

Chapter 351 - Qian Rongzhi's Melancholy

"This is already the sixth trigram. Are you going to continue?" Li Qingshan asked. Although Han Qiongzhi had never mentioned it, they had probably asked Ma Buyi to personally divine for her fate since she was a legalist disciple. If they could determine her fate, then it would not be a search mission, but a rescue mission.

Searching for a live person was searching. Searching for a dead person was also searching.

Xiao An gradually familiarised herself with the usage of the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots, but for six consecutive trigrams, they were all the worst of the worst. She could not find a single chance for survival. However, she refused to give up because this was all very strange.

If Qian Rongzhi were dead, then she should have been able to predict a rough location of her corpse. However, the trigrams suggested that she seemed to be in hell. This was the most unlikely place possible.

Even if hell was where all souls would return to, even Ma Buyi's arts of divination were unable to extend across worlds.

"I want to divine one last trigram."

"Alright." Li Qingshan nodded. Although spirit turtles possessed some prophetic powers, he was two-ninths of a spirit turtle at most. He could only sense life-threatening danger.

When he fell into Altar Lord Black Lotus' formation in Ancient Wind city, there had been no warnings at all. He even had to rely on his instincts as a daemon to sense that something was amiss in the very end, and he had failed to escape. Of course, he believed it was because his senses were not sharp enough, but sure enough, he had just been shaken up in the end, without encountering any danger at all.

Xiao An closed her hands. Seven types of true qi, yin, yang, and the five elements, condensed according to a special method, as if they were paralleling the propagation and decay of everything in the world, resonating with a sliver of unseen fate.

In the end, it condensed into a round cup. Thousands of colours merged and swirled along a special pattern, like a kaleidoscope, like it was forming various diagrams, images, and words. However, just a single glance of it made Li Qingshan's head spin.

A thin bamboo lot rose up from it slowly, and the cup disintegrated. Xiao An suddenly snatched up the lot, as if she had grasped the unseen fate.

The Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots originated from the most ancient Divination of the Seven Stars. A lot decided a fate, giving her knowledge of good and bad luck, life and death, the past and the future.

Li Qingshan was unable to tell what was going on. He just wondered to himself. If he used turtle shells for divination, then Xiao An would use lots for divination. Of course, he had no idea that his dream lover Gu Yanying's Six Trigrams Divination used bronze coins as a medium.

The lot obviously was not a real lot. There would not be lots of best of the best or worst of the worst. Instead, it would produce a piece of information from the ever-changing fate. Good or bad luck, or life or death, all seemed the same to fate. Only humans had a concept of the best of the best and the worst of the worst.

Xiao An closed her eyes and frowned. She released all of her imagination as she tried to read the information in the lot.

Fate would never tell you clearly, "Hey, John Doe, you're going to be unlucky today." Even just a simple piece of information like that was ten times more informative than all of wikipedia. It was a hundred times more difficult to understand than a piece of art from a drunken impressionist.

The main job of the diviner was to read the information and tell the person, "Hey, John Doe, you're going to be unlucky today. It's best if you don't go out."

Yet, there happened to be a time limit to this. The bamboo slip of light constantly flickered and twisted, dispersing in Xiao An's hands very soon.

Li Qingshan asked, "How's it?"

Xiao An opened her eyes and furrowed her brows firmly. The Cloud Bookcase of the Seven used the first six lots as a foundation, so the seventh lot would be the most accurate one. She finally found a sliver of survival in the hellish images. It was so frail that it was almost hopeless. It was like a lone lantern within a fierce storm, where it could be put out at any moment.

Li Qingshan heard Xiao An's explanation and pondered for a while. "Are you thinking of finding her?"

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The fly confirmed the source of the smell. It circled around a few times cautiously. It failed to discover any other flies, which made it slightly uneasy.

However, it was unable to resist the temptation of the smell. Driven by its instincts, it landed on a widened eye of the "corpse".

At that moment, something seemed to swim past in the pupil of the "corpse". The eye of the "corpse" suddenly turned.

It fell to the ground silently, its short life coming to an end. Together with many other creatures of the same kind, they laid on the ground, dead.

Using the momentary clear-mindedness, the eyes swiveled, observing the surroundings. Only through that could she learn how long she had remained here for. Her thoughts had been completely torn apart, while her senses became the greatest lies, making her believe she had already remained here for over a century.

Her rationality only played a measly role, as if she was searching through garbage within ruins, wanting to rebuild a city. It was ridiculous and pointless.

However, she managed to find her long-lost sense of time. Her memories returned to roughly three months ago.

The proud, noon sun barely managed to penetrate the green canopy, landing in this forest and making a wide, shallow stream sparkle.

She stepped into the stream and disturbed the silence there. She tried to focus on finding the whereabouts of the man-eating daemonic beast so that she could forget about her original reason for coming here, but she was unable to forget it.

The world was heading into late spring, but her heart remained in the chilly winter, unable to forget about turmoil. She had found nothing in the past few months, and she would be able to let out a sigh of relief every single day, but there seemed to be another power constantly pulling her towards the sludge.

She almost wanted to give up, to travel far away and start over in a place where no one knew her. However, the arts of divination existed in this world. Perhaps that person was helpless against Gu Yanying, but finding her and killing her could not be any easier.

She stopped at the centre of the stream. Once she crossed through this stream, she would reach the depths of the forest, which was filled with various dangers. She could declare an end to the mission once she reached that stage.

“Are you looking for someone?”

Just when she wanted to turn around, a gentle voice made her stop. The voice came from a man who possessed a face as gentle as his voice. The corner of his lips curled into a faint smile. His black ceremonial robes were dark like the night. The tattered bottom of his clothes moved with the stream.

She sighed gently, as if a great burden had been lifted from her shoulders. The real danger she had been waiting for the entire time had already come.

Only then did she slowly turn around. She bowed. “Greetings from subordinate Qian Rongzhi, Altar Lord Black Lotus.” Finally, she had met the greatest person within the White Lotus cult apart from the holy mother once more.

“Qian Rongzhi, how dare you come here!” Before Altar Lord Black Lotus could say anything, a little girl in white emerged from behind him. She seemed to be five or six years old at most, and her voice was childish, but the coldness in her pupils were enough to freeze the blood within her veins. Qian Rongzhi said nothing at all. That’s right, this was the White Lotus Mother, the source of her fear this whole time.

“You seem to have been searching for us the entire time?” Altar Lord Black Lotus asked curiously. They were aware of Qian Rongzhi’s arrival, but they were worried it was a trap. He had racked his brains to prevent White Lotus from stepping into this potential trap. Exposing their tracks for a mere Qian Rongzhi was very unnecessary.

However, today, he was no longer able to pacify her fury, which was why they had appeared. That ma’am Gu was not patient enough to do all this. She could not even be bothered with chasing them down, which meant she no longer took this past enemy of her seriously anymore. Yes, the game had already ended.

Qian Rongzhi immediately dropped to her knees and lowered her head into the water. “Yes, Qian Rongzhi was under Gu Yanying’s control and caused a huge mistake. I deserve a thousand deaths. I’ve specially come for punishment from the holy mother and the altar lord!”

“Don’t mention that name!” The little girl screamed.

“I’m no longer an Altar Lord. Just call me Black Lotus!”

“I’m still the White Lotus Mother!” The little girl screamed again.

“Alright, alright. You’re still the White Lotus Mother.” Black Lotus bent over and spoke to her like he was coaxing a child. Afterwards, he stood up straight again and rubbed his temples like he was troubled. “I really do want to spare you, but can’t you come up with a proper reason? Now that the White Lotus Mother has lost her temper, she’s very difficult to appease.”

Qian Rongzhi wanted to speak, but Black Lotus interrupted her by raising his hand. “I don’t want to hear your lies. Please treat us with sincerity, okay? In order for you to understand the severity of this matter, I’ll kill you if you utter another lie from now on.”

“I don’t want to listen to her. Black Lotus, kill her! Kill her!” The White Lotus Mother constantly stamped her foot, causing the water to splash everywhere.

Black Lotus grabbed the White Lotus Mother’s little hand. “You better speak soon! The White Lotus Mother is running out of patience. Stand up and look into my eyes. Tell me why you’ve come.”

Qian Rongzhi stood up and stared into Black Lotus’s clear, dark, and serene pupils. She could no longer utter a single word of everything she had prepared beforehand, as all of it were lies.

“I want a way out.”

“Don’t you even think about it!” The White Lotus Mother kicked the water fiercely.

Black Lotus smiled. “Very good. There’s something we both want then. Without a doubt, killing out of hatred is pointless. Of course, not everyone agrees with that.” For example, the tiny White Lotus Mother beside him. She was tempted to skin that traitor Qian Rongzhi alive.

“I’m very curious about why you weren’t influenced by the Heart Cleansing Technique of Clear Ripple?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “That’s probably because I’ve practised the arts of charm...”

“The Heart Cleansing Technique of Clear Ripple is not an art of charm. Do you know its origins?”

Qian Rongzhi shook her head. She had not even managed to feel what the technique had done to her.

Black Lotus explained. There had once been an eminent monk who had witnessed all aspects of life. He saw how there were countless people who refused to come to their senses throughout the vast world. Out of lament, he created a technique where he could fill the mind of others with his own comprehension, allowing them to attain enlightenment in a single instant.

Even a fool, a simpleton, could comprehend the supreme essence of the buddhist dharma, no longer bound by the various afflictions of the world. It was called the Wisdom Imbuement technique. It was not a technique to control the minds of others from the demonic path.

The Heart Cleansing Technique of Clear Ripple originated from that. It could not be resisted, as the technique was beneficial to the person in the first place. Under the influence of the technique, it would seem like they had awakened their innate knowledge and comprehended the past, removing all

bottlenecks of the mind from the path of cultivation until they reached the limit of the caster's cultivation. If Hua Chengzan had been influenced by this technique, he would have successfully reached Foundation Establishment a few years ago.

Only then did Qian Rongzhi understand why all people within the White Lotus cult under the influence of the technique would smile from ear to ear, remaining positive even when the White Lotus cult was severely crippled, as if they were filled with endless satisfaction.

Black Lotus said, "Can you tell me exactly why?"

Qian Rongzhi lowered her head. "Actually, I want to be like them very much." Growing up, she too had once enjoyed moments of utter delight, but she could no longer recall any of it. She frowned and shook her head powerlessly. "But, I just can't be happy!"

Chapter 352 - Qian Rongzhi's Recollection

"So... you can't be happy... I see now." Black Lotus sighed gently and took pity on her.

Originally, he had thought it was a deeper plan from Gu Yanying, using some kind of artifact to resist the Heart Cleansing Technique of Clear Ripple. However, the answer he received was surprisingly simple. Even the Heart Cleansing Technique of Clear Ripple was unable to wash away her pain that was like pitch-black sludge.

Actually, he had witnessed similar situations in the past, but most people who resisted the technique ended up killing themselves very soon. Even if they continued to live, they would be tortured endlessly by their own pain, becoming no different from zombies, dull and unable to focus. Since they were unable to break free from it, death became their best salvation.

"Then why do you still want to live?"

"Why? Why?" Qian Rongzhi lowered her head and murmured. Suddenly, she smiled and tidied up her hair. "Perhaps it's just because I refuse to die."

Having reached this stage, any hard work would be futile. Her fate was in the hands of others. However, she felt no fear at all. Just like what Black Lotus had said, death was not a particularly bad option for her.

Black Lotus said sincerely, "Rongzhi, I really do want you to live..."

"No, don't even think about that!" The White Lotus Mother screamed.

"Then the issue right now is, what am I supposed to do to let you live? I might not be an Altar Lord anymore, but I can't disobey the White Lotus Mother's orders."

"Black- Lotus- who's- side- are- you- on?" The White Lotus Mother stressed every single word as she kicked Black Lotus's calf furiously. Black Lotus laid his hands out helplessly.

Qian Rongzhi raised her head. Through the cracks between the green leaves, sunlight twinkled like stars. Her figure was reflected in the serene stream, standing aloof from the world, as if everything happening right now no longer had anything to do with her.

She had done what she could. The rest was up to fate.

Black Lotus pondered for a while before suddenly smiling. He raised a finger and said, "People always say there is no perfect outcome, but if you look closely, you'll always be able to find a way."

Afterwards, he crouched down and said to the White Lotus Mother, "Holy mother, will you be satisfied if you just kill her like this? It'll basically be salvation for her instead."

The White Lotus Mother said, "Do you really think I'll kill her so easily? I will make her go through all the cruel tortures in the world, until she sobs and begs me, until her mind is broken. Then I'll kill her."

Qian Rongzhi's lips curled into a sneer. Sobbing and begging? Mind broken? Do you want me to act it out for you right now?

Black Lotus seemed to grasp the crux of the matter. He smiled. "Yes, cruel torture. Do you still remember that?"

The White Lotus Mother's face blanked out at the thought of something before smiling viciously. "Yes, we'll go with that. You're the clever one." She took out something from the sumeru ring on her finger and handed it to Black Lotus.

Black Lotus opened his hand at Qian Rongzhi. A translucent piece of amber sat within the palm of his hand. A tiny snake, as thin as a strand of hair, was sealed with the amber. It was incredibly small, but its gorgeous colours were enchanting.

Qian Rongzhi asked, "This is?"

"This comes from the Mist province."

"A Snake gu?" Qian Rongzhi frowned. The Mist province was also known as the Myriad Mountains. Although Great Xia had already reigned over it for all these years, it was still an uncivilized and undeveloped place. The path of cultivation of savages differed drastically from those practiced in the central lands. The arts of shamanistic gu were one of the strangest methods to kill people in the world. It had made a name for itself.

"That's right."

"You want to kill me with this?"

"I heard from a friend that real gu is not for killing people. Instead, it's to make living people feel like they'd be better off dead."

Qian Rongzhi's eyes lit up. Since it was for making living people feel like they would be better off dead, that meant she could live.

"Though, this gu is called a gu of burden. For the past three hundred years, it was believed to be a gu of death, as no one had ever survived once afflicted by it. They would all die from the agonising pain. Even the most cold-hearted, toughest man would become as frail as a child once they were afflicted by this gu."

The White Lotus Mother's smile grew even wider. It was innocent yet cruel. Even Qian Rongzhi experienced chills from it.

Black Lotus continued, "Only afterwards did people discover that this gu did not cause death. It did not even cause any harm at all. All the people who died to the gu died by suicide. If you can endure the pain, you'll benefit tremendously from it instead. There had even been a cult that had arisen from it, worshipping the snake as their holy snake."

Qian Rongzhi stepped through the stream and made her way forward. She reached towards the Snake Burden gu without any hesitation at all. Pain? She had always been a very tolerant person.

Black Lotus closed his hand instead. His face sank. "Do you really plan on living like this? Once the gu is planted, it will never go away. It will be bound to you forever, which is why it's called a burden."

"I don't think I have any other choice." Qian Rongzhi sneered.

Black Lotus stared at her deeply. "I suddenly regret this slightly. If you choose death, I will give you a swift one. You won't feel any pain at all."

The White Lotus Mother said unhappily, "Black Lotus!"

Black Lotus bowed seriously. "No matter how unhappy you are with this, I can't just let you do this. Slaughter and death have always been unavoidable, but humiliation and abuse are not things we should do. If you insist on this, then please kill me first!"

The White Lotus Mother was powerless against him. All she could do was turn around furiously.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "Thank you for your kind intentions, but if I were in search of a swift death, why would I still come here?"

Black Lotus fell silent for a moment. He opened his hand. "Fine then. I respect your choice, but please listen to the last bit I have to say. According to my knowledge, this snake is not a creature of this world. Instead, it comes from the Hell realm. As a legalist disciple, you should know about this."

Qian Rongzhi's eyes narrowed. She obviously knew about this. The legendary Hell realm had a total of eighteen major hells and countless minor hells. It was where all dead souls returned to throughout the trichiliocosm. All their sins would receive a final judgement in the underworld. It was the ultimate representation of law. She also understood very well why the Snake Burden gu did not cause death. The tortures of hell had never been for slaughter, but for punishment.

It was to make even the toughest evildoers feel pain so that they could then repent.

"This snake comes from the Venomous Snake hell. The so-called cruel tortures of the living world is no different from a mere game before the punishments of hell. In other words, you will be living in hell every single day from today onwards."

Before he had even finished talking, Qian Rongzhi had already snatched up the amber. She brought the amber to the sunlight and raised her beautiful face, looking at the gorgeous, tiny snake in there. She glanced at Black Lotus, and her lips curled up. "Thank you for your kind intentions."

The amber slid down between her fingers. Under the illumination of sunlight, the snake inside seemed even more enchanting. Suddenly, she opened her eyes, and it fell straight into her mouth.

Within the darkness, cracks appeared on the amber before it shattered all of a sudden. She did not release it. Instead, it broke free from its restraints by itself.

Like a wild beast that had caught the scent of blood, like a gluttonous taotie that had seen delicious food, this shameless soul filled with hatred was like its favourite food and a warm bed. It dove in deeply and helplessly.

TL: A taotie is an evil creature of gluttony within Chinese mythology. It is one of the four perils, along with hundun, qiongqi, and taowu.

Qian Rongzhi trembled all over. She immediately dropped to her knees in the stream. The tiny snake that was even more gorgeous than a rainbow swum through her face like a tattoo. It swam under her skin, and it seemed to become slightly larger than when it was in the amber.

She suddenly widened her eyes, falling down limply and kicking up a splash.

An indescribable, even unimaginable, pain moved through her like a snake. She opened her mouth as widely as she could. If she could still let out any sounds, she would definitely be shrieking miserably right now. However, the pain had already seized her body and locked up her throat. All she could let out were pointless choking sounds.

However, every inch of her body moaned. The entirety of her soul wailed.

She had completely underestimated the tortures of hell. She was completely wrong. She was nowhere near as tough as she had imagined herself to be. In just a single moment, she began to feel regret. She was willing to do anything to rid herself of this pain.

Did those souls in hell repent for their past sins every single day and night too?

Although she had widened her eyes to the limit, her vision was a blur. Everything in the surroundings seemed to spin, turning into blurry colours. She could vaguely make out a black shadow that approached her, which said, "Since this is the path you've chosen, I wish you a safe journey."

Black Lotus stood up and said to the White Lotus Mother, who relished Qian Rongzhi's horrible shape with great interest, "Let's go!"

The White Lotus Mother said, "Let me watch for a little longer."

Black Lotus looked at her fiercely, and the White Lotus Mother grumbled, "How stingy!"

When the first wave of pain had passed, the venomous snake that came from hell seemed to have moved around enough. It settled down.

She supported her body and crawled back onto her knees. The sky had already darkened completely. She did her best to tidy her chaotic thoughts. Although her face was sheet-white, she was basically unscathed. The White Lotus Mother had not even touched a single hair on her. It was even better than the best-case scenario she had imagined before.

However, her mind was close to collapsing completely. It was very strange. If a person underwent pain they could not endure, they would fall unconscious or be driven crazy even if they survived. However,

she managed to maintain a clear mind the entire time, carefully tasting every moment of pain. Perhaps this was the wonders of the punishments of hell!

Returning to her senses, the first thing she did was grab her own throat. All she needed to do was close her hand gently. Blood would seep out, and she would be free.

Her sharp nails dug through her sheet-white skin. Warm, bright-red blood oozed out. After hesitating for quite a while, she pulled her hand back again and stood up as she tried to stabilise herself. She found a small cave in the mountains and dove in before falling unconscious.

She dreamt of a large snake coloured even more gorgeously swallowing her in a single bite. She woke up again very soon, and the second wave of pain arrived.

Time slipped by with each passing day. When she could move around, she would replenish her food and water before awaiting the next round of pain in utter fear. Yes, fear, unprecedented fear, so much fear that she trembled. Even when she rested, the snake would torture her in a different way, which made her contemplate salvation through death at every single moment.

However, she refused to just go like this. Gradually, she could make some simple movements during the punishment, but it only made the situation even worse. Every single time, she would lose her mind, tempted to dig out the snake from her body. She would rip through every inch of her skin. Fortunately, the bodies of cultivators were powerful, so the wounds would always heal very quickly.

She even came up with a ridiculous idea. If she peeled off her own skin, could she break away from the snake? However, her remaining rationality stopped her. The snake had already merged with her, and if she did something like that, she would die very soon. She could not just die like this!

At this moment, the aura of danger interrupted her recollection.

A daemonic beast that seemed like a wild cat arrived in the cave by following the scent of blood. Its glowing eyes hovered about in the darkness.

It was a daemonic beast that had condensed a daemon core. Perhaps this was the man-eating daemonic beast she had been searching for, but none of that matter anymore. Even if she were in perfect shape, she would not be confident that she could defeat it, but she was extremely frail now. Even moving a single finger was a struggle.

Chapter 353 - To Never Repent, To Never Mend Her Ways

Xiao An did not answer Li Qingshan immediately. Instead, she began thinking in silence.

“Since you’re considering it, then let’s go look for her. It’s not like it’ll take a lot of time anyway.” It was rare for Xiao An to be interested in someone else. Li Qingshan felt like he should encourage something like this. And, with what Qian Rongzhi had left for Xiao An, they had to do what they could.

“It’s too dangerous.” Xiao An shook her head.

“Don’t worry. I might not know divination like you, but I can still sense real danger.” Li Qingshan pointed at his head before rubbing her hair. “Just treat it as me going out to have some fun with you.”

“Alright.”

They arrived at the Hawkwolf Guard. Li Qingshan accepted the mission and went upstairs to give Han Qiongzhi some notice.

After a series of intimate contact, Han Qiongzhi heard about the details of Li Qingshan's mission. She said in surprise, "You want to accept this mission? Do you know her very well?"

"I obviously don't know her as well as you. We've basically just worked together a few times. She's probably dead already, but I should still bring her remains back!" Li Qingshan studied Han Qiongzhi as he said without the slightest concern.

The floor-to-ceiling windows allowed scorching sunlight to pour in. As she sat in the tall back chair in her Scarlet Wolf uniform, she seemed extremely valiant. Li Qingshan leaned against the table right in front of her, daydreaming away.

Han Qiongzhi stroked her chin in thought; this action was extremely masculine, which gave her a different kind of charm.

"Alright, you can go!"

Li Qingshan smiled. "What, are you worried that your man might run into the White Lotus Mother, and she might keep him around as a trophy husband?"

Han Qiongzhi leaned against the seat back and raised her legs, crossing them on the table. She looked down. "If it were little Hua, then there might have been some chance for that to happen. With your looks, you'll probably just be cut up immediately. I received news a few days ago that the White Lotus Mother and Altar Lord Black Lotus have already returned to the Mist province to rebuild the White Lotus cult."

Li Qingshan asked, "Is the information reliable? Aren't they afraid of being caught there?"

"The Mist province is not the Green province. It's truly a lawless place. Basically all the people who cannot deal with the Hawkwolf Guard in the Green province will flee there. If you really can't find her, don't forget to just bring some remains back." Han Qiongzhi winked.

"That doesn't sound like a good idea!" Li Qingshan said. The search mission for Qian Rongzhi came with quite a lot of contribution. After all, it had to do with the fate of a Scarlet Wolf guard.

"Who cares? I'm in charge right now anyway. It's not like little Hua is here. Old Wang has gone cultivating too. I have to deal with all these matters alone. It's driving me crazy."

"Fine then. Wait for my return." Li Qingshan leaned over and gave her a deep kiss before standing up and leaving.

Han Qiongzhi arrived beside the floor-to-ceiling windows and watched his cloud takeoff. She smiled with her lips closed.

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The daemoniac beast moved with startling speeds. Its two glowing eyes were like drifting shadows, producing two long trails of light. It circled around Qian Rongzhi again and again, rapidly drawing closer.

Qian Rongzhi widened her eyes as far as she could. In the beginning, they managed to follow the daemonic beast around, but afterwards, they stopped moving, as if she had completely grown numb to it all already.

The daemonic beast confirmed that this was not a trap. The two balls of circling green light suddenly moved towards the centre of the cave. The daemonic beast lunged over and bit Qian Rongzhi's neck. That was the only place on her body with fewer wounds. Even when she was in extreme pain, she would constantly control herself so that she would not accidentally end her own life.

Was this going to be it after enduring all that pain for three months?

Four canines pierced her skin first, followed by the rest of the teeth. They just needed to close up a little more, and there would be no need to wait for her to suffocate. They would directly shatter her vertebrae.

Even at this moment, her gaze and expression remained the same as before. The pain that could agonise others was as lovely as the spring breeze to her, while the looming death might have only been salvation to her.

The daemonic beast stiffened. Tremendous pain permeated its entire body instantly like venom.

Qian Rongzhi finally revealed a smile, which seemed more demonic than anything else on her terrifying face. With her hands beside her body, she propped herself up slowly before biting into the daemonic beast's neck.

At a closer glance, a tiny, gorgeously-coloured snake had already begun circling around Qian Rongzhi's neck. A parasite would protect its host. Its method of protection was obviously to make the enemy have a taste of the same pain.

When the punishments of hell descended, the daemonic beast's daemon qi completely dispersed. It could not even move a single muscle. Its tough hide was gradually pierced by her teeth, and the metallic, salty blood flowed into her mouth. She was like a vampire, sucking hard and using the blood of others to make up for her own blood loss.

She had already finished off the food she had prepared in her hundred treasures pouch a long time ago. Fortunately, the smell of blood she gave off lured many wild beasts over. This was the method she had used to eat them all and replenish her energy.

Filling herself with blood, she recovered quite a lot of strength. She ripped open the daemonic beast's belly and took out a translucent daemon core the size of a rice grain. She consumed it immediately and did her best to meditate.

The daemon core happened to match her elemental affinity. It was basically luck bestowed upon her by heaven. The true qi she had not seen in a very long time finally appeared within her sea of qi once more. Powered by the true qi, her wounds gradually closed up.

Qian Rongzhi suddenly felt dizzy. Touching her forehead, she found that it was another fever. Remaining within the forest and having lost her true qi for an extended period of time, this was already the third time she had fallen sick.

She knew that she had to leave here. She required a better environment to recover, or she might end up dying here. If she drew over even stronger daemonic beasts, they would be able to crush her throat before becoming seized by the pain.

She saw the disemboweled carcass of the daemonic beast. Before she left, she had to finish it off so that she could build up enough strength.

The sun set and rose, but there was no concept of time at all in this gloomy cavern.

It had only taken Li Qingshan and Xiao An a few hours to reach the hamlet on the edge of the forest. Sure enough, the villagers had seen traces of her. The last few footprints from her led into the forest.

She had been so brazen, openly disclosing her tracks. Clearly, she did all of this on purpose.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An currently stood before the forest. The serenity made it seem like a different world. Looking for a single person in a forest that extended for thousands of kilometers really would not be easy.

However, it was not too difficult for Li Qingshan. He was very familiar with that woman's smell and aura.

As he moved about swiftly and undertook a rapid search, a heavy smell of blood caught his attention. He lifted up the curtain formed from vines and saw a monster laying within a wild beast, eating its organs.

A hint of a familiar scent wafted over through the heavy smell of blood. He struggled to believe his eyes. "Qian Rongzhi?"

The "monster" suddenly raised her head and saw Li Qingshan. She was surprised. She smiled in an extremely vicious manner and said extremely powerlessly, "You've come." She said it like she was sitting peacefully at home, welcoming the visit of a good friend she had not seen in a very long time; she did not act like she had just spotted a saviour from her despair.

Li Qingshan said nothing. All he did was take out a pill and walk over. Even he himself found this sight to be rather horrific. He never thought the White Lotus cult could actually be so cruel.

Qian Rongzhi spotted Xiao An behind him and suddenly felt a sense of shame. She curled up. The venomous snake in her body settled down slightly for some reason.

Li Qingshan wanted to force her mouth open and shove the pill in there.

"Don't touch me!"

From that moment of distraction, Li Qingshan's hand had already touched her face. Immediately, indescribable pain filled his body. Before he knew it, the tattoo of a coloured snake had appeared where the tip of his finger had touched her.

The parasite's instincts of protecting the host would not change with the host's will. From now onwards, anyone who wanted to touch her would have to face hellish pain too.

The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas! Li Qingshan jerked his hand back and stared at it in shock, but he discovered that it was unscathed. His body was perfectly fine too; it was as if the pain earlier was just a dream.

At this moment, a pair of small, tender hands grabbed her hand.

“Xiao An!” Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi said together.

Xiao An showed no expression of pain at all.

The snakes of hell could be delivered to this world to punish the living, while in the Venomous Snake hell, they punished the dead. However, Xiao An was neither dead nor living.

Warmth spread through her hand. Qian Rongzhi saw holy, golden light rise up from Xiao An. Then, the light spread through her body along her hands, enveloping her completely in the golden light.

Her wounds gradually healed, and subsequently, the vicious, uneven scars were erased bit by bit. This was not the effects of buddhist techniques. Instead, it originated from the power of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. Her appearance seemed to become even more charming than before.

Xiao An let go and receded to Li Qingshan’s side. Qian Rongzhi said gently, “Thank you.” She asked Li Qingshan, “Do you have water?”

With a snap of his fingers, a swirl of water wrapped around her body, washing away the filth and rags on her before vanishing as steam. It revealed her pale body and beautiful proportions, completely naked.

Li Qingshan had always been a person with very strong desires, but standing before this woman, his mind would always be as calm as water. It was no different right now. He could not even be bothered with shifting his gaze.

Qian Rongzhi was no different. She picked up her hundred treasures pouch and took out a dress, putting it on. She moved her arms and extended her legs in the process in a natural manner. She was neither trying to seduce him nor avoid him.

It was as if he did not treat her as a woman, and she did not treat him as a man.

Li Qingshan said, “Looks like you’ve suffered quite a lot.”

“Do you want to know?” Qian Rongzhi had already put on the dress. She was straightening out her hair before a mirror.

“Let’s hear it.” Li Qingshan was rather curious.

As a result, Qian Rongzhi told him what she went through casually. She said it so easily that it sounded like she was telling a story about someone else.

Even Li Qingshan shivered inside after hearing it all. He asked, “How do you plan on dealing with this gu?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “There’s nothing I can do about it, nor is there any need for me to do anything about it. As long as I let go of my shamelessness and hatred, it’ll naturally stop torturing me.”

The Venomous Snake hell had always been for punishing those who ran amok due to a lack of shame, those who sinned endlessly due to hatred. However, punishment was not its purpose. Instead, its compassionate purpose was to get the sinner to come to their senses and realise the sins they had committed so that they could attain redemption and salvation.

Li Qingshan mockingly asked, "Can you achieve that?"

Qian Rongzhi smiled in response. "Of course not. I won't feel shame for anything. I hate everyone in the world!"

The venomous snake swam around happily, and she suddenly collapsed on her knees, digging her fingers deeply into the earth. Her smile became twisted due to the pain, but it also became more resplendent. Even if she sank into endless suffering within Avīci, she would never repent or mend her ways.

Chapter 354 - No Title

Looking at her like this, killing intent surged within Li Qingshan for some reason. She had already recovered her wounds, turning back into that pretty Qian Rongzhi, but she felt even more inhumane than the "monster" he saw earlier. He asked nonchalantly, "Does that include me too?"

Qian Rongzhi asked, "Are you a person?"

Li Qingshan was slightly aback. He sneered disdainfully, "As long as I can live to my heart's content, does it matter if I'm a person or not? I didn't want to get my nose in your business, but Xiao An divined that there was a chance for you to survive, which was why I paid a visit here."

Qian Rongzhi glanced at Xiao An deeply. Xiao An remained composed the entire time, just like she was usually. She was expressionless.

Qian Rongzhi smiled, "Keep the items I had you to hold onto. You can treat it as a gift of gratitude."

Li Qingshan took off on a cloud, returning to Clear River city with his "mission item".

When Qian Rongzhi appeared before Han Qiongzhi in one piece, even Han Qiongzhi became surprised. After learning about her encounter with the White Lotus Mother and spending all that time tending to her heavy injuries in the forest, Han Qiongzhi smiled. "You have quite the luck. So much for my worries for you." Even Han Qiongzhi had no idea about the role Qian Rongzhi had played in the mission to trap the White Lotus cult last time.

"Thank you for your concern, second senior sister," Qian Rongzhi replied politely. Though, did she really have good luck?

Maybe she did. After receiving treatment from Xiao An, the benefits of the venomous snake of hell gradually presented itself. After the pain, her thoughts would always become especially clear. Her body and soul seemed to go through a few changes too.

Qian Rongzhi's return caused quite a disturbance within the Hawkwolf Guard. Despite her usual manner of taking advantage of everything within her reach, she turned down Han Qiongzhi's banquet for welcoming her back.

During those three months, she seemed to have established a slight connection with the venomous snake that burdened her. She gained a slight control over the time of the "punishment", but she needed even more time before she could merge with it properly. The path of the future was within her grasps once more.

Returning to her residence alone, a familiar figure stood at the entrance. Qian Rongzhi said in surprise, "Little Tian, what brings you here?"

Chu Tian said with great concern, "I heard you returned. Where have you been all this time? I was very worried for you. There were many times when I wanted to search for you."

Unfortunately, he never tried searching for her, not even once. Qian Rongzhi was not surprised by this at all. It was not because he was insincere towards her. She still held great confidence in her ability to manipulate and influence people. It was just that to certain people, nothing was more precious than their own lives.

As Chu Tian extended his hand over, her eyes lit up. If she held the hand right now, he would probably end up dropping to his knees, begging her to spare him, no matter how much of a genius he was. She would be able to find out about anything he was hiding, including any trump cards he possessed.

However, she hesitated before pulling her hand back in the end. Chu Tian was a genius that many people kept an eye out for. If he died mysteriously, the entire academy would definitely be shaken up. At a time like this, it would be much better for her to avoid causing any incidents. He had already become hers anyway.

She suddenly felt delight inside. She was still a sixth layer Qi Practitioner, but she now possessed a pair of fatal, venomous fangs that could harm these so-called geniuses.

Chu Tian was disappointed, but he felt ashamed too, so he just remained silent. When he heard how it was Li Qingshan who brought her back, he felt even more depressed inside. Why was that guy everywhere?

When Qian Rongzhi "accidentally" mentioned she had lost her hundred treasures pouch during the mission and was worried about her future cultivation, Chu Tian immediately gave her many pills and spiritual pills with great generosity.

Qian Rongzhi tried to decline the offer before accepting it in the end. "Thank you, little Tian. I will return all of this to you."

Chu Tian stared at her face in fascination. He felt like no one was more charming and enchanting than her.

With a gentle cough, Wu Gen emerged from the darkness. He too had once considered searching for her, but as the descendant of a clan, he obviously could not risk his life and go to that forest where the White Lotus Mother might have been hiding. Afterwards, he began to believe her death was certain, and he slowly stopped thinking about her. After hearing about her return, he hurried over to see her. He greeted her in an unnatural manner.

Qian Rongzhi shot a glance at Chu Tian and smiled. "Brother Wu, you've come."

Seeing how she did not resent him at all, Wu Gen felt even more ashamed. Having heard she had lost her hundred treasures pouch, he too gave some spiritual stones and pills to her in a hurry. As a descendant of a clan, he was very well-off in this aspect, much wealthier than Han Qiongzhi.

After saying a few words dripping with jealousy to Chu Tian, the two of them parted unhappily.

Qian Rongzhi let out a heavy sigh. It really was quite a pity that she could not gulp down all the food laid out right before her. If only this world was a little more chaotic, chaotic enough for no one to care if a person or two died.

Qian Rongzhi was not exactly a prominent figure in the academy, but she was on very good terms with many people. She had visitors during the next few days. Not only were there legalist disciples, but there were many disciples from other schools too. None of them had come empty-handed, so her hundred treasures pouches began to swell up again.

All of them said junior sister Qian's bearing had changed drastically after returning, becoming even more beautiful and enchanting than before. However, none of them knew she would tie up her entire body in the dead of night every single day and begin a routine journey to hell.

Under the nurturing of pain, the colourful, venomous snake slowly grew.

Summer went and autumn came. Li Qingshan roused in the small bamboo loft. His true qi had already gradually reached the peak of the seventh layer. Before long, he could break through once again.

He saw Xiao An staring at him with widened eyes. Li Qingshan smiled. "You can stop looking at me. You better go and conduct the morning chanting, or your master's going to grumble about me again."

Ever since the dharma assembly, she became responsible for holding the morning chanting in the Anāsravā? temple, and she would then handle the allocation of matters for the day. This was obviously the One Thought master's arrangements, and this had always been the job of the primary disciple too. Even she was unable to shirk away from it. Though, it came with quite a lot of benefits. She had already helped Li Qingshan earn many pills from the One Thought master.

Li Qingshan was not treating her as a child labourer either. In order to practise a high level ability like the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, the major focus was on the cultivation of the mind. It was not something that could be resolved by reading a few buddhist scriptures and attending a dharma assembly. She also needed to build up her understanding through the various aspects of day-to-day life, whether big or small.

Having grown accustomed to her company, Li Qingshan was rather reluctant to see her go everyday, but after some thought, he realised it was akin to sending a child off to school. Coming into contact with a few more people and matters through her identity as a primary disciple would definitely bring great benefits to her future cultivation.

After Xiao An's departure, Li Qingshan sat there for a little longer. He neither cultivated nor practised martial arts. Instead, he let his mind go blank, without thinking of anything at all. This was akin to his daily routine of getting up in the morning, brushing his teeth, and washing his face.

Only then did he leave the room. The sky had already brightened up completely. Two children played around as they swept and cleaned up the leaves on the path within the bamboo forest. They were both at the second layer. Channelling their true qi into the broom, they swung it casually and kicked up a fierce wind, causing the bamboo forest to sway gently.

The two of them began fighting against one another with their brooms, producing a loud crack every time they clashed. It actually seemed very choreographic. As they fought, they called out, "I'm the

second senior brother! You're the third senior brother!" Suddenly, they saw Li Qingshan, and they bowed in a hurry, greeting him politely, "First senior brother."

Before the next entrance examination had even arrived, the school of Novels had already gained new disciples. These children chosen from various places were also given the opportunity to choose their schools after a period of nurturing.

These two boys chose the school of Novels. They both possessed an elemental affinity for water, except their talent was nothing special, though it still made Liu Chuanfeng grin from ear to ear for a few days straight. The school of Novels was finally prospering under his control.

Li Qingshan was finally no longer alone. He patted their heads. "Stop messing around. Go study!"

The large boy said, "We're still sweeping this place!" The other boy chimed in, "If we don't get this place clean, master will scold us."

Li Qingshan knew that Liu Chuanfeng was having his moment as a master. In the past, he had never cared about the courtyard full of fallen leaves. Li Qingshan took a liking to the two of them. He smiled. "I'll sweep it for you."

A crystalline water dragon flew out from his hand. Winding about, it washed away all the fallen leaves, revealing the cobblestone path underneath.

The boys cheered. They were filled with admiration towards him. If only we could become as impressive as first senior brother one day.

"A'Jun, A'Sheng, you're done with the sweeping, so why don't you get over here?" Liu Chuanfeng's dignified voice rang out from within the bamboo loft.

"Yes, master."

Li Qingshan shook his head with a smile and watched them bound away. Ever since they arrived here, Liu Chuanfeng seemed to have become a completely different person. He was radiating with the dignity of a teacher and a master.

"Qingshan, you should go soon and come back early too," Liu Chuanfeng added.

Li Qingshan also said, "Yes, master."

Liu Chuanfeng stroked his beard in satisfaction. Peering within himself, his Divine Talisman of Great Creation flickered with light. He had never accumulated so much power of belief before. He had been stuck at the tenth layer for many years, and now, he finally had a shred of confidence in reaching the gates that led to Foundation Establishment.

What mattered the most to a clan or sect? That was the presence of a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Otherwise, no matter how reputed they were, people would still look down on them. The school of Novels still depended on him, the school leader, at the end of the day!

In order to save some power of belief and prepare for Foundation Establishment, he was no longer willing to conjure women to go at it anymore. With his two young disciples here, he could not afford to tarnish his reputation either.

Li Qingshan arrived at the outskirts of the island and saw Li Long working there. It was all thanks to the various crops he had grown that Li Qingshan had managed to console Milliped, who remained in the bug pouch. He greeted him with a smile before taking off into the air.

Only when Li Qingshan turned into a tiny speck and landed on Great War island did Li Long lower his head, going back to tending his medicinal garden. Among the various crops, spiritual herbs were the hardest to grow. They had extremely strict requirements on the environment, but the process of growing them was most beneficial to agriculture disciples.

It was also because of the abundant spiritual qi on Cloudwisp island that Li Long had cleared away a small plot of land and tried planting a few hardier medicinal herbs. He had no idea how they would do, but his ability for planting and tending to crops and his cultivation experienced an obvious increase. He would be able to take another step forward very soon.

As long as the four crucial elements of cultivation—wealth, companionship, method, and environment—were all present, the first few layers were relatively easy to break through.

In a martial arts hall, Li Qingshan's fist whistles through the air, flying towards Han Tiewi's face. Han Tiewi's body swiveled like a screw as the spear in his hand swept towards Li Qingshan's legs like a black dragon that crawled along the ground.

Li Qingshan sniggered. Completely ignoring the attack from below, his fists moved about and conjured a series of blurs. To the military disciples on the side, it seemed like he had thrown several dozen punches at the same time, engulfing Han Tiewi's face. Who said I couldn't touch your face? He yelled, "Time to pay back your debt!"

Chapter 355 - Refining True Spirit Pills

Han Tiewi abandoned the spear without hesitation. He managed to catch Li Qingshan's fists accurately among the blurs.

Both of their legs suddenly sank deeply into the ground, causing it to crack loudly.

After a few clashes, they parted. Both of them heaved gently.

Li Qingshan could not help but admit that the school of the Military was truly a school for actual combat, and Han Tiewi deserved his position as the primary disciple. Li Qingshan had already unleashed the battle skill of Ocean Brawling to the limit, but he still failed to touch Han Tiewi's face. He was able to counter or nullify the attack every single time with ingenious moves.

And, in human form, even his abilities as a Body Practitioner paled in comparison to Han Tiewi, a tenth layer Qi Practitioner, and his abilities as a Qi Practitioner were even less worth mentioning. When they clashed, he would endure relatively more of a beating. His brother-in-law was quite the opponent.

Meanwhile, Han Tiewi felt even more shocked. Every single layer was a huge difference for Qi Practitioners. In particular, the tenth layer was worlds apart from the previous nine layers. His moves that should have been able to vanquish the enemy would only cause slight wounds to Li Qingshan. Moreover, his endurance was shocking. Although Han Tiewi had never suffered a defeat, he would be dragged into an arduous struggle every single time.

Li Qingshan rested up a little and caught his breath. Seeing the midday sun, he said, "Hey, it's time to eat!" The military disciples all agreed with him. "It's time to eat! It's time to eat!"

After a free lunch in the school of the Military, Li Qingshan casually made conversation with Han Tieyi. Nowadays, Li Qingshan would come to the school of the Military every morning for training so that he could gain a better grasp over the usage of battle skills. The two of them admired one another, and combined with their connection through Han Qiongzhi, they had quickly become friends.

"It's already quite late. I need to go to Benevolence island." Li Qingshan checked the time and stood up. The afternoon was for learning alchemy. Arriving on Benevolence island, Ru Xin said she wanted to focus on cultivation for the next few days, so she told him to refine a cauldron of pills alone.

Ever since he received the Jade Sculpted Cauldron of the Coiled Dragon from Han Qiongzhi, Li Qingshan's success rate for pills had increased drastically. His ability to refine pills improved with each passing day, but it would still take more than just a few days if he wanted to gain the ability to refine a high level pill like the True Spirit pill. Though, Li Qingshan was in no hurry. He went to Contention island and accepted a few alchemy missions before beginning to refine pills.

Around dusk, Han Qiongzhi finished her day's worth of work and cultivation. She turned down the invitation from a few colleagues to go out with them and instead spent some time with Li Qingshan as he refined pills. She brought him some food, and they talked about love.

Alchemy was very time-consuming, but it was not like artifact forging, which required concentration at all times and not even the slightest distraction. Most of the time, they played the role of a stoker, which was why impressive alchemists would often recruit a few lads to help watch over the cauldron. Li Qingshan did not have that privilege, but he did not find it boring either with the company of a beauty.

At night, Han Qiongzhi left, and Xiao An returned. She mentioned that Qian Rongzhi had broken through to the seventh layer. She had come to find her today, speaking with her for a while.

The cold stars embellished the night sky, but very soon, they were expelled once more by the red sun rising up from the east. This continued on as an endless cycle. In the blink of an eye, winter snow fell once more.

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Li Qingshan's alchemy ability constantly increased, but he instead began to run out of patience.

The deeper his understanding of alchemy became, the more he understood its profundity. It was definitely not like what he had originally imagined, where he could casually learn it for a year or two and then refine True Spirit pills en masse, which he could then use to exchange for cultivation pills.

In reality, the process was riddled with difficulties.

Just the first step of gathering spiritual herbs was an obstacle. Even though the other spiritual herbs for refining True Spirit pills were nowhere near as uncommon as the Blue Butterfly flowers, they were still extremely rare, which would cost him a tremendous amount of spiritual stones at the start. If he wanted to turn all the Blue Butterfly flowers into True Spirit pills, its cost would be calculated in the tens of thousands at the very least.

One or two of them basically had no market either. They were basically all in the possession of master alchemists, used to refine other high level pills. If he wanted to purchase them, he would have to pay an astronomical sum of one or two times their regular price at the very least. And, if he created such a disturbance purchasing these materials, everyone would know what he was up to. He could never afford to underestimate the intelligence of other cultivators.

Afterwards would be the second step, refinement.

Alchemy was not that simple. Even though he was in possession of something as powerful as the Jade Sculpted Cauldron of the Coiled Dragon, it would take him several months at the very least to learn how to refine True Spirit pills. And, once he did learn how to refine them, he would just barely be able to refine them. The success rate would be pitifully low. In other words, he would have to waste large quantities of precious materials.

If he wanted to increase his success rate, it would be very simple—spend another two or three years learning! However, whether his success rate could even exceed fifty percent was a whole different story. If he could easily learn how to refine high level pills like True Spirit pills in just two or three years, such that he could pump them out cauldron after cauldron, the streets would be filled with alchemists.

The last step, sale.

Even if he ignored the other problems and managed to refine True Spirit pills en masse, how was he supposed to sell them and exchange them for pills used for cultivation? This was not a game; he could not sell them just by finding a store, dragging and dropping them in followed by a click of the mouse. He had to conceal his identity first, but that would definitely result in others trying to force the prices down; they might even try to rob him by force.

Wealth begets trouble. A batch of True Spirit pills that could nurture a group of Foundation Establishment cultivators meant that even many Foundation Establishment cultivators who normally seemed very friendly could possibly change all of a sudden.

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“Can I trust you?” Li Qingshan asked casually.

In Ru Xin’s alchemy room, Ru Xin was teaching Li Qingshan how to refine a cauldron of Fragrance pills. It was a relatively high level pill, but it was not for cultivation. Instead, ingesting Fragrance pills would imbue the body with an exotic fragrance. It had become extremely popular among female cultivators recently.

This time, it was not a mission from the academy, but Ru Xin’s work.

During a boring pause, the two of them could not even be bothered with bantering with each other. Li Qingshan listened to the sound of snow falling onto the ceiling quietly. He was not looking at Ru Xin either, staring at the wall as if he was in thought.

“What’re you asking that for all of a sudden?” Ru Xin turned around.

Li Qingshan looked into Ru Xin’s eyes. “Answer me.”

Ru Xin's eyes with contrasting irises swiveled around, as if she was considering why Li Qingshan had asked this question. She stared at the ceiling. "I'm not sure myself."

"We've known each other for so long already, but there seems to be a mysterious veil over you, such that I can't grasp you," Li Qingshan said. Having known each other for so long, they bantered about anything and everything, but he had never heard her mention her origins. Even if it was mentioned, she would immediately change the topic.

"What a coincidence." Ru Xin stared straight at Li Qingshan. To her, wasn't Li Qingshan no different?

Their eyes met. After a moment of silence, Li Qingshan smiled, and afterwards, he saw his smile appear on her face like a reflection.

Indeed. They both had secrets that they could not tell anyone about. However, even if they were friends, there was no need for them to share all their secrets.

"Have you refined True Spirit pills before?"

"I haven't, though I'd like to try if the opportunity arises," Ru Xin said calmly. The most important spiritual herb for refining True Spirit pills, the Blue Butterfly flower, was almost extinct, so there really had not been a lot of people who had refined it before.

Li Qingshan opened his hand, and a blue butterfly that flickered with soft light fluttered gently, brushing past Ru Xin's face.

"Then give it a try!"

Ru Xin extended her hand, allowing the blue butterfly to perch on the tip of her finger. She sighed in amazement. "It really is a Blue Butterfly flower. I've only seen them in books. I never thought you'd actually possess one. No wonder you've been working so hard to learn alchemy. So it was for refining a single True Spirit pill."

Li Qingshan shook his head with a smile. "No, not just a single pill."

Ru Xin's mouth widened slightly as blue butterflies of light fluttered through the alchemy room. Dozens, hundreds, and even more dyed the room with a beautiful colour. However, what she wondered was whether she could fill this alchemy room if she exchanged them all for spiritual pills.

Only after a very long time did Ru Xin return to her senses. She stared at Li Qingshan deeply as her eyes flickered with a different emotion. "Thank you for your trust in me!"

Li Qingshan said, "It's not like I have another choice. Once you refine them, I can let you take thirty percent."

This figure managed to make even Ru Xin's heart skip a beat. Let alone anything else, if she possessed so many True Spirit pills, she could immediately begin her push towards Foundation Establishment.

Li Qingshan's next words made Ru Xin calm down. "You'll be responsible for gathering the other materials, you'll be responsible for refining the pills, and finally, you'll be responsible for exchanging them for cultivation pills on my behalf, best if they're Virtue Accumulation pills. The most important part

of all of this is you'll be responsible for keeping it a secret. I think you understand this even without me telling you!"

"Of course I do." Ru Xin smiled. "If any news of this gets leaked, it might even end up costing us our lives."

"Really?" Li Qingshan did not think it would be as severe as she imagined it to be. After all, this was still an orderly age of peace. He just did not want other people connecting this with the underground.

Ru Xin said, "The academy isn't as safe as you imagine it to be. The school leaders might not be able to do anything to us, but what about pressure from even higher up? The reason why you decided against working with the Han family was not because they're too powerful, but because I'm a loner, right?"

Li Qingshan could not help but admit to that. He could trust Han Qiongzhi, but he could not trust the entire Han family. As for Ru Xin, she did not come from a clan, and her background was blank too. Apparently, she did not even come from the Clear River prefecture. Even her current master, the leader of the school of Medicine, Hua Ci, was a strange, eccentric old man. This also meant that once this matter became exposed, even Ru Xin would not be able to keep the True Spirit pills.

"Sorry. As it's very important, I can't place complete trust in anybody." If it were not for the few months they had spent together, Li Qingshan would have never vested this much trust in her.

"I can understand. If you really were a person who trusted others so easily, then I'd only look down on you. I'll tell you a secret too then!" Ru Xin took out an alchemy cauldron from her hundred treasures pouch.

"A supreme grade spiritual artifact cauldron!" Li Qingshan blurted out. This was not a regular supreme grade spiritual artifact, but a rare alchemy cauldron. And, the design of the cauldron was extremely strange. At first glance, it seemed more like a furnace, and from the complicated patterns on it, he could immediately tell from everything he had learnt about alchemy recently that it was not a product of the Green province. Instead, it came from the Mist province further south.

However, Li Qingshan did not mention that. The people of the Mist province had always been denounced as savages by the people of the Green province. Although they were both under the rule of Great Xia, the skirmishes between the two vassal states had never stopped throughout history. The borders were stationed heavily with soldiers, and the Hawkwolf Guard always sustained its greatest losses there.

The vassal kings of the two provinces had feuded throughout history. If it were not for the empire's restraint, they would have declared war against each other long ago. Was Ru Xin a spy from the Mist province?

As for Ru Xin, how was it possible for her to not guess that the Blue Butterfly flowers originated from underground? There were only a handful of organisations in possession of Blue Butterfly fields, which were protected by layers upon layers of formations. Even Foundation Establishment cultivators would not be able to pluck a single flower. However, how did a mere Qi Practitioner like her manage to venture so deep underground?

Before they knew it, both of them had revealed a fraction of their secrets to one another. However, neither of them planned to probe any deeper, but they seemed to grow slightly closer to one another.

Then, Ru Xin said, "I've accumulated quite a lot of spiritual herbs. Some of them can be used for refining True Spirit pills, so there's no need to specially gather them."

Li Qingshan smiled. "What a coincidence."

In the end, the two of them managed to produce seven types of spiritual herbs for refining True Spirit pills, two from Li Qingshan and five from Ru Xin, all amounting to extremely large quantities. It went without saying that they were obviously specialties of the underground and the Mist province respectively.

And, most of the spiritual herbs that originated from these two places were relatively more precious. As for the remaining spiritual herbs, Ru Xin was responsible for collecting them. As the primary disciple of the school of Medicine, she was in charge of the medicinal material store rooms, so she could easily fetch a few spiritual herbs under the name of refining other pills without much difficulty at all.

In the afternoon of the next day, Li Qingshan arrived in the alchemy room again. Ru Xin took out a formation scroll and set up the formation, ensuring that no one could peer into this place.

Li Qingshan asked, "How's it?"

Ru Xin said with a sunken expression, "My master has already found out about this!"

"What!?" Li Qingshan was overwhelmed by surprise and fury. He strode over and grabbed her by the shoulder.

"I'm kidding! Hey, it hurts!" Ru Xin furrowed her brows slightly, like a saddened beauty. It was quite a melancholic and enchanting sight.

"You-" Li Qingshan became even more irritated. What an improper woman, but he did loosen his hand.

Their faces were inches apart. Ever since parting yesterday, they had wondered about each other's identity very much. In the past few months, they had not had any more bodily contact, so it suddenly became rather awkward now.

Li Qingshan let go of her shoulder. "Now is not the time to be joking around."

Ru Xin said, "I'm trying to get you to relax a little. Otherwise, we look like thieves!"

Li Qingshan said, "We're not thieves. We're adulterers!"

Ru Xin placed her hand on Li Qingshan's shoulder with a smile. "That's not completely impossible. I like rich men the most. How about you throw first young miss Han aside? Don't forget to retrieve the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms from her too and give it to me instead. I'll give you the cauldron I normally use in exchange." She also normally used a high grade spiritual artifact cauldron.

Li Qingshan said, "Don't even think about it. Show me the spiritual herbs. Why are there so few?"

Ru Xin said, "It's enough for now. If I take too much at once, people will find it strange. We can take it easy."

Li Qingshan expressed that he had understood.

Ru Xin said, "Then, let's begin!"

"Oh right, what's this cauldron of yours called?"

"The Crystal Resin cauldron."

Ru Xin shrank the Crystal Resin cauldron to the size of her hand before placing in spiritual herbs one by one in a particular order. Finally, she placed in a single Blue Butterfly flower.

The only objective of her first attempt was to experiment around and gain experience. She was only aiming for a single True Spirit pill, and she was not expecting to succeed.

Ru Xin sat with her legs crossed in utter focus. She was no longer as relaxed as when she normally practised alchemy.

Li Qingshan sat to one side. He was afraid of disturbing her, so he meditated instead.

Over four hours later, the cauldron opened, and an exotic fragrance wafted out.

"Succeeded as a fluke. Here." Ru Xin picked up a violet pill from within the cauldron. It was exactly the same as what he had seen before.

Li Qingshan closed her hand. "This is for you." Then he rocked it gently. "For a smooth cooperation!"

However, the second pill ended in failure, wasting a Blue Butterfly flower. Ru Xin could not help but sigh gently.

On the other hand, Li Qingshan remained unfazed because he had obtained these Blue Butterfly flowers just too easily. He said, "Just continue." He made Ru Xin lament inside. Wealthy people really are different.

"Though, you'd better go back and rest up so that I can tidy through my thoughts. We can continue tomorrow." Ru Xin stowed the Crystal Resin cauldron away and revoked the formation. She suddenly smiled. "If you stay here, young miss Han might really think we're adulterers."

"I almost forgot. I'll see you tomorrow then!" Li Qingshan made his way out of the alchemy room, but he admired the correctness of his choice. Even with Ru Xin's many years of experience and a supreme grade spiritual artifact cauldron, the success rate so far was only around half. If Li Qingshan refined it instead with his half-assed alchemy, he probably could not even achieve a success rate of a half.

Han Qiongzhi was waiting by the lake. It was currently snowing gently, and the sky had dimmed a long time ago. She questioned, "Why were you so late today?"

Li Qingshan felt rather apologetic. He wrapped his arm around her shoulder. "Alchemy took some time. You must have waited for quite some time now. Where do you want to go today?" Today, she wore a large, red hooded cloak, with the brim of the hood embellished with white fur. Standing among the snow, she seemed like a red ball of fire, warming his heart.

After a busy day, they would spend time together like only they existed in the world. It was their favourite moment of the day. Their tracks were no longer limited to just the academy and Clear River city. It had reached other places with beautiful scenery in the surrounding region too.

Han Qiongzhi's face reddened slightly. "Let's go boating!"

Li Qingshan's eyes lit up. Going boating had already become a special signal between the two of them.

The white catkins stretched for kilometers, and the snowflakes in the air blanketed everything.

Within the remote reeds was a small boat, causing the water to ripple gently. The enchanting gasps of a woman rang out softly.

The cabin was layered with a thick, embroidered quilt, and the red cloak was casually tossed aside.

Li Qingshan laid atop Han Qiongzhi, deeply kissing his beloved woman. His left arm wrapped around her body, fondling her left breast through her clothes while his right hand stroked her body recklessly, moving from her perfectly round legs to her perky bottom.

The coldness in the air was unable to affect their scorching passion.

Refusing to be blocked by the barrier that the clothes formed, Li Qingshan stuck his hand into her clothes.

Han Qiongzhi immediately grabbed his hand. Her eyes seemed like she was about to melt away as she smiled at him. "Sex fiend!" Afterwards, she wrapped her arms around his neck and began kissing him again. She felt a large, warm hand slide into her clothes, clutching her full figure, which made her let out a moan.

The soft breasts felt like water in his hands, yet it was also surprisingly supple. Li Qingshan would mould their shape or play around with the two slightly hardened beans as he wished.

But very soon, he no longer felt satisfied. The narrow space prevented him from doing anything else. He wanted to see them with his own eyes. In the past, she would stop his greedy behaviour, but it seemed to be rather different today.

Under Li Qingshan's astounded gaze, Han Qiongzhi propped herself up and took off her layers. Only when her red undergarment remained did she stop. She turned away with a reddened expression. "Do it yourself!"

A large portion of snow-white skin appeared before Li Qingshan. Sure enough, her figure was as thin as it had felt like, while the deep gully sucked his attention away.

"What's wrong?" Li Qingshan did not behave like what Han Qiongzhi had been expecting him to. Instead, he held her face in concern, which made her heart warm slightly. She said, "Don't get ahead of yourself. I originally planned on telling you this later, but I plan to enter secluded cultivation for a while."

Chapter 356 - Engagement

"You're going to break through to the tenth layer?" Li Qingshan suddenly understood. She had remained at the ninth layer for a very long time now. Opening the twelve standard meridians was even more

complicated than opening the eight extraordinary meridians. It required absolute focus. Qi Practitioners would usually choose to break through in secluded cultivation.

“Yep! So much for catching up to me.” Han Qiongzhi pouted with a smile.

“How long will you take?”

“It’ll be a few months at the very least!” Han Qiongzhi answered after some thought. That also meant they would not be able to see each other for a few months.

“I’ll let you take advantage of me today.” Han Qiongzhi propped up her back with both arms. Her delicate collar bone made her seem rather thin, but the pair of jade bunnies before her seemed even more plump, as if they wanted to burst out of her undergarment.

Li Qingshan stopped worrying. He smiled. “If you insist.” His hands reached behind her and undid the knot, and her fiery-red undergarment slid down, revealing a pair of snow-white breasts that stood proudly like they had been carved from jade. There were even a pair of bright red beans that had once taken Li Qingshan away in his fantasies.

Han Qiongzhi did not cover herself up in embarrassment like other women. She remained in the same posture, just turning her head away and leaving the shy, delicate side of her face to Li Qingshan. Her beautiful cheeks were slightly red, which made her seem extraordinarily elegant.

This instead dispersed Li Qingshan’s lust. He admired the top half of her body; she was like a goddess sculpted from marble. Every single curve was utter perfection, such that he became afraid to desecrate it.

Han Qiongzhi bit her lower lip. Compared to his warm, reckless hand, his gaze seemed to embarrass her more. She grumbled, “Have you stared enough?”

“I’ll never stare enough, even if I spend my whole life staring.” As he said that, Li Qingshan wrapped his hand around her and kissed her rosy lips gently. He licked and kissed her soft neck before gradually moving down. He kissed her delicate collar bone, leaving behind a faint mark. Then he proceeded to bury his face in the gully before finally reaching one of the beans, sucking on it gently.

Han Qiongzhi let out a heavy exhale and twisted his ear. As she heaved, she said, “Are you... a child?”

Li Qingshan raised his head and smiled. “I’m not, but I can give you one.” He fondled around with her breasts, moulding it as he wished. The tender breasts seemed to ooze between his fingers, but it would be able to recover its perfect shape the moment he let go.

“Never. I hate children,” Han Qiongzhi said stubbornly. However, if he really did want children, he would have to wait until she reached Foundation Establishment at the very least.

She suddenly felt rather amazed. A year ago, no, just half a year ago, she had never even considered bearing a child for a man, yet now, she was seriously considering the idea. She basically felt like she had been possessed. She patted Li Qingshan’s face. “You evil guy. You must have drugged me or used some kind of arts of charm against me, haven’t you?”

Li Qingshan said, "I'm the one having doubts, alright. To think that I, Li Qingshan, a great man with a steel heart who could get any woman I want, would just be enchanted by a girl like you, even holding myself back for you to maintain your chastity. How illogical."

Han Qiongzhi found that both infuriating and funny. She had never seen someone so shameless before, who would take advantage of her while grumbling about being restricted to just her.

But after closer thought, she became rather touched by this. Men of the current age, even just regular people, would have multiple wives and consorts if they had a bit of money, while cultivators were even worse. They did whatever they wanted. There were plenty of male cultivators in the academy who had visited the Parlour of Clouds and Rain before, and it was commonplace for them to support multiple women outside.

This was something extremely worth boasting over among men. She disliked Qiu Haitang, but when the legalist disciples gathered, they would still end up going to the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. All of them had slept with multiple women, and no one found any fault in that either. Even she was no different.

Only when she began taking a liking to him did she understand the jealousy of a woman. She was tempted to tie him to her and forbid any other women from looking at him, and he actually agreed to her request. As they met throughout the past few months, no matter how passionate they became, he would never try to insist on going any further as long as she refused. She just felt that he treated her very differently compared to how other men treated her.

In reality, Li Qingshan was just under the influence of the social norms from his previous life. No matter how tempted he was to take multiple women as his partners, he was still very accepting and tolerant when he met a woman he actually liked. Moreover, the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression could control lust, or he would have run out of patience a long time ago. In his past life, he had been labelled as beyond help with his masculinity, but now, he had instead become a good man. Sure enough, the environment determined how people thought.

"Forget it. I'll just throw the rest of my life into the hands of a single woman like you." Li Qingshan lowered his head to kiss her, but Han Qiongzhi blocked his lips.

"Hmm?"

Han Qiongzhi said, "Why must I be the only one to strip?"

"That's not a problem at all." Li Qingshan smiled. In a neat and quick fashion, he stripped himself naked. His robust body rippling with muscles radiated with pressure.

"I didn't tell you to strip everything!" Han Qiongzhi called out, but she could not help but admire his body. She touched his chest in complete satisfaction. Glancing down, the chief culprit that had once pressed against her stared right back at her furiously. She casually prodded it and grumbled, "How ugly!"

Li Qingshan felt like all of his lust had been roused all of a sudden. He laid down on top of her and whispered in her ear, "You won't be able to say that very soon. I've already stripped now, so it seems to be rather unfair." He extended his hand to take off her skirt.

“Not right now.” Han Qiongzhi knew what he was trying to do, so she grabbed his hand in a hurry. “After I emerge from seclusion, you can go ask for my hand in marriage with my father! By then, I’ll give you everything.” Towards the end, she could not help but lower her head in embarrassment, all the way to her chest.

Li Qingshan beamed in surprise and joy. He propped her head back up by her cheeks. “Qiongzhi!”

Han Qiongzhi said, “Don’t celebrate too soon! My father still hasn’t agreed yet!”

Li Qingshan said, “Your father can only celebrate for having such a great son-in-law like me, so why would he turn me down? Even if he turns me down, can you turn me down too?”

“Who knows, I might not necessarily... Get back here!” As Han Qiongzhi said that, she suddenly felt Li Qingshan trying to take off her skirt again.

Li Qingshan said, “Just let me admire it in advance. Don’t tell me you’ll even deny your future husband of a request like this! Don’t worry, I’ll definitely wait until the night of marriage before I turn you into a woman.”

How could Han Qiongzhi deny the man who was about to become her husband? She poked his nose gently and said rather softly, “Now that’s what you said. Don’t go back on your word.”

Li Qingshan smiled and scooped her up. He grabbed the edge of her skirt and pulled off the entire thing, revealing her pale thighs. Han Qiongzhi did not even get the chance to maintain her final line of defence. She seemed to become a lamb to his slaughter in the blink of an eye.

Both of them felt their hearts tremble. Although they had already embraced one another countless times before, this time was utterly different. The colour of bronze and snow pressed together firmly, completely different from one another. One was tough like rock, while the other was as soft as cotton. They seemed like they were trying to merge together.

Han Qiongzhi hugged her tightly and firmly pressed her chest against his, listening to his powerful heartbeat. She could feel the stiffness pressing firmly against her buttock. His large, coarse hand gently slid along her back that was as soft and smooth as silk. Scorching passion suddenly rose up in her. If he really tried to take her in this moment, she would not be able to turn him down. She was at his whim.

Li Qingshan breathed in deeply and slowly let go of her. The entire process was so difficult that he felt like he was carving out a piece of flesh from his body. He placed her on the embroidered quilt and said, “Let me take a good look at you.”

Han Qiongzhi felt lost, almost rather reluctant to leave his embrace. She wanted him to continue holding her like that, doing whatever he wanted to her.

Li Qingshan almost gasped in admiration as he appreciated her body. She was perfectly proportioned. In particular, she was extremely plump where she should be plump. She was utterly charming.

No matter how liberal Han Qiongzhi was, she still struggled to hold back her embarrassment in this moment. She curled up her slender legs, no longer giving off the slightest sense of manliness at all. She was basically waiting for a man to take her.

That night, their date lasted for a very long time. As soon as they remembered they would be parting very soon, such that they would not be able to see each other again for several months, neither of them wanted to pay any attention to the time.

Only when the next morning arrived did they put on their clothes again reluctantly.

Li Qingshan personally accompanied her to the dwelling for secluded cultivation and watched the door close. He was almost tempted to enter secluded cultivation with her, but with a shake of his head, he dismissed that thought. If they entered secluded cultivation together, they would probably end up with a child, so how could they still cultivate in peace?

Last night, they remained entangled until she found him utterly pitiful from how hard he was holding himself back. In the end, she even dismissed her own embarrassment and boldly lended him a helping hand before sternly warning him to not go around her back while she was in secluded cultivation, or the thing in her hand would end up being hers.

Only then did Li Qingshan understand her scheme. He smiled. "Just this technique won't be enough if you want to stop me from going around your back." He stared at her delicate, red lips.

Han Qiongzhi immediately understood what he was saying. Why would she ever agree to that? She directly stated that only prostitutes in brothels would do something like that and cursed him as an ingrate for taking advantage of her kindness by going too far. In the end, Li Qingshan agreed to an alternative and went at it on her tender breasts, even sullyng her face at the very end, which led to quite a lot of grumbling from her.

Li Qingshan could tell that after confirming their relationship, she was actually extremely bold in this aspect. She might have even known more than him from her frequent visits to the Parlour of Clouds and Rain in the past. By then, he had to properly coax her into experimenting around and this second life of his would have been entirely worth it. He had already begun to look forward to his married life.

As for Han Qiongzhi's warning, he did not pay any attention to it at all. Right now, his heart could no longer contain any other person. Even Gu Yanying would have to stand aside.

Returning to Cloudwisp island, Li Qingshan notified Xiao An before heading straight to Ru Xin's alchemy room on Benevolence island. Now that Han Qiongzhi was no longer here, he could focus on alchemy. She would probably need True Spirit pills too if she wanted to break through to Foundation Establishment!

At that moment, he had failed to consider why she would ever require his pills as the first young miss of the Han family. All he wanted was the best for her.

Ru Xin smiled as soon as she saw Li Qingshan. "The stirrings of love are still plastered over your face. Looks like you've had quite the night last night. Don't tell me you've already destroyed young miss Han's body?"

"Of course not. It's just that I'll probably get married in a few month's time." Li Qingshan smiled from ear to ear. He had tried very hard, but he could not help himself in the end. He revealed it to Ru Xin, who kept another large secret of his.

Ru Xin's heart stirred. She said sadly, "Then I really do have to congratulate you! It's just a pity that I had to spend my entire night in front of an alchemy cauldron alone, thinking about alchemy. I don't even have someone close who cares for me."

Li Qingshan smiled. "Senior sister, if you want a man, you could form a line so long that it reaches Clear River city."

Ru Xin stepped over and placed her hands onto Li Qingshan's shoulder gently. The light in her eyes rippled. "It's just a pity that the person I want already has someone else."

Chapter 357 - Bold Gambles

Li Qingshan stared at her gentle face that differed dramatically from Han Qiongzhi's and was left speechless for a moment. He felt rather proud of himself inside, yet also rather awkward. In the past, he could tease her a little over this, but it was not so easy now.

He thought to himself, Li Qingshan, oh Li Qingshan. Qiongzhi has just entered seclusion, so you can't do anything that'll let her down. As a result, he said a few things that could make Ru Xin give up on him.

"Don't tell me you thought I was talking about you?!" The mischievous smile that Li Qingshan found familiar appeared on Ru Xin's face.

"Of course not! Never!" Li Qingshan pried her hands away passive-aggressively. He eased up inside, yet he also felt slightly disappointed for some reason. He was unable to tell when she was telling the truth. Was it a joke earlier, or was she probing him?

Or, perhaps she really did have someone she liked, which was why she had never accepted confessions from any man in all these years. Was that man in the Mist province? Immediately, he imagined a savage man covered in tattoos and a blue piece of cloth, holding a child on the top of a mountain and gazing northward at the distant mother of his child...

He shuddered. Why did it seem rather familiar and rather comfortable to him too?

As he imagined that, Ru Xin had already moved away softly, closing the door and laying out the formation scroll, making all preparations for them to "commit adultery". She moved around as lightly as a white ghost.

Looking at her graceful, gentle figure, she did not seem like she had given birth before at all. Li Qingshan nodded to that thought.

Ru Xin said, "Oi, what's wrong with you? Did you end up shooting your brains out too last night? Give me the Blue Butterfly flowers!"

Li Qingshan felt like he had been struck by lightning. He was tongue-tied. Is this something you should say? Is this something you should say?

Ru Xin said in complete contempt, "It's just some old business between a man and a woman, isn't it? I know much more about it than you, little boy."

Li Qingshan could not help but take a step back. He had heard how the female barbarians of the Mist province were extremely liberal in this aspect. He began to imagine a group of men covered in tattoos with white cloth on their heads standing on the top of a mountain, gazing northward.

As if she could read his mind, Ru Xin blushed slightly. She scolded, "What're you thinking about? I'm a doctor!"

Li Qingshan made fun of her. "It's not like I've said anything."

Ru Xin's expression stiffened. It was true. His thoughts had nothing to do with her. She directly took out the Crystal Resin cauldron. "Let's stop messing around. I'll show you the results of my research last night."

Li Qingshan took out a Blue Butterfly flower, but Ru Xin raised three slender fingers instead. "Three."

Li Qingshan expressed his doubts. "Are you confident about success?"

"Of course."

Ten hours later, the alchemy cauldron let out a muffled bang. The refinement process had ended in failure.

Faced with Li Qingshan's contemptible gaze, Ru Xin tidied the hair on the side of her head, unperturbed. "Accident."

"Do you want to continue?" Li Qingshan asked. The success rate had already fallen to twenty percent now.

Ru Xin became motivated too. "Of course! Let's go with... one."

Li Qingshan took out three Blue Butterfly flowers and handed them to her again. "Since you're confident, let's continue!"

The light in Ru Xin's eyes flickered. "Aren't you afraid I'll destroy them again?"

"Just keep going. It's not like it's just my loss," Li Qingshan said. He did not doubt the person he chose, nor was there any need to doubt her. There was probably no better choice than her within the entire academy.

"Then let's go with five!" Ru Xin propped herself up and brought her left foot forward, now half-kneeling on the cushion. She rolled up her right sleeve, revealing her beautiful forearm and pressing it against the Crystal Resin cauldron. Like a female dealer in a casino, she pressed down on the dice cup boldly and called out, "Finalise your bets!"

Li Qingshan muttered female barbarian inside before handing five Blue Butterfly flowers to her. Afterwards, he stared fixedly at the Crystal Resin cauldron like a gambler who had just placed down a large bet, but he ran out of interest very soon. Instead, he began looking at Ru Xin. After he stared at her for a while, she shot a vicious glance at him.

He shifted his gaze and became bored again, so he just started meditating.

A night passed, and the sky lit up. The cauldron opened and crystalline light poured out.

Ru Xin took out five True Spirit pills and smiled. "Success!"

Li Qingshan also smiled in relief. "Do you want to continue?"

Ru Xin said, "Let's continue!"

This time, they went with seven.

Alchemy did not become easier when batches were smaller. It was like cooking in the kitchen. If the portion was too small, then it would be extremely difficult to control the heat and taste, and it would waste a lot of time and energy too.

Of course, more was not necessarily better either. Dishes made from a communal pot would never taste better than those made in a small pot. It was fine if dishes tasted bad, but if pills "tasted bad" that would mean a drastic reduction in their effects, preventing them from achieving their intended effects.

The degree of control, the skill of the alchemist, and even the quality of the cauldron were all relevant. With Ru Xin's ability, refining twelve True Spirit pills each time was perfect.

Under Li Qingshan's liberal support, she reached this very soon, but it also meant a loss of a hundred thousand spiritual stones with each failure.

Every time they opened the cauldron, it was like a bold gamble.

Throughout this process, Li Qingshan personally witnessed another side of Ru Xin, which was her gambling nature of advancing forward bravely.

And, she just happened to win her gambles. The success rate was elevated to over ninety percent very soon, exceeding Li Qingshan's greatest expectations. It even surpassed Ru Xin's own expectations.

A few days had passed now, and she had made several cauldrons of pills consecutively. Ru Xin had already become rather tired, but neither of them said they wanted to stop.

Under the intense pressure, Ru Xin was like a gambler who had suddenly begun to win after losing everything before becoming completely hopeless. She was in a state of excitement, completing unleashing her potential. Even her luck seemed to improve.

Li Qingshan had experienced this wondrous state in his past life. It was like Michael Jordan's surekill dunk on the basketball court. Right now, every single cauldron of pills Ru Xin refined was a surekill. If she stopped right now, she would probably never be able to attain the same success rate again.

Time flew by and snow covered the path leading up to the alchemy room completely.

All the disciples of the school of Medicine could not help but sigh and shake their heads as they walked past the alchemy room. In the past, he would only remain inside for an afternoon, but now, it had already been half a month. Since when had their first senior sister spent so much time with a man before?

Discussions filled the entire academy. This Li Qingshan had just sent the second senior sister of the school of Legalism off to secluded cultivation, and now, he had locked himself up in the first senior sister of the school of Medicine's alchemy room. Who knew what he was doing. What, was he supposed to be

refining pills? You might believe it, but I don't. What kind of pill took so long to refine, such that they could not even rest?

Some of them said that Ru Xin was taking advantage of this opportunity to steal Li Qingshan. This was what most of the female cultivators said. Li Qingshan had made quite a name for himself recently, so he did have some charm among the female cultivators.

Others said Li Qingshan knew a special technique that could bewitch the soul, or how else was he supposed to bewitch two famous beauties of the academy? After all, these two women had never gotten involved with matters of love in the past. They had turned down countless admirers before. They needed to drag Li Qingshan out before it was too late and bring him to justice.

It went without saying that this was the rumor among the male cultivators, which came with many jealous, envious gazes and grinding teeth whenever it was mentioned.

Li Qingshan and Ru Xin had never considered this either, but right now, every successful cauldron was equivalent to a profit of hundreds of thousand spiritual stones, so why would they still care about anything else? It was not like they were doing anything wrong anyway, so they could gossip for all they wanted!

On this day, two military disciples quietly discussed among themselves in the Main Martial Arts stadium, "They still haven't emerged. It has already been twenty-three days." "I pity senior sister Han. He really isn't worth it. Li Qingshan is a bastard." Among their sorrow and fury was indescribable envy too.

Before they had even finished speaking, a black figure arrived right before them. The Black Dragon whistled through the air and lifted them up, sending them flying and landing heavily far away on the edge of the stadium.

Han Tiewi pulled back the metal spear behind him and said coldly, "Haven't I told you? Do not whisper to each other during training! Both of you, swim fifty laps around the island!"

The two disciples groaned inside. Swimming fifty laps around the island would almost cost them their lives. They knew that their first senior brother had been in a bad mood recently, so they would never object. They clasped their fists. "Yes, sir!"

Han Tiewi's face was icy. After a while of thought, he suddenly strode away from the stadium.

"Tiewi, where are you going?" Han Anjun looked down from a platform and frowned slightly.

"I'm going to go find Li Qingshan." Han Tiewi clasped his fist and lowered his head. Han Qiongzhi had told him to keep an eye out on Li Qingshan before she entered secluded cultivation. He had not thought too much about it originally, but he was forced to act now.

The military disciples who were currently training all slowed down slightly. They looked over. Li Qingshan was probably in trouble this time.

"Do you think he's that kind of person? Do you think Ru Xin is that kind of person?" Han Anjun asked.

"I don't," Han Tiewi replied. He knew their personalities extremely well, and even if they wanted to commit some acts of adultery, there was no reason for them to do it so openly. Instead, he was unable

to put up with other people discussing Han Qiongzhi. They made her sound like she was an idiot, even though she was not particularly clever sometimes.

“Fall back,” said Han Anjun.

“Yes, sir!” All Han Tieyi could do was return to the stadium and viciously drill the military disciples.

“Li Qingshan, get out here!”

On Benevolence island outside the alchemy room, Chu Tian was like an enraged bull as he bellowed out. Seeing how there was no response from inside, he went up to push on the door.

Immediately, a group of medical disciples surged over and stopped him. “Entry is forbidden to the alchemy rooms. Do not trespass.” “Senior sister Ru Xin is currently refining pills, so please return, fellow Chu!”

“There’s no need for you to stop me.” Chu Tian advanced boldly. Five-coloured true qi rose up from his body as he forced his way through them, slamming the door of the alchemy room with a palm strike.

The medical disciples were not actually trying to stop him either. They were extremely curious about just what Ru Xin and Li Qingshan were doing, but they were afraid of seeing something horrible too.

The door let out a flash, and he actually failed to smash through it. Now, it was not just Chu Tian. Everyone’s doubts erupted. Did they really have to cast down a formation when refining pills in the academy?

Right now, Ru Xin had her eyes closed as she focused on refining pills in the alchemy room. She furrowed her brows slightly.

Li Qingshan cursed inside. Without saying anything at all, he immediately stood up and made his way out.

They had just reached a critical juncture. If they were careless, they would end up destroying twelve True Spirit pills, and that would not be all. If someone managed to barge in here and sensed they were refining True Spirit pills or saw Ru Xin’s Crystal Resin cauldron, it would be even worse.

Unable to force open the door, Chu Tian became even more furious. Five-coloured true qi gathered in his hand as he struck out viciously.

The door suddenly swung open, and a water spout whistled out, slamming into Chu Tian heavily and directly sending him flying.

Chapter 358 - Success with Alchemy, Awaiting Good News

The water dispersed, and Li Qingshan appeared. His true qi surged, and surprisingly enough, he had already reached the eighth layer. He was just a millimeter away from the eighth layer in the first place, and he basically spent every day cultivating since he had nothing else to do, making rapid progress as a result. With his extremely pure true qi, he broke through naturally, almost without any obstacles.

“Chu Tian, have you lost your mind?” Li Qingshan was furious. The door to the alchemy room behind him closed once more. No one had managed to see what was going on inside.

Chu Tian was protected by his true qi of the five elements, so he was unscathed. He stabilised himself mid-air and barked, "You finally have the courage to come out! What were you doing inside? What did you do to senior sister Ru Xin?" Seeing how Li Qingshan had reached the eighth layer, he was secretly surprised. How did Li Qingshan cultivate so quickly?

Li Qingshan said, "What's it got to do with you?"

Chu Tian said, "How doesn't it have to do with me? Senior sister Ru Xin likes me, so anything that has to do with her has to do with me. If you have some wits about you, move aside obediently. I don't want to fight you here. I'll teach you a proper lesson when the time of our match arrives."

"She likes you? What kind of crazy are you suffering from? If you don't piss off, I'll show you what's what right now!" Li Qingshan said with his hands crossed. He seemed like a door god, refusing to take a step back.

Cutting off a person from his wealth was akin to killing their parents. Li Qingshan was truly filled with killing intent now. However, his brows became firmly furrowed. It had been some time since he last saw him, but Chu Tian had actually reached the ninth layer already. The rate at which his cultivation improved was truly startling. His aura was more powerful than before too. Just defeating him would be difficult, let alone stopping him. The formation alone definitely could not stop Chu Tian's Palm of the Five Elements. Even just the shockwaves of the battle would be enough to destroy the alchemy room.

He glanced at the two girls standing behind Chu Tian nearby and questioned, "You're just going to watch as he comes looking for another woman?"

The two girls said together, "As long as we're in brother Tian's heart, we'll support him no matter what he does!"

The surrounding people all gasped in admiration, while Chu Tian became even more complacent. "You hear that? I'm not like you, trapped firmly to a single woman." Suddenly, he remembered it was very likely that Li Qingshan had not been trapped, having already touched his woman, so his face became even more twisted.

Li Qingshan was taken aback. He had never considered that something like this was actually possible. He cursed, "No wonder you've come looking for her like you've gone mad. I wouldn't want these spineless women either, even if you're giving them to me!"

The expressions of the two girls changed drastically. Chu Tian's face immediately sank. "You can insult me, but you can't insult my women. Those who cross my bottom line must die!" True qi of the five elements completely erupted from his body. The Palm of the Five Elements erupted with blinding light and sailed through the air.

Li Qingshan extended his arms and roaring waves surged over from behind him like a tsunami.

The two of them had managed to completely piss each other off in just a few exchanges.

Chu Tian descended from above. His palm strike fell down like a mountain.

Li Qingshan raised his head. The Palm of the Five Elements had completely filled his vision, almost blanketing him; it was as unavoidable as the wrath of heaven. He stomped down and shot off. His aura

surged like the ocean, but he was disadvantaged by the geography. He was just about to collide into the Palm of the Five Elements.

Suddenly, he unleashed the Wave Treading Form and shifted himself mid-air, dodging the attack.

“I knew you would be too afraid to take it on!” Chu Tian laughed madly. Ignoring Li Qingshan, he rushed straight towards the alchemy room. The more Li Qingshan tried to stop him from looking inside, the more he felt as if something was amiss.

The door was just inches away when Chu Tian suddenly felt his body tighten. Glancing down, a stream of water had wrapped around his waist firmly like a snake. He looked back quickly and saw the other end of the stream in Li Qingshan’s hand. Great waves had already arisen beneath his feet.

Everyone below heard three blasts of air. Li Qingshan had unleashed the Wave Treading Form three times consecutively while pulling Chu Tian along. He shot off like an arrow, travelling far away from Benevolence island. He managed to blow a great chasm within the still surface of the lake. In the blink of an eye, the two of them had turned into two tiny specks.

Everyone gasped inside, Both of them have become even stronger!

Chu Tian’s true qi of the five elements shuddered and shook off the water stream. He lunged towards Li Qingshan with the same, simple palm strike as before, but it was deadlier than any other technique.

Li Qingshan did not dodge. He just stood there with his arms crossed, sneering.

Chu Tian suddenly felt a great sensation of danger from behind. He quickly turned around, and a huge, vajra sword cleaved down as a golden streak of light.

Clang! With a lengthy sound, Chu Tian raised his hand up and managed to block the sword, but he was unable to block the sword qi and sword intent within the strike.

Boom! The lake water below was actually cleaved in half by the strike, churning violently with a slash that stretched for several dozen meters.

As it turned out, Li Qingshan had brought Chu Tian to somewhere near Anāsravā? island. Xiao An had already reached the tenth layer now. If there was a person in the academy whose true qi surpassed Chu Tian’s in terms of quantity, it would definitely be her.

Blood oozed out from the corner of Chu Tian’s lips, but he did not even get the chance to call them underhanded.

Li Qingshan’s fist whistled over from behind. It was not a punch, but a drill. Layers of water spun at high speeds such that it no longer seemed like water. It had become the most terrifying weapon for slaughter.

The Vortex Form!

The blood that had oozed out from the corner of Chu Tian’s lips turned into a spray as he was knocked away. He tried to stabilise himself, but golden light filled his vision.

A guardian king blocked his trajectory. Wielding its sword with both hands, it raised it once again before swinging down swiftly. The attack was even fiercer than before.

Their teamwork was flawless, as if they could read each other's minds. They beat up Chu Tian to the point where he could not even catch his breath. All he could do was watch on helplessly as he was pushed towards dire straits step by step.

Finally, he felt danger for his life. He reached towards his hundred treasures pouch in a hurry. He wanted to use that, but how was he supposed to make it in time?

The sword changed direction mid-stroke, going from a slash to a smack. The wrathful avatar of the guardian king subsided.

With a bang, Chu Tian shot off like a broken kite, falling into the Lake of Dragons and Snakes with a huge splash.

Li Qingshan nodded towards Xiao An, and she expressed back at him, "You have me here, so go deal with your matters!"

Li Qingshan glanced down. An injured Chu Tian posed no threat, so he turned around swiftly. "What a fool!" He strode away by treading on waves.

If he had problems, he would look for Xiao An. Dealing with Chu Tian alone was rather difficult, so he just worked with her. This had always been a trump card of his, and it had never disappointed him before. The Palm of the Five Elements was a very powerful cultivation method, but it was not more powerful than the Guardian King's Scripture of Demon Subdual. You might practise five kinds of true qi, but Xiao An practises seven!

At this moment, a few figures flew over from the neighbouring islands. The various school leaders had reacted to this. The One Thought master and Liu Zhangqing were obviously among them.

Li Qingshan rushed back to the alchemy room and said to everyone, "You better all disperse!" Then he entered the alchemy room again.

Everyone had yet to return to their senses. In such a neat and quick fashion, the super genius Chu Tian had just been taught a lesson like this?

"Sigh, Chu Tian only knows how to harass people like us. Out of the three who fought earlier, who wasn't a genius? A genius has been taught a lesson by two other geniuses working together, so this outcome is expected."

"I thought Chu Tian could have his revenge after reaching the ninth layer, but I never thought Li Qingshan cultivated so quickly too. He has reached the eighth layer in such a short amount of time. Looks like there's no hope for Chu Tian to get his revenge."

As they discussed, someone whispered, "Don't tell me he's reached the eighth layer so quickly because of dual cultivation!"

If Li Qingshan were outside right now, he would definitely consider choking this person to death. As a result, the suspicions and rumors became even more widespread.

Xiao An was scolded a little by the One Thought master, but what else could he do to this junior sister of his?

As for Chu Tian, he was brought back by Liu Zhangqing and locked up. After all, he was the one who started everything this time. He had broken the rules forbidding fighting in the academy. Moreover, even if he fought, so be it. He even lost in such an ugly manner, which completely embarrassed Liu Zhangqing as a school leader.

Chu Tian gritted his teeth in hatred, almost fainting out of anger. He was tempted to use that right now for revenge, but while he was arrogant, he was not a complete fool after all. If he brought that out, it would immediately be taken away from him.

Surprisingly enough, his cautiousness was rather similar to Li Qingshan's.

Li Qingshan returned to the alchemy room and sat down beside Ru Xin quietly. An hour later, the cauldron opened.

Twelve perfectly round, shining True Spirit pills sat within the cauldron silently. Both of them smiled in relief.

Li Qingshan was just about to pass more Blue Butterfly flowers over to her, but Ru Xin waved her hand. "Let's just stop here this time! Are you really trying to work me like a slave?"

As she said that, she felt like her body was deflating. Across all these days, she had used pills to replace food and used cultivation to maintain her mental condition. She had refined pills for days and nights on end, so she had truly become utterly exhausted.

"Then we'll continue in the future!" Li Qingshan checked his hundred treasures pouch. There were still a lot of Blue Butterfly flowers remaining. He had basically gained a clear understanding of their value now. This startling amount of wealth would be enough for him to spend for a very long time.

"Let's split the goods!" Ru Xin smiled. She was exhausted, but she was unable to hide her joy. She had made some startling returns this time, and she had improved her alchemy by quite a lot too.

Checking the number, Ru Xin had refined almost a hundred True Spirit pills across these twenty-three days. It was split into two piles in the end. Li Qingshan received over sixty of them, while Ru Xin received over twenty of them.

Like a money grubber, Ru Xin carefully inspected the True Spirit pills many times before finally stowing them away in her hundred treasures pouch. She explained why she had chosen to stop here.

"With these True Spirit pills, I'm certain that I'll soon reach Foundation Establishment successfully. By then, the success rate will definitely be higher than right now if I power the Crystal Resin cauldron as a Foundation Establishment cultivator."

"Then it'll be my turn to congratulate you." Li Qingshan extended his right hand.

Ru Xin held his hand and shook it gently. She beat him to it. "For a smooth cooperation."

Li Qingshan smiled. He directly gave twenty True Spirit pills to her. "Help me exchange them into pills for cultivation. The more the better."

“You’re not afraid I’ll rip you off?” Ru Xin smiled. If she fell out with him over twenty True Spirit pills, it would not be embarrassing even if news made it out.

Li Qingshan said, “Not really.”

“As long as you’re not afraid. Don’t worry, they won’t go for less than the market price whether they’re sold or exchanged.” Ru Xin accepted the True Spirit pills without asking why Li Qingshan needed so many pills for cultivation. What, was he supposed to gulp them down and his cultivation would grow like that? Unbeknownst to her, she had accidentally guessed the actual answer.

“Rest up properly. I’ll be awaiting the good news.” Li Qingshan waved his hand and left through the door.

Chapter 359 - Coming up with a Scheme, Killing a Foundation Establishment Cultivator

Ru Xin let out a deep breath. He really was quite a good man!

Li Qingshan returned to Cloudwisp island and saw Xiao An sitting below the loft. He smiled. “What, you weren’t put under house arrest?”

Xiao An said, “I’m beyond his control. I can sense that he’s slightly afraid of me.”

Li Qingshan laughed and scooped her up. He whispered something into her ear, and Xiao An beamed in response. She felt happy for him. He had endured and waited for so long, and finally, there was a glimmer of hope.

Afterwards, Li Qingshan continued to go find Ru Xin every day to learn alchemy. Although he could just get her to refine whatever pills he needed right now, they would eventually part. He would not remain in the Clear River prefecture, the Ruyi commandery, the Green province, or the nine provinces forever.

One afternoon, before Li Qingshan could even visit Ru Xin, she came to visit him instead. She handed some pills to him before smiling. “I’m going to enter secluded cultivation.”

Li Qingshan said, “Good luck.”

“You too.”

After Ru Xin departed, Li Qingshan raised his head. Faint clouds floated through the blue sky. Currently, his heart was overflowing with joy. It was about time for him to set off as well.

Li Qingshan went to Anāsraṃṃ island to call Xiao An along, but Qian Rongzhi actually happened to be there too. She crouched down beside Xiao An, telling her something. Seeing Li Qingshan walk over, she stood up and smiled. “Have you heard?”

Li Qingshan asked, “Heard what?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “Vice sect master Wei of the Sect of Clouds and Rain has successfully established a foundation.”

Li Qingshan had almost forgotten about this person’s existence. Roughly two years had already passed since he last clashed with Wei Zhongyuan. After that, he spent most of his time in the academy.

Combined with his rise to prominence, Wei Zhongyuan probably understood there was nothing he could do to Li Qingshan with just a cultivation at the tenth layer, so he had been very quiet too.

“He’s managed to reach Foundation Establishment despite how old he is?”

Qian Rongzhi said, “I don’t know. I heard he managed to get his hands on two True Spirit pills somehow and succeeded out of luck.”

Li Qingshan immediately understood that the two True Spirit pills probably came from the twenty True Spirit pills he had given to Ru Xin. He was at a loss as for how to react. The matters of the world truly were unpredictable.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. “That old coot won’t spare either of us. Do you want to work together again? I can give you the opportunity to clash with him!”

Li Qingshan asked, “Just by you?”

Qian Rongzhi looked around and saw that no one else was present, so she extended her hand. A brightly-coloured little snake emerged from her sleeve, slithering into her palm and suddenly raising its head. Part of its body went from being a tattoo to an actual creature.

Li Qingshan understood now. If it was this, then probably even Foundation Establishment cultivators would suffer if they were not prepared. All they needed was a single moment and Li Qingshan and Xiao An could even kill a Foundation Establishment cultivator if they worked together.

“You can separate it from your body?”

“I can’t. It’s already merged with me, and why would I separate it from me anyway? Look at how beautiful it is!” Qian Rongzhi gently stroked the tiny snake’s head, like a mother soothing her child.

Li Qingshan contemplated the proposition before agreeing to it.

He just happened to be in search of a place to take his final step, to face the heavenly tribulation and become a Daemon General. If that old bastard ended up coming for him, wreaking havoc at a crucial moment, it would be troublesome.

He would strike first so that he was in control of the situation.

Under the vast night sky, Wei Zhongyuan stood atop a mountain. The wind buffeted his robes as he gazed down at the other mountains. He felt like he could do anything. The spiritual qi of the world constantly resonated with him. Never had he felt so happy before.

Many memories flashed through his head. Suddenly, it stopped on a young face. He ground his teeth. “Li Qingshan, I will return the pain and humiliation you’ve caused me by ten, no, a hundred fold!”

However, no matter how bold he was, he still would never venture into the academy to kill him. That was just seeking death. However, he had already ordered people to keep an eye on Li Qingshan at all times. He would capture him the moment he set foot out of the academy. If there was no evidence, no one could do anything to him.

However, his top priority right now was not this. Shooting off in the air, he arrived above Clear River city in the blink of an eye. He directly landed in front of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. Under the gaze of thousands of people, he walked towards the parlour, like a king returning to his rightful place with insufferable arrogance.

The Parlour of Clouds and Rain blazed with light just like before, making it seem like daytime inside. Wei Zhongyuan gazed at the sky before striding in.

In the eyes of regular people, they found this man to be awe-inspiring, like a god. However, all the cultivators gasped in amazement. He was clearly a Foundation Establishment cultivator with the feeling he gave off.

The parlour full of disciples rushed over to congratulate him. Everyone tried to fawn over him, and the people who belonged to Wei Zhongyuan's side in the first place were overjoyed.

Wei Zhongyuan swung his hand in a dramatic manner. "The Sect of Clouds and Rain has some internal affairs to settle today, so the parlour will be closing down for today. Everyone, please return!"

The disciples of the Sect of Clouds and Rain immediately began to clear everyone out. Every single word of his bore the weight of a mountain and had to be enforced. To Qi Practitioners, Foundation Establishment cultivators were unshakeable existences. Every single disciple understood that the Sect of Clouds and Rain would be going through some changes today.

Wei Zhongyuan led a group of disciples and directly made his way to the highest floor.

Qiu Haitang currently stood among the rooftop garden, gazing at the resplendent night scenery of the city with her arms in her sleeves in thought. She heard something from behind and suddenly turned around, meeting Wei Zhongyuan's eyes. Both of them were slightly taken aback before undergoing a different series of reactions. One's worries grew heavier, while the other's lust and joy surged.

Wei Zhongyuan studied Qiu Haitang's body greedily. He no longer had any scruples. He fantasized about the joys of pushing down this woman who had once ordered him about, now completely at his whim. He took a step forward and clasped his hands. "Sect master Qiu, I've already undergone the heavenly tribulation successfully and reached Foundation Establishment. According to the rules of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, I hope we can complete our marriage soon so that we can become cultivation partners and comprehend the wonders of yin and yang together!"

Qiu Haitang waved her hand in a rather tired manner. "You can all go."

With her lingering influence, the disciples of the Sect of Clouds and Rain would never disobey her. They just looked at Wei Zhongyuan.

"You can all go wait outside." Wei Zhongyuan waved his hand. He was not afraid of Qiu Haitang suddenly turning hostile against him. She might have reached Foundation Establishment many years ago, but she was still an early Foundation Establishment cultivator. The cultivation methods of the Sect of Clouds and Rain focused on harmony between yin and yang, or mutual promotion and regulation. If she were bold enough to turn him down, then she would immediately fall out with the sect. By then, he would be able to succeed her as sect master, and he could then capture her as a traitor who broke the rules of the sect, allowing him to do whatever he wanted with her.

Everyone dispersed, only leaving the two of them on the rooftop. Wei Zhongyuan frowned. "Who else is there?"

"Disciple Qian Rongzhi greets vice sect master Wei!" Qian Rongzhi emerged from behind a flowering shrub on the side.

Wei Zhongyuan said, "Weren't you expelled from the Sect of Clouds and Rain already?"

"I accepted her as a disciple of mine again." Qiu Haitang's expression was cold and haughty.

Wei Zhongyuan's expression changed, and his eyes narrowed. He stared at Qian Rongzhi to a point where she shivered, but now was not the time to fuss over something like this after all. He took another step forward and asked Qiu Haitang, "So what do you think, sect master?"

Qiu Haitang hesitated and looked back at the night sky, gazing in the direction of the Academy of the Hundred Schools. The person she was waiting for was currently cultivating arduously in seclusion.

Wei Zhongyuan strode forward and reached towards Qiu Haitang's hand. "Today, you'll have to agree to it whether you want to or not."

Qiu Haitang's expression changed, while Wei Zhongyuan sneered. Black and white spiritual qi collided viciously, but it caused no disturbance at all. Instead, they nullified each other.

With how yang could overcome yin, Wei Zhongyuan gained a slight upper hand. Just as he was about to grab Qiu Haitang's wrist, Qian Rongzhi blocked him as a gesture of loyalty to protect her master. She called out, "Vice sect master Wei, please don't be like this."

Wei Zhongyuan immediately sent a slap towards Qian Rongzhi's face, but suddenly, all of his strength vanished. It did not produce any sound at all.

The hell snake slithered onto Qian Rongzhi's face and bit Wei Zhongyuan's hand. Wei Zhongyuan's mouth widened as his eyes bulged. This was agony from the depths of his soul.

At that instant, Li Qingshan's figure appeared behind Wei Zhongyuan. He pressed his hand on his back, and over a hundred strands of sword qi surged out. Wielding the vajra sword, Xiao An swung down with it from above, while a pair of fingers extended from Qiu Haitang's hand, stabbing towards Wei Zhongyuan's eyes.

Under the pressing killing intent, Wei Zhongyuan forcefully suppressed the pain and mobilised his true qi. He wanted to put up a desperate counterattack, but it was already too late.

Sword qi rampaged through his body, tearing apart his organs that had lost the protection of spiritual qi. The vajra sword landed on the top of his head, and the sword qi and sword intent surged all the way to his feet. Not only had the two slender fingers pierced his eyes, but they had even penetrated his brain, stirring it up viciously.

In the end, all he heard was Qian Rongzhi say, "Vice master Wei, what're you touching my face for?" Afterwards, he lost all consciousness within the pain and a refusal to accept this.

Wei Zhongyuan's body collapsed loudly. A mighty Foundation Establishment cultivator had been reduced to a corpse in a single instant.

Li Qingshan immediately stowed the corpse away. The corpse of a Foundation Establishment cultivator was equivalent to an extra large pill to Xiao An. The benefits it could provide could not be compared to the corpses of regular people. Wei Zhongyuan's hundred treasures pouch obviously ended up in his hands too.

Qiu Haitang was still in a slight daze. She struggled to believe that Wei Zhongyuan had just died like this, dying so easily. That day, Qian Rongzhi had visited her and told her she could help her kill the Foundation Establishment Wei Zhongyuan silently. She was still rather unconvinced. Even if three Foundation Establishment cultivators worked together in an attempt to kill a single Foundation Establishment cultivator, it would not be that easy, let alone with a mere Qi Practitioner.

However, the reality was presented right before her. Even if she had done nothing, the three of them probably still would have managed to kill Wei Zhongyuan. Three Qi Practitioners had killed a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

"Master, I've done it." Qian Rongzhi bowed towards Qiu Haitang, but there was not the slightest loyalty in her eyes. The matter of the White Lotus cult sure had ruined a lot of her plans.

Qian Rongzhi had been a double-crossing spy. It was not like Qiu Haitang was an idiot. She had discovered that Qian Rongzhi was not under her control at all. All the loyalty she showed in the past was an act, so much for her for teaching her the various cultivation methods of the Sect of Clouds and Rain without the slightest suspicion, treating her like an obedient puppet.

But by then, Qian Rongzhi had already established a connection with Gu Yanying. She had assisted Gu Yanying in completing the plan. Even if Qiu Haitang was utterly furious, she could not lay a single finger on Qian Rongzhi, or she would be treated as a member of the White Lotus cult, which was enough to destroy her entire sect. Trying to use mesmerisation to control a Hawkwolf Guard went even more without saying.

Afterwards, the two of them never met again until a few days ago. Qian Rongzhi suddenly visited her and told her that she could eliminate a disaster for her...

Chapter 360 - As a Daemon General

Qiu Haitang took out two True Spirit pills and placed them in Qian Rongzhi's hand. This was the remuneration they had agreed on at the beginning. She glanced at Li Qingshan. All she could do was hold back the urge to silence him for good.

Li Qingshan gave everything useless to him in the hundred treasures pouch that had to do with the Sect of Clouds and Rain to Qian Rongzhi. He had never expected Qiu Haitang to be part of the plan.

However, Qian Rongzhi knew that including her was for the best. They were facing a Foundation Establishment cultivator after all. No one could guarantee that her hell snake could be effective. If they failed with the first strike, the consequences they faced would be extremely terrifying. She would never risk her life unless there was at least an eighty percent of success.

Moreover, Qiu Haitang would never divulge the secret that they had killed Wei Zhongyuan, or she would not be able to remain as the sect master for any longer. Killing a disciple from the same sect had always

been forbidden regardless of the time or age. She might have been the sect master, but the sect still had the existence of a first elder.

Qian Rongzhi accepted everything from Qiu Haitang and Li Qingshan. Seeing how they both stared at her, she said, "You don't have to look at me like that. Wei Zhongyuan is your mortal enemy, not mine. It's not like he knows I killed his son. I've risked my life to help both of you, so I deserve these benefits."

Li Qingshan said, "You were worried that one of us might give in to Wei Zhongyuan's pressure and expose your secret!"

Qian Rongzhi said, "Fortunately, a future like that can't happen anymore. I hope this remains as our secret together." Suddenly, she frowned and grabbed her wrist. "It's about time. Let's just part here!" She smiled towards Xiao An before taking her leave first.

Li Qingshan was just about to leave too when Qiu Haitang said, "Hold on."

Li Qingshan said without even turning back, "I remember you once said you never wanted to see me again."

"Give me Wei Zhongyuan's corpse."

Li Qingshan said, "Don't worry, it's not going to appear in this world again."

Qiu Haitang's sunken gaze swept over from Li Qingshan to Xiao An before returning to Li Qingshan. An eighth layer Qi Practitioner and a tenth layer Qi Practitioner. Their futures were limitless, and their once opposition Wei Zhongyuan was now dead. Xiao An had already been accepted as a disciple of the Annihilum Light Chan Master, the head monk of the Bodhi courtyard of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga. Basically no one within the Ruyi commandery was still bold enough to think about her as a disciple.

All of their disputes no longer existed. Qiu Haitang's face morphed into a smile. "Come often. You might even have to call me sister-in-law in the future."

Li Qingshan broke into laughter. "You sure are confident."

Qiu Haitang smiled. She was filled with confidence. She possessed an enchanting appearance, a perfect figure, and an impressive cultivation. Just what man wouldn't be interested in her?

"I hope that does indeed happen one day!" Li Qingshan said. In his opinion, Hua Chengzan's behaviour definitely did not arise from giving up on Gu Yanying, but from being deeply triggered by her instead. This sect master Qiu's wishes would probably end up falling through.

Watching Li Qingshan sail off on a cloud, Qiu Haitang's hips swayed from side to side as she made her way down the building. She told the disciples that she had managed to persuade vice sect master Wei into travelling and cultivating outside. Without any evidence, no one could deny it. No one dared to deny it.

Many of the customers had just been cleared out. Turning around, they saw the doors of the parlour open again. They sighed inside. Vice sect master Wei sure had come and gone quickly.

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Where to cultivate? Where to prepare for the tribulation?

Li Qingshan thought about this question long and hard. In the end, he chose to revisit an old place.

A jade dragon gushed down from a cliff that stood over a hundred meters tall, plummeting into a deep pool. It was a period of winter drought, but the water continued to roar thunderously, splashing everywhere.

That's right. This was the place the black ox had initially brought Li Qingshan to cultivate. It was where Xiao An began with the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, as well as the place where they encountered Xuanyue by chance.

The various memories drifted through his head like clouds. Li Qingshan laughed aloud, diving head-first into the frosty pool.

This place belonged to the Boundless mountains, so there were no humans here. It was also close to human establishments, so no daemonic beasts wandered the area. It was extremely secluded too, which made it a perfect spot of cultivation.

He arrived within the cavern behind the waterfall with Xiao An. Seeing how everything remained the same as before, he experienced a sense of nostalgia.

"Looks like we'll have to stay here for a while!" Li Qingshan said. Before he had left this time, he had accepted many random missions, just in case he raised any suspicion for not returning for a long time.

Xiao An nodded. "Alright!" She had made up her mind. She had to work hard to keep up with his footsteps.

Li Qingshan sat down and took out all the pills Ru Xin had given him. Just as he had requested, they were all high level pills. There were even three Virtue Accumulation pills among them.

Li Qingshan directly took a Virtue Accumulation pill and ingested it before closing his eyes to digest and absorb it.

Xiao An sat down near the entrance of the cavern, watching over him.

Days passed one after another. The flow of the waterfall increased; this was the sign of the winter snow melting.

Li Qingshan constantly ingested pills. He had already eaten the three Virtue Accumulation pills, but he was still some distance away from that final step. Although it was a step, sometimes it felt worlds away, beyond his reach.

However, he was in no hurry. He settled down and allowed time to pass by rapidly. The snow melted, and the plants sprouted.

One day at a certain moment, he suddenly opened his eyes. His pupils were hiding the light of joy. The ray of light he had been looking forward to all this time finally descended from the sky. He felt like he had crossed over some sort of boundary, stepping into a different world.

At the same time, he felt the arrival of tremendous danger. All he managed to tell Xiao An was, "Go away!" He was subsequently swallowed by scorching white lightning.

A spark as thick as a snake knocked Xiao An away. The cavern turned into a sea of lightning. Bolts of lightning wove together, crawling around like they were alive as they produced a fearsome roar like a tiger or dragon's cry.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The tribulation of lightning did not descend from above as expected. Instead, it surged over from everything, passing through the thick rock and underground, enveloping Li Qingshan completely in a single instant. It arrived so quickly that he had absolutely no time to react.

In that instant, Li Qingshan even gained the impression that he had released the lightning, and the source of the lightning was the spirit turtle's daemon core in his body. The lightning penetrated the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell, it penetrated his Ox Demon Forges its Hide, and it penetrated his bones and flesh. It even pierced his very soul.

Li Qingshan had made a huge mistake. Regular daemons all spat out their daemon cores when they confronted the tribulation, moving far away from it.

It was exactly because the cultivation of the daemon core had crossed this invisible boundary of the world that lightning was summoned to kill them, so why would they keep the daemon core within them as they went through the tribulation?

Unfortunately, Li Qingshan was ignorant about this. There were no human books that detailed just how daemons went through their tribulations, nor had any Daemon General ever told him about this. He did have a Daemon General beside him, but Milliped had always been a dunce, so why would he tell him this?

The rocks in the cavern all crystallised from the scorching energy before shattering and melting together once more from the intense heat. They constantly shattered and melted together.

Intense pain! The agony of being ripped apart! He felt pain like he was being torn away inch by inch!

"The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas!" Li Qingshan roared out. The daemon core emitted rings of blue light, suppressing his mind, soul, and body.

Li Qingshan roused himself. His body swelled rapidly. When he rushed out of the cavern, he had already reached a height of seventy or eighty feet. He had completely transformed into a daemon, and he was rapidly growing larger. His roar drowned out the lightning as he waved his arms and legs, like he was fighting against an invisible enemy.

The water in the pool and the waterfall had been reduced to mist in a split second, surging violently and landing on the ground like thick clouds. All that was left was a lofty figure and constantly flickering lightning.

It seemed to last for eons, but it was just a short moment in reality. The lightning vanished as swiftly and mysteriously as when it had arrived, without any prior signs at all.

"Qingshan!" Xiao An took a step forward and called out his name in worry.

He heard the call on the edge of unconsciousness and jerked awake.

The white mist that enveloped the entire place was like a wet towel that had been viciously rung out. Torrential rain poured down, dousing his long, scarlet hair. At the same time, the water level in the dry pool rapidly rose.

He glanced down. The surging surface of the water still managed to reflect a blurry figure.

When he saw himself in the water, he became surprised. Is that me?

Xiao An rushed into the white mist and spotted him too. She stopped and was taken aback.

“So noisy!” He casually reached towards the sky, and the mist turned into water immediately, returning to the pool.

He was not submerged by the water. Instead, he rose with it, standing on the surface of the water. Waving his hand, the surface flattened out completely, turning into a mirror. It clearly reflected the blue sky and white clouds, as well as his appearance.

Long, fiery hair ran down his back. His naked body was like a work of art that a master sculptor had poured his heart out over. Every single curve of his seemed to be carefully planned and chiseled, conforming to the golden ratio of utmost perfection. It was a balance between strength and beauty.

If even this was unable to surprise Li Qingshan, then he would become utterly stunned when he saw his own face in the reflection.

He had seen many handsome men before, like Hua Chengzan and Han Tiewei, but this face of his was no less handsome than theirs, or even more so. If he could ignore the two curved horns that protruded from his head, he was enough to become the dream lover of every single woman.

Li Qingshan suddenly realised that this would be his appearance after transforming. He touched his face and smiled. “So heavenly tribulations even come with a facelift.” After all, those birds and beasts would gain a proper appearance after undergoing a heavenly tribulation. He already seemed like a human in the first place, so he had been directly struck into a handsome man by the lightning.

Xiao An smiled too. She asked, “How do you feel?”

“I obviously feel... fantastic!” Li Qingshan roared out, alarming a great flock of birds in the forest. He laughed aloud, revealing his sharp canines. He actually seemed rather fiendishly charming.

Power surged through his body endlessly, which tempted him to find a powerful enemy for a great battle. The elders of the three mountains and Fu Qingjin, these opponents originally out of his reach, had suddenly been pulled up close to him. He had bided his time for so long. Finally, the moment for him to resolve some past matters had arrived.