

Chapter 411 - Conquering the Discontent

A great hole appeared in Li Qingshan's chest, and he fell out of the sky. After that moment of glory, the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather returned to normal and became completely dull in colour.

"Master!" Ye Liubo cried out and tried to go up, but Ye Mingzhu stopped her. "The battle hasn't ended yet!"

Li Qingshan rapidly fell down. As he watched Bloodshadow's figure grow further and further away, his lips gradually curled into a smile.

Bloodshadow lowered his head and stared at his pale-white hand in disbelief. It was covered in bloody marks. Normally, he could eliminate such wounds instantly. Even if he were ripped to pieces, it would just be a very ordinary wound.

But right now, the marks rapidly expanded. Purply-green poison inhibited his body's recovery, and it rapidly spread, turning his pale face into the same colour.

At that moment, who knew how many times Li Qingshan had swung the blade. He had not achieved it through his strength alone. Instead, he had relied on the power of the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather. Like most spiritual artifacts, the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather also came with a killing move, which was known as "Poisonfeather Dance". It was like the bloom of flowers, the dance of the Poisonfeather bird, completely unleashing all the poison stored within the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather. It was a fatal strike of either winning or dying.

With Bloodshadow's speed and reaction, landing the attack was difficult, so he could only wait until the last moment when neither of them could retreat. Finally, the blade played a critical role and injected all the poison into Bloodshadow's body perfectly.

In the air, Bloodshadow shattered and fell down like toy bricks. A blood-red daemon core flickered within, barely holding all of the pieces of flesh together.

Xiao An, who hid in the darkness silently, stared at the daemon core. The firelight in her eyes flickered!

Li Qingshan flipped and landed on one knee, pressing a hand against his chest. The moment he landed on the ground, the Strength of the Earth flowed out endlessly, nourishing his body.

Nearby, Bloodshadow turned into an assembling pile of flesh, constantly wriggling and spraying with poison, doing his best to recover.

The battle was so brutal that everyone became dumbfounded. Wounds like that would be absolutely fatal if a night roamer received them, yet they managed to hold on and recover with their terrifying life force.

But even at a time like this, the Spider Queen did not plan to make them stop. Her eyes flashed as a smile stretched over her face. She seemed glamorous as she radiated with joy.

"Ma'am Spider Queen, they're both powerful generals under your command. War is near, so it won't be good if we suffer any losses. Please end this as a draw!" Dragonsnail said slowly. Northmoon's strength

had completely exceeded his expectations. If he were allowed to triumph over two Daemon Generals consecutively, his status would probably even surpass Dragonsnail's.

"A draw? Don't even think about it!" Before Dragonsnail could even finish speaking, Li Qingshan interrupted him with his hoarse voice. He had put up with so much, so how could an outcome like this satisfy him?

"What, you want to keep fighting?" Dragonsnail raised his head and asked. Basically all of Li Qingshan's organs had been destroyed, and his spine had vanished too. The upper and lower half of his body could rip apart at any time. He was clearly in no state to keep fighting.

"I can obviously keep fighting!" The corner of Li Qingshan's lips curled up, and suddenly, he tossed the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather high into the air. A scarlet figure leapt out from the darkness, catching the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather and landing in front of Bloodshadow. His red hair danced around in the air. He was Li Qingshan's mirror clone.

His mirror clone probably could not even withstand a single strike from Strongboulder or Bloodshadow before dispersing, and he would have to split his focus to control it. As a result, Li Qingshan had kept it lurking in the darkness for a surprise attack. Sure enough, it was extremely effective now.

"Ma'am Spider Queen, t- this isn't fair!" Bloodshadow assembled his head with difficulty and was so frightened that it almost split apart again. He objected weakly.

"This is one of my innate abilities. It's always been a part of my powers, so how is it unfair?"

The Spider Queen remained silent, agreeing to Li Qingshan's words.

Li Qingshan raised the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather with a vicious smile.

"I admit defeat!" Bloodshadow cried out. If he let even more poison invade his body, it would lead to permanent, severe damage to his cultivation. Yet, he had no idea that the Blade of the Drinking Poisonfeather had run out of poison a long time ago, having been reduced to an ordinary blade.

Those three words silenced the entire gorge. No one thought Li Qingshan would actually win, and he would win so beautifully. He had defeated both Daemon Generals in the area they were strongest in.

"Master, you've won!" Ye Liubo cheered and rushed over, embracing Li Qingshan firmly.

Li Qingshan grinned painfully. He pushed Ye Liubo aside and propped up himself, climbing back onto his feet. He clasped his hands at Spider Queen Lolth from afar.

"Alright, from today onwards, you are the commander of all the night roamers. I await your next performance!" Spider Queen Lolth announced loudly and smiled charmingly at Li Qingshan. Lifting up and dragging her red dress, she vanished into the darkness. Dragonsnail followed close behind.

"Once you recover, I'll challenge you again, Northmoon!" Strongboulder leapt up and flew to the top of the gorge with a rumble. He was actually startling fast, nowhere near as sluggish as Li Qingshan imagined him to be. His wild laughter rang out from afar when he had already vanished.

Bloodshadow finally purged all the poison from his body. He transformed into a red blood bat and glanced at Li Qingshan in pure resentment before flapping his wings and flying to the other end of the gorge.

The night roamers all looked at one another. There was surprise, worry, fear, and hostility, but regardless of what they were feeling, they all knew that this daemon called Northmoon had become a figure of great importance in this region, and he possessed power over the fates of countless night roamers. The situation underground had completely changed.

“The Spider Shadow clan is willing to offer its full support for sir Northmoon to become the commander of night roamers. Sir Northmoon, please return to Blacklustre city with me to rest.” Ye Mingzhu approached him before anyone else, becoming the first matriarch to swear loyalty to Li Qingshan.

Apart from the Spider Shadow clan, the other night roamers all remained silent, vanishing into the darkness. They returned to their cities to discuss what they would do next. Not only had Ye Mingzhu’s behaviour failed to set a model for them all, but it even made the other clans more suspicious instead.

These crafty, doubtful, and unruly night roamers would never yield to a daemon so easily. Making them give up on the open and hidden conflict that had occurred over all these years was even more difficult.

The Spider Queen had only granted him the status. If Li Qingshan wanted to convert this status into actual benefits, he would have to keep working hard by himself. However, he had already grown accustomed to this a long time ago. He would obviously personally fetch what he wanted.

In Blacklustre city, Li Qingshan laid comfortably on the soft, leather chair. Ye Liubo massaged his shoulders, letting his head rest on her plump chest, while Ye Liusu stood to the side, personally feeding the hazelnuts specially produced underground into his mouth. However, she was clearly very unaccustomed to such a job.

“Sir, the other clans still haven’t made any responses. They seem to be contacting one another secretly,” Ye Mingzhi reported.

“Mingzhu, prepare to conquer the discontent for me!”

Li Qingshan pulled out a ship’s wheel from his hundred treasures pouch. The Soaring Dragon ship was already gone, but the wheel was still the control for all the puppets.

Chapter 412 - Value of Use

“As you wish, sir.” Ye Mingzhu lowered her head, and her lips curled into a smile. As long as she borrowed his power, the Spider Shadow clan could easily surpass the other clans. Everything was even simpler than she had imagined it to be.

“Just so you know, I won’t do anything.”

Li Qingshan destroyed Ye Mingzhu’s plan in a single sentence. She raised her head in surprise. “But, with our Spider Shadow clan alone, how are we supposed to contend with the other clans?”

“Do you really think that I’ll just say something, and the Spider Shadow clan will automatically be in charge of the other clans? If I were to fight, what difference is there between the Spider Shadow clan and the other clans?”

Li Qingshan's metallic voice brought up a grim reality. He was not hoping to earn the so-called "loyalty" of Ye Mingzhi or other night roamers. If they offered no value for use at all, and he had to busy himself for everything, what was the point in becoming the commander of night roamers after all this effort? Was it supposed to be for democratic liberty so that they could live better lives?

"I'm not too sure what to do." Ye Mingzhu's heart trembled. She understood that Li Qingshan was definitely not an easy target to control and use. Ye Liusu opened her mouth, but she was silenced by a glance from Ye Liubo, letting out a silent sigh.

"Don't worry. I will provide you with necessary support." Li Qingshan placed the ship's wheel in Ye Mingzhu's hand.

"Thank you for your bestowment, sir!"

Ye Mingzhu's eyes lit up slightly after hearing Li Qingshan's explanation. Her mind got to work. With the status granted by the Spider Queen and a force under her command, she had a great chance at conquering the weaker clans. If she united them, then...

"Now is the time for you to demonstrate yourself. I'll give you a month. Go make your ambition come true!" Li Qingshan patted Ye Mingzhu's shoulder with a smile.

Ye Mingzhu took her leave. Ye Liubo wrapped her arms around Li Qingshan's neck. "Master, if she defies your orders after obtaining power, what will you do?" This was probably the problem that worried all rulers in the world. Those who achieved great merit were harder to control. As a matter of fact, it was even possible for their roles to reverse.

Li Qingshan's reply was very simple. "Then I'll switch her out with someone who does obey me."

This was the principle of governance among cultivators. Tricks and tactics were nothing before absolute power. Li Qingshan would be an idiot if he wasted his energy on this. He had to do all he could to free up more energy and obtain more resources. Becoming even stronger was the correct path to take.

The objective behind this all and all of the hard work was for climbing even higher. By then, he would have completely shaken off these people already.

The objective he had temporarily forgotten became clear once more. Li Qingshan raised his head and looked at the gloomy ceiling. His gaze pierced through the thick rock and soil, seeing the azure sky with a different pair of eyes that led to beyond the Nine Heavens.

"Let's go, Xiao An. Let's return to the academy."

Leaving behind his clone to watch over the situation underground, Li Qingshan's main body returned to human form. Holding Xiao An's hand, a cloud rose up beneath their feet, lifting them up and flying them off in the direction of the academy.

His hundred treasures pouch contained a tremendous amount of spiritual herbs offered up by Ye Mingzhu, or should he say the Spider Shadow clan. Once they subdued the other clans, this quantity would multiply. Right now, he just lacked a person to refine them into pills—Ru Xin.

"Ru Xin is still in secluded cultivation!?"

On Cloudwisp island within the shimmering bamboo, Li Qingshan let out a long sigh, which made Han Qiongzhi frown. "Why do you care about her so much?"

"What's wrong with caring about friends? Congratulations, you primary disciple of the school of Legalism." Li Qingshan pulled Han Qiongzhi into his embrace with a smile, pressing his forehead against hers intimately. He stared at her bright, beautiful face in complete affection.

"There's something I want to discuss with you." Han Qiongzhi pinched him and retracted her delicate body into his embrace.

"What's up?"

"I want to enter seclusion for a while." Having reached the tenth layer, Han Qiongzhi should have devoted a lot of time to merging and achieving mastery over the twelve standard meridians and eight extraordinary meridians. Now that something big was looming over the horizon, she had to redirect her focus to cultivation again.

"What a coincidence. I plan to too." Li Qingshan raised his brows. He just happened to be planning to tell her about this. He needed a quiet place to tend to his wounds, and he also needed to properly focus on practising qi.

"Together?" Han Qiongzhi's eyes lit up. If it were possible, she would rather remain by his side constantly.

"Then will we still have time to cultivate?" Li Qingshan pinched her waist with an evil smile. Having done it now, she became more graceful and charming.

"I refuse to believe you won't get tired." Han Qiongzhi reddened, but she refused to relent.

"Since when has it ever ended without you begging for mercy?" Li Qingshan's smile widened, and Han Qiongzhi became even redder, but she could not help but admit to that. Tucking her hair behind her ear with her little finger, her voice became tender as she whispered into his ear, "I can find a suitable method of dual cultivation."

"I even have to think of cultivation when I'm doing it? That's too troublesome." Li Qingshan was very interested, but upon further thought, he still chose to decline. He had far too many secrets. Just absorbing spiritual qi of the world as he cultivated could lead to a lot of suspicion.

"I think you just don't want to be with me!" Han Qiongzhi became annoyed. It was rare of her to consider so much, but he still refused her.

"I've already promised Xiao An," Li Qingshan said helplessly.

"If you don't want to, then forget it. That'll just be your bad luck!" Han Qiongzhi snorted coldly. If Li Qingshan declined, what could she do? She was not a pestering person. She would never behave like she could not even live anymore if he were not by her side.

All Li Qingshan could do was coax her before celebrating with her alone, spending a night entangled together. The next day, he accompanied her to the seclusion dwellings in the Han family, parting with her reluctantly.

At the bottom of Contention island, Li Qingshan and Xiao An held hands and watched the stone door close and the formations activate. They smiled at one another.

“Does it still hurt?” Xiao An undid Li Qingshan’s clothes and placed her hand against his chest. He seemed fine on the surface, but she could feel that the hole was nowhere close to healing, so she asked in concern.

“A little, but it’s fine.” Li Qingshan rubbed her head. Ever since that battle, his chest had never stopped hurting, but he was rather good at withstanding and hiding pain. Unfortunately, he could not fool Xiao An.

“Let me help you,” said Xiao An. As her tiny hand stroked his chest, Li Qingshan felt the pain gradually disappear. It warmed up slightly, filled with indescribable comfort.

Power surged out from her hand. Under the nourishment of this power, the flesh and blood in his body started to teem with vitality, and his wound began to heal faster.

After a night and two days, Xiao An let go, and Li Qingshan had made a complete recovery. He was even tougher than before. “And I had thought it would take half a month at the very least! I really do need you around!”

Xiao An let out a smile of exhaustion and relief. “As long as it doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Chapter 413 - Li Qingshan’s Orders

The Governing meridian began in the lower abdomen, extending down to the crotch, moving along the spine, and reaching the brain. It governed all the yang meridians in the body, which was why it was called the “sea of yang meridians”. It was the last of the eight extraordinary meridians to be opened.

Li Qingshan sat quietly as a faint, blue haze gradually rose up from him. When he practised qi now, he no longer had to ingest any pills. The endless spiritual qi of the world would gather in his body automatically, far more effective than any regular pill.

If he could withstand it, he would direct it to the sea of qi in his dantian for conversion into true qi. If he could not, the spirit turtle’s daemon core would absorb it, converting it into daemon qi. Nothing went to waste.

Limited by the size of his sea of qi, his cultivation speed was not particularly fast. However, he was able to remain in a state of cultivation for all twenty-four hours of a day, so a single day of cultivation for him could rival ten from regular people.

As he became absorbed in cultivation, his mind rapidly sank, submerging in a boundless, azure ocean. A spirit turtle carried him, allowing him to drift freely through the ocean. He was at great comfort. This was a form of extreme peace and freedom of the mind.

Although cultivation was often described as arduous, true cultivation was never arduous. Regular people just were incapable of understanding this mysterious feeling.

At this moment, Li Qingshan’s mirror clone in his underground dwelling remained in the same posture, seated on the stone bed. He used the spiritual qi within the spiritual stone vein to maintain his mirror clone in case anything unexpected happened.

He had already cast down numerous formations using the formation banners. Even Fu Qingjin would not be able to move around so freely. After who knew how long, Li Qingshan opened his eyes and saw Ye Mingzhu bowing before him. He asked, "Has it been a month yet?"

"Only fourteen days have passed. The matriarchs of the five other clans have come to seek an audience with sir Northmoon. These are their gifts."

Ye Mingzhu smiled. Everything had gone much more smoothly than she had imagined, obviously due to how she handled it all. More importantly, Li Qingshan's strength that had led to consecutive victories against Strongboulder and Bloodshadow had crushed the courage of the other clans to confront him directly. In this brutal underground world, only strength could earn respect and leave people convinced.

Li Qingshan opened the boxes. They all contained spiritual herbs over a thousand years old, and he smiled in satisfaction. That's right. This was the exact outcome he wanted. He did not want to busy himself with collecting spiritual herbs. Instead, he just wanted to move his mouth and have his subordinates handle it.

"How did you do it?" Li Qingshan was rather curious. There were six major night roamer clans, so how had Ye Mingzhu completed this mission in such a short amount of time without destroying a single clan? He was rather surprised by this.

"I just declared an ultimatum three days ago—anyone who doesn't come today will be hunted down and slain." Ye Mingzhu giggled.

"That simple? If none of them came, what would you have done?"

"Actually, they all agreed to it soon after I left."

"And then they all came." Li Qingshan's expression was rather strange.

"Yes. They obviously all hoped that some idiot wouldn't come, which would let them destroy her clan and divide up her territory. It's exactly because of this reason that they're afraid of becoming that idiot." Ye Mingzhu played around with her hair. With her deep understanding of night roamers, she had grasped their weakness with ease.

Li Qingshan shook his head with a sneer. Even at a time like this, they still did not forget about internal conflict? Perhaps this had already become a habit engraved in their very beings.

"You've done very well. Send them in!"

"Yes." Ye Mingzhu turned around and said loudly, "Liubo, Liusu, sir Northmoon wishes to see the matriarchs."

Under Ye Liubo and Ye Liusu's lead, the matriarchs of the five night roamer clans entered the cavern and arrived before Li Qingshan. They all stated their names and clans before bowing together. "Greetings to sir Northmoon."

Apart from an old woman and a young girl, all of them were beautiful madams like Ye Mingzhu. They all raised their heads and studied Li Qingshan. No matter how dissatisfied they felt, they all showed utmost respect. None of them were ignorant enough to openly oppose him. People as stupid as that would have never been able to become matriarchs in the first place.

From a certain perspective, it was also this kind of cleverness that prevented them from uniting and opposing this ruler from a foreign race.

“This should be our first meeting, right? Let me just say a few words before we start—those who obey me will live, and those who defy me will die. Do you understand?” Li Qingshan remained seated there. He did not seem arrogant, nor did he give off any pressure. He just said it very seriously; it was as simple as telling them he liked it when it was sunny and disliked it when it was rainy.

“Understood,” Ye Mingzhu replied first, and the other matriarchs agreed in a hurry. With their current circumstances, they no longer had much interest in resisting anymore. At the end of the day, as long as the Spider Queen wanted to unite the night roamers, she would definitely send over a Daemon General to lead them. They would be ruled over no matter who it was. Even if they put up a desperate struggle, it was pointless, so why not use this opportunity to gain an upper hand over the future?

Li Qingshan smiled in satisfaction. This came before everything else. If any of them dared to say they did not understand, he would not mind making an example out of them. There might not even have been a need for him to do anything, as the other matriarchs might try to do it for him.

“Very good. You’ve already seen the formations when you came here. This is my first order. Send powerful members over to serve me under my direct command. We’re going to be erecting a fortress here in preparation for the attacks from the humans.”

Before the matriarchs could even respond, Li Qingshan continued, “The second order is that all night roamers are forbidden from killing one another as long as they are in my territory, whether secretly or openly. If anyone defies this order, not only will they pay with their lives, but their entire clan will be punished too.”

Ye Liusu’s eyes lit up. Was this not what she had been striving towards the entire time, to stop the night roamers from killing one another and uniting them once more? Perhaps he really might be able to change everything.

“The third order is that from today onwards, all clans will give me offerings of spiritual herbs. All varieties are welcome, and the older, the better. Do you have any objections to these three orders?”

Under the gaze from Li Qingshan’s scarlet eyes, none of the matriarchs had any objections. The three orders seemed restrictive, but they were not completely unacceptable. It was not like he had specified what kind of powerful members he wanted with the first order, so they could deal with it easily. The second order was even simpler. If they could not kill one another, then they would not kill one another.

The last order was a little troublesome, but spiritual herbs never really held much value to night roamers in the first place, as they could not refine pills. Only fruits that could be directly ingested were relatively more valuable. The gifts they had brought forwards were all the former.

Li Qingshan had not placed any specifications on that order either. All of the clans had built up a supply of regular spiritual herbs. As a matter of fact, some spiritual herbs grew throughout their territory and were never picked because they had no idea on how to use it. They were all extremely old, so it would be very easy to fill the quota with them.

“You’ve all been very cooperative, which delights me. It would be impolite of me to not reciprocate. Here are a thousand Qi Gathering pills. Human cultivators normally use them to cultivate. You can split them evenly between the five matriarchs!”

As the most common pill, Qi Gathering pills held very little value. He could obtain a lot of them with just a single spiritual stone. However, they were crucial to all sects and Qi Practitioners.

Li Qingshan had found several tens of thousands of them in the Green Vine Elder’s hundred treasures pouch. For a sect that cultivated spiritual herbs and refined pills, it was very normal for them to have built up such a large supply.

Li Qingshan basically no longer required them anymore. Sitting down and taking in a breath of spiritual qi would be equivalent to several hundreds or even thousands of Qi Gathering pills. However, they were perfect for him to reward others with. He was basically salvaging them.

The matriarchs’ expressions all varied. They had obviously heard about the renowned Qi Gathering pill, and they were capable of refining them too. However, many of the herbs that went into the pills could only be found above ground, which inhibited them from refining them. Even when they managed to get their hands on some, the pills seemed extremely precious. They would only use them to nurture their most talented clansmen.

Two hundred Qi Gathering pills was already a very great sum to them, enough to support a year’s cultivation of ten night roamers. They would be able to nurture another group of elite warriors. Although it was nowhere close to the value of their gifts, they were still rather surprised and overjoyed, as they had never thought they would receive a gift like that in return. They all found this sir Northmoon to be so reasonable that he no longer seemed like a daemon.

“Ye Mingzhu.”

“Yes, sir.” Ye Mingzhu just happened to be tempted by all that. Hearing her name being mentioned, she stepped forward in a hurry. Her eyes were filled with eagerness.

“You’ve done this well, gathering the matriarchs. Here’s a True Spirit pill as your reward. If you have someone suitable ingest it, they should break through very soon and face the heavenly tribulation.”

There was no need for Li Qingshan to explain what the pill did. The various clans were extremely well-informed. Ever since Ye Liubo returned to show off, the matriarchs immediately learnt about the existence of such a wondrous pill. Now, all of their eyes widened, staring straight at the True Spirit pill in Li Qingshan’s hand. They were tempted to snatch it over right now. Powerful members who had undergone the heavenly tribulation were the most precious, central force in all clans.

“Thank you for the reward, sir Northmoon.” Ye Mingzhu smiled widely and bowed gracefully, accepting the True Spirit pill.

“Then I’ll leave the ship’s wheel that controls the puppets and cannons in your possession for now. I hope you can maintain the order underground.”

Li Qingshan’s words made Ye Mingzhu elated. She said in a hurry, “I definitely won’t disappoint you, sir.” As long as she possessed this power, she would be able to consolidate her position as the greatest

matriarch. She looked at Li Qingshan with so much charm that she seemed like she was infatuated with him.

The faces of the other matriarchs became extremely warped. Ye Mingzhu had once shown off the power of the puppets to them. If they faced them in direct confrontation, it would come at an extremely heavy price even if they managed to destroy this puppet army. As for the cannons, their power was even more terrifying. Even those who had undergone the heavenly tribulation would be injured if they took on a blast.

The tiny ship's wheel was like a staff of power, giving Ye Mingzhu the power to destroy any clan. They now understood that he had bestowed her with it.

No, we can't let this continue. The matriarchs exchanged glances, and all of them thought of the same thing.

"Sir Northmoon, I have objections to that! "I have objections too!" "Me too!"

The matriarchs who had always been so tolerant, agreeing with whatever Li Qingshan said, all objected together. They were indignant. They could accept the rule of a daemon, but they could not accept Ye Mingzhu walking over them.

Chapter 414 - Arrangements and Arrival

"Oh? Then what do you think?" This was the exact outcome that Li Qingshan wanted. He had no idea how to use schemes with his authority, but he was still capable of stimulating the enthusiasm of his subordinates.

"A weapon like that should remain in sir Northmoon's control. How can you just give it to someone else?" The old woman said, putting on a vicious front like "If I can't obtain it, then none of you even think of obtaining it".

"Sir Northmoon bestowed this upon me. How can you question his decisions?" Ye Mingzhu rebuked immediately. She had already become very good at bringing up "sir Northmoon" constantly.

"That's reasonable, but I don't have the habit of taking back something I've given away. If that's the case, then you can take turns with the ship's wheel. However, that'll depend on your upcoming performance."

In just a few words, Ye Mingzhu went from being startled to joyful to worried again, while the other matriarchs all saw hope. As it seemed, he had not been bewitched by Ye Mingzhu. As long as they demonstrated sufficient loyalty, they could receive a similar reward too.

They no longer had any intentions of brushing aside Li Qingshan's three orders. Otherwise, their clans would decline and be surpassed by others even if they personally got involved.

"At it seems right now, Mingzhu's performance has been the best, so she'll be in charge of the ship's wheel first." Li Qingshan stood up and arrived beside Ye Mingzhu, patting her on the shoulder like he was comforting her.

"Thank you for your trust, sir Northmoon."

“Liubo, here’s your reward.” Li Qingshan took out a bright yellow satin. This was a supreme grade spiritual artifact he had obtained from the Golden Pheasant Elder’s hundred treasures pouch.

“Thank you, master!” Ye Liubo was overcome with excitement. She threw herself at him and gave him a kiss despite the current circumstances.

The matriarchs became even more envious. This was a powerful weapon that only humans could forge, yet he actually gave it away to his servant so easily. No, they could not allow this to go on for any longer. Both of his servants were Ye Mingzhu’s daughters. As time went on, it would be very disadvantageous to them. As a result, they all thought of the same thing.

Li Qingshan glanced past the six matriarchs. “With the current upheaval, I hope you can let go of your conflict of the past and unite together, to devote yourself to ma’am Spider Queen. If you continue to remain in a state of disunity, riddled with internal strife, you’ll definitely be destroyed by the humans.”

“Yes.” The matriarchs accepted his orders and took their leave.

“Master, can I switch my reward for something else?” Ye Liubo immediately became glued to him as she giggled away.

“What, you don’t like it?”

“I do like it, but I’d much rather have you, master.” Ye Liubo licked her lips and stuck her hand into his clothes, sliding down his body and grasping a certain object. Her eyes became clouded with lust.

“Go play to one side. If I’m supposed to give you whatever you want, isn’t that very insulting to me?!” Li Qingshan pushed her aside in annoyance. She was so lustful that she had almost lost her mind. If he let her touch him a little more and something happened, he would be mortified.

As she watched Ye Liubo play around with the bright yellow satin, Ye Liusu, who had received nothing, became slightly disappointed for some reason. She suddenly made up her mind and went up. “Sir Northmoon, can you please promise me something?”

“What is it?”

Li Qingshan was rather curious. Ever since Ye Liusu became his servant, she had remained silent and obedient. She would do whatever he made her do, but she was as serious as a machine. She would never lower herself in an attempt to flatter him. She really did seem a little like a princess. It was rare of her to be so proactive.

“Please protect the night roamers and lead them back to under the starry skies. As long as you promise that, I’ll serve you with utmost sincerity. I’ll be loyal to you and only you, and I’ll do everything I can to serve you, just like Liubo.” Ye Liusu’s delicate face was filled with determination. She had always focused on cultivation for the rejuvenation of the Night Roaming folk, but her future had always been so uncertain. His appearance seemed to bring her a glimmer of hope. Perhaps she had been influenced by Ye Liubo, so she also believed slightly that as long as he was willing, he actually could change everything.

“Big sister...” Ye Liubo was rather surprised.

“Even if you have to betray the Spider Shadow clan?” Li Qingshan smiled in thought. The more he understood the night roamers, the more he found Ye Liusu to be strange. Her eyes were filled with a

willpower so determined that it was close to becoming a belief, completely lacking the darkness that regular night roamers possessed. Perhaps all races would have a strange one or two!

“Yes.” Ye Liusu agreed with gritted teeth. Sorry, mother. This is for the sake of the night roamers.

“Are these clansmen really worth it? I think most of them want to kill you out of jealousy.”

“The underground without the stars and moon have twisted their minds. I believe night roamers were not like this in the first place. They just need to break away from... control.”

“That’s a very good idea, and I’m very tempted, but I decline!”

“Why?” Although she had guessed this possibility, Ye Liusu’s disappointment still exceeded her expectations.

“Because you’ve completely misunderstood it all. I reward loyalty, but never will I do anything in exchange for anyone’s loyalty. I only do what I want to do. You’re welcome to help out or just stand aside and watch. You have no other choice.”

Ye Liusu returned to where she stood before in silence.

Li Qingshan returned to his state of cultivation, but before long, he jerked awake again. The powerful members of the various clans had arrived much sooner than he had imagined.

The first to arrive were ten beautiful night roamers. They were either cold, tender, or sweet, but their appearances were all the best of the best among the night roamers. Combined with their revealing attires, they all seemed like beauty pageants. They did not just possess beauty, but great strength too. Every single one of them had undergone the heavenly tribulation already, all noble princesses in their respective clans.

After stating their names and offering up their spiritual herbs, they actually lowered their proud heads and expressed that they were willing to leave their clans and serve Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan could not help but laugh. These matriarchs were all trying to express that they too could provide him with what the Spider Shadow clan had provided him. As for just how loyal these princesses would be, he had no plans to rely on them at all. They all looked at him like they wanted to eat him, not only drooling over his “handsomeness”, but also because they wanted to obtain things from him.

Ye Liubo was absolutely nothing in the eyes of these princesses. She had just been slightly lucky. If even she could be bestowed with a supreme grade spiritual artifact, why couldn’t they?

“Master.” Ye Liubo felt greatly threatened, subconsciously grabbing Li Qingshan’s arm. As for Ye Liusu, she let out a deep sigh instead. It was no wonder why he had brushed her aside like that. Everything she could offer up was nothing in his eyes.

“Alright, I accept. From today onwards, you will be my personal guards.” Li Qingshan did not turn them down. The clans needed to be balanced and remain equal to one another. He also required a group he could directly command. And, obtaining a group of personal guards like that was probably the dream of every man!

“Liusu, you can be their captain,” Li Qingshan said next.

Ye Liusu was taken aback. The proud princesses immediately objected, "Why her?" "We should decide that through a battle."

Li Qingshan could not be bothered with dealing with all that. He directly said, "I'm going to cultivate. You can all disperse!"

Li Qingshan shut his eyes, and the cavern settled down once more. He opened his eyes again. "Liusu, why aren't you leaving?"

"Why me? It's not like I'm anything of value in your eyes," Ye Liusu asked in confusion.

"Because you're very special."

"Very crazy you mean!" Ye Liusu's heart skipped a beat, and she lowered her head. Her lips curled into a bitter smile. "Mother said that if I were born into a regular household of night roamers, I wouldn't have such crazy thoughts."

"All dreams seem just as crazy in the very beginning. I might be a daemon, but I don't dislike those who have hopes and dreams," Li Qingshan said with a smile.

"Then why did you turn me down?"

"All Liubo entrusted to me was herself, but you want to entrust far, far too many things to me. You couldn't handle it yourself, so you want to throw it to someone else and then take it easy."

"I don't." Ye Liusu tried to defend herself.

"I have no interest in serving as the mediator between a group of women, but you might be able to influence them with your thoughts, such that they will serve you. I've already given you the opportunity, so work hard! I don't know whether you can succeed, but if there really is a day when night roamers can return beneath the starry sky, no longer scheming and plotting and killing one another, that'll all be because of you, not because of me."

Ye Liusu's feelings surged. For the first time, she could understand a little of what Ye Liubo felt. Since young, no one had ever said something like that to her. No one had ever encouraged her, approving of her thoughts and giving her their support.

When Li Qingshan defeated Strongboulder and Bloodshadow consecutively, she only admired his strength and strategy. But with what she heard right now, she actually felt like she was unable to stare at him directly. Her mind that had become impervious to desires and passions through many years of arduous cultivation began to ripple.

Li Qingshan shook his head slightly. Sure enough, idealists were the easiest to fool. Originally, he planned on giving Ye Liubo the position of the captain, but Ye Liubo's cultivation was just too low, and she lacked the required temperament. In comparison, Ye Liusu's temperament was better. At the very least, she seemed to possess some leadership and was relatively simple and easier to control. At the very least, she would not look at him greedily.

However, Ye Liusu had just been too unenthusiastic. Becoming his servant seemed to have a very big effect on her. As a result, he came up with all of this. He was not completely fooling her either. If Ye Liusu actually grasped this opportunity, she could indeed achieve a lot.

Ye Liusu arrived outside the cavern. She pressed her hand against her chest, still feeling her heart thump heavily. She had no idea whether it was because of what he said, or because of just how he was.

“Master really is powerful. He can actually make someone like you who has purged her heart of desires to yearn for love.” Ye Liubo walked over from one side with a wide grin.

“Stop the nonsense. Let’s go.” Ye Liusu’s face reddened before recovering her cool demeanour. She grabbed Ye Liusu’s hand and walked off. Now was not the time for her to consider this.

“What’re we doing?”

“Since they want a battle, then I’ll give them a battle.” Ye Liusu was brimming with morale. This was an unprecedented opportunity. She had to grasp it.

As the sun set in the west, the evening glow filled the sky. A green figure appeared in front of a cave that led underground.

Fu Qingjin stood with his sword, his face exhausted. However, the moment he drew the Green Ruins sword, his eyes erupted with life. He turned into a streak of green light and dived into the pitch-black cave.

The negotiations fell through. Only the option of killing remained!

Chapter 415 - Misjudgement

The green light moved with unmatched speed, following the same route that he had used last time to lure out Milliped. He rushed straight towards where Li Qingshan cultivated.

Suddenly, mist blocked his path. Fu Qingjin frowned and stopped.

The daemon was actually capable of such thought, enough to understand how to use formations? However, how could these formations stop him?

Fu Qingjin brought his fingers together, sliding across the Green Ruins sword slowly. The Green Ruins sword lit up with glaring light, containing startling power.

Li Qingshan was completely in the dark about all this. Even if he knew, there was nothing he could do. His mind was submerged in cultivation as time passed slowly. His cultivation as a Qi Practitioner advanced steadily as ebbs of Gui Water true qi burst through his acupoints one after another.

Suddenly, his mirror clone underground opened his eyes. As the person who had laid down the formations, he could clearly sense that the formations had been touched.

Were they here?

“Personal guards, gather!” Li Qingshan leapt up as his voice boomed out in all directions. Although only his clone was present, he possessed twelve powerful night roamers and an advantage in geography. That was enough to put up a battle. Just getting through the formations would cost them quite a lot of effort.

In just a while, twelve figures flew over. Leading them, Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo held their heads high. Some of the ten princesses were still reluctant to accept them, but they still followed behind them.

Working together, Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo had faced off against the princesses of the five other clans in a series of battles, two-against-two. Although it had not been completely one-sided, their combination and mutual understanding completely exceeded their opponent's mutual disunity. Combined with Ye Liubo's supreme grade spiritual artifact, they ended up dominating the battles easily despite how it seemed on the surface, consolidating their position as the leader of the guards.

What filled Ye Liusu with enthusiasm the most was when she told these princesses about her idea of unity, three of them agreed. Regardless of whether this agreement was sincere or fake, it was still an extremely rare step forward. Her respect for Li Qingshan increased.

"Master, may I ask why you've summoned us?"

Li Qingshan raised his hand, silencing them. He concentrated on the ship's wheel in his hand and gradually became confused. The opponent seemed to be trapped in the formation, and they seemed to be trapped in the very first formation, the mist formation. It definitely was not Fu Qingjin.

With a flash, he arrived at the edge of the formation and saw a night roamer stuck in there. He let him in to question him.

A while later, Li Qingshan's expression became strange.

The night roamer was the Spider Queen's messenger. The Spider Queen urgently summoned him back to Cobweb city to discuss official business. The reason for that was a human cultivator had single-handedly killed four Daemon Generals and almost a hundred regular daemons before vanishing again. And, the territories of the four Daemon Generals were all around Li Qingshan's territory.

Li Qingshan could basically imagine that the cultivator had chosen to actively avoid his region after running into the formations, killing all the Daemon Generals in the surroundings instead.

"Do you know what the human cultivator looks like?"

"I don't. I only heard he was a green flash."

Li Qingshan had no idea whether he should feel happy or disappointed.

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"You've come."

Spider Queen Lolth leaned back on her throne in Cobweb city, propping herself up with her arm as she faced the four most powerful Daemon Generals under her command. She was relaxed. She had not become frantic or irritated from the loss of her soldiers and generals, nor did she feel sad or angry. Instead, she was brimming with interest, as if she was fascinated by this.

"You all must have heard about what had happened already!"

"Yes."

"Northmoon, I think he was originally looking for you!"

“He’s called Fu Qingjin, the liaison of the Daemon Suppression alliance in Clear River prefecture. I basically killed the Green Vine Elder right in front of him. I thought he would tear through the formations without any regard to fight me, but never did I think...”

“Fu Qingjin, a disciple of the Sword Collection palace. He really was something else. The four Daemon Generals did not even get the chance to blow up their daemon cores. If Bloodshadow had not made it in time, even more Daemon Generals would have died to his hands.”

Li Qingshan could not help but glance at Bloodshadow. He forced back Fu Qingjin? I think Fu Qingjin just didn’t want to become entangled in a battle underground.

“If it weren’t for the fact that I can’t venture above ground, I would definitely make this Fu Qingjin or whoever he is remain underground forever.” Bloodshadow was filled with self-restraint. The senses of daemons covered an extremely wide range, and Bloodshadow happened to be the best among the best. He changed the topic and questioned, “Northmoon, everything happened around your territory, yet you didn’t sense anything at all?”

“Northmoon’s daemon qi has never been greater than ours. Not to mention that what you see right now is just a clone. Northmoon, I’m very curious about where your main body is right now.”

Before Li Qingshan could answer, Dragonsnail had already cut him off slowly.

“Obviously above ground, spying on the Daemon Suppression alliance.”

“Is this how you spy on them?” Bloodshadow sneered.

“What’s there to bicker about? Can’t we just kill our way back?!” Strongboulder bellowed out, brimming with battle intent.

“Strongboulder is right. Northmoon, you killed four of theirs, so they’ve killed four of ours. It’s very fair. Bloodshadow, from today onwards, the Daemon Generals to the west will be under your command. Strongboulder, the east will go to you. Northmoon, continue to watch over the night roamers. Dragonsnail, you will be responsible for dispatching them. We can’t let them find an opening so easily again.”

Strongboulder and Bloodshadow both beamed. This meant that they could command around several dozen Daemon Generals now. Dragonsnail’s eyes flashed. He was not given any subordinates, but he would serve as the carrier of the Spider Queen’s commands, which was an extremely important role.

Li Qingshan sank into his thoughts. They were really declaring war with this kind of arrangement!

With just a few words, the Spider Queen had determined the situation underground. Afterwards, she stood up slowly. “Under his majesty the dragon king’s command, all the daemons under my command can move about freely and kill humans from here on out!”

At the same time, Fu Qingjin laid out a hundred daemon cores before the many Foundation Establishment cultivators in a meeting of the Daemon Suppression alliance. They varied in size and glimmered like pearls.

Daemon cores were the crystallisation of hundreds or thousands of years of cultivation of daemons. They were worth much more than regular spiritual herbs or pills. Apart from being able to increase

cultivation drastically and assist with breakthroughs when ingested, they also served wondrous purposes in the aspects of forging artifacts and formations. Exactly because of how rare they were, it made them worth even more. As for the value of the daemon cores of Daemon Generals, it was completely beyond imagination.

It was like Fu Qingjin had laid out a hundred diamonds before a group of regular people, immediately drawing over everyone's gazes. They all gasped in admiration at the same time before erupting in a buzz of activity.

Fu Qingjin stood with his hands behind his back, watching on coldly. In consideration of the bigger picture, he did not choose to attack the formation. Apart from his reluctance to waste time and energy, the biggest reason was because he did not actually have any grievances with Li Qingshan at all. Whether it were the three elders or Jiang Shancheng, if they were dead, then they were dead. There was no reason for him to take special note of their deaths.

Although Li Qingshan forcefully annihilating the Green Vine mountain had humiliated him and the Sword Collection palace, he had never cared about the concept of "pride" in the first place. All he did was undertake retribution according to the Sword Collection palace's orders and bring back the daemon cores to stir the greed within these people. Since he would be killing no matter who he killed, why did he have to choose the most troublesome opponent?

"Fellow Fu, how did you achieve this?" asked a cultivator fervently.

Fu Qingjin could not be bothered with telling them, but upon considering the Sword Collection palace's arrangements, he told everyone what he had gone through, immediately winning over another round of praise.

"Doesn't this defy the Treaty of Kings?"

"From today onwards, all human cultivators can venture underground and purge daemons freely within the vicinity of the Clear River prefecture!"

After a series of cries, everyone fell silent. The priceless daemon cores, the spiritual stone veins hidden deep underground, and the century or millennium old spiritual herbs all seemed to be waving at them. Tempted by all that, even daemons no longer seemed so terrifying.

Only a handful of people became deeply worried. They looked around and took note of the situation around them, but they said nothing. Was everything really just this simple? There was no free lunch in the world after all.

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"Hold on. Ma'am Spider Queen, I have a different opinion."

In Cobweb city, Strongboulder and Bloodshadow just happened to rouse up in surprise and joy when Li Qingshan objected.

"Oh? What would be your opinion?"

"I don't think we should let the daemons do whatever they want!" Li Qingshan could easily imagine the sight of countless daemons surging out from the underground world that they had been trapped in. He

could also imagine just what kind of disaster powerful, bloodthirsty, and battle hungry Daemon Generals like Strongboulder and Bloodshadow could cause for regular people.

“Why?” The Spider Queen frowned. The most radical Daemon General under her command had suddenly said something like that, which confused her.

“Bloodshadow has doubts over my investigations, so let me tell you about it. That is, the humans aren’t actually completely united. There are two large factions among them, which are the Daemon Suppression alliance composed of various sects and the cultivators of the government, primarily based around the Academy of the Hundred Schools.”

“So what? They’re all our enemy!” Bloodshadow said.

“You’re not wrong. However, they aren’t necessarily friends with one another either. If we focus on the Daemon Suppression alliance only, it’s very likely for the Academy of the Hundred Schools to remain passive. At the very least, they will take their time. That way, our overall strength will greatly surpass the Daemon Suppression alliance, which would give us an extremely great advantage.”

“However, if we openly massacre everyone and pull regular people into the mix, we will force the Academy of the Hundred Schools to join the battle immediately, which is instead disadvantageous to us. All of this is for the bigger picture. Please give us your wise judgement over this, ma’am Spider Queen.”

Li Qingshan spoke calmly, backing himself up with reason. He only wanted to target the Daemon Suppression alliance. The Daemon Suppression alliance had been the ones who stirred up the war in the first place. As long as these radicalists were destroyed, perhaps it was possible for peace to return between humans and daemons.

Bloodshadow was speechless. He could not help but admit that Li Qingshan was rather reasonable. Strongboulder also studied him up and down like he did not know Li Qingshan at all. Someone who was bold enough to throw his own life at him was actually so meticulous.

“Northmoon, oh Northmoon, this is exactly what you excel in! I really need to praise you for your courage and your wits.” The Spider Queen clapped gently.

“You overestimate me, ma’am!” Li Qingshan smiled. He believed this suggestion that was beneficial to the war would be accepted by the Spider Queen.

Dragonsnail lowered his head and smiled mysteriously.

“Then I look forward to your future performance,” Spider Queen Lolth said.

Is that supposed to be accepting or declining? Li Qingshan stared at the Spider Queen’s vicious smile, and his heart shivered. Suddenly, he understood something. After misjudging Fu Qingjin, he had misjudged her.

She just wanted to watch the world burn!

Chapter 416 - Conflicted

“I think we should start with the regular people. Humans are cunning, and they know how to use traps called “formations”, which are extremely dangerous. However, if we target the cities occupied by

regular people, they'll be caught completely caught off-guard. We'll have the initiative then. We can set down traps and kill any cultivators that come to rescue them." As the Spider Queen's greatest advisor, Dragonsnail slowly expressed his opinion.

"What if they don't come to rescue them?" Strongboulder frowned. Compared to regular people, he would much rather kill cultivators.

"We'll massacre a city with each passing day! I refuse to believe they'll turn a blind eye to it!" Bloodshadow extended his bright red tongue and licked his lips. What he required the most for cultivation was fresh blood, but he was forbidden from slaughtering other daemons and night roamers underground. He could only rely on making do with the "offerings" from the night roamers. Dragonsnail's strategy suited him perfectly.

"We should target cultivators!" Li Qingshan found it to be even more unacceptable to target these innocent people who had nothing to do with the Daemon Suppression alliance or cultivators in general.

"Aren't so-called cultivators just cultivated regular people? Don't regular people eat the flesh and blood of our kin to grow? Only by severing the roots can we truly defeat the humans. Have you forgotten about such a simple principle?"

Dragonsnail asked three consecutive questions, leaving Li Qingshan speechless. Humans fed off beasts. When the range of human activity increased, the range of habitation for beasts was reduced. Weren't other species going extinct every single day in the world completely dominated by humans from his previous life?

So-called animal conservation was basically just the leftovers from the person who sat at the very top, whatever they could be bothered sparing. And, it was built on top of personal need. Wild beasts were locked up to serve as playthings, while livestock would be butchered once they were raised. Human apathy was instead the most terrifying apocalypse to beasts.

War had not just begun. Instead, it had never stopped. Humans and daemons opposed one another in their very nature. The founding emperor who had maintained several millennia of peace between the two races had basically achieved an unbelievable feat.

"Dragonsnail is right. That's the way we daemons handle things," the Spider Queen said in appreciation.

"Northmoon, you'll experience the taste of failure soon," Bloodshadow said in a sunken manner.

"Hahahaha, we can finally massacre humans freely! Northmoon, why don't we see who kills more people?" Strongboulder laughed madly.

Li Qingshan suddenly experienced an absurd thought. Why am I associated with them at all? The faces around him gradually twisted, sometimes becoming a terrifying Rock of Slaughter, sometimes becoming a bat reeking with the smell of blood. In the end, an eight-eyed, eight-legged, vicious spider would lunge at him.

Afterwards, he saw himself. His ox horns and tiger claws were peeled away from his body as his skin like black iron would become bronze, recovering his original appearance, which was human!

“Northmoon, you’ve spent the most amount of time on the surface. Which city do you think we should start off with? It’s best if they have a larger population.”

Dragonsnail’s voice seemed to ring out from an extremely distant location, interrupting the images in front of Li Qingshan. The Spider Queen, Bloodshadow, and Strongboulder all stared at him, waiting for his reply.

“Ma’am Spider Queen, there’s something I’d like to report!”

“What is it?”

“I’ve reached a bottleneck in my cultivation lately. I want to enter secluded cultivation for some time and make a breakthrough so that I can properly fight Fu Qingjin to the death. I might not be able to partake in the initial battles.” Li Qingshan lowered his head, and his scarlet hair draped down over his face, concealing the hint of confusion in his eyes. Suddenly, he discovered that everything was already completely beyond his control. Perhaps thinking he could control it was a conceited illusion in the first place!

“Really?” The Spider Queen’s eyes flickered in doubt.

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“Master, you’ve returned. How did the discussion go?”

Li Qingshan returned to the cavern in his territory, and Ye Liusu immediately went up to receive him.

“From today onwards, I will be entering secluded cultivation. Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo will be temporarily in charge of everything that happens in the territory. If there isn’t anything important, don’t disturb me.” Li Qingshan made his way onto the bed of spiritual stone and announced loudly.

In the end, the Spider Queen had agreed to his request. She did not suspect at all that this powerful subordinate of hers with illustrious achievements would experience conflict like that inside.

“Thank you for your trust, master.” Ye Liusu beamed inside.

The other night roamers had objections, but Li Qingshan completely ignored them. He dispersed them before just shutting his eyes.

“Xiao An, what do you think I should do?”

Below Contention island in the seclusion dwelling, Li Qingshan opened his eyes and told Xiao An everything that troubled him without holding back at all.

“Help neither.” After some thought, Xiao An answered like that.

“Help neither?”

“Yep. What do other humans or daemons have anything to do with us? It’s not like you’re the one killing them. They’re killing among themselves, so don’t worry about them. All we have to do is focus on cultivating.”

Xiao An blinked her large eyes and comforted him softly. Actually, she struggled slightly to understand what troubled Li Qingshan. After all, in her eyes, it did not matter even if all the other living creatures died apart from him. Perhaps it was more correct to say she hoped for that exactly.

“That’s reasonable. Perhaps I’ve been thinking too much.” Li Qingshan shook his head with a bitter smile. As a half-human, half-daemon “monster”, he had already lost his standpoint, thrown into a predicament of absolute isolation. He could not help but think of Gu Yanying. Did she ever become conflicted like this too?

Suddenly, his eyebrow twitched. Xiao An placed her little hand on Li Qingshan’s forehead seriously, as if she wanted to flatten his furrowed brows.

Li Qingshan smiled. At least he would never be lonely.

“Let’s cultivate. I want to make it to Foundation Establishment in a single breath and take out what brother ox gave me!”

Li Qingshan was overcome by his lofty aspiration. He immediately sat down and began cultivating, but a while later, his brows became subconsciously furrowed again. Even when he used the Spirit Turtle’s Method of Sea Suppression, he was unable to enter a proper state of cultivation.

At that moment, Li Qingshan suddenly heard the clear, pleasant chanting of scriptures. It was Xiao An’s voice.

Xiao An sat in front of Li Qingshan as she rotated through the Skull Prayer Beads in her hand. Scriptures emerged from her mouth, directly reaching his ears.

Although he could not understand the scriptures at all, Li Qingshan’s heart gradually settled down. He began to think over everything he had gone through since leaving Crouching Ox village. Like rewinding tape, the various scenes began to recede faster and faster.

Various figures flashed past his eyes as various matters unraveled like silk from a cocoon.

Before he knew it, his heart had already become entangled with so many emotions of love and hatred. Now, they were instead like cobwebs and dust, whisked away bit by bit.

There were also existences he could not whisk away so easily, like Fu Qingjin and Han Qiongzhi. They were the hatred and love deeply engraved in his heart. Whenever he reached them, the tape seemed to become stuck, stopping on this scene.

Xiao An’s scripture changed, and these scenes brushed past. Finally, he returned to Crouching Ox village once again, returning to the young boy who slept soundly on the hay in that tiny cowshed.

Three years passed with a flick of a finger.

Chapter 417 - Circumstances Come and Go with Time

Li Qingshan let out a deep breath like a steam whistle. Fierce gales of wind were kicked up in the large dwelling. He opened his eyes, and they flashed like two stars. The light gradually receded, becoming deep and dark like a pond.

“Xiao An, how long has it been?”

“Around three years.”

“Three years. It has been so long.”

Li Qingshan was rather surprised; to him, it did not feel long at all, brief as a matter of fact.

Three years were enough for the plants to wither and bloom three times, enough for children to become youths. But to him, it had been as brief as a flick of a finger.

There was no concept of time in the mountains and caves. This was the definition of time to cultivators.

He had not spent all three years meditating away. Every now and then, he would talk with Xiao An and fight a little. It definitely had not been boring. Instead, he found it to be surprisingly substantial.

Together, they had not been serious the entire time, talking about cultivation and only cultivation. Often, they talked about things that had nothing to do with cultivation at all. However, they understood what each other was thinking from a single glance and smile. They were fellow cultivators, or perhaps intimate friends.

Ye Liusu seemed to have reported to his underground clone a few times during this period, but the contents had already become blurry. Yet, he could recall every single word from an ordinary conversation with Xiao An from two years ago.

“Have you gained anything today?” Xiao An asked.

“Confusion still exists in my heart.” Li Qingshan shook his head gently and placed his hand on his chest.

Right now, Li Qingshan’s cultivation was not at the ninth layer, but the tenth layer. He had only used half a month to open the Governing meridian with the help of the spiritual qi of the world. Afterwards, he got to work with tidying up the twelve standard meridians, which were the three yang meridians of the arm, the three yang meridians of the leg, the three yin meridians of the arm, and the three yin meridians of the leg.

After two years of absolute focus, he finally tidied through all of it and broke through to the tenth layer. In the final half a year, he had constantly tried to break through to Foundation Establishment and obtain what the black ox had left for him.

In the very beginning, Li Qingshan had been very confident, as he possessed many True Spirit pills. He believed he could reach Foundation Establishment even if he had to forcefully pile his way up with the pills.

But as his cultivation continued, he discovered it was not that simple. The path of human cultivation placed great emphasis on cultivating the mind. If he was shackled down inside, then everything would become much more difficult. It could even become a great obstacle. This was the reason why Hua Chengzan had not been able to break through even after all that time. It was not a lack of talent, nor did the Hua family ever lack True Spirit pills.

“I’ll have to face what I must face in the end. Xiao An...” Li Qingshan murmured to himself.

“Let’s emerge!” Xiao An smiled sweetly with bright eyes and shining teeth.

Three years had passed, but her figure had not changed at all.

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Seeing the light of day again, Li Qingshan squinted his eyes and gazed at the landscape of lakes and mountains in the distance. Nothing seemed to have changed much compared to three years ago. However, he could sense that the formation over the academy had become even more profound and powerful.

Xiao An had to pay a visit to the school of Buddhism, while Li Qingshan directly visited the school of Legalism. He arrived before a small, delicate building by the lake. This was where Han Qiongzhi resided in the school of Legalism.

Over the three years, the person that he worried the most about was her. He was afraid something would happen to her in the chaos of war. He had wanted to emerge when he reached the ninth layer, but he soon considered the possibility that she was still in secluded cultivation. Even if he did emerge, she would be under protection with her background, so he stopped worrying. However, he could not help but admit his mental state had already changed compared to when he was deeply in love with her.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Li Qingshan knocked on the door.

Footsteps rang out from behind the door, and Li Qingshan became slightly excited. However, when the door opened, he was a bit stunned.

Because of the formation there, Li Qingshan did not try to sense the aura in the building. However, the person who opened the door right now was not Han Qiongzhi, but a legalist disciple he was somewhat familiar with, Wu Gen.

Seeing Li Qingshan, Wu Gen was taken aback too. He said in a hurry, “You’re looking for senior sister Han, right? Senior sister Han no longer lives here.”

Li Qingshan’s heart sank slightly. This was her residence. How could it be offered to someone else so easily?

“You’ve already reached the tenth layer. Congratula...” Before Wu Gen could even finish talking, Li Qingshan had already flown off on a cloud, travelling straight towards the school of the Military’s Great War island.

At the same time, Xiao An returned to Anāsṛavā? island to see the One Thought master.

“Junior sister Xiao An, you’ve returned.” A disciple of buddhism faltered before bringing her to the One Thought master’s meditation room in the end. As she passed through the familiar monastery and pavilions, she could feel that many of the life forces that once moved about in the Anāsṛavā? temple had vanished.

“Abbot, senior sister Xiao An has emerged from secluded cultivation. She wishes to see you.” The way the monk referred to Xiao An left her slightly puzzled.

A skinny monk, so skinny that he was just a bag of bones, emerged from the meditation room. With a stern expression, he brought his palms together. "Junior sister Xiao An, long time no see."

"Mind Enlightenment." If it were not for Xiao An's ability to sense the life force of others, she would have never been able to connect the person before her right now to the tall, chubby primary disciple of buddhism from back then, Mind Enlightenment.

After being defeated by Xiao An, Mind Enlightenment had punished himself with three years of wall facing and self-reflection in the Cliff Inscription cavern. After a series of arduous cultivation, he finally broke through and successfully established a foundation. He now wore the abbot's kāṣāya.

"You don't have to be confused. I'm the leader of the school of Buddhism now, the abbot of the Anāsravā? temple." As he said that, Mind Enlightenment did not show any pride at all. Instead, irrepressible sorrow surged out. "Master... master has already died."

"How did he die?"

"He was slain by a daemon!" Mind Enlightenment's eyes widened, like the furious glare of a guardian king.

Xiao An lowered her head. She had no idea what to say.

"Don't you feel sad at all? Not even a bit?" Mind Enlightenment questioned loudly.

"I don't." Xiao An was emotionless.

"Y- you're heartless!" Mind Enlightenment pointed at Xiao An as his voice trembled. Clearly, he had been truly angered.

Xiao An did not refute him either.

"As the leader of the school of Buddhism, I don't think you're suited for the position of primary disciple anymore!" Mind Enlightenment called out, stunning the entire temple before turning around and leaving furiously.

Xiao An was not angered. She never wanted to be some primary disciple in the first place. She did what she was supposed to do, so it was time to go find Li Qingshan. She turned around quietly and made her way out.

The buddhist disciples who heard the disturbance all made their way out, casting gazes of either surprise or disdain at Xiao An. Xiao An ignored it all, directly making her way into the forest of stūpas. There was a very new stūpa with the dharma name One Thought engraved below. It was basically the final part of him that remained behind to remember him by.

Xiao An was still emotionless. She took out a pearl that seemed to be made out of gold and stared at it for a long time. This was the Guardian King's pearl that the One Thought master had given her.

Please forgive me. I can't mourn for you, but if it's possible, I will avenge you.

.....

In the Main Martial Arts stadium, Han Tiewi stood on a platform with his arms crossed, watching the military disciples train. Through the baptism of war, he had broken through to Foundation Establishment, but he experienced many near-death encounters as the price. Suddenly, he raised his head and saw a cloud fly over. He said gently, "He's finally here."

"Tiewi, do you know..." Li Qingshan spotted Han Tiewi too, flying over to him quickly.

Han Tiewi remained as stoic as ever. He did not say anything, not even a greeting. He handed a stack of letters to Li Qingshan.

The letters were clearly labeled, "For Li Qingshan only. Letter from Han Qiongzhi."

Li Qingshan opened the letters one by one in order. The first letter came from two years ago.

After reading through it, Li Qingshan stopped worrying. As it turned out, Han Qiongzhi had already left the academy two years ago. She had gone to the Ruyi commandery to continue cultivating under her uncle, Han Anguo. Perhaps because she never received a reply, but the letters gradually lessened. The last letter was from three months ago.

After reading through it, Li Qingshan was unable to describe what he felt. There was relief, disappointment, and some ease.

"Don't blame her. She waited half a year for you. During a mission, she came across a Daemon General and almost lost her life," Han Tiewi explained for once.

"Why would she carry out such a dangerous mission?" Li Qingshan asked with a frown.

"There are no safe missions now."

"What about the others?" Li Qingshan looked back at the Main Martial Arts stadium, and pairs of eyes looked over at him too. Through these three years, the military disciples had developed a bleak aura around them, which made him think about the personal army he had faced in the Han family back then. Although it was just training, every single one of them radiated with murderousness, as if they were facing actual enemies.

However, there were only three or four hundred people present, with many unfamiliar and immature faces among them. Their cultivations were not particularly high either. Clearly, they were disciples who had joined recently.

"Some died. Others fled," Han Tiewi said.

Li Qingshan gazed at the clear, blue sky. In a daze, he seemed to see a colossal monster dwelling above the fifteen hundred kilometers of the Clear River prefecture, silently devouring life. The name of this monster was war. Saying that it was no different from three years ago was his greatest mistake.

Even if he ignored the kind of person Han Anjun was, why would she ever flee from danger with how stubborn she was?

"Do you want to write back?" Han Tiewi asked.

“Not right now.” Li Qingshan considered it before shaking his head gently. He could tell from the later letters that she was doing very well right now. She was also making preparations to establish a foundation. It would be best if he did not bother her mental state and affect her cultivation right now.

Speaking of which, who knew when they would meet again?

Three years, five years, perhaps ten years... Even his mental state right now was different from the past, so let alone many years into the future.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An met up outside Cloudwisp island. Before they could even reach the bamboo loft on the island, a woman’s figure appeared. Li Qingshan could not help but frown when he saw her.

Qian Rongzhi saw Xiao An, and her eyes lit up. She approached her with a flash and crouched down, grabbing Xiao An’s hand. She asked, “Does it hurt?”

Xiao An shook her head.

Qian Rongzhi’s smile became even more resplendent. She wanted to give Xiao An a hug, but she hugged nothing.

“Qian Rongzhi, why have you come?” Li Qingshan pulled Xiao An behind him.

“You’re still the same as before. Take out your Scarlet Wolf tablet. There’s a mission.”

Li Qingshan took out his Scarlet Wolf tablet in doubt. It flashed gently, and sure enough, Hua Chengzan’s voice rang out in a blurred manner,

“Qingshan, I heard you emerged from seclusion, so I have a mission for you. It shouldn’t be dangerous, but I can’t say for sure. Anyway, you should familiarise yourself with the situation first! Qian Rongzhi already knows about the details of the mission. I’ll take you out for dinner once you get back.”

Hua Chengzan seemed to be busy. He just said a few words in a hurry before falling silent.

“Would you like to see it? Our heaven, that is!” Qian Rongzhi smiled like a colourful, venomous snake.

Chapter 418 - Waking Up

This was a small city three hundred and fifty kilometers from Clear River city. It was a small city, but it still had a population of several tens of thousand people. However, piles of corpses and puddles of blood spanned as far as the eye could see.

The red blood soaked the ground, drying into a black mess before the winter froze it cold. It was sticky and slippery.

With every step Li Qingshan took, he would alarm countless crows as well as various other unknown scavenging birds of prey. However, the strangest part about it was there were no signs of invading enemies at all.

A madam dressed in an apron firmly embedded her kitchen knife into a man’s head. However, right before his death, the same man attacked her, crushing her throat. Their faces were twisted with hatred the moment before they died, as if they were facing their greatest enemy. And, it was possible to tell

from where they lay that they were clearly husband and wife. The virtuous madam had probably finished making dinner and had come out to call the man in.

A regular soldier with a spear pierced the chest of an armoured military officer. At the same time, he was pierced by three other spears, whose wielders were dressed in the same uniform. They seemed to be soldiers and officers responsible for defending the city, but they had become icy-cold corpses now. They had forgotten about their responsibilities and killed one another.

A little girl with her hair tied into buns used her hemp waistband to choke another child to death. Her head had become dented by the metal ball that the other child originally played with. Their faces were twisted with viciousness and murderousness that did not belong to children. The bloody metal ball had rolled to one side. Originally, this was a very ordinary game between two friends.

Wives killed their husbands, soldiers killed their officers, and friends killed their companions.

It was as if the people in the city had all gone insane, attacking the people around them and all perishing together.

Li Qingshan could vaguely guess whose handiwork this all was. He clenched his fist as his face became rather ugly.

"I thought you'd like it! Thankfully, it's winter. If it were summer, there'd be much more to see!" Qian Rongzhi walked over from behind.

"Aren't there any people who try to deal with this?"

"There were in the beginning, but after a few massacres, they came to their senses. Who would sacrifice themselves for regular people who are no different from ants? Oh right, there was one a while back. The One Thought master came to bring salvation, and he challenged the rock demon, but he lost."

"The rock demon!?" Li Qingshan confirmed his thoughts inside. It could not be wrong. This was the power of the Rock of Slaughter. Strongboulder had arrived here and unleashed his natural power, making everyone descend into madness and kill one another.

To a daemon like him, massacring an entire city was a piece of cake. If Li Qingshan were willing, he could kick up an earthquake here and reduce the entire city to ruins.

"You still don't know, do you?" Right now, the daemons are being commanded by the rock demon and the blood demon. They're both powerful daemons who have massacred countless cities. The cities massacred by the rock demon are all like this, while the cities massacred by the blood demon won't have a single drop of blood left. There aren't a lot of people who can hold their ground against them, whether it's from the academy or the Daemon Suppression alliance."

"Then what are we doing here? What's there to investigate?"

"We're here to collect corpses."

"Collect corpses?"

"This is an easier job, alright? I can tell Hua Chengzan is taking very good care of you. Look, what's that?" Qian Rongzhi pointed ahead.

Under the setting sun, a tottering figure stood up.

A survivor! Li Qingshan's heart skipped a beat, but he immediately dismissed that thought. The figure was a stalwart farmer. His eyes were completely white with long, protruding teeth. His body had already become blue, wrapped with corpse qi. Suddenly, he turned around and locked onto the aura of the living. With a growl, he lunged towards Li Qingshan. A wooden cart blocked his way, but he directly smashed through it.

"That's a zombie!" Li Qingshan suddenly understood.

Qian Rongzhi rushed over with a flash. A bronze bangle flew out from her hand and smashed into the zombie's head. The zombie vanished, and with a flash, the bronze bangle returned to her hand. A bloody mark had appeared on it, almost covering the entire bangle.

"The deceased hold extremely great resentment. They only need to be slightly refined, and they'll become Corpse Soldiers who can serve in battle. All the Corpse Soldiers produced from cities massacred by the rock demon have the best quality. Their murderousness and malice linger without dispersing. They can even become zombies by themselves and be refined into Corpse Generals." Qian Rongzhi smiled sweetly.

Corpses climbed up to their feet. Under the setting sun, they growled at the sky, as if they were baring their fangs at it in resentment.

Li Qingshan was shocked by this. His attempt to lecture Qian Rongzhi was reduced to silence when it reached his lips. He was responsible for everything before him.

He could try to justify himself, blaming the Daemon Suppression alliance as the ones who started it all and the fact that war between humans and daemons was unavoidable in the first place. He could say that he only played the role of a soldier in this. However, all of his excuses seemed pitiful before this sight. Even just one ten-thousandth of the responsibility weighed as heavily as a mountain.

Disregarding what Li Qingshan felt, Qian Rongzhi made her way around gracefully and subdued these zombies one by one. Xiao An tugged Li Qingshan's sleeve, worried and concerned for him.

Li Qingshan rubbed her head and silently got to work, collecting corpses.

.....

A racoon-like daemon moved around through the streets, constantly changing directions and avoiding the balls of exploding fire.

Balls of fire flew over the city, illuminating the night. A few disciples from the Fire Cloud sect, dressed in scarlet clothes, were in hot pursuit, unleashing balls of scorching fire and setting whole regions ablaze.

The entire city smoked, engulfed by fire. Noises and wails rose up into the sky like the smoke.

Li Qingshan gazed down from the sky in the distance, and he felt strangely surprised. From his perspective, it just seemed like a few cultivators committing widespread arson.

Before they had even completed the first mission, a second mission arrived. The traces of a daemon were discovered in this city and needed to be eliminated. However, this was what he saw when he arrived.

“Someone’s beat us to it. They’re from the Fire Cloud sect,” Qian Rongzhi said.

“What are they doing?”

“Purging daemons, obviously. It’s fine. Once they succeed, we’ll just kill them too. We can even get our hands on a few hundred treasures pouches. Don’t look at me like that. If they have the opportunity, they won’t show any mercy either. The academy’s lost a lot of disciples, but it’s not like they only died to the fangs and claws of daemons.”

The threat of the daemons had not united the humans. Instead, it broke the original order, making all conflicts even more violent. The Rock of Slaughter was not present, but killing one another had already become the norm. No one would mind obtaining a few hundred treasures pouches without facing any danger at all. It was not like anyone would look into the matter with the current chaos anyway.

Before Qian Rongzhi had finished speaking, Li Qingshan already flew down.

“Oh no. Senior brother, we’ve let it escape!”

The racoon-like daemon was extremely nimble. It turned around a corner and vanished. When the disciples of the Fire Cloud sect rushed over, all they saw was a small hole in the corner of the walls. They could not help but feel overcome with dismay. That was a daemon core!

At this moment, Li Qingshan descended from the sky. The disciples of the Fire Cloud sect immediately became vigilant. However, all they saw was Li Qingshan wave his hand and conjure a few water dragons, lunging into the fire and putting out the firestorm.

These techniques immediately made the disciples of the Fire Cloud sect change in expression. This definitely was not someone they could handle.

“May I ask which senior brother you are? How come we’ve never seen you before?” The leader of the group was an eighth layer Qi Practitioner, gathering his courage to pay respects to Li Qingshan. Seeing how Li Qingshan had appeared in the eye of the public, he did not immediately behave like he was about to kill and rob him.

“Did you catch the daemon?” Li Qingshan stood on the roof and asked them from above.

“We didn’t, or we’d definitely offer it up to you.”

“Do you know how many people you’ve just killed?” Li Qingshan gazed at the city. Plumes of smoke still rose up into the sky. With his superhuman hearing, he could clearly hear the many sobs and moans, rising up into the night sky in a playful manner.

In the blink of an eye, countless families had been destroyed. Even with the heart of steel that Li Qingshan believed he possessed, he was unable to remain indifferent to all this.

“If we don’t kill the daemon, it’ll just lead to even more deaths!” That disciple of the Fire Cloud sect sure was righteous. He clearly possessed much more resolve than Li Qingshan. Afterwards, he feigned pity. “Oh, we didn’t want to do this either! We were just careless, letting the daemon take advantage of us.”

Most of the battles between humans and daemons would not occur in the wilderness, but in cities. Powerful daemons would massacre cities in anger, while weaker daemons would make use of the complex layout of human cities to hide and prey on humans. This was commonplace. Whenever they began fighting, they would cherish their own lives the most. Why would they care about the lives of regular people?

Li Qingshan waved his hand, and as if spared, the disciples all flew away from the city, gradually turning into specks of firelight before suddenly going out.

“Another mission.” Qian Rongzhi walked over from where the firelight had been extinguished. Her collection of corpses had increased yet again.

Li Qingshan turned a deaf ear to her. He stood with his arms crossed, sinking into his thoughts. He was like a statue in the darkness.

“What, after three years of seclusion, the vicious tiger’s become a cowardly cat?” Qian Rongzhi smiled faintly. Originally, she thought there would be even more opportunities for her to collaborate with him, but his behaviour had left her slightly disappointed or even angered. Perhaps she should risk her life to anger him!

Xiao An glanced at Qian Rongzhi. Qian Rongzhi raised her hands and shrugged, no longer saying anything else.

“Thank you, great immortal! Thank you!” The common folk gathered over beneath the roof, lowering their heads, thanking him and asking for help. Li Qingshan ignored all of it, and the crowd dispersed.

Before he knew it, a night had passed. The many stars receded, and the east lit up.

In a corner, Qian Rongzhi, who was currently holding Xiao An’s hand and speaking with her, suddenly raised her head, looking at Li Qingshan. Gradually, a familiar feeling began to awaken from him, which made her tremble slightly. The rising sun in the east coated him in a layer of gold.

“Time to go, Xiao An. Let’s go back.” Li Qingshan opened his eyes, no longer lost or confused. It was filled with composed determination.

Xiao An leapt up, arriving beside him and grabbing him by a finger.

“The mission!” Qian Rongzhi said.

“You’d better just handle these boring missions yourself!” Li Qingshan behaved like he had just woken up, slightly lazy. He abandoned Qian Rongzhi and took off with Xiao An.

The three years were like a dream. He had woken up now.

Qian Rongzhi raised her head and watched him disappear into the horizon. She suddenly smiled. You have some more value of use when you’re like this!

In the windy sky, Xiao An cast a questioning glance at him.

"I'm not you. I can't help neither. I can't cut off everything. I will bear my responsibilities, my responsibilities as a human, my responsibilities as a daemon." Li Qingshan stared at the glimmering horizon, and his lips curled up. His smile was slightly exuberant and naive, as if he was still that high-spirited, young, gallant wanderer.

"I'm not a particularly clever person, nor can I come up with any good ideas. However, as long as I kill both sides, the war will stop!"

Chapter 419 - The Boundlessness of the Ocean, Unable to Neglect Deep Love

"Yep. I'll help you!"

At this moment, no one had any idea that an unruly chess piece would enter the board properly, much less expect what change his appearance would bring.

Li Qingshan returned to Cloudwisp island. He frowned near the bamboo loft and heard the moans of a woman ring out from Liu Chuanfeng's room.

Don't tell me this bastard has used the Divine Talisman of Great Creation to do that again. Li Qingshan said to Xiao An, "Wait here!"

Afterwards, he rushed over and kicked open the door.

Sure enough, Liu Chuanfeng was entangled with a naked woman. The woman was so life-like that even Li Qingshan struggled to tell whether she was real or fake.

"Who is it? Oh, Qingshan, you've emerged from seclusion!" Liu Chuanfeng turned around and saw Li Qingshan, beaming with surprise. He had already reached Foundation Establishment, but he was unable to hide his feebleness. Combined with his messy clothing, Li Qingshan only frowned when he saw him.

"What the hell are you doing?" Li Qingshan barked.

"Living in the world, you should seize the day and enjoy yourself- Ah, ah, let go of me. I'm your master!"

Before Liu Chuanfeng could finish talking, Li Qingshan had walked over and grabbed him by the shoulders, lifting him up.

"Master my ass. So much for my efforts for you to reach Foundation Establishment. You're wasting the power of belief again to do something as depraved as this."

"S- s- she's real. She's from the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. She's not made from the power of belief!" All Liu Chuanfeng felt was like his shoulders were about to be ripped apart. He was in no state to maintain his facade anymore as he explained frantically.

Li Qingshan looked at the woman again and saw her surprise. Never had she seen a Qi Practitioner "harass" a Foundation Establishment cultivator like that.

After chasing away the woman, Li Qingshan and Liu Chuanfeng sat down.

"When did you succeed with establishing a foundation?"

“Over two years ago.”

“How’s the school of Novels doing?”

“Oh Qingshan, the school of Novels is completely done for! Daemons run amok and bandits are everywhere. Everyone’s in a state of fear. No one’s in the mood to read these stories anymore. We even have to go risk our lives to kill daemons. Who knows when we’ll be slaughtered. Qingshan, just spare me!”

Did all that hard work go to waste like this?

If it were yesterday, Li Qingshan definitely would have sighed and lamented, but right now, he grabbed Liu Chuanfeng by the collar and lifted him up. “Then you still have to keep writing! This is exactly when people need your stories! You need to inspire people!”

“Alright, alright, alright.” Liu Chuanfeng had always been somewhat fearful of this disciple of his, and it was not just because of his cultivation. Just a single vicious glance from Li Qingshan could make him feeble inside. He would never object.

“As long as you understand!” Li Qingshan dropped Liu Chuanfeng. As he made his way out, he looked back and added, “There’ll always be an opportunity to turn things around.”

.....

“The tenth layer! Qingshan, you cultivate at an alarming speed!”

Around dusk, Hua Chengzan rushed back in a hurry and arrived on Cloudwisp island. His eyes lit up the moment he saw Li Qingshan. Breaking through to the ninth and tenth layers had always been the most time-consuming, yet he had managed it in just three years. He was truly something else. Perhaps he could succeed with establishing a foundation before long and lend great support.

“Barely, just barely. You’ve changed too. Looks like I’ve missed out on quite a lot in the past three years.” Li Qingshan studied Hua Chengzan, and he discovered that his handsome appearance was more mature and sombre now.

“You’ve already seen everything you should see. What do you plan on doing next?” Hua Chengzan’s face sank.

“Lend assistance to the academy, obviously,” Li Qingshan replied without the slightest hesitation.

“Let’s go. We need to celebrate for you. I’ll go call Tieyi. The others don’t have time. Even if I call them over, you might not necessarily see them. You can’t exactly call this maltreating you if you have the three of us celebrating for you!”

Having three Foundation Establishment cultivators celebrate for a Qi Practitioner was an extremely rare treatment to enjoy. It was basically impossible unless they had close ties with one another.

However, Li Qingshan shook his head and declined. “That won’t be necessary.”

“Is it because there’s not enough people?”

“I want to celebrate once I reach Foundation Establishment,” Li Qingshan smiled. He had already made up his mind. He could make a push through this final obstacle now.

“Foundation Establishment?” Hua Chengzan raised an eyebrow. He called himself a genius, but in order to successfully establish a foundation, who knew how much effort he had spent towards it. He would have never mentioned it so easily.

Liu Chuanfeng on the side raised his head in surprise too. This disciple of his really liked to boast.

“You want to enter seclusion for another three years?” Hua Chengzan probed. He thought Li Qingshan was trying to avoid the current situation after seeing all the dangers. This was a common thought. As a result, the academy maintained an extremely tight control over the disciples in secluded cultivation now. However, he felt like Li Qingshan was not that kind of person.

“It shouldn’t take that long this time.” Li Qingshan shook his head gently.

At this moment, Han Tiewi descended from above. Without saying anything, he directly shoved a letter into Li Qingshan’s hand.

Li Qingshan opened the letter in confusion. There were only ten words, “You bastard son of a bitch, write back to me!”

“You contacted her.” Li Qingshan smiled bitterly as he read those ten words again and again. His heart warmed up. Her appearance suddenly grew clear in his mind, like she was cursing him loudly in his ear.

“She’s still my elder sister after all,” said Han Tiewi. Although they never seemed like siblings, even rather distant at first glance, their familial connection where blood ran thicker than water could never be severed.

“I often forget about that.” Li Qingshan stowed the letter into his bosom.

“Are you going to reply?”

“Of course.” Li Qingshan smiled. His heart was no longer lost or confused. His various thoughts of running away had all been swept clean. This was his responsibility as a man.

Han Tiewi then took out a jade slip and passed it to Li Qingshan.

“What’s this?”

“You’ll know once you take a look.”

Li Qingshan opened the jade slip and immediately became speechless. The jade slip recorded a cultivation method—the Arts of the Boundless Ocean.

“You said you wanted the cultivation method that could allow you to completely power Ocean Wielding. This is it, the Arts of the Boundless Ocean. She asked our uncle to find it. Although it’s missing the first half, she’s asked our uncle to patch it up, so it shouldn’t affect it too much. It should be the cultivation method most suited for you. She wanted me to give it to you once you emerged. You can say it’s a surprise.”

Li Qingshan rubbed his tingling nose. He had almost forgotten he had mentioned this to her, yet she still remembered it. Was it all just a coincidence? No, it wasn't. It was inseparable love. Even if she did not know about his various secrets, did that make her love any less real?

Li Qingshan waved around the jade slip in his hand. "If I wasn't going to reply, you never planned on handing me the jade slip, did you?"

"I'm still her younger brother after all," said Han Tieyi after quite a lengthy silence. Although every single cultivator had their own thoughts and choices towards these emotions, people who were faithless and fickle did not deserve her concern.

Li Qingshan returned to his room and wrote a reply with just a few flicks of the brush. He shoved it into the envelope and handed it to Han Tieyi.

"She's written so many letters. You're just going to answer her with a few words?" Hua Chengzan smiled.

"She knows. Actually, I hate writing a lot." Li Qingshan's heart was no longer shackled down anymore.

Chapter 420 - All Rivers Converge to the Ocean, Success with Foundation Establishment

In the commandery city of Ruyi, within the great general's estate.

Han Qiongzhi frowned slightly in worry. This guy actually had not written back immediately after emerging from seclusion. What was he thinking?

"My old cousin, are you thinking about that man again?" A delicate, young girl, around fourteen or fifteen, giggled. She had her hair tied up in buns and was currently standing on a looming, great oak tree.

"Meimei, get down from there!" Han Qiongzhi raised an eyebrow.

"Cousin, people are fickle. He might have already fallen in love with someone else." Han Meimei leapt down, landing on Han Qiongzhi's back and wrapping her hand around her neck as she prattled on like an old man.

"You better not talk nonsense. He's always been a little mysterious. He might have encountered something!"

"Miss Qiongzhi, there's a letter."

A caretaker personally delivered a letter. Han Qiongzhi beamed inside, but she suddenly felt like Han Meimei on her back weighed like a boulder. She struggled to take a step forward. Her back lightened again, and Han Meimei flew over, snatching over the letter and giggling. "Come chase me!"

"Give it back!" Frustrated, Han Qiongzhi lunged over as quickly as she could, but she missed. Han Meimei swiveled around and landed on the roof gracefully. "You can't catch me."

Han Meimei had reached the tenth layer too. Her cultivation was profound, and her reactions were so fast that they surpassed Han Qiongzhi's. She was like a monkey, leaping about and dodging through the garden as she opened the letter.

“What? There’s just three words, and the handwriting is so horrid.”

Han Qiongzhi’s heart sank. She roared, “Give it to me, or I’ll tell uncle!”

“Oh my, you’re actually angry! You’ll tell my father just because you can’t catch me. You’re shameless!” Han Meimei leapt over a roof and vanished while the letter drifted down gently, landing in Han Qiongzhi’s hand.

Sure enough, there were only three words written there in a wriggly, crooked manner—Wait for me.

“What the hell is this supposed to be!?” Han Qiongzhi curled her lip, but her eyes were filled with smiles. She pressed the letter against her chest.

“Everyone look! My cousin’s thinking about her man!” Han Meimei emerged from somewhere again. This time, she was carrying a gong, creating a ruckus as she yelled at the top of her lungs.

Han Qiongzhi sighed. Because their cultivations were similar, they had been arranged to cultivate together. It would be strange if she could cultivate in peace like this!

Though, I won’t wait for you. Do you really think I’m supposed to wait for you just because I’m a woman? You’re the one who’s supposed to wait for me. I’ll return to the Clear River prefecture as soon as I successfully establish a foundation.”

It might be dangerous, but that was where her family and her lover were.

Li Qingshan did not enter secluded cultivation again. Instead, he arrived outside the academy, entering an area with some desolate reeds near the banks of the Lake of Dragons and Snakes.

As he gazed at the lake that spanned as far as the eye could see and listened to the rising and falling waves, he could still sense the boundlessness of the ocean even though this was not the sea.

He had studied the first half of the Arts of the Boundless Ocean countless times. Now that he obtained the other half, he no longer hesitated at all. He immediately began cultivating.

Strands of Gui Water true qi were converted into Boundless true qi. Although it was also of the water element, it was many times more turbulent and powerful, like comparing a mountain stream to the billows of the ocean.

There was an extremely high requirement on the elemental affinity of water to practise the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, but this was no problem to Li Qingshan at all. After reaching the third layer of the spirit turtle, he seemed to possess the spirit turtle’s bloodline. His water affinity had completely surpassed the high jia standard that he was tested as back then. He could be described as the perfect person to practise the Arts of the Boundless Ocean.

Ten days later, Li Qingshan converted the final strand of Gui Water true qi in his body into Boundless true qi. Like its name, it really did seem boundless. He finally witnessed the gateway leading to Foundation Establishment.

His mind was unshackled, and his true qi was full. Finally, he took out ten True Spirit pills and placed them in a row.

All rivers converge to the ocean! Li Qingshan bellowed inside.

His eight extraordinary meridians and twelve standard meridians were like rivers that true qi constantly lingered in. Suddenly, it all began to flow into his sea of qi, kicking up turbulent waves in his sea of qi. It actually felt like it had gone beyond his control.

The Boundless true qi cultivated from the Arts of the Boundless Ocean was extremely powerful, but at a time like this, it had instead become a cultivator's greatest test. If he were unable to control the turbulent true qi, the true qi would burst through the dantian and destroy the cultivator.

The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas!

The spirit turtle's daemon core glowed brightly, flattening the frenzied sea of qi instantly.

Afterwards, Li Qingshan began to ingest the first True Spirit pill. As soon as it reached his belly, it turned into a strange, flexible aura.

It was like a droplet of divine water landing within the sea of qi before pervading instantly and leading to startling changes. The true qi thickened and became sticky.

If he were a cultivator who had remained at the tenth layer for a very long time like Hua Chengzan or Han Teyi, just a single True Spirit pill would have sufficed. However, Li Qingshan had cultivated for too brief of a period. He had not accumulated and consolidated his true qi enough, and the Boundless true qi was simply too powerful. As soon as the effects of the True Spirit pill began to kick in, they began to disperse.

Li Qingshan halted and immediately consumed a second True Spirit pill to ensure that the effects would linger. Since he was unable to use the regular method, he would use the most forceful method to overcome this obstacle.

Just like that, he ingested nine True Spirit pills consecutively.

Not a single strand of true qi flowed through his dantian anymore, as all of the true qi had frozen into ice. The sea of qi had become a sea of ice.

The corner of Li Qingshan's lips curled up. He stowed the final True Spirit pill away. It was already time.

Cracks appeared on the sea of ice before it shattered loudly. An aura much purer and much more refined rushed up; it ignored the existence of the meridians and went straight into Li Qingshan's mind.

In that instant, everything was clear. His mind was transparent.

Li Qingshan understood that he had finally opened up a sea of consciousness, which was also known as a violet palace, lingtian, or spiritual field. From now onwards, he would be able to use soul sense. He would be able to sense and control the spiritual qi of the world as a human. However, this feeling was not unfamiliar to Li Qingshan at all.

Normally, the heavenly tribulation would descend right now.

A fierce gust of wind arrived, making the reeds bend over. The water rippled endlessly.

Li Qingshan looked around, but sure enough, a second heavenly tribulation did not descend. He could fool humans and daemons, but he was unable to fool the heavens. The number of tribulations of the heavens were no more and no less, treating all as equals. Since Li Qingshan had already gone through it, it would not descend again.

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Ever since the war between humans and daemons unfolded, the academy would hold routine meetings between the school leaders. The person who hosted them was no longer Liu Zhangqing anymore, but Wei Yangsheng, who had also reached Foundation Establishment. Liu Zhangqing had not fallen in battle, instead devoting his efforts to doing a better job as the prefect.

The school leaders had been replaced by many new faces. Among those three years, many original primary disciples had taken the most important step in their lives, reaching Foundation Establishment. Reaching Foundation Establishment was anything but easy, but since they could become primary disciples, they were talented. As long as they did not suffer from any particularly large mental shackles and spent sufficient time, they would all be able to take this step sooner or later.

The leaders of the schools of Legalism and the Military had become Hua Chengzan and Han Tieyi. Wang Pushi and Han Anjun now focused on the matters of the Hawkwolf Guard and the military.

“School leader Liu, I’ve heard that Qingshan has already emerged from secluded cultivation, so why didn’t he come with you?” Wei Yangsheng frowned and asked before the meeting. The primary disciples would listen along in the meetings too. Sitting behind Wei Yangsheng was Chu Tian.

“Qingshan said he wanted to break through to Foundation Establishment...” Before Liu Chuanfeng could even finish, Chu Tian sneered. “Don’t tell me he’s gone into hiding again!”

Primary disciples originally had no authority to speak arbitrarily, but Chu Tian had reached the highest realm of Qi Practitioner, the tenth layer, and he had made quite a name for himself during the three years. With the power of the Palm of the Five Elements, he had slayed many daemons. Even when he came across regular Daemon Generals, he would be able to escape easily. He would definitely become a powerful Foundation Establishment cultivator in the future, and they all knew about his pettiness, so no one wanted to offend him.

Moreover, Chu Tian had spoken the minds of many people present. All of them knew that safety was no longer a concept that existed for Qi Practitioners in this day and age. Who hadn’t emerged from these circumstances? Why are you allowed to cultivate in peace while others risk their lives in battle?

“Can you really call breaking through the ninth and tenth layers in three years running away?” Liu Chuanfeng rebuked with a flushed face.

“Chu Tian, shut your mouth.” Wei Yangsheng silenced Chu Tian, but he asked instead, “School leader Liu, Qingshan has only just broken through to the tenth layer recently! Now he’s making preparations for Foundation Establishment. How long will that take? Don’t tell me it’s another few years? Could you perhaps convince him that cultivation isn’t all about seclusion? The academy just happens to be in need of manpower. If he acts like this, it won’t be a good influence. Regular disciples all have an issue with this.”

“What a pair of fleeing lovers,” said a chubby, middle-aged man in silken clothes sarcastically from a corner. It was not just regular disciples who had an issue with this. The leader of the school of Miscellany, Gou Dai, had an issue with it too. The school of Miscellany was similar to the school of Novels. It was also a lower school of thought, unskilled with battle. They never had a lot of disciples in the first place, and they had lost quite a few during the chaos of war.

Moreover, the primary disciple that he had high hopes for died at the hands of daemons last year. He was forced to stand with a group of juniors from the past, which he struggled to accept. He was infuriated the moment he heard Li Qingshan’s name. If his disciple was in secluded cultivation too, how would he have died?

Han Qiongzhi left, and Li Qingshan remained in secluded cultivation. They earned themselves the nickname of “fleeing lovers” within the academy.

“Please don’t insult him, senior,” Han Tiewi raised a straight eyebrow of his and said coldly.

“That’s how all the disciples in the academy refer to them! You’re welcome to kill all the disciples for this, school leader Han!” Gou Dai continued to fume, but his voice did grow a lot softer.

“Qingshan has his plans. If the academy can gain another Foundation Establishment cultivator, that’ll be far better than a tenth layer Qi Practitioner. Let’s continue discussing our future strategy instead!” Hua Chengzan stood up to mediate the bickering.

“That’s not necessarily true. Why don’t we look at who has killed more daemons instead?” Chu Tian was peeved off by that.

The other primary disciples refused to accept this too. They had all spent a much longer time in the academy than Li Qingshan, so why was he supposed to receive special treatment?

Just when Hua Chengzan was about to defend Li Qingshan, a tremendous aura shot over swiftly from afar. It was a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

The room fell silent. Had an original school leader returned? However, the aura did not resemble any one of them.

It had arrived so quickly!

As they pondered, the aura descended from above, and the door was flung open. Li Qingshan strode in and looked around, arriving in the corner and sitting down behind Liu Chuanfeng.