actually possess such strength. He had some understanding regarding the powers of the school of Novels. It should have been limited by the Divine Talisman of Great Creation. This situation had clearly arisen from countless people firmly believing in his novel. Just how did he achieve this in merely half a year?

Liu Chuanfeng had stopped cheering. As he stood on the platform, his mouth hung agape as he raised both hands; he was like a frozen statue. His entire body was tense, as if he was pushing the waves along.

Sun Fubai took in all of this greedily. Both joy and sorrow filled his face. Yes, this was the power of the school of Novels their master had described to them, as well as the thing he had once doubted. Now, Li Qingshan was proving it to them, to everyone.

The school of Novels was not trash. The heavens had bestowed the school of Novels with this child.

Han Qiongzhi held her hands and gazed at Li Qingshan in fascination. She was tempted to tell everyone that this was her man. Of course, everyone actually already knew that.

Wang Pushi shook his head. This kid sure caused a lot of surprises! It had only been a year since he joined the academy. If he had the time to develop, just what level could he reach? The Han family had found a fantastic son-in-law. He would definitely be a capable person in the future.

But at this moment, Han Anjun felt slightly worried aside from his delight, which was soon followed by relief. She had to slowly experience this great life of hers by herself.

Juechenzi saw how the slovenly daoist priest directly poured alcohol into his mouth and smiled. "Master, you've become filled with regret again."

The slovenly daoist priest growled. "Since when did I feel regret? Since when did I feel regret, huh?" He could not help but admit that he did feel a tinge of regret. Even the arts of the school of Novels could be unleashed to such a degree by him. If it were the arts of daoism instead, wouldn't it be even more powerful? Sigh, if I had known earlier, I would've treated this kid a little more politely. There are plenty of disciples I've cursed before, but only a fucking kid like you was bold enough to lose your temper at me!

At this moment, the glow on the Hellscape Rhapsody gradually dimmed. No matter how much effort he put in as a painter, all paintings had a moment when they ran out of power.

The water that Li Qingshan had conjured was just regular water, slightly lacklustre compared to the fire, but with the mutual regulation of the five elements, it was extremely easy for water to put out fire, and it would take tremendous amounts of energy for fire to evaporate water.

Li Qingshan suddenly kicked up an even taller, even larger wave. I'll give up on all the power of belief I've accumulated over the past half a year. I'd like to see just how much longer you can last!

Chu Dangqing was at his wits end. He continued to power the Hellscape Rhapsody, and a tiny crack appeared on the painting. He no longer cared. Even if he had to destroy this painting, he would continue.

"Dangqing, that's enough!" Chu Shidao's voice rang out in Chu Dangqing's head.

"But master..."

"If you keep fighting, it won't be a victory for either of you." Chu Shidao was a person who appreciated paintings, so how could he just watch as Chu Dangqing destroyed the Hellscape Rhapsody he had spent six months painting? And, Li Qingshan showed no signs of running out of power of belief. Chu Dangqing's chances of triumphing had already approached zero.

Chu Dangqing could not disobey his master. He kicked over the table and stowed the Hellscape Rhapsody away reluctantly.

Li Qingshan immediately stopped using the Divine Talisman of Great Creation. It had not been easy for him to gather the power of belief. Every bit counted.

In a single instant, the water and fire subsided together.

Everyone found this incredibly surreal. If it were not for the clear traces left by the scorching fire and surging water in the stadium, they basically would have thought it was all a dream.

Silence descended. Everyone exchanged glances. Just who had won?

The school leaders, however, all saw it clearly. Liu Zhangqing shot a questioning glance towards Chu Shidao.

Chu Shidao raised his hand at him before making his way over to Chu Danqing's side. He patted his shoulder in consolation and said to Li Qingshan, "You've won."

Li Qingshan clasped his hands. "You've gone easy on me."

However, he saw Chu Danqing's eyes redden as his lips trembled, as if he was about to burst out crying. Why do I feel like I've become a great villain who bullies naive boys? It's just a match. Do you have to be like this?

Before this, while Li Qingshan was radiating with confidence, he had already prepared himself for defeat. After all, nothing was absolute. Compared to the crushing defeats he had suffered in the past, a match that did not even threaten his life was absolutely nothing. The worst outcome would just be moving to another island and developing there. The school of Novels did not depend on its environment too much. As long as his thoughts remained with him, would development really be an issue?

As someone who had climbed up from the very bottom, there was no way Li Qingshan could understand Chu Danqing, who had never suffered any setbacks during his decade of learning paintings. He had lost his first battle right after emerging from the mountains, so it really was difficult for him to put up with this contrast. Li Qingshan only thought he had won a powerful painting, but never did he imagine it would be Chu Danqing's wife.

Cheers rang out from the platforms. The school of Novels did not really have a good reputation, but compared to the school of Painting who were outsiders, they were still more attached to it. After all, they had spent all these years cursing it. Now, everyone recognised the power of the school of Novels.

They could actually conjure a character who could use the abilities of painters to defeat painters; this was simply unbelievable. Some of the new disciples even began to regret that they had not enrolled for the school of Novels instead.

With Liu Zhangqing presiding over the matter, Chu Shidao and Liu Chuanfeng arrived at the centre of the stadium. Their primary disciples followed behind them.

Chu Shidao offered the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms with both hands. "I've long heard that the school of Novels can conjure anything and everything in a miraculous manner. With what I've seen today, it really is true. You really do live up to your reputation as one of the ten standard schools designated by the founding emperor.

“Your dear disciple is even more so a talent among men. We’re sincerely convinced with our defeat this time. If I have offended you in any way in the past, please forgive me, school leader Liu. This painting is an amalgamation of all my efforts, so please accept it as an apology from me. Please treat her well too.”

Chapter 349 - Seeing What I Love

With such an “important figure” speaking to him so politely, Liu Chuanfeng was rather flattered. He returned the gesture in a hurry. “You flatter us, master Chu. This disciple of mine only managed to triumph over your dear disciple out of sheer luck. There are many commonalities between the arts of the school of Novels and the school of Painting. We definitely need to exchange thoughts in the future. We’ll both benefit.”

Accepting the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms, he directly passed it to Li Qingshan. Although he was rather reluctant to give up the heavenly maiden in the painting, Li Qingshan did deserve it.

“Don’t worry, master Chu. I will definitely treasure this painting.” Li Qingshan received it politely with both hands. He had won this battle, but he had used up almost half of his power of belief. This was the natural limitation of the school of Novels. However, at least he had earned some impressive spoils from the battle, making up for this loss. This was the best outcome possible. He did not want enemies everywhere either.

Of course, he was still clueless about winning over a certain person’s wife.

Chu Shidao nodded. “Danqing, you should seek guidance from senior brother Li more frequently in the future.”

Even though Chu Danqing disagreed with this, all he could do was answer, “Yes.”

“I’m not worthy of the title of senior brother. In the past on Cloudwisp island, Danqing and I got along the moment we met. We even drank together. We treated each other as friends and referred to one another as brothers back then, but for some reason, he stopped visiting after that one time.” Li Qingshan’s impression of Chu Danqing was quite good. He felt like he possessed a sense of naivety that was rarely seen.

“You’re still bold enough to mention that? If you hadn’t made me drunk, why would I have said something like that?” Chu Danqing glared at him, but he also felt embarrassed.

“Something like that?” Li Qingshan was taken aback. He had absolutely no idea why Chu Danqing resented him. They might have been opponents, but it was not like there were any great grievances between them!

Only after giving it some thought did he understand what he was saying. All he could do was smile bitterly. Why was this guy as fragile as a boy going through puberty, no, a primary school student? They were both geniuses, but he was basically on the other end of the spectrum compared to Chu Tian, that idiot who constantly flirted with women without the slightest sense of shame. He was so naive that he was adorable.

Perhaps geniuses had always implied a special temperament different from regular people, which was why they were able to walk along their own path. Among all the geniuses he had seen, Hua Chengzan was a romantic, Han Tieyi was a frozen piece of metal, and Chu Tian was an arrogant idiot. As for Xiao

An, who was publicly acknowledged as the greatest, she might have been the most special one out of them all.

“In other words, you didn’t tell anyone about it?” Chu Danqing suddenly grabbed Li Qingshan’s shoulder, as if he had seen a sliver of hope in endless darkness.

“Who still remembers what you say when you’re drunk?” Li Qingshan’s expression was strange. It was not like he was some gossiping woman who had the time to tell others about what someone said when they were drunk.

As if he had avoided a disaster, Chu Danqing let out a deep sigh. In other words, his reputation had not been destroyed. As it turned out, he had been overthinking the entire time. However, when he thought about how he had actually dwelled on this matter for so long, even painting the Hellscape Rhapsody because of this, he became filled with regret and humiliation once more, tempted to throw himself at a wall.

Chu Shidao became curious. “What did he say?”

Li Qingshan said casually, “Danqing said he wanted...”

Chu Danqing covered Li Qingshan’s mouth in a hurry. “Master, it was just some drunken nonsense. It’ll only tarnish your ears.”

Chu Shidao smiled and bid farewell with clasped hands. “School leader Liu, take us to the school of Painting!”

“Then come with me!” Liu Zhangqing waved his hand. Soon after the match had been confirmed, they began building, planting, and designing gardens on an empty island south-west of Contention island.

Originally, he planned to give it to the school of Novels as compensation for their loss, but he never expected the final outcome to be like this. He had obtained his benefits already, and the school of Painting was unable to criticize him anymore either. With a disciple like Li Qingshan, there was no reason for the school of Novels to decline any further.

After this battle, the school of Novels must have made a name for itself. A lot of people would probably fill in the three words “school of Novels” during the next entrance examination, right?

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Chu Shidao and everyone else arrived on the island for the school of Painting that was currently under construction. The structures there were already close to completion. It was unable to rival Cloudwisp island’s spiritual qi, but it was still an extremely exquisite place. It had its own thriving atmosphere.

Liu Zhangqing had been unwilling to offend the school of Novels too much, so he had asked the leader of the school of Mohism to personally build the structures here. The buildings and their features here were all elegant and tasteful.

After seeing off Liu Zhangqing, Chu Shidao leaned on his cane and arrived at the front of the structure. He gently touched the column that still gave off the smell of pinewood and let out a smile in delight.

“Master, why did you treat that Liu Chuanfeng so politely?” Chu Danqing supported Chu Shidao carefully. Foundation Establishment cultivators and Qi Practitioners were people of two completely different worlds, not to mention that Chu Shidao was no regular Foundation Establishment cultivator.

“If being a little more polite can turn enemies into friends, why can’t I forsake my antiquated pride?”

“Master, it’s all my fault.” Chu Danqing blamed himself. “I even made master lose that painting, damn it.”

“No. If you won, I’d be even more polite. The school of Novels cannot be underestimated. Li Qingshan cannot be underestimated. Even if you can’t turn them into friends, you can’t turn them into enemies. As for that painting, it’s not like you like it anyway. She’s just a painting. I’ve really grown senile. I worry over you too much. I’m confident that you can paint a painting that’s ten, no, a hundred times better. You’ll be able to paint the woman you love inside.”

But master, I like living people!

This sentence dwelled in Chu Danqing’s mind. He was not brave enough to say it. All he said was, “That painting is master’s precious memory. I’ll definitely take it back!”

“I have so many memories that they’re almost about to leak out, which was why I painted that painting. I’m probably the last person in this world who needs her. How strange. Matters from two centuries ago have actually become so clear now.” Chu Shidao leaned against his cane. His smiling gaze seemed to see through Chu Danqing, through the academy, and through time, to a very, very distant past.

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“Qingshan, I never thought you’d actually win using this book.” Liu Chuanfeng flipped through the thin picture book. He was still in some disbelief.

Li Qingshan explained his reason, and both Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai came to a realisation. Cultivators never took regular people seriously, let alone the children among regular people. Only at this moment did they realise just how important of an aspect they had neglected. Sun Fubai immediately made up his mind. Whatever those private institutions of hope were, he would establish them right now.

Liu Chuanfeng suggested celebrating properly. Li Qingshan glanced at Han Qiongzhi, who stood nearby and patted Liu Chuanfeng’s shoulder. “We gotta be discreet. They’ve accepted their defeat in such an elegant manner, so we can’t make too much of a display either just because we’ve won.” He had no interest in celebrating with two men. He would much rather show off to his woman.

Sun Fubai also expressed his agreement. Chu Danqing would definitely become an impressive figure in the future. It would be for the best if they could resolve this grievance.

Li Qingshan clasped his hands to bid them farewell and arrived before Han Qiongzhi. “Qiongzhi, how was my performance?”

“You said you’ll definitely treasure the painting. How do you plan on treasuring it?” Han Qiongzhi mentioned that immediately. She seemed to be smiling and furious at the same time.

A cloud lifted up Li Qingshan and Han Qiongzhi, taking them off into the air. They arrived beside Xiao An.

Li Qingshan bowed towards the One Thought master and said to Xiao An, "Let's go. We'll go have some fun in Clear River city."

Xiao An glanced at Han Qiongzhi. "I'm going to go cultivate."

"That works too. Wait for me to bring back your present." Li Qingshan rubbed her head with a smile. They spent every single night together anyway, so it was not like they were lacking time. If the three of them were together, the atmosphere would be rather strange.

Han Qiongzhi's heart eased up slightly. She nodded towards Xiao An to express her gratitude.

The cloud flew out of the academy, heading directly towards the city. Han Qiongzhi suddenly said, "Hold on."

Li Qingshan stopped the cloud. "What's wrong?"

Han Qiongzhi said, "You still haven't answered my question. Don't you even think about avoiding it!"

Li Qingshan smiled. "I'll obviously treasure her like I treasure you. Surely you can't grow jealous over a painting!"

"Don't you dare! I'll be jealous because I can! Hand over the painting!" When she heard that, Han Qiongzhi immediately refused to accept this and extended her hand.

Li Qingshan casually tossed the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms to her. "Here, take it!"

Originally, Han Qiongzhi only wanted to test him, but she had never expected him to be so straightforward. It was not just a simple painting. Its value had exceeded the imaginations of regular Qi Practitioners. Her heart felt warm.

Out of curiosity, she unfurled the painting and saw that the face of the heavenly maiden was a blur, as if it were covered by mist. The power hidden within had completely exceeded Chu Danqing's Hellscape Rhapsody. It had completely exceeded the value of any spiritual artifact.

"Hmph, it doesn't seem like anything special at all to me. I don't want it." Han Qiongzhi tossed the painting back to Li Qingshan. "Though, you have to tell me who you see in the painting."

Li Qingshan accepted the painting and asked in surprise, "How did you know?"

So the rumors really were true. Han Qiongzhi smiled complacently. "Just what don't I know? Stop trying to change the topic. Tell me." She acted like she did not care, but she was rather nervous inside. Would it be her?

Li Qingshan said, "Can I not say it?"

Han Qiongzhi said with absolutely no confidence, "Of course not!" Did he see Gu Yanying? If that were the case, she could not blame him, but she plummeted into dejection.

Li Qingshan said, "Fine then! Since you want to know, there's no reason for me to hide it from you. That's right, the person I saw was... widow Li from my village."

Han Qiongzhi's heart had already sunk. When she heard Li Qingshan's answer, it instead petrified her. She blinked her eyes. "What... did you just say?"

Li Qingshan said with embarrassment, "You know, I was young! Widow Li is who all the men in our village fantasized over."

Han Qiongzhi's mind was thrown into disarray. Widow Li obviously posed no threat to her, but when she thought about how she had been defeated by a "widow Li" who did not even have a name, she found it even more difficult to accept.

Li Qingshan laughed aloud and pulled the fiery Han Qiongzhi into his arms. He raised her chin. "You idiot, it's you!"

Han Qiongzhi growled angrily, "Li Qingshan, you're teasing me again!"

Li Qingshan gently shook her chin and smiled. "That's not called teasing. That's called being toyed with!"

"I- is it true?" Han Qiongzhi's voice suddenly sunk as she bit her lip. If it were not her, she would much rather him lie to her.

Li Qingshan stopped smiling and gently kissed her forehead. "I swear!"

Chapter 350 - Qian Rongzhi's Disappearance

Li Qingshan's love life was not a blank piece of paper, but it was not a lot better than Chu Danqing's. Only that startling glimpse of Gu Yanying under the snowy pine tree outside Qingyang city had allowed him to experience what love at first sight was.

However, he was not Hua Chengzan. No matter how deep of an impression Gu Yanying had on him, no matter how great of an oath he had sworn because of her, she was nowhere near as important as the beloved woman in his arms right now.

As a result, when he saw the painting, the memory was just a pitifully short recollection. What appeared in his head was her posture sitting back against the nose of the boat, natural and graceful, making him admire her from the bottom of his heart.

"You're in my arms, so why would I still be thinking about a painting?"

"Qingshan." Han Qiongzhi felt like her heart had been melted. She felt as giddy as a cloud, about to fly off into the air.

The two of them leaned against one another above the blue waves. They were both filled with utter satisfaction.

Even Li Qingshan had never expected a single word from him to achieve something like this. The tip of his finger slid past her plump lips, and he smiled. "Are you satisfied now?"

"That's more like it." Han Qiongzhi shot a glance at him. Her limpid eyes rippled as a rosy glow filled her cheeks. She was extremely charming.

"Is there a reward for me?" Li Qingshan poked her supple chest.

“Here, the gift I promised.” Han Qiongzhi knocked his hand aside and pulled out an item from her hundred treasures pouch.

“This...” Li Qingshan was taken aback; this could not be wrong. It was the high grade spiritual artifact pill cauldron he had taken a liking to in the school of Miscellany. The alchemy cauldron was not forged from metal. Instead, it was a rare cauldron completely carved out of jade. There was a long dragon coiled around the mouth of the cauldron. Its full name was the Jade Sculpted Cauldron of the Coiled Dragon.

Weren’t men supposed to be the ones to buy things that women took a liking to? Their roles seemed to have reversed. Li Qingshan’s heart melted.

“How’s it? You like it?” Han Qiongzhi asked in concern. Although she originated from an aristocratic family, the last thing Han Anjun did to this daughter of his was spoil her. It took up all her past savings and her contribution in the Hawkwolf Guard converted into spiritual stones to gather enough money to make this purchase.

Li Qingshan said nothing. He placed down the alchemy cauldron and directly kissed her on her cherry lips.

“I’ve already said...” Han Qiongzhi struggled weakly, but this man embraced her almost forcefully, preventing her from putting up any resistance at all. He kissed her lips, and her mind immediately blanked out. She hugged him subconsciously.

The tip of Li Qingshan’s tongue pried open her lips and extended in, tasting her to his heart’s content. He forcefully pulled her body that almost seemed to melt away into his embrace. His heart had already been completely filled by her. Wasn’t a woman like her worth him doting on with everything that he had?

A while later, their lips parted, but they were still connected by a string of saliva.

Han Qiongzhi’s eyes were lost. Her lips were slightly agape, still reminiscing the first kiss of her life. The feeling lingered for a very long time.

Returning to her senses, she was met with Li Qingshan’s smiling gaze. “So you really are so afraid of being kissed, Qiongzhi!” He could feel earlier that the woman in his embrace seemed to have crumpled, completely collapsing in his arms, allowing him to do whatever he wanted.

“You’re not a man of your word. I gave you a gift with such kind intentions, and you instead used the opportunity to bully me. You were even so forceful with me. Your embrace was killing me.” Han Qiongzhi’s face was completely flushed as she grumbled flirtatiously. She did not blame him for his actions driven by passion at all.

“For you.” Li Qingshan stowed the alchemy cauldron into his hundred treasures pouch before taking out the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms. He felt like he had been completely substandard as a boyfriend. All he cared about was enjoying himself, and she ended up giving him a present first.

Han Qiongzhi refused it. “I’m not trying to exchange things with you. You won it, so just keep it!”

Li Qingshan shoved the painting into her hands. “This is a token of love, you understand?” Actually, even he himself did not understand this too well. Compared to those gestures of romance like tying a knot

with a strand of hair, their tokens of love were much more pragmatic. However, this was the exact woman he liked, one who had no idea what romance was.

Only then did Han Qiongzhi understand the implication of the painting in her hands. She was utterly delighted, and she immediately began to admire it fondly. She looked at it again and again, as if the painting in her hand was no longer the same one from before.

A while later, she suddenly closed her eyes and raised her head, puckering her lips slightly.

Li Qingshan asked, "What're you doing?"

"You idiot. I want to try it again. It's quite a nice feeling." Han Qiongzhi opened her eyes and grumbled happily. "Don't use the opportunity to toy with me."

Li Qingshan shook his head and sighed. Since when were there women who would demand for kisses when they had just kissed for the first time? If he treated her as a shy beauty, then he really would have misjudged her. "Thank you for reminding me." He lowered his head and kissed her. His left hand wrapped around her slender waist, gently touching her as his right hand landed on her perky bottom, massaging it hard.

Han Qiongzhi moaned gently and writhed her body subconsciously. Her mind was completely taken away by the hot, sweet kiss with him. She only focused on dealing with the foreign object that had invaded her mouth, without any concern for anything else. She just let him do what he wanted.

After these few moments of intimate contact, Han Qiongzhi turned down Li Qingshan's suggestion of going boating with a smile. Her red lips brushed past his cheeks, stopping by his ear and whispering, "You sex fiend. Stop thinking about this all the time."

She curled back the middle finger on her right hand and flicked him below gently. She was not completely unfamiliar with a certain organ on a man's body, except most of her contact came from dead people. Living and attached to her own man, she found the various phases it went through to be extremely fascinating.

With how she was like, she would never take his teasing lying down. If she had the opportunity, she would definitely return the favour and give him a taste of what she was capable of. She could not allow him to believe he could bully her whenever he wanted just because she had become his woman.

Li Qingshan suddenly widened his eyes before frowning. He shot a glance at her viciously. Once a tomboy gained a hint of femininity, it would be the end of the world. Her wild style of approaching things had almost driven him mad. Only when he secretly used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression did he manage to suppress his restless desire. He had already grasped her weakness anyway, so there was no need for him to be so worried. She would be stripped, washed, and eaten sooner or later.

They arrived in the long-awaited Clear River city and strolled around together while holding hands.

Willows stood along the banks of the Clear river. Boats stretched across the river like silk. It was a scorching summer day, but the interest for outings continued to soar.

In this day and age, society was quite liberal. Particularly within a prefectural city like Clear River city that was directly under the control of cultivators, even the legendary heyday of the Tang dynasty was unable to rival its liberty.

After all, one of the three rulers of the Ruyi commandery was female. Women could practise martial arts and cultivate. They were not dependent on men. The one beside Li Qingshan was a living example of this.

Although Han Qiongzhi simply stood out too much, forcing Li Qingshan to deal with a few rascals taken away by her beauty, this long-awaited secular lifestyle and the hubbub of the streets made Li Qingshan reminisce for quite a while.

As he strolled past the tall structures and held the hand of this woman who gave off a sense of modernness, he felt like he had returned to his past life. When no one was around, she would peck him with a kiss before scampering to one side with a smile, looking at his helpless expression of being teased.

Around dusk, Li Qingshan bid farewell to Han Qiongzhi—it was obviously a kiss as she had completely fallen in love with this act of intimacy—before returning to Cloudwisp island. Sure enough, Xiao An was waiting in his room, reading a buddhist scripture quietly. She smiled as soon as she saw him and tilted her head. “Where’s my gift?”

Li Qingshan sat down right in front of her. After a moment of consideration, he still decided to tell her this piece of news in the end. After all, this was the last bit of news that woman had left behind in this world.

“Qian Rongzhi’s gone missing. She told me to give you these things.”

Xiao An was stunned. She stared at the pile of pills and spiritual stones before her.

Completely in love with Han Qiongzhi, Li Qingshan had almost forgotten about this woman’s existence completely. It was Han Qiongzhi who had mentioned this during their idle talk. Qian Rongzhi had vanished for three months now, and the Hawkwolf Guard had already sent out a search mission for her. It was basically confirmed that she was already dead.

Han Qiongzhi had already grown accustomed to death, so she only let out a sigh back then, and she no longer thought about it anymore. Unless there were special circumstances, the relationships between cultivators had always been so flimsy.

Li Qingshan sighed gently. Had she finally reached the end with her mad pursuit?

Xiao An suddenly recalled the woman who laughed madly among the pile of corpses and pools of blood. Her heart trembled. Was she really dead?

“I want to divine a trigram for her.”

“Fair enough.” Li Qingshan held no expectations at all. Qian Rongzhi’s final mission sent her southward to investigate a man-eating daemonic beast. She had basically left the boundaries of the Clear River prefecture. Her destination was a vast forest with countless daemonic beasts of various sizes thriving.

There were countless venomous insects, and it was connected to the underground caverns. Just entering the place came with extreme danger.

There were even rumors that it was very possible for the place to be the White Lotus Mother's hiding spot after she had escaped. However, even Gu Yanying never bothered to check, so who was bold enough to verify this? Even if they managed to find her, all that awaited them was death. As a result, although the Hawkwolf Guard had issued a search mission after Qian Rongzhi's disappearance, absolutely no one was bold enough to venture there.

Xiao An closed her eyes and sat with her legs crossed. Her right hand brushed past the various items.

As a divining art of the school of Yin-yang, she had never given up on understanding and practising the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots. However, this was the first time she had used it.

At the same moment, the light from the setting sun weakly penetrated a canopy woven from leaves in a forest over a thousand kilometers to the south. The forest had already descended into darkness.

A fly buzzed and searched around. Suddenly, it caught a heavy, sweet, ravishing scent; it was a mixture of blood and rot. It often represented a corpse that it could lay eggs on and allow its descendants to thrive.

It fluttered its wings and flew quickly in that direction. It avoided a spider's web and arrived before a small hill. The smell came from here.

It circled around before entering the cave that was almost covered in vines. It had already become pitch-black like night in there, but that was unable to stop it. Very soon, it found its target, a humanoid corpse lying on the ground.

Yes, humanoid was all it was. Its beautiful clothes had already been ripped apart, reduced to pieces of blood-soaked rags. It bore absolutely no resemblance to its former shape. Injuries covered the body like blood-red mouths, leaking with blood or even pus. They seemed like crying eyes or wailing mouths, trying to explain its indescribable pain.

The "corpse" did not have a single inch of intact skin. Even the gaps between the injuries were riddled with uneven scars, as if they had been viciously ripped open again just when they had healed.

The face was no different from the body. It was not even possible to distinguish its gender. Only a pair of eyes remained wide open, so widely open that the corners had almost ripped apart. They stared into the darkness ahead and were covered in a layer of grey dust.