

### Chapter 421 - Seeing the Black Ox Again, Waiting a Thousand Days

Everyone was stunned. Liu Chuanfeng twisted himself around. His mouth opened, but he faltered.

Hua Chengzan's eyes shone brilliantly. "He actually succeeded!" From meeting him the first time till now, not even a decade had passed. He had gone from being a worthless member of the jianghu to a Foundation Establishment cultivator who could preside over an entire region.

And, he had accomplished this without any clan or background. Those so-called geniuses were nothing special at all before him. Gu Yanying's special instructions truly seemed insightful now.

The leader of the school of Miscellany, Gou Dai, widened his eyes. He was unable to say anything at all, as the aura Li Qingshan gave off was actually slightly more powerful than his. He did not seem like he had just succeeded with Foundation Establishment at all.

The Arts of the Boundless Ocean definitely played a role, but Li Qingshan's startling talent after reaching the third layer of the spirit turtle was even more important. After reaching Foundation Establishment, cultivators did not judge each other's auras on the strength of their spiritual energy alone. They placed great focus on their connection with the spiritual qi of the world too.

Just by sitting there on his knees, Li Qingshan's aura was like the waves of the ocean, endless and connected with the world, becoming one with nature. All the other Foundation Establishment cultivators present who had broken through recently felt slightly pressured before him.

"Why are you all staring at me? Keep going. I want to listen in too." Li Qingshan smiled. He was not like regular Foundation Establishment cultivators who ravished in joy after breaking through. He had already experienced this extraordinary power when he broke through to Daemon General.

He had only come to understand the situation so that he could decide where he could start.

"Qingshan, you actually!" Liu Chuanfeng lunged over and grabbed Li Qingshan by the shoulders. He was elated, even happier than Li Qingshan himself.

"Qingshan, that's fantastic. That way, our academy will possess another Foundation Establishment cultivator!" Wei Yangsheng smiled. However, Chu Tian behind him clenched his fist and gritted his teeth. He, a blessed prodigy, had actually lost to a country bumpkin in terms of cultivation speed. However, no matter how arrogant he was, he still understood the difference that existed between Foundation Establishment cultivators and Qi Practitioners. He was not bold enough to openly provoke him.

The other school leaders all gathered over to congratulate him. Gou Dai forced out a smile on his round face too, discussing the matters of the past with great affection with him.

Only the leader of the school of Buddhism, Mind Enlightenment, furrowed his brows and remained where he was. He had just dismissed Xiao An as the primary disciple of the school of Buddhism, and everyone in the academy knew how close Li Qingshan and Xiao An were. He was afraid he had already offended Li Qingshan deeply.

"Senior brother Mind Enlightenment, you've emerged too." Li Qingshan took the initiative instead.

“Yeah. Congratulations on your successful Foundation Establishment, junior brother.” Mind Enlightenment brought his palms together and bowed.

“From today onwards, Xiao An is no longer a member of the school of Buddhism. She’ll be with me instead, so she won’t be accepting any pills from the school of Buddhism anymore. I do believe she’ll definitely avenge the One Thought master. I’m sorry for your loss, senior brother.” Li Qingshan had heard about the One Thought master’s fate from Xiao An. Xiao An never mentioned anything about what she would do, but he had already made up his mind.

In the past, the One Thought master had taken great care of Xiao An. All the pills she obtained ended up in his belly too. Li Qingshan was not exactly saddened by the One Thought master’s death, but he had to keep clear accounts of the kindness he received. He had to maintain a clear conscience.

“Amitābha,” Mind Enlightenment said before lowering his head and falling silent.

Leaving the Academy of the Hundred Schools was not so easy. Li Qingshan only possessed the right to say something like that with his current cultivation. The other school leaders would not object either. Moreover, Xiao An had already been accepted by the Annihilum Light Chan Master of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga as a disciple. This identity of hers completely surpassed her identity as a disciple of the school of Buddhism.

Li Qingshan’s gaze landed on an empty seat. That originally belonged to the leader of the school of Medicine. The primary disciple of the school of Medicine was missing as well.

Hua Chengzan said, “Ru Xin’s already succeeded with Foundation Establishment too. She’s now the leader of the school of Medicine, but she spends most of her time outside, healing the sick. She rarely attends these meetings.”

Li Qingshan nodded. “Senior brother Wei, could you explain the current circumstances to me?”

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It was getting late, so the meeting ended. The news of Li Qingshan’s breakthrough to Foundation Establishment shook up the entire academy, but the person that the news revolved around, Li Qingshan, turned down any celebratory banquets and left the academy with Xiao An, arriving in a desolate valley.

The moonlight was hazy, and the plants were verdant.

Li Qingshan’s eyes shone. He felt slightly excited and very eager inside. Foundation Establishment had never meant much to him, but what it represented was something extraordinary.

He calmed himself down and found a cavern before sealing off the surroundings with a few formation scrolls. Only then did he fish out a ring from his clothes. It was the Soaring Dragon Elder’s sumeru ring.

Li Qingshan took in a deep breath and held the sumeru ring firmly. Just what had the black ox left for him inside? Was it an ultimate treasure? Some ultimate pill? Or perhaps it was only a joke, just a way to encourage him?

Lifting up the ring, Li Qingshan and Xiao An’s hands merged together. Under Xiao An’s gaze, Li Qingshan slowly slid the ring onto his finger.

Afterwards, he closed his eyes and channeled spiritual energy into it. The ring gradually began to glow, lighting up the dark cave. Li Qingshan's heart shuddered. This was the first time he had experienced something like this.

Then, Li Qingshan released his soul sense, sending it deep into the sumeru ring. However, he was stopped by an energy, preventing him from venturing any deeper. A huge, golden dragon coiled firmly in his boundless sea of consciousness.

This was a form of will the Soaring Dragon Elder had left behind. Only by erasing it could he truly make the sumeru ring his.

Li Qingshan smiled. He could finally see the gate. Now, all he had to do was barge through that gate. He immediately mobilised his soul sense to attack the golden dragon. With that, the golden dragon jerked awake, emitting a lengthy roar. It seemed to kick up a fierce gust of wind, making his entire sea of consciousness tremor.

The soul sense Li Qingshan had released was basically torn to shreds instantly. He felt his head grow light as the world spun around him. He had never expected a will left behind by the Soaring Dragon Elder who had been dead for all these years to still possess so much power.

To Foundation Establishment cultivators, the sea of consciousness was even more important than their sea of qi. If the sea of qi were destroyed, they had a chance at cultivating it again, but if their sea of consciousness shattered, even the best outcome was being reduced to an imbecile.

Li Qingshan was not completely unprepared. He bellowed out inside, *The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas!*

A turtle's shell no different from his daemon core appeared in his sea of consciousness. In the beginning, it was only the size of a grain of rice, but as it absorbed the shattered soul sense, it rapidly strengthened. Before long, a huge turtle shell hovered in the sea of consciousness, forcefully suppressing all the chaos.

Li Qingshan eased up, and his mind cleared. Afterwards, he immediately sent the spirit turtle hurtling towards the golden dragon.

Boom! There was a thunderous rumble in his mind, and he experienced a splitting headache.

Only after a very long time did the rumbling stop. Li Qingshan had already withdrawn his soul sense, and he discovered that the spirit turtle had already shrunk, while the golden dragon had grown slightly dimmer too. Fortunately, the will the Soaring Dragon Elder left behind only attacked reactively and not proactively, giving him sufficient time to catch his breath. It also reminded him to be constantly cautious about this aspect when he fought other people.

Practising the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, his spiritual energy was powerful and his body was tough, but there were no improvements in his soul sense. It was said that only the cultivation methods of mohism focused on this aspect, as it could improve their control over many more powerful puppets.

However, perhaps due to practising the three supernatural abilities of the ox demon, tiger demon, and spirit turtle, Li Qingshan's sea of consciousness had been extremely powerful the moment he opened it. He recovered rather quickly too. When the spirit turtle returned to its original size, Li Qingshan sent it towards the golden dragon again.

Boom! There was another rumble. He repeated this again and again. After who knew how many times, the golden dragon had already become extremely dim, as well as less than a tenth of its original size.

However, through the constant depletion and recovery, the spirit turtle had instead grown slightly larger. Mustering up all his strength, the spirit turtle smashed down, and the golden dragon let out another roar, but it was so feeble that it sounded more like a wail before death. Unable to bear the burden anymore, the dragon twisted.

The sumeru ring flashed, and the obstacle that blocked Li Qingshan finally vanished. He let out a sigh of relief, about to open up the sumeru ring and look for what the black ox had left behind.

A man with a pair of horns appeared out of nowhere with his back towards him, seated on the spirit turtle. Li Qingshan had only seen this figure once, but it was deeply embedded in his mind. It was even loftier than mountains.

Li Qingshan cried out, "Brother ox!"

"You're finally here." The black ox's voice seemed to boom out like a bell, enough to cause avalanches. It resounded through his entire sea of consciousness, but it caused Li Qingshan no discomfort at all.

"Don't tell me you've been hiding away and secretly spying on me the entire time!" Li Qingshan had absolutely no doubt that the black ox possessed a repulsive habit like that. After all, he had spent a dozen or so years like that, playing himself off as a normal ox.

"Kid, don't get too ahead of yourself. This is just a part of my soul sense that I left behind. Why would I care about what you do? A decade for you is as brief as a day for me."

"Then why'd you leave in such a hurry? Why didn't you spend a day or two longer with me? That way, I can continue to listen to your teachings too. If I ended up being finished off by someone, that day of yours would be wasted."

Originally, Li Qingshan thought the black ox would say, I have plenty of time. Even without Li Qingshan, I have a Zhang Qingshan and a Wang Qingshan.

However, the black ox said instead, "Then I'll have to find you again in sa?sāra and spend another day. Don't doubt yourself. No matter who tells you you're of absolutely no importance or significance, you can just treat them like they're talking out of their ass."

"Then can you tell me why you chose me?" Li Qingshan wondered. Was it because he possessed some kind of impressive talent? Or because he was just some reincarnation of someone powerful, which the black ox wanted good graces with?

"That's because I believe you, even though you're just a regular old kid with a bit of innate knowledge."

At this moment, the black ox's figure flickered. "I'm going to go. Keep advancing forward, kid. Don't make me find you in sa?sāra. That takes a lot of time, y'know. I don't have too much time. I hope this won't be the last time we meet." As he said that, the black ox's figure gradually faded away.

Li Qingshan shuddered inside. "Then how long do I have?"

"Around a thousand days."

Li Qingshan was relieved. "Then just wait in peace! I might just be a regular old kid, but I'm not that useless." If I can't even achieve something with ten thousand years of cultivation, I'll kill myself, alright?  
"Oh right, what about the thing you left for me?"

"Isn't it in your heart already?"

#### **Chapter 422 - Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine, Phoenix's Nirvāṇa**

"Oi, don't you even think about slipping away just because you're acting all profound!" Li Qingshan was taken aback. He extended his hand over, but it passed straight through the black ox's body.

The black ox extended a finger backwards to his forehead before vanishing like a dream with resonant laughter.

Li Qingshan immediately felt like something had appeared in his sea of consciousness, but he was unable to think too much about it. The moment the black ox turned around, he saw many wounds crisscrossing viciously across the black ox's chest.

Suddenly, Li Qingshan understood why he did not turn around. He could not help but become dazed. Even right now, the black ox's power was unfathomable to him, yet who was able to cause him such severe wounds? And, just who was responsible for his broken horn?

Why don't you tell me anything? That's because even if you tell me, it's useless!

Xiao An held Li Qingshan's hand and asked about what had happened in concern.

Li Qingshan raised his head. His gaze seemed to pierce the rock and soil, the mist and haze, the wispy clouds and the sky, reaching beyond the Nine Heavens. Only after a very long time did he lower his head again. He smiled. "Looks like we need to hurry up. I just saw brother ox again. It seems like he needs us."

Beyond the Nine Heavens suddenly ceased to be an empty promise, as the person who gave him everything and believed the regular him was not just an insignificant figure was currently awaiting his assistance.

"I'll accompany you." Xiao An said seriously.

"Of course." Li Qingshan withdrew his soul sense, returning to his sea of consciousness. He discovered that a few, dark figures had appeared in the boundless darkness.

Was this what brother ox had left to him?

The soul sense that condensed into a spirit turtle dispersed and reverted into Li Qingshan's original appearance, completely naked. He moved through the sea of consciousness and arrived between the dark figures. Counting carefully, there were a total of eight dark figures. They seemed like the silhouettes of various animals.

Li Qingshan was most familiar with one of them. Was that not an ox?

Li Qingshan extended his hand. As soon as he touched the silhouette, the silhouette immediately lit up. An ox demon stood with an indomitable spirit, its back arched like a lofty mountain. It stood with vigorous spirit, as if it radiated with great might endlessly.

Li Qingshan was even more familiar with the information that emerged from it. Was this not the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength?

Li Qingshan was overjoyed. That also meant that the eight silhouettes were eight supernatural abilities and cultivation methods. He found the tiger and turtle before long, but he felt like something was missing. No, it was not eight. It should have been nine. This feeling was completely groundless, yet it was also so strong.

The ox suddenly spoke, "That's right. The name of this supernatural ability is the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine. It's the work of my entire life. Kid, how much you can comprehend and how many transformations you can achieve will be up to you."

"Brother ox, you still haven't left!" Li Qingshan beamed, but the ox fell silent, like it was dead. He understood now. This was the final message the black ox had left behind when he sealed the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine into his sea of consciousness.

However, he never explained why it was called the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine, or why there were only eight transformations here? However, Li Qingshan no longer cared about that. He scanned past the eight silhouettes around him, filled with shock inside.

He finally understood why he always felt like the supernatural ability the black ox had taught him was nowhere near as wondrous as the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. As it turned out, he had not even properly cultivated the first transformation of the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine, the Ox Demon Transformation. If he succeeded in cultivating all nine transformations, then what would Fu Qingjin be? What would the Sword Collection palace be? He would definitely be heading to beyond the Nine Heavens, while the nine provinces in this world would not be able to contain his existence.

Brother ox had truly left behind something impressive to him.

Li Qingshan calmed down and devoted his focus to the Ox Demon Transformation. The profound truths it contained were much more complex and far-reaching than what the black ox had originally explained to him. Back then, he had only given him a rough explanation of it all because he was limited in his ability to understand, barely enough for him to make progress and cultivate.

Only when he comprehended it carefully right now did he feel enlightened. In particular, the aura that the ox demon figure radiated with was his best teacher. As he comprehended the cultivation method, he subconsciously replicated the ox demon's movements.

From Xiao An's perspective, Li Qingshan's flesh seemed to fluctuate like waves, trembling strangely and giving off a startling aura.

Suddenly, Li Qingshan felt slightly perplexed. As his comprehension of the ox demon gradually deepened, he did not sense endless strength or great freedom to do whatever he wished, but deep sombreness and helplessness.

A mantra suddenly appeared in his mind. "The Ox Demon, with its Great Strength, Sinks in the Mud."

Li Qingshan looked at the ox demon figure again, and it no longer seemed the same. It was the same ox demon, standing with an indomitable spirit and endless strength, stuck and sinking in the mud. Its

strength was boundless, but it was unable to use it; it was all for nothing, like a hero at his end in front of a lamenting hegemon.

Li Qingshan shook his head before touching the tiger-like silhouette that flapped its wings to his right. A roaring tiger seemed to leap out from the darkness, radiating with surging malice and murderousness. It took Li Qingshan by surprise before he beamed with delight.

This was the second transformation of the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine, the Tiger Demon Transformation. It was battle hungry and murderous, wanting to destroy the world. Even the battle intent and killing intent that belonged to Strongboulder, known as a Rock of Slaughter, seemed like child's play before the tiger demon.

Li Qingshan immediately realised that the Tiger Demon Transformation brother ox had taught him was even less complete. Certain important components had basically been purposefully omitted. The tiger demon was a demon of slaughter, so its power should have been greater.

However, when Li Qingshan focused and comprehended it, the frenzied killing intent immediately dominated his mind. He actually felt the urge to kill everything in the world. A mantra also appeared all of a sudden. "The Tiger Demon Forges its Bones, with a Frenzied Heart."

Li Qingshan used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression in a hurry to suppress this sudden murderousness. He had abruptly become drenched in cold sweat. He knew if brother ox had taught him the original version right from the beginning, he would have already become a bloodthirsty madman.

Looking at the tiger demon figure, it was a whole different sight again. Its tiger eyes were filled with blood-red killing intent, frenzied and insane.

Li Qingshan frowned slightly. Since it was called the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine, and these two belonged to the demonic path, the spirit turtle should have been divine. He casually pressed his hand against the spirit turtle's silhouette.

The spirit turtle appeared and multicoloured light unfolded resplendently. The rising and falling back was layered with criss-crossing inscriptions, constantly manifesting the good and the ill. Its aura was completely different from the tiger demon and ox demon's, sacred and noble, sagacious and peaceful. Even though it was also a beast, it could not be labelled as a daemon, much less a demon. Instead, it was a god that had transcended mortality.

Li Qingshan comprehended its will and immediately felt like his heart had emptied out, purged of all desires. Instead of devoting all his strength to constantly fighting others, he would be better off sitting and observing the aura of the world, the fluctuations in fate.

"Qingshan! Qingshan!"

When Li Qingshan comprehended the Ox Demon Transformation and became sombre, Xiao An was not worried. When Li Qingshan comprehended the Tiger Demon Transformation and radiated with murderousness, Xiao An only became slightly concerned. But when Li Qingshan's expression became serene and tranquil, peaceful yet distant, Xiao An's expression changed drastically. She went up to shake his shoulders, calling him by his name.

Li Qingshan opened his eyes. His pupils were as calm as stillwater, having lost some emotions and desire. It was a chilling sight. Only when he saw Xiao An clearly did some of his intense feelings return, like a few buckets of dye had been thrown into a clear pool of water.

Li Qingshan scratched his head. He shook his head with a bitter smile. Originally, he had thought the Spirit Turtle Transformation was a little safer, so he lowered his guard, but never did he expect that gods were even better at harming people than demons.

He suddenly understood. Over all these years, even though the spirit turtle suppressed the ox demon and tiger demon, there was still an endless demonic nature that could not be washed away. If he only practised the Spirit Turtle Transformation, his character would definitely change drastically. He would become a proper cultivator who purged his minds of desires.

Exactly because of the conflict between the demonic and the divine, he could maintain the human nature within him, such that he was still that Li Qingshan.

The third mantra appeared in his mind too. It was an auspicious one for once. "The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas, Foreboding Fate."

Li Qingshan felt like he had benefited tremendously from the complete cultivation methods of the three transformations. If he could spend some time and comprehend them carefully, his strength would definitely climb even higher.

The Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine was not like regular cultivation methods. He could focus on a single one, or alternate between them. Each transformation was independent to one another, yet also closely linked.

A thought crossed Li Qingshan's head. In other words, should I learn a fourth transformation? Since brother ox's chosen to give me the cultivation method at a time like this, it should be fine.

Li Qingshan raised his hand before lowering it again. The fourth transformation had to be a divine transformation. If he accidentally chose a demonic transformation, the Spirit Turtle Transformation would not be able to keep his daemon qi suppressed, and his mind might suffer from irreversible effects.

He contemplated the five remaining figures for a while. Li Qingshan's gaze landed on the figure above the spirit turtle. According to the order, that should have come after the Spirit Turtle Transformation.

The dark figure was a huge bird that flew in the air, flapping its wings with a long tail dragging behind. Its posture was graceful, such that even though it was just a dark silhouette, the feeling it gave off was magnificent and glorious.

Li Qingshan no longer hesitated. His hand landed on it, and a clear cry rang through his sea of consciousness, resounding and grandiose, graceful and mild.

Li Qingshan had heard countless musical instruments and countless songs before, but none of it could compare with the cry. It was like a magnificent symphony, condensing into the most beautiful musical notes.

A phoenix!



Li Qingshan stared at the soaring phoenix for a very long time. It was so magnificent and noble that it seemed like a flowing ball of fire.

The phoenix was the chief of birds, the king of avians. Even regular people were very familiar with this divine bird. It was rumored to possess the five virtues, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and trustworthiness, and it was of noble and pure character. It did not perch unless it was a wutong tree, and it did not drink unless it was morning dew.

TL: Wutong trees (Chinese parasol trees) are known as the favoured resting places of phoenixes in Chinese mythology.

And, whenever it died, it would blaze with fire before undergoing a rebirth in flames, obtaining an even more beautiful body and greater life force. It was known as a “phoenix’s nirvāṇa”, cycling again and again and obtaining eternal life.

Spirit turtles possessed longevity, but there would still be a time when they met their end. However, phoenixes were truly undying birds.

The phoenix circled around slowly and landed on Li Qingshan’s shoulder. Only then did Li Qingshan discover that its darkness had already vanished. Perhaps it was because he had already made a decision!

The phoenix used its vermilion beak to peck him gently and tremendous amounts of information flowed into his head. Li Qingshan obtained the cultivation method of the fourth supernatural ability, the Phoenix Transformation. It was known as the Phoenix’s Scripture of Nirvāṇa.

PS: The planning’s basically done, enough for a hundred thousand or so characters. Any holes are guaranteed to be filled. It’ll be fascinating enough. However, I’m going to put in some painstaking effort this time and come up with a plan of a million or so characters, just in case you say I don’t have any moral integrity.

Finally, congratulations to Alliance Head “A Soft Yes”, heh, albeit a late thank you.

### **Chapter 423 - The Soaring Dragon Emerges, the Heavenly Secrets Change**

Li Qingshan caressed the phoenix feathers. The phoenix was not particularly large, only around one and a half meters tall. Its long tail feathers draped down elegantly, filled with indescribable dignity and nobility.

The Phoenix’s Scripture of Nirvāṇa entered Li Qingshan’s head. At the same time, he comprehended its spirit, the phoenix’s dignity and its noble, pure heart. It was different from the spirit turtle’s clear, reflective mental state, more like a virtuous sage of the past.

The arrival of the phoenix ushered peace.

As a result, Li Qingshan obtained the fourth mantra—The Phoenix Undergoes Nirvāṇa Rebirth, with an Undying Heart.

Daoism possessed techniques of praying and aversion, which were split into two streams of thought. Those who prayed prayed for blessings and those who averted averted disasters, which had to do with the dispelling and elimination of disasters. The phoenix possessed the power of nirvāṇa, or rebirth,

possessing an undying heart. Even in the face of life-threatening danger, it was fearless, let alone mere disasters.

As Li Qingshan was touched by the mantra, he could not help but sigh over how the mantras for the ox demon and tiger demon both sounded like depressing curses, while the mantras for the spirit turtle and phoenix were pleasant blessings. Brother ox, who created these supernatural abilities, was still a demonic daemon after all!

And, these eight supernatural abilities corresponded to four gods and four demons, so what would the final one belong to?

Dismissing his various doubts, Li Qingshan settled down to comprehend the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa, but he opened his eyes again before long. Sure enough, it was not that simple.

The spirit turtle lorded over water, and Li Qingshan's cultivation was completely oriented towards water. Yet, the phoenix happened to lord over fire. As the spirit turtle sunk into the deep sea, the phoenix danced in the nine heavens. One was peaceful, while the other was vigorous. Their natures were complete opposites.

The concept of a balance between fire and water, the unity of movement and peace, was nothing rare in the cultivation world. However, that was only for regular cultivators. The special nature that these two divine beasts possessed was extremely pure. He would basically be dreaming if he wanted to make them exist in harmony.

After cultivating for a few hours, Li Qingshan gave up temporarily. The wilderness was not a place to cultivate. He would be better off finishing what he needed to do and returning to the academy!

Li Qingshan's thoughts became directed at the sumeru ring again. His eyes gradually lit up, shining brightly.

The ring contained all of the Soaring Dragon Elder's possessions. The various spiritual artifacts, no, arcane artifacts, pills, spiritual stones, and talismans must have reached a startling sum. Even to him right now, it was still an astronomical piece of wealth.

Just the pills inside were probably more than enough for him to increase his cultivation by a single layer, let alone everything else.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An exchanged glances. Li Qingshan channeled his spiritual energy and extended his soul sense into the ring. The sumeru ring swung open, and an unbelievably large space appeared. There was too much to see inside, where everything glowed or flickered. Before Li Qingshan could even properly see what was in there, a golden streak of light shot towards him.

The Soaring Dragon sword!

Li Qingshan had an extremely deep impression of this sword. The blade of the sword was like a dragon's body, while the hilt was like a dragon's head. It was covered in golden scales, glistening brightly. It seemed like a living dragon.

And now, the sword actually sprang alive, flying out of the sumeru ring and shooting towards Li Qingshan. It was like a golden bolt of lightning, wanting to avenge its master. The sword thrummed like a dragon's roar.

Everything happened right in his face, such that even Li Qingshan was rather flustered. Xiao An was a few steps away, which made it even less possible for her to assist him.

Clang!

At that critical moment, the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell rose up and blocked the Soaring Dragon sword. Before Li Qingshan could even let out a sigh of relief, he saw the Soaring Dragon sword bounce off and take off into the sky like a startled dragon.

"Capture it! It wants to run!" Li Qingshan called out and leapt up, but he was still a beat slower than the Soaring Dragon sword. It was just about to penetrate through the formation and the cavern.

All of this had happened in a single instant. The Soaring Dragon sword was like a supreme swordsman, throwing its life on the line to launch an assassination attempt before taking off upon failure. Li Qingshan had never expected a sword to be so intelligent. It was inconceivable.

Clang! A bone sword appeared and sent the Soaring Dragon sword flying. The Soaring Dragon sword circled around a few times before fleeing in a different direction. Twelve Skull Prayer Beads scattered and surrounded it, trapping the Soaring Dragon sword.

The Soaring Dragon sword exploded with light, and its dragon's roar became even louder. With a series of clangs and clangs, it shook away the Skull Prayer Beads, but it immediately became drastically slower. As it turned out, the twelve Skull Prayer Beads had turned into twelve thumb-sized Skull Demons, clinging onto the sword desperately.

The Skull Demons possessed startling physical strength, enough to rip apart rock, even surpassing regular Daemon Generals. However, the Soaring Dragon sword actually managed to continue flying about, squirming around in the cave like a golden snake. Whenever it was stopped by Xiao An, it seemed to grow even more frantic. This continued until a huge hand grabbed the hilt firmly, unleashing the Tremors of the Ox Demon and the Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas.

The Soaring Dragon sword let out a long cry before being sent back into the sumeru ring and sealed up.

Li Qingshan let out a sigh of relief, but he suddenly felt uneasy inside.

A lone mountain pierced the clouds, like a single island within the sea of clouds. Below, it was not connected with the ground in any shape or form. It just hovered there, alone and aloof.

This was the Sword Collection palace's renowned Sword Collection peak. Its cliffs and precipices were covered in swords, either covered in rust or entangled by vines. They all seemed to be nothing special at all. The mountain had hidden away their edge, making them wait quietly for their next master.

Because swords would be pulled out, there were many sheathe-like grooves among the swords. The moment the Soaring Dragon sword emerged from the sumeru ring, the Sword Collection peak sensed it, and one of the grooves suddenly erupted with light, dispersing the clouds. It was like a mother calling for her travelling child's return.

Every single sword would automatically return to the Sword Collection peak after its master died. However, even when the light had subsided, the Soaring Dragon sword still had not returned. It shook up the entire Sword Collection palace.

On the main peak of the Sword Collection palace, in the Heaven Reliant palace, a middle-aged man swung his hand. "Invite over the Divining Elder."

The middle-aged man's appearance was simple and refined, with his hair flowing freely. Before him was a map that covered all nine provinces. He drew an invisible line on the map with his gaze. Upon closer inspection, this coincided perfectly with the direction and angle from the streak of light that the Sword Collection peak had emitted.

With a few coughs, an old man with white hair dressed in white stepped into the palace as he leaned against a strangely-shaped sword. He seemed to be tottering about, where just a gust of wind could blow him over, but every single step he stood was extremely steady.

"Greetings, palace master."

The middle-aged man frowned slightly at the sight of the Divining Elder, as just a few years ago, the Divining Elder had not been reduced to this. In order to find the Soaring Dragon Elder's murderer, he mobilised the heavenly secrets, but he happened to touch on something and suffered from a backlash of the heavenly secrets. Within a single night, all his hair turned white, and he fell unconscious for seven days and nights. When he woke up, he only said a single thing quietly to the middle-aged man,

"No matter what it is, it's not something that anyone in this world can deal with. I'd advise the palace master to drop this matter for now. There may be a favourable turn in the situation in the future."

"Has there been a favourable turn?" asked the middle-aged man.

Clang! The Divining Elder drew the Sword of Divination, and his aura changed drastically. His eyes became as deep as the sea, and the Sword of Divination split into black and white along the ridge. A eight trigrams diagram circulated rapidly near the edge as the black and white blended together into chaos.

A while later, the Sword of Divination flew up, and the tip of the sword landed firmly on the map, landing on the line that the middle-aged man had drawn mentally. His eyes suddenly lit up, and the entire palace seemed to dim.

"Still the Clear River prefecture?"

#### **Chapter 424 - An Acquaintance Unchanged**

Around noon, Fu Qingjin landed among the remote mountains. The grass grew vibrantly in the surroundings, dyed golden by the sunlight. They waved in the autumn wind, rustling quietly.

Fu Qingjin was more alert than ever. The Soaring Dragon sword had appeared here. In the message, the Divining Elder had been so stern that he dared not be careless, not even in the slightest.

Very soon, he sensed the abnormal activity of the spiritual qi of the world there. Fu Qingjin found a cave. The cave was not very deep, such that he reached the end very soon. There was nothing in there anymore, but he could sense someone had cast down formations here.

A streak of golden light fell from the ceiling, landing in Fu Qingjin's eyes. Through the crack, he could see the sky outside.

That's right. It had to be here. The Soaring Dragon sword had not managed to escape, but the sword qi had already pierced the sky.

Fu Qingjin closed his eyes. As the sun shifted overhead, the streak of sunlight vanished before long.

Fu Qingjin snapped his eyes open. First of all, the person was not particularly powerful, below the second heavenly tribulation at the very least. Otherwise, he would have been able to suppress the Soaring Dragon sword before it could emit sword qi. Second of all, the person should have been a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Daemon Generals could not open sumeru rings. Moreover, he should have been rather powerful, as stopping the Soaring Dragon sword was anything but easy.

Only one question remained. Did this person obtain the sumeru ring through a coincidence, or was he connected to the Soaring Dragon Elder's death?

There were approximately a hundred Foundation Establishment cultivators in the Clear River prefecture. All he had to do was investigate where they were when the Soaring Dragon sword emerged. Then, he could use a process of elimination, and he would definitely be able to find some clues.

There were no absolute hermits among cultivators. Human life was limited and people could be found no matter where they hid, especially with Foundation Establishment cultivators.

Fu Qingjin made his way out of the cave as his eyes flickered with cold light. He had to retrieve the sumeru ring and the Soaring Dragon sword no matter what!

Near the shore of the Lake of Dragons and Snakes, within the ripping reeds, Xiao An opened her hand, and the sumeru ring flashed. She thought about something before tossing the sumeru ring into her mouth and swallowing it with a gulp.

"Is it just you?" At this moment, Qian Rongzhi arrived by striding on the water, looking around.

Xiao An nodded.

"Did he tell you to come find me?"

Xiao An nodded again.

"What's the matter?" Qian Rongzhi was very confused.

"Gathering corpses." Xiao An finally spoke. She took out a pile of spiritual stones. "Here's the remuneration. Don't let a lot of people find out about this."

"Why?" Qian Rongzhi crouched down and propped up her cheeks.

Xiao An stopped talking. She thought back to the cave when she parted with Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan had said, "Xiao An, looks like we can't open this sumeru ring without proper preparation in the near future. I felt that something was amiss earlier. The Sword Collection palace might have discovered our location already from that moment just then."

“From now onwards, we’ll split up. I’ll go find Ru Xin so that she can refine pills for me, while you... you’ll go find Qian Rongzhi and get her to gather corpses for you so that you can continue forging Skull Prayer Beads. Didn’t you say forging eighteen of them will allow you to cast formations? I think it’ll be up to you to kill Bloodshadow.”

Killing either Strongboulder or Bloodshadow required enough strength to make the battle completely one-sided. Otherwise, once he failed, he would not be able to remain among the daemons anymore. Strongboulder was impregnable, while Bloodshadow was as fast as lightning. Both of them were tough bones to chew. If he wanted to guarantee their deaths, he had to possess strength that completely overwhelmed them.

Among all the people that Li Qingshan knew, basically all of them were more trustworthy than Qian Rongzhi. However, there was no one more suitable for this than her. Only a person as meticulous and secretive as her could guarantee complete secrecy when handling this matter. Even Li Qingshan paled in comparison to her in this regard.

However, her nature of constantly acting in her own interests had instead become a safeguard at a time like this. Although Li Qingshan did not necessarily like this nature of her, their cooperation had always resulted in success.

Xiao An said nothing, so Qian Rongzhi just stopped asking. She pushed the pile of spiritual stones back. “I’ll find him when it comes to remuneration. What kind of corpse do you need? Corpse Soldiers and Corpse Generals that have already been refined, or will any do?”

“Any will do... but don’t kill mindlessly.”

“Did he tell you this too? Heh, why would I spend all that effort? The last thing I’d need to do with the current circumstances is kill mindlessly.”

“I’ll bring you to a good place.” Qian Rongzhi smiled.

“He doesn’t want me to be with you.” Xiao An lowered her head.

“Fine then. Sometimes I really want to kill him. Don’t glare at me, I’m just kidding. The weather’s perfect!”

The rippling surface of the Lake of Dragons and Snakes reflected their figures, as if they had been gilded with gold. Qian Rongzhi’s smile seemed to become slightly warmer too.

“Let me rest a little. We’ll set off immediately, we’ll set off immediately.” Qian Rongzhi lay down on the dried grass, resting her head on her arms and shutting her eyes. A gorgeous, little snake winded across her face. It was a strange and terrifying sight to behold, but her face was extremely peaceful.

When Li Qingshan saw Ru Xin again, she was healing the sick in a small city by the mountains. Dressed in white clothes, she smiled warmly as she stood among the people. Wherever her hand passed by, the wounds would all heal, and the diseases would be cured. Everyone knelt on the ground and lowered their heads, constantly referring to her as goddess, bodhisattva, or great immortal.

Her expression became even gentler, and she told them all to stand up. Under the setting sun, a halo seemed to appear on her head, which made her seem noble and pure, just like a goddess.

“Oh great benevolent bodhisattva Ru Xin, my chest hurts. Do you have any medicine for it?” Li Qingshan came up with an idea and withdrew his aura, pushing aside the crowd and going up to her.

Ru Xin heard a familiar voice ring out from behind her. Looking back, her eyes flashed brilliantly, and she smiled. “If your chest hurts, that means you have a wicked heart. The only way to heal it is to dig out the heart and cut away the wicked flesh. However, I can tell that your heart has become wicked through and through. Even immortals won’t be able to save you. You are beyond help.”

“Then I’ll dig it all out and give it to you.” Li Qingshan laughed aloud. After three years, this old acquaintance of his had not changed at all, which was truly a joyous matter.

However, he unintentionally infuriated everyone there with that smart comment of his. In particular, the younger men were filled with indignation. “What are you supposed to be? Why have you come to joke around?” “Don’t let him escape! Beat him up!”

An old man rushed over and threw a punch at Li Qingshan, treating Li Qingshan as a rascal. Li Qingshan tilted his head and dodged, but he did not fight back. With his current strength, a slight movement could kill a whole swathe of people.

Ru Xin burst out laughing. Not only did she withhold from explaining, but she even said, “Thank you all for upholding justice and fighting for me.”

“Move side! I’m her husband!” Li Qingshan roared out, immediately stunning the entire crowd. Afterwards, he grabbed Ru Xin and pulled her out.

Ru Xin did not put up a fight. She clasped her hands at everyone with a smile, allowing him to drag her away.

Everyone was stunned. In particular, the younger men were all ashen. Their hearts were broken. She actually had a husband!

It was a small city, but actually it was more like a large town. There were grey tiles and whitewashed walls, with a small stream flowing through the place and leafy neighbourhoods.

Li Qingshan dragged Ru Xin to a quiet pavilion. To one side was the flowing stream and to the other were houses with wisps of smoke rising up slowly from the chimneys. Looking up, the entire city was smoking from its chimneys.

Ru Xin smiled. “My dear husband, it’s time for you to let go!”

“Your dear husband is reluctant to.” Li Qingshan thought of a smart remark and teased her.

“If you’re reluctant to, then break it off with the girl from the Han family. Otherwise, I’d have to explain everything to her.”

“Looks like fate just opposes us being together.” Li Qingshan let go and shrugged.

“You’ve established a foundation too? Sigh, I originally wanted to show you the power of a Foundation Establishment cultivator and give you a fierce beating so that you cough up your remaining Blue Butterfly flowers. Looks like I won’t be able to do that now.” Ru Xin rubbed her wrist. Her beautiful pupils slanted slightly as she smiled widely.

"I'm very tempted to try that. How's it? Foundation Establishment feels great, right? You'll have to thank me for that." Li Qingshan sat on a bench in the pavilion by the stream.

"That makes two of us." Ru Xin sat down beside him.

"I heard you've been serving as a roaming doctor ever since you emerged from seclusion, healing regular people. To be honest, it's made me look at you in a new light."

"I'm just completing the missions from the academy." Ru Xin smiled slightly, giving an explanation.

As it turned out, the consequences of war were not as simple as daemons massacring cities. Corpses constantly caused plagues. If it were not for the work of the disciples of the school of Medicine, probably even more people would die of disease than to the jaws and claws of daemons.

"And it's not just that simple. Bandits are running amok right now. Many people are using the chaos to pillage and plunder. They're even more vicious than daemons. The schools of Confucianism and Legalism have sent out many disciples to maintain stability in the various regions. They're in even more danger than I am. Creatures like people really love to kill one another!" Ru Xin sighed slightly as her smile faded.

"You seem slightly melancholic?" Li Qingshan studied Ru Xin in interest. He had noticed that her gaze darted about, clearly thinking about something. Even when the Academy of the Hundred Schools was attacked by the White Lotus cult and suffered numerous losses, she had never behaved like that.

"What, have I enchanted you? You better go break it off with the girl from the Han family quickly!" Ru Xin stroked her hair and smiled and spoke just like before.

"Enough joking around. Do you still have time to refine pills?"

Li Qingshan stated his reason for finding her. Just as Ru Xin considered his request, a bare-footed girl with her hair tied up in buns ran over. She shoved an apple into Ru Xin's hand. "Big sister, I picked this from the mountains. Thank you for curing my dad."

"Oh, what a good girl. It's going to rain soon, so you better hurry back and help your mother with the laundry!" Ru Xin smiled and rubbed the girl's head, biting into the apple with a crisp crunch.

The girl answered her and scuttled off. She called out from afar, "It's going to rain! Bring the clothes inside!"

Ru Xin spat out the apple flesh in her mouth before casually tossing the apple behind her.

"Why'd you throw it away? That's someone's good will after all." Li Qingshan caught the apple. The bite mark on there was neat, which only demonstrated how perfect her teeth were.

"Obviously because it's disgusting. I've saved the person, I've accepted her good will, and I've eaten the apple. There's no need to torture my mouth any further." Ru Xin suddenly said mischievously, "Don't tell you saw me take a bite and you wanted to..."

Before Ru Xin could finish, she heard a plop. The apple landed in the water and floated away.



Li Qingshan patted his hands. "How did you know it's going to rain? Your affinity is wood, if I recall correctly!" There were clouds in the sky, but it was still sunny. He too could sense the gathering and variation of the moisture in the air, but he was still unable to say with certainty that it would rain.

"It's just an offhand remark. Do you want to gamble a True Spirit pill on it? If I win, we'll set off immediately. I've created a new dwelling, so I'll take you there and show you around."

"Can I not gamble?"

However, before long, the sky became shrouded by dark clouds and autumn rain descended. Ru Xin extended her hand craftily, like her scheme had just succeeded.

"Let's go!" Li Qingshan placed a True Spirit pill in her hand.

The rain became heavier, forming a curtain outside the pavilion.

"There's something wrong with the rain." Ru Xin frowned and gazed at the mountains to the west.

"There's daemon qi!"

Li Qingshan sensed it too. The rolling daemon qi in the distance surged into the clouds. At the same time, a rumble rang out in the distance, growing closer and closer.

The two of them arrived at the top of the mountain and saw a yellow, muddy flow suck up loose rock and branches, howling as it rushed over.

A flash flood!

### **Chapter 425 - Ru Xin's True Form**

The flash flood raged towards the small city. It was impossible for the daemon qi it contained to fool Li Qingshan and Ru Xin's senses. This was not a natural disaster, but a daemonic disaster. They probably only had a moment before the flood swallowed the city, reducing it to a land of water. The entire city of living people would probably be decimated.

Li Qingshan said, "Let's stop the flood first!"

Ru Xin extended her hand and waved it. Verdant leaves expanded to the size of doors and scattered, forming a dam in the flood's path.

"Do you really think you can stop me with your puny tricks?" A sneer rang out from afar. A strange catfish swam in the muddy flow. Its wide, pitch-black back seemed like an isle. Surprisingly, it was a Daemon General. Shadows flickered about in the water, hiding many daemon soldiers, driving the flood together.

The pouring rain all gathered towards the flood, making the flood even more powerful. It smashed through the dam of green leaves violently.

The residents of the city heard the disturbance, and all of them emerged from their homes to investigate, only to be met with this shocking sight. A dragon's roar rose up, going from soft to resonant. At the same time, a crystalline water dragon several dozen meters long condensed from the sky full of rain. It rushed down, slamming towards the strange catfish that was behind the flood.

This was Li Qingshan's first time using a technique as a Foundation Establishment cultivator. It was so effective that even he himself was taken aback.

The catfish's colossal, pitch-black body suddenly leapt out of the water, slapping apart the water dragon with its tail. It used the water to make the flood even more violent. Containing colossal boulders, it flowed downwards like thousands of horses freed from their reins.

The strange catfish made use of its geographical and environmental advantage, not in hopes of killing the two of them, but in hopes of killing off the entire city. This was no longer something Foundation Establishment cultivators could stop.

Li Qingshan wanted to fly down and use his spirit turtle's daemon core to suppress the flood. He hoped that Ru Xin would be careless, and she would fail to notice this strange ability of his. However, Ru Xin ended up saying, "I'll go stop the flood. You go kill the daemon!"

"What? How are you supposed to stop it?"

Before Li Qingshan could even finish his question, Ru Xin had already flown down. As she watched the roaring flood grow closer in the valley, her eyes suddenly became completely blue, like a peaceful lake. At the same time, her drifting hair became a light blue, while her skin seemed to become translucent like water. She leapt into the flood.

"Shut up and get going!" Ru Xin rose up in the water, surrounded in clear water over a dozen meters tall in the shape of the top half of her body. She unfurled her arms and caught the flood. The water seemed to turn into black threads, scattering in the drizzle.

Despite his astonishment, Li Qingshan took a step forward, and turbulent waves rose up below his feet. When he took another step, he had already reached several hundred meters away. The rain in the air pulsed with the waves of air he gave off as he directly plunged into the flood.

Ocean Wielding—The Rising Tide Form.

Immediately, the spiritual qi in his sea of qi swelled up like the tides of the ocean, continuously with an unstoppable aura. Originally, Li Qingshan could not use this move when he had not practised the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, so now that he used it, it actually filled him with indescribable delight. Without further thought, he struck out with a palm strike.

Bang! The turbid waves parted, and the catfish Daemon General slipped away, but the other aquatic daemons that supported its attack were not so fortunate. They were sent flying despite not receiving the brunt of the attack, dying then and there.

Li Qingshan dove into the flood headfirst and was immediately met with the catfish's huge, toothy mouth, and it swallowed him in a single gulp. The strange catfish was stunned. It originally wanted to chew Li Qingshan to pieces, but Li Qingshan had thrown himself into its belly, so it smiled viciously instead. Its stomach fluids could dissolve even metal.

Suddenly, a sharp pain appeared in its belly. The strange catfish tossed and turned violently in the flood. Not only had it failed to digest Li Qingshan, but Li Qingshan had made a mess inside it. Suddenly, a figure burst out, and it was no other than Li Qingshan. He clutched a daemon core that shone with faint, blue light. It trembled constantly, but it was unable to break free.

The catfish knew that it was unfortunate enough to have run into a powerful opponent. It yelled out, "I'll take you down with me!" With that, it tried to blow up its daemon core, but a huge, pitch-black hand suddenly pressed down on its head, gripping it firmly. The hand then tightened and crushed it to pulp before tossing everything into a hundred treasures pouch, guts and all.

Li Qingshan's eyes grew scarlet. He scanned around and silenced all the remaining daemons by finishing them off. He obtained seven or eight daemon cores and over a dozen corpses, all of which he stowed away in his hundred treasures pouch.

Downstream, Ru Xin immediately felt the pressure on her lessen, but even without the control of daemon qi, the flood had already developed properly. Combined with the pouring rain, the flood grew to a wall of water over a dozen meters tall. Just the sight of it was enough to strike fear into people's hearts.

Even when Ru Xin used her other ability, it was extremely difficult. She was gradually giving way, while the "water Ru Xin" she had conjured also showed signs of collapse.

In the mountain city, there were no longer any people who still paid attention to this. Every single one of them had grown ashen from panic, kneeling on the ground, praying with sincerity, and calling out for help. To Ru Xin, these cries and calls seemed to be right by her ear, which made her smile bitterly inside. It's useless even if you beg me. I'm not an actual supernatural being after all. I'm just a mere cultivator who's just set off on the path of cultivation.

She had never thought she would still be so powerless even when she exposed herself before him.

The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas!

Li Qingshan descended from above, landing towards the front of the flood. The raging waters immediately settled down, but the danger still lingered. The wall of water continued to rise. If this continued, it would directly flatten the entire city like a tsunami.

But in that moment, Li Qingshan seemed to have forgotten about all of this. He stared straight at Ru Xin. Only now could he see her true form clearly. Not only had her eyes changed in colour, but a pair of blue fins had sprouted behind her ears. There were a pair of even larger fins on her back, transparent like silk and moving around as freely as wings. Below her waist, her beautiful legs had turned into an azure fishtail, swaying elegantly in the water.

"Have you stared enough? If you have, help me out!" Ru Xin said in irritation.

"Alright then! Get out of the way!" Li Qingshan smiled, like a child who had just learnt the secret of an adult, which Ru Xin found to be extremely irritating. Without saying anything else, she moved to one side.

The wall of water immediately collapsed. When the people of the city saw this, cries rose up from everywhere. They fell back on their bottom as their legs became jelly. However, all they saw was the gushing water swirling upwards towards the sky.

Li Qingshan's arms constantly whirled around, unleashing the Vortex Form as the spirit turtle's daemon core in his body glowed brilliantly. He flew high into the air.

Now that the strange catfish had been slain, the dark clouds had dispersed, allowing the sun to emerge. Sunlight scattered on the swirling river that filled the sky, leaving everyone dumbfounded.

With a powerful swing, he scattered the water like a splash of ink on paper. In that instant, the river in the sky drained away and shattered in the air, actually raining cats and dogs. It left all the people in the city drenched.

The water spray surged, leaving behind a rainbow across the city. Cheers rang out everywhere.

Li Qingshan returned to the valley between the two mountains, and Ru Xin had already transformed back. She was so relaxed that she behaved like nothing had happened at all.

Li Qingshan was unable to hold back his curiosity. He immediately asked, "You're merfolk?"

Ru Xin answered with a question, "Even if regular people primarily cultivate the water element, how can they possess so much control over water?"

#### **Chapter 426 - The Eight Gates of Golden Locks, the Illusory Water of Invisibility**

"That's because I'm talented," Li Qingshan laughed loudly. A rainbow stretched over behind him as the sunlight shone resplendently.

"I'm not different then," Ru Xin said in an exasperated manner. "If you want me to refine pills, then keep your mouth shut." Leaping up, she stepped onto a verdant leaf and drifted off in the wind.

Li Qingshan followed behind her on a cloud, unable to help himself as he studied her back. Merfolk were also one of the otherfolk. They resided in water, mainly around the shore of the South sea. They were beautiful and good at singing, able to spin water into silk, and their tears could become pearls.

The Mist province was much larger than the Green province. He was unable to imagine how she had managed to traverse almost fifty thousand kilometers to settle down here. After seeing her true form, she had only become even more mysterious.

"Alright, alright. I'm half-Merfolk. What do you think of it?" Ru Xin was unable to put up with Li Qingshan's gaze anymore, so she suddenly stopped the verdant leaf and spoke up in annoyance.

"Nothing really. Actually, you were quite beautiful just then, especially your eyes," Li Qingshan said sincerely. Perhaps because they condensed the essence of nature, there were many races of otherfolk known for their beauty, while the Merfolk were among the most beautiful. It was said that their eyes possessed a mysterious power, and direct eye contact had to be avoided, or it could enchant people.

Ru Xin's heart skipped a beat. She found Li Qingshan to be very strange. When regular people saw otherfolk, they would either be shocked and surprised or they would be repulsed. He did not react like that at all, which made her feel closer to him. Her nervousness and anxiety settled down. She pointed at her eyes with a smile. "The Condensed Jade pearls refined from my eyes are priceless."

Li Qingshan was taken aback before sneering. "And I had thought it was something impressive. There's something on me that's worth much more than your pair of beads."

Ru Xin had originally mentioned it to test him, but she never expected him to get competitive instead. She had no idea on how to respond. She was rather curious about what he was talking about, but the phrase “beads down below” suddenly crossed her mind, which made her take off.

Li Qingshan was perplexed. I’m talking about my daemon core. What were you thinking of?

A hundred and fifty kilometers south-west of Clear River city were a few dozen mountains that rose and fell. They were known as the Chain mountains. They were not exactly a blessed land, but spiritual qi was abundant, which made it a good place to cultivate.

The two of them moved through the enshrouding mist and landed on a cliff face. Ru Xin waved her hand, and the scenery before them twisted, revealing the entrance to a dwelling. Two large words were engraved above, “Ru Xin”.

Li Qingshan smiled. Boldly labelling the entrance with her own name really did suit her.

“Please, fellow Li.” Ru Xin made a gesture for him to come in.

The cave was complete with stone tables and chairs. Everything was arranged neatly and elegantly in nature, without a speck of dust. The curling incense only made the place even more otherworldly.

Ru Xin said, “Do you want tea? If you don’t, I’m not going to bother. You’re not having any, right?”

Li Qingshan smiled. “I’ll have some.”

As Ru Xin prepared the tea, Li Qingshan did not hold back and inspected the entire place, in and out. Suddenly, he heard a clatter in the front room, and Ru Xin yelled out, “Li Qingshan, get your ass over for your tea.”

Li Qingshan returned to the room, picked up the tea cup, and took a small sip. He said slowly, “This place might be peaceful and quiet, but if a daemon attacks, it’ll be bad.”

“The formations can last for a while and sending a distress signal to the academy is very convenient too. Moreover, it’s not like I’m made out of paper, completely useless. Let’s not talk about this. Take out the remaining Blue Butterfly flowers. With my current ability, refining a few True Spirit pills won’t take very long at all.” Ru Xin brushed him off.

Li Qingshan placed down the tea cup and opened his hundred treasures pouch. Blue Butterfly flowers fluttered out rapidly, but that was not the end of it. Then he took out the spiritual herbs he had collected underground one by one.

“Thousand-year Dark Blood ginseng, thousand-year milkvetch...” Ru Xin was taken aback as she appraised the spiritual herbs one by one. Her eyes lit up. She had refined pills for so long, so she had seen quite a large variety of spiritual herbs. However, all of these spiritual herbs were either millenium-old or centuries-old. Every single one of them were spiritual herbs people could only dream of, yet Li Qingshan had pulled them out like vegetables. She had even forgotten how to speak for a moment.

“Alright, just these for now.”

“Fellow Li, please have some tea.” Ru Xin smiled softly and lifted up the tea cup.

“Right here!” Li Qingshan snorted and opened his mouth.

“Sigh, to think you’d actually believe me.” Ru Xin threw the cup on the table before picking up the spiritual herbs and carefully examining them. “Where did you get all these spiritual... Forget it. Heh, we’re rich. Looks like my two years of doing good hasn’t gone to waste.”

The two of them arrived in the alchemy room. Ru Xin took out the Crystal Resin cauldron before taking out various spiritual herbs. She immediately began refining.

Li Qingshan backed out silently. Ru Xin looked back. “Where are you going?”

“I’m off to set up a dwelling.”

Li Qingshan had plans to set up a dwelling a long time ago. There were too many prying eyes in the academy, which really made cultivation inconvenient. It was even more so when it came to his daemon cultivation. After seeing Ru Xin’s dwelling today, he made up his mind.

“You’re not going to watch this time?”

“I’m too busy. No time.”

“Don’t blame me if any pills go missing.”

“That’s fine. I’ll just kill the donkey once it’s done its job. Even you won’t be able to escape.” Li Qingshan waved his hand without even looking back.

Ru Xin was slightly surprised as she quipped, “You’re the donkey.” Li Qingshan had already made his way out of the dwelling, and his laughter gradually vanished. Originally, she thought he would spend some time with her refining pills, and it would be rather troublesome, but she never expected him to leave so eagerly, which instead made her feel rather lonely.

She suddenly smiled. He was clearly so deeply shrouded with mysteries, yet she never doubted him and thought he would actually turn against her and show no mercy. Even just thirty percent of the pills refined from these spiritual herbs were enough for any two cultivation sects to turn against each other and declare war.

She shook her head and dismissed these thoughts. Sitting with her legs crossed, she activated the Crystal Resin cauldron and began refining pills.

Li Qingshan returned to the academy and notified Liu Chuanfeng about how he wanted to set up a dwelling outside. Afterwards, he found Xiao An. “Have you already spoken with Qian Rongzhi?”

“Yep. She’s already gathered around seventy or eighty thousand.”

“So quickly?” Li Qingshan was surprised.

As it turned out, collecting corpses was not all that Qian Rongzhi did during these years. She had done plenty of backstabbing and killing too. She had accumulated forty or fifty Corpse Soldiers within her possession alone, and they were all elites that had been carefully refined. She sold off all the other corpses of lower quality, or she probably would have possessed a hundred and ten or twenty thousand

corpses. And, she was well acquainted in the academy, so she could gather seventy or eighty thousand just by asking around, which she passed onto Xiao An for now.

“She didn’t accept the spiritual stones. She said she would find you instead.”

“That works too.” Li Qingshan rubbed Xiao An’s head. He thought about how it really had been a correct decision to leave this matter to her. “Let’s go set up a dwelling!”

“A dwelling?”

“Our home.”

“Home.” Xiao An repeated softly. Her heart created by the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty suddenly heated up. She nodded firmly. “Alright!”

Just as the two of them were about to leave, Hua Chengzan and Han Tieyi arrived together. One of them possessed a picturesque appearance, as handsome as ever, while the other had a pair of straight eyebrows and twinkling eyes, radiating with valiance. After undergoing the heavenly tribulation, they became even more enchanting. As they stood together, they were like two perfect pieces of jade.

Li Qingshan went up to receive them. “What brought you here?”

“Qingshan, I heard you wanted to set up a dwelling. Do you need our help?” Hua Chengzan said enthusiastically. Han Tieyi never liked talking, so he just stood there coldly.

“There’s no need. Isn’t it just digging out a cave?”

“You can’t say that. You can’t go without formations if you want to set up a dwelling. This Eight Gates Formation of Golden Locks might not be the best formation, but it should be enough to protect your dwelling. You can call it a gift for succeeding with Foundation Establishment.” Hua Chengzan was just speaking modestly. The Eight Gates Formation of Golden Locks cost tens of thousand spiritual stones at the very least. Even Foundation Establishment cultivators would struggle to destroy it if they were alone. Moreover, it could lock in spiritual qi, such that even regular mountains would become fantastic places to cultivate as time went on.

Li Qingshan was touched. He accepted the entire set of formation discs and banners. Right now, he did not exactly lack a few tens of thousand spiritual stones, but all of it came from unknown sources. If he spent them carelessly, it was very easy for him to draw suspicion. Hua Chengzan’s formation was basically giving him exactly what he needed when he needed it, but there was nothing he could give back in return. Everything he carried on him was stolen goods.

Suddenly, he thought of something. He took out the strange catfish’s daemon core that he had just obtained from his hundred treasures pouch. “It would be rude of me to not reciprocate. Please take this.”

Hua Chengzan and Han Tieyi’s gazes were drawn over. Hua Chengzan accepted the daemon core and said in surprise, “This is a Daemon General’s daemon core. Where did you get this?”

Li Qingshan told him the entire story. Han Tieyi’s eyes flashed as he stared at him. Hua Chengzan said, “I’ve heard about this daemon too. It’s already flooded many cities and towns. I never thought it would die to your hands.”

Apart from gift-giving, he had come to persuade Li Qingshan to not cultivate single-mindedly and forget about the matters of the academy and the Hawkwolf Guard, but never did he expect him to kill a Daemon General right off the bat, so what else could he say? Even if he entered seclusion for another year or two, no one could criticise him.

And, the value of the daemon core surpassed the worth of the Eight Gates Formation of the Golden Locks. He fiddled around with it before returning it to Li Qingshan. "I haven't come to make an exchange, so why would I want your daemon core? If you don't have a use for it, I can purchase it from you, but you cultivate the water element, and the daemon core's the water element too, so it suits you the most! You better keep it for yourself!"

Li Qingshan was actually very reluctant to give it away too. Since Hua Chengzan had said that, he just obliged and stowed the daemon core away. As long as his cultivation could increase, did he have to worry about not being able to pay him back?

"Brother-in-law, where's your gift?" Li Qingshan teased.

Sure enough, Han Tiewei rummaged through his hundred treasures pouch and seemed to pull out something, but his hands were empty.

Li Qingshan squinted his eyes. Only after careful observation did he make out a transparent sword around a meter long. Although it did not glow at all, Li Qingshan could clearly sense it was a supreme grade spiritual artifact.

Hua Chengzan smiled. "This Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility comes from general Han's personal collection. When you use it, both the wielder and the sword can turn invisible, making it a perfect weapon for secret assassinations. He's basically accepting you as his son-in-law, Qingshan."

"My father's never said that," Han Tiewei said. Hua Chengzan ignored him and asked, "Where do you plan on setting up your dwelling?"

"The Chain mountains."

"Isn't that..." Hua Chengzan shut his mouth and glanced at Han Tiewei.

Han Tiewei was just about to pass the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility to Li Qingshan when he suddenly tightened his grip and pulled it back. Li Qingshan grabbed his arm. "Brother-in-law, how can you take back something you've given out? This is a gift from my dear father-in-law."

Han Tiewei tried to pull his hand back, but it did not even budge. He was secretly surprised. What strength!

Li Qingshan smiled. "Don't mess around. Don't forget, you still owe me a punch!"

"Come get it!" Han Tiewei threw a punch. He had wanted to clash against Li Qingshan since a long time ago.

#### **Chapter 427 - Defeating Tiewei with Cloud Parting, Chu Tian's Killing Intent Rises**

"We're already married, so how can I bring myself to hit you?" Li Qingshan dodged with a smile.



“What do other people have to do with matters between us?” Han Tiewei took a step and chased after him, wielding his finger as a blade and swinging down viciously.

“If that’s the case, I’m not holding back! Cloud Parting Form!” Li Qingshan brought his palms together and pushed them forward in an ordinary manner. Han Tiewei’s face changed as he felt like a huge tsunami was slamming towards him. It completely drowned out the sky, making it impossible to dodge.

Swish! A wheel of blue light whistled past, making the bamboo sway and surge in waves.

Hua Chengzan’s clothes were ruffled. He secretly thought in admiration, Qingshan has only gone through the heavenly tribulation recently, yet his control over spiritual qi is already so meticulous, and it possesses tremendous power too. Taking him head on probably isn’t a good plan. Sure enough, Han Tiewei was like a floating boat within the surging waves, drifting back several dozen meters and landing gently, but he was completely unscathed. He pushed off his feet again and lunged towards Li Qingshan.

“Cloud Parting Form.” Li Qingshan pushed out his hands calmly again. With the support of the tremendous spiritual qi cultivated by the Arts of the Boundless Ocean and the spirit turtle’s daemon core assisting him in mobilising the spiritual qi of the world, it basically cost him nothing to use the Cloud Parting Form.

All Han Tiewei could do was retreat again. He had personally handed the Arts of the Boundless Ocean to Li Qingshan, so he understood exactly what it was about. The greatest highlight of the cultivation method was its boundlessness and vastness. For some reason, this advantage seemed especially prominent when Li Qingshan used it. When he had first returned after establishing a foundation, no one had thought such a tremendous aura would belong to a cultivator who had broken through to Foundation Establishment recently.

In short, he could not afford to take him head-on. All he could do was search for an opportunity and finish him off in a single strike.

However, Li Qingshan seemed to fall in love with this move. Regardless of what Han Tiewei unleashed, he remained standing exactly where he was. In the blink of an eye, he had already pushed out over a dozen Cloud Parting Forms.

Han Tiewei’s battle skills were wide-reaching and flexible, but he happened to be helpless against Li Qingshan.

Originally, he had wanted to wait for Li Qingshan to deplete all his spiritual qi and become exhausted, but he never expected his attacks to grow smoother and more vigorous over time. Han Tiewei had been forced back over a dozen times. He had not even managed to touch Li Qingshan’s clothes.

Hua Chengzan burst out laughing. “Qingshan, you shouldn’t bully an honest person.”

Li Qingshan even had the effort to spare to converse with Hua Chengzan. “This is called dominating with a single move. You obviously use whatever move that’s effective on the battlefield. How can you call this bullying?”

Even with Han Tiewei’s mental fortitude, he cursed inside out of anger. His face became even colder. He took a step and the tiling below shattered. At the same time, he drew his weapon. The tassel on the

spear danced like fire as he merged with the spear, striking out like a dragon in an attempt to forcefully destroy Li Qingshan's Cloud Parting Form.

"Oh my, the brother-in-law's angry," Li Qingshan said before pushing out with his hands again. Han Tiewi raised an eyebrow, but he was not met with a cloud-parting tsunami. His spear thrust struck nothing. When he looked at Li Qingshan's face again, he saw a strange smile rise up. Oh no, I've fallen for this bastard's ploy! He wanted to alter his attack, but it was already too late. Li Qingshan extended his right hand and grabbed him, unleashing the Vortex Form and went from pushing to pulling. Han Tiewi's figure shifted to the side slightly, and Li Qingshan's left fist whistled over.

A clash between the powerful only depended on a single moment.

The spear in Han Tiewi's hands suddenly became as flexible as a snake. With a twist and turn, it stabbed directly towards Li Qingshan's heart.

Li Qingshan pulled his fist back and retreated, taking the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility with him. He drifted away with Xiao An as his laughter rang out from the cloud in the distance. "Since we're one family, I'll forget about this punch. Li'l bro Tiewi, if you run into any trouble in the future, feel free to come find your brother-in-law! Haha!"

"This guy... Tiewi, are you fine? That's a draw." Hua Chengzan saw Han Tiewi standing silently with his spear and asked in concern.

"It's not a draw. It was close, but I lost." Han Tiewi gazed at the sky and rubbed his face that had almost been struck. Who knew what he was thinking about.

"Victory and defeat is commonplace in the school of the Military. Moreover, when it comes to a real life-or-death struggle, you would have never allowed the enemy to get in your head so easily. I know that towards Ru Xin, you feel..."

"Stop talking. I'm not you," Han Tiewi interrupted him coldly. It was human nature for people to fall in love, but not everyone had to become blinded, lost and grief-stricken over the word of love.

"Alright, alright. You're both real men with hearts of steel. Only I am a sentimental little girl." Hua Chengzan lamented as he rubbed his face.

Even Han Tiewi could not help but curl his lips at this sight as his eyes hid a smile. His small emotional knot vanished.

"Sir, Fu Qingjin of the Daemon Suppression alliance is outside. He wishes to see you. He wants to ask about a few things." A legalist disciple reported.

Hua Chengzan had already stopped joking around. He exchanged glances with Han Tiewi. They both wondered about the same question, "What's brought him here?"

Just around when Li Qingshan left the academy, he ran into an extremely familiar figure. Fu Qingjin stood with his arms crossed and his head tilted back, looking at the sky. He lowered his head back down and glanced past Li Qingshan indifferently.

Li Qingshan frowned, brushing past him on his cloud, but he heard Fu Qingjin say, "Please hold on, fellow cultivator." In the blink of an eye, he arrived before him.

“What’s the matter?”

“I just wanted to ask where you were yesterday,” Fu Qingjin said slowly.

“Why’re you asking that?” Li Qingshan immediately became alert. Just as he had expected, the appearance of the Soaring Dragon sword had left behind traces, which was why the spirit turtle’s daemon core had warned him.

“Nothing really. I’m just asking?” Fu Qingjin smiled warmly in an extremely patient manner, even nodding towards Xiao An. However, his courtesy was more like the courtesy that a modest and good-natured king would show to his subordinates. He had good intentions, but it was unsettling.

Even if they felt displeased, regular cultivators would still be forced to show some respect and answer him. However, the two of them did not get along too well. Xiao An completely ignored him, while Li Qingshan said, “I’ll be wherever I want to be. What’s it got to do with you?” He directly sailed off on his cloud.

Fu Qingjin did not stop him, nor did he chase after him. He just watched him leave as he pondered to himself. At this moment, Hua Chengzan received the news and came to receive him. Fu Qingjin asked, “May I ask who the person that just left is? How come I’ve never seen him before?”

Hua Chengzan was slightly surprised, confused by what his intentions were. He gave him a short introduction to Li Qingshan.

In the right hand behind Fu Qingjin—hidden in his sleeve—was a curved, slender horn. He thought to himself, The truth.

Another person appeared on his large, mental list of suspects, Li Qingshan.

Fu Qingjin did not chase after him, which made Li Qingshan even more alert. This person is much more shrewd than the three elders.

Flying for a little longer, a bright streak of five-coloured light rushed over from below. Chu Tian bellowed out, “Li Qingshan, so what if you’ve reached Foundation Establishment? Are you bold enough to face me and test yourself against my Palm of the Five Elements?”

Li Qingshan sighed. Only if my enemies could be as “adorable” as the one before me. He smiled as a result. “Alright. If I won’t even smack a face offered up to me, why did I establish a foundation at all?”

Ever since the meeting last time, Chu Tian had become pent up with fury. Coupled with hearing how Li Qingshan had actually gone to find Ru Xin, even wanting to set up his dwelling in the Chain mountains, he basically flew into a rage. This was basically no different from becoming a couple.

He had waited a very long time for this. The land below was uninhabited and sparse with trees. If he used that here, no one would know what had happened. His killing intent suddenly swelled.

## **Chapter 428 - Qing Xiao**

Li Qingshan sensed the killing intent and raised an eyebrow. Looks like I need to end it all today! Chu Tian, oh Chu Tian. I don’t have any particularly great grievances with you, but with the hostility you’ve shown, you can’t blame me for showing no mercy.

True qi of the five elements shone brightly and condensed into a large hand above Chu Tian's head. However, his mind gradually settled as he stared at Li Qingshan coldly. He began to recall the various times he had been humiliated by him. Li Qingshan, today's the day you die.

Li Qingshan exchanged glances with Xiao An. Even a lion uses its full strength to catch a rabbit, so let's leave out all the nonsense later. We'll work together and kill him instantly, just in case he makes more trouble in the future. Xiao An agreed, clenching the Skull Prayer Beads.

The setting sun cast their shadows on the sparse forest below. Their eyes clashed. A battle to the death could break out at any time.

Li Qingshan frowned and glanced at the distance, rubbing Xiao An's head and studying Chu Tian curiously. Did fate really protect him because he was a Reincarnated Celestial?

"Chu Tian, what are you doing?" Wei Yangsheng flew over quickly and called out loudly from afar.

Chu Tian arrived here for an ambush as soon as he heard how Li Qingshan wanted to set up a dwelling. He thought he had been secretive, but his face always gave away what he was thinking. Radiating with murderousness and sneering every now and then, anyone could tell there was something wrong with him. The moment Chu Tian left the academy, confucian disciples reported this silently to Wei Yangsheng.

"School leader, what brings you here?" Chu Tian's expression changed as he stowed the item away again. He was afraid to unleash it.

"Junior brother Li, what are you doing?" Wei Yangsheng ignored Chu Tian. He greeted and asked Li Qingshan.

"Chu Tian is challenging me. Don't stop him, senior brother. I'd like to see what he's capable of," Li Qingshan said. He could also sense something amiss. Chu Tian was arrogant, but he was not actually stupid after all. Was he unable to tell the difference between their strength? Since he was bold enough to challenge him, he definitely possessed some kind of powerful trump card.

"Chu Tian, is this true?" Wei Yangsheng asked in surprise. Just who was Li Qingshan? Let alone a Qi Practitioner, even Wei Yangsheng himself had no confidence in being able to defeat him. Challenge him? Are you sick of living? You've even chosen such a remote location. If Li Qingshan gets carried away with his murderousness, do you really think you'll survive?

"School leader, leave me alone! This is a matter between us!" Chu Tian waved his hand in annoyance.

Wei Yangshen was angered by how he lashed out. So much for worrying about your safety and rushing over in such a hurry, yet you're not even going to appreciate it, finding me annoying instead. "Alright then. Chu Tian, your cultivation is outstanding, so I'm going to leave you alone. I'll just watch from here and see how you'll achieve victory. Just wait for my celebratory applause." He backed away to one side.

"Don't get angry, senior brother." Li Qingshan smiled. He knew Wei Yangsheng remained here because he still did not want Chu Tian to suffer too much. However, Chu Tian right now was someone of absolutely no importance to him. It did not matter even if he left him alive. There was still ample time ahead.

Chu Tian frowned and became frantic. His fist tightened before he loosened it again. In front of Wei Yangsheng, he was unable to use that item. Surely he could not kill Wei Yangsheng as well? They had spent so many years together, so he did become somewhat attached to him. His anger had yet to reach the point where he would even turn against his friends. However, if he did not use that, how was he supposed to win?

If he forfeited like this, it would be embarrassing, so he still clung onto a small sliver of hope. He had basically perfected his true qi of the five elements now. If he unleashed the Protection of the Five Elements, he was capable of keeping himself safe even when he faced Foundation Establishment cultivators. Once he returned, he could say that Li Qingshan was helpless against him even after reaching Foundation Establishment, and it would still be his victory.

Li Qingshan cut right to the chase. He spread out his arms and used the Vortex Form conveniently, swirling the invisible spiritual qi of the world and creating a huge vortex in the blink of an eye. It spun rapidly, unleashing a great suction force and even kicking up a violent breeze. Some of the trees with shallower roots below had even been ripped out of the ground, sucked into the vortex and torn to shreds.

Wei Yangsheng's expression changed slightly as he backed away by another few dozen meters. He thought, Is the Arts of the Boundless Ocean really this powerful? It's fantastic news that the academy has gained such a powerful person, but Chu Tian is probably going to be in for some bad luck. For a moment, he had no idea whether he should be delighted or worried.

Chu Tian was startled. He gritted his teeth and unleashed his true qi of the five elements desperately in an attempt to stabilise himself. However, he was like a fallen leaf in a whirlpool, sucked towards the centre helplessly. Suddenly, he roared out and swung the Palm of the Five Elements violently towards Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan smiled. The spin of the vortex reversed and Chu Tian flew out again, watching helplessly as Li Qingshan grew further and further away. The vortex reversed again, and he was sucked back. This repeated for who knew how many times. All Chu Tian felt was the world spin around him as he became light-headed. He could not even put up a fight.

Foundation Establishment cultivators had always possessed an absolute advantage in power over Qi Practitioners. Chu Tian might have been able to protect himself before regular Foundation Establishment cultivators with his true qi of the five elements, but how could Li Qingshan be compared to a regular Foundation Establishment cultivator?

Li Qingshan simply sat down on the cloud and wielded the spiritual qi of the world, sending Chu Tian wherever he wished. He was completely toying with him.

Wei Yangsheng let out a soft sigh. He wanted to speak up, but he stopped himself. Teaching Chu Tian a lesson would be good too. If a Qi Practitioner had leapt out in front of him and wanted to make trouble, being toyed with would be a gentler fate to suffer.

Chu Tian roared furiously, "Li Qingshan, I'll fuck-"

"You'll what?"

With a flash, Li Qingshan arrived in front of Chu Tian and swung down with his hand. Chu Tian's protective true qi shattered and collapsed.

Bang!

Like a balloon, Chu Tian flew into the remote forest. There was a boom, and the trees trembled. Dust rose up everywhere.

Li Qingshan wanted to pursue, but Wei Yangsheng stopped him and coaxed him. "Junior brother, please just drop the matter. Do it for me. He's learnt his lesson."

Chu Tian leapt up from the crater he had created. He stared at Li Qingshan, completely overcome by fury. "Li Qingshan, you've gone too far!"

Li Qingshan said in surprise, "Weren't you challenging me? What's this got to do with me? Don't tell me you've come specially to cheer me up? Thank you then, I am in a much better mood now."

"Chu Tian, why don't you apologise?" Wei Yangsheng grabbed Chu Tian and shot him a glance.

"You- you- you-" Chu Tian looked at Wei Yangsheng before looking at Li Qingshan. He was clearly hiding a powerful trump card, but he was unable to use it. He felt so frustrated and furious that he actually burst out into tears with a wah.

Li Qingshan was the one who became very embarrassed now. He clasped his hands towards Wei Yangsheng. "Senior brother, I'll be taking my leave first."

Wei Yangsheng was exasperated by Chu Tian. He said earnestly, "Little Tian, we're all from the academy. It's not like he's killed your parents or stolen your wife, so why must you invite humiliation like this? Even if you want to redeem yourself, you'll have to establish a foundation first!"

"Senior brother... if you hadn't... if you hadn't..." Chu Tian choked out between his sobs.

"If I hadn't what?"

"Wah!"

.....

The Hawkwolf Guard of Clear River city was bustling with activity. Hua Chengzan descended from above and stepped in.

"Commander Hua, you've come." The many people all greeted him.

"Yeah, I've come." Hua Chengzan nodded towards them one by one. He made his way up the stairs quickly and entered through the door.

Wang Pushi stood in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows and said without even looking back, "Where is he? Didn't I tell you to bring him back to receive orders?"

Hua Chengzan said, "He said he wanted to set up a dwelling, so I let him go for now."

"You're far too lenient with him. He's reached Foundation Establishment, and he's a Hawkwolf guard. He's a disciple of the academy on top of all of that. He has his responsibilities. What kind of impression is

he giving off if he enters seclusion whenever he wants to and sets up a dwelling whenever he wants to? What would everyone else say?" Wang Pushi turned around and said sternly. Compared to three years ago, his appearance had not changed much. He just seemed slightly more weathered.

"But he just killed a Daemon General."

Wang Pushi was taken aback. "He still can't be permitted to do whatever he likes." However, his tone had softened. Even among the school leaders of the academy, not everyone was capable of killing a Daemon General. Although Li Qingshan did whatever he liked, without any control at all, no one could nitpick what he did. As a matter of fact, they would even praise him.

"Fu Qingjin just came. He asked me where I was yesterday. He seems to be investigating something." Hua Chengzan mulled over the conversation he just had with Fu Qingjin, wanting to deduce something from it. As the leading figure of the Daemon Suppression alliance in the Clear River prefecture, there would be a profound reason regardless of what he did.

"What's he investigating?" Wang Pushi frowned.

"I'm not sure. From his tone, it sounds like someone did something huge yesterday. He also mentioned that he wanted to do something big soon, and he wanted our cooperation. He said it would greatly benefit us too." Hua Chengzan crossed his arms and sank into his thoughts, rubbing his chin with one hand as he tried to guess what Fu Qingjin was thinking.

In the Chain mountains, a white cloud flew around freely between the mountains. Li Qingshan and Xiao An were looking for a suitable place to set up their dwelling. In just a while, they had already toured through the several dozen mountains of various sizes there.

Finally, Li Qingshan chose a mountain. It was not particularly lofty or precipitous, but it did possess some delicate beauty. "Let's get to work!"

"Yep." Xiao An nodded.

They circled around the mountain again and found a natural cave. Li Qingshan condensed the pulses of water in his right hand into a huge drill, and the rock fell to the ground as dust. He expanded the cave, turning it into the entrance of their dwelling.

Li Qingshan ventured deeper. Before long, he had dug out a huge hole in the middle of the mountain. He had basically created the most simple dwelling possible.

In the end, he took out the formation discs and banners and set up the Eight Gates Formation of Golden Locks. He saw eight words and the eight gates flash in order around the mountain, "Resting, Life, Wounding, Obstruction, View, Death, Alarm, Beginning." The eight trigrams circulated around the mountain peak before suddenly stabilising and drooping down. It vanished at the same time, as if it had merged with the mountain. The spiritual qi of the mountain was firmly locked in.

TL: The eight gates comes from the Qimen Dunjia, which is an ancient form of Chinese divination. The "men" in "Qimen" refers to the gates, also known as the eight gates. You may know the eight gates from Naruto, used by Might Guy and Rock Lee, which come from the same origin, but are translated a little differently from their original etymology. I've translated them according to their original etymology

here, so they will differ from Naruto. I'm not going to explain why they're named like this, as that'll take too much time and is not particularly relevant to the story.

Li Qingshan nodded in satisfaction. From that moment onwards, no one could enter the mountain easily unless they had his permission. If he cultivated here, he did not have to worry about his daemon qi leaking out and drawing attention.

Arriving in front of the dwelling, Li Qingshan flattened the rock there with a wave of his hand. He said to Xiao An, "My handwriting is no good, so you do it instead!"

Xiao An bit her lip. The bone sword protruded from her hand. With a few flicks, rock fragments fell down with her beautiful penmanship. Three large, sunken words appeared, "Qing Xiao's Home." Qingshan and Xiao An's home.

"Qing Xiao's Home dwelling. What a strange name. But that doesn't matter. From today onwards, this is our home." Li Qingshan inspected it with crossed arms, radiating with vigour. Xiao An smiled.

The bright moon had just risen, and the moonlight scattered across the autumn mountains. It illuminated a small and a large figure, freezing time.

#### **Chapter 429 - As the Spirit Turtle Wills, the Heavenly Secrets Become Unfathomable**

The dwelling that Li Qingshan had set up was neither elegant nor grand. It could only be described with a single word—big.

Within the spacious centre of the mountain, Li Qingshan took out the daemon core of the strange catfish. The daemon core was of the water element, so the power it contained was perfect for him. He opened his mouth and swallowed the daemon core.

A tremendous energy was unleashed within his body. Although it was not explosive, the power was enough to claim the lives of regular Foundation Establishment cultivators. Li Qingshan used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression, and even then, he struggled slightly to keep it suppressed. His body immediately began to change, rapidly stretching and expanding, reverting to his most primitive form as a daemon.

Tremendous daemon qi directly pierced the mountain, rushing towards the sky. The Eight Gates Formation of Golden Locks immediately came into use, locking in this aura. If he were in the academy, he definitely would have given himself away, but he did not have to worry about that here.

The spirit turtle's daemon core shone brilliantly and revolved rapidly, using everything it had to suppress the energy and gradually absorb the daemon core. Only then did Li Qingshan's figure slowly recover.

Seeing how Li Qingshan would be fine, Xiao An sat down beside him and summoned the Corpse Soldiers. She unleashed the Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration and Pale Flames of Bone Smelting, alternating between the two as she refined a corpse.

Ten days later, a Skull Prayer Bead was completed. Fourteen tiny Skeleton Demons leapt around in the surroundings, as if they were welcoming their new companion.

Li Qingshan's cultivation had reached the most critical juncture too. During the three years of secluded cultivation, he had never stopped practising the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression. Originally, he



thought he could easily break through to the fourth layer of the spirit turtle with the water element daemon core, but only now did he discover that it would not be so easy. Even if he absorbed the entire daemon core, he would still be lacking a little.

This was the essence that a Daemon General had condensed and refined over centuries or millennia! As his cultivation progressed, his daemon core's demand for resources grew at an astonishing pace. If he just sat there and absorbed the spiritual qi of the world, who knew how many years it would take him before he broke through.

Li Qingshan suddenly remembered he had obtained a few daemon cores of lower quality as well when he killed the strange catfish. They were basically all of the water element too, so he gulped all of them down, making up for the final part he was lacking.

In the Sword Collection palace, the white-haired, white-bearded Divining Elder sat with his legs crossed before the map of the nine provinces. The Sword of Divination was placed across his knees as the eight trigrams diagram continued to revolve around the ridge of the sword.

As Fu Qingjin undertook his investigation, the Divining Elder had never stopped searching. A sumeru ring was equivalent to a miniature world. Apart from the owner, no one could find out what was going on in there, let alone sense the Soaring Dragon sword's aura.

The Divining Elder pondered to himself for a while before setting his target to the Soaring Dragon Elder's sumeru ring again. It was difficult to find out about the matters of different worlds, but a "gate" would always remain in this world, at least until the other world was destroyed. Although it would not give off any aura at all, he could still use it to grasp its trace.

A few years ago, the Divining Elder had tried this, but he ended up suffering a backlash, leaving him heavily injured. What injured him was not the black ox himself, but the soul sense he had left behind in the sumeru ring. If it were not for the soul sense, the Sword Collection palace would have sniffed out Li Qingshan already and ripped him to shreds with their divination techniques.

Li Qingshan thought the black ox had already left, but little did he know that the black ox's power had been constantly protecting him throughout these years. And now, with the disappearance of the soul sense, Li Qingshan seemed to turn into a child who had lost his final layer of protection. Not only did he have to survive in this world by depending on himself, but he also had to face enemies well beyond what he could handle right now.

"Rise!" The Divining Elder's hands danced about like a lotus flower, stretching and performing seals with unbelievable speed. The Sword of Divination let out a long thrum and rose up. The tip of the sword pointed down, right over his head.

"One with the Sword!"

The Sword of Divination fell, piercing and melding into the top of the Divining Elder's head. The diagram of yin and yang appeared in the Divining Elder's pitch-black pupils, constantly revolving as he gazed at the map.

In that instance, his gaze seemed to pierce the many mountains and rivers, gazing over the entirety of the Clear River prefecture. He was trying to find the tiny sumeru ring in this land that stretched fifteen hundred kilometers.

He did not need any investigations, any analyses, any questions, or any thoughts. He directly asked fate itself, appealing to the heavens for an answer.

No one knew how long he had wandered in the river of fate. The corner of the Divining Elder's lips suddenly curled in delight. He had finally found it!

It was like finding a ray of sunlight in the darkness. All he had to do next was follow this ray of sunlight and trace it back to its source.

The Divining Elder completely stopped worrying too. During the previous divination, the great disaster had appeared with this ray of sunlight. He had vaguely made out the back of a figure. It did not give off any hostility, nor did it purposefully attack him, but that was the most terrifying part of it all, as its existence alone had made his divination completely collapse.

If it were not for merging with his sword and having the Sword of Divination enduring most of the damage, his sea of consciousness would have almost received a devastating blow. This felt no different from an insect that had actually flown a little too close to the crater of a volcano. The volcano would continue to sputter and surge like before, completely neglecting the existence of the insect, but just a wisp of smoke it produced was enough to kill the insect.

The Divining Elder followed the ray of sunlight and suddenly encountered some interference. It alarmed him, but he calmed down again very soon. It seemed like his target also knew divination, except from the contact earlier, he could tell that his target was weaker than him.

Xiao An, who was refining her Skull Prayer Beads, lurched inside. She frowned slightly and began to practise the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots.

The Divining Elder immediately sensed the interference intensify. The ray of sunlight began to twist, and the path he followed became obscured. A clash between practitioners of divination was more profound and mysterious than any other clash.

The Divining Elder smiled, filled with confidence. He nullified Xiao An's interference bit by bit, advancing towards his target steadily.

Li Qingshan had absolutely no idea that Xiao An right beside him was currently embroiled in a battle like that with the Divining Elder over five thousand kilometers away. He just comprehended the variation with the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression silently until his mental state attained absolute peace.

Something seemed to be brewing and growing restless within the spirit turtle's daemon core that was shaped like a turtle shell, like the birth of the universe. Suddenly, the turtle shell shuddered, and a pair of eyes lit up, deep and sagacious.

Li Qingshan opened his eyes. His pupils shone with deep, blue light. In that instant, he seemed to feel what regular people described as "something clicking into place". Many questions and problems that he had racked his brain over suddenly seemed to become clear. Even the entire world became clear.

After breaking through to the fourth layer of the spirit turtle, the profound inscriptions on the spirit turtle's daemon core became clearer. He began to radiate with an invisible power that spanned deeply into the vast river of fate, kicking up a ripple.

The Divining Elder snapped open his eyes in surprise. Just when the answer was about to be presented before him, the ray of sunlight vanished completely, like it had been obscured by a dark cloud. He was unable to find its source anymore.

"You've finally roused." Xiao An let out a long sigh of relief.

"What's wrong?" Li Qingshan scratched his head. Although he did not exactly know how to use the spirit turtle's ability of divination, hiding and obscuring had always been the spirit turtle's instincts. It did not just hide him as a person from divination, but his entire fate; in particular, it hid the fate of those closely attached to him.

"You didn't sense it? Someone tried to use divination to find us, or should I say, it." Xiao An looked at the sumeru ring in her hand.

With that, Li Qingshan seemed to recall something. He frowned. "It felt like... someone was spying on me earlier, which made me very uncomfortable, so I just hid... Why would I think of something like this?"

Xiao An brought her palms together and smiled. "According to the buddhist scriptures, twenty moments pass within a flick of a finger, and twenty thoughts occur during a single moment. This is just one of your thoughts. You obviously won't sense it normally."

Li Qingshan bent his finger and flicked it. He smiled. "So that's four hundred thoughts. That should be the so-called unconscious mind, right?"

Many thoughts would flash past at lightning speed, such that even the person themselves would not know they had thought of something like that. After reaching the fourth layer of the spirit turtle, not only had Li Qingshan's daemon qi increase drastically, but he had become more meticulous and intricate with his thoughts too, reaching an unprecedented state.

Li Qingshan paced around. He even understood the protection that the black ox's soul sense offered now. He was very touched. Brother ox must have calculated his cultivation progression accurately. After reaching the fourth layer of the spirit turtle, even if he could not foresee everything, at least he would not be killed through something like this. That had basically eliminated one of his worries.

He smiled. As for how he would take his next step, he already had an idea.

The Sword Collection palace definitely had a way to locate the Soaring Dragon sword, which was why Fu Qingjin had asked him a question like that. If he wanted to remove any items from the sumeru ring or make the Soaring Dragon sword his, he had to find a suitable location that could both allow him to avoid the Sword Collection palace's search and weaken the Soaring Dragon sword.

A place like that was not actually difficult to find. It was right below Li Qingshan's feet. If he continued to venture downward, to even greater depths, he could use the interference from the underground magnetic field.

“Xiao An, what do you think?” Li Qingshan told Xiao An his thoughts.

“Smart.” Xiao An praised sincerely.

Li Qingshan laughed aloud before sighing again. His fate had been led underground once more. However, he was in no hurry to set off. There was no need for Northmoon to appear so soon.

Talking with Xiao An a little more and checking on her results, Li Qingshan calmed down. He then took out the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility to refine. It would be a combination made in heaven if he used it with the Glazed Mirror of Invisibility.

In the blink of an eye, over a month had passed. Autumn went and winter came. The mountains became covered in snow.

The Crystal Resin cauldron opened once more. Ru Xin stretched her neck and stood up, taking out the refined pills from the cauldron and storing them into bottles. She took a glance and found that still a lot of the spiritual herbs from Li Qingshan remained.

I wonder how he’s doing, getting me to do all the hard work! Let me go get some air!

Just as she thought that, someone touched the formation. Li Qingshan’s voice rang out from outside, “Ru Xin, open up.”

Ru Xin opened the formation and the entrance to the dwelling, erupting on a rant right off the bat. “Don’t yell out like that in the future! If I were refining pills, what would happen if I become distracted? Is it going to be on me or on you?”

“I knew you weren’t refining pills. How’s the refining going?” Li Qingshan entered without any invitation.

“How did you know?”

“I guessed.” Li Qingshan smiled. That was not a lie. He did not purposefully try to divine anything. He just thought of Ru Xin, and a thought crossed his head, She might be sick of alchemy. Afterwards, he just paid a visit.

### **Chapter 430 - Fu Qingjin’s Questioning, Strongboulder Comes Knocking**

“Would you like to come to my dwelling and take a look?”

“Where is it?”

Li Qingshan extended a hand. A wisp of cloud formed a bridge, extending into the distance through the mountains.

Ru Xin followed the winding cloud bridge, making her way around the mountain in front of her. She travelled quite a short distance and arrived in front of Li Qingshan’s dwelling. Looking at the three words, Qing Xiao’s Home, she sank into her thoughts and fiddled around with her hair. “So close? Don’t tell me you’re planning to do something to me!”

“You overestimate yourself. I’m just protecting my pills, as well as the alchemist.”

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“In other words, you were cultivating in your dwelling that day?” Fu Qingjin crossed his legs and fingers as he stared at the master of the Vermillion Clothes sect right before him with a slight smile.

The master of the Vermillion Clothes sect seemed rather uneasy. “Fellow Fu, What’re you asking this for? Of course I was cultivating in the sect.”

Fu Qingjin took out a curved, slender horn from behind, which flashed. “Have you heard of the xiezhi before?”

“I’ve heard that it’s a divine beast that can see through deception. Don’t tell me that’s...”

“That’s right. This is a xiezhi’s horn. I hope you tell me the truth, as it’s very important.” Fu Qingjin fiddled with the Green Ruins sword absentmindedly.

The master of the Vermillion Clothes sect’s face twisted. This was his secret. He definitely could not let anyone know. However, he glanced at the Green Ruins sword before glancing at the xiezhi’s horn and became conflicted. In the end, he said, “Fine. I’ll tell you. That day, I ventured underground...”

“Alright, I understand.” Fu Qingjin turned around as he stood up. He had already achieved some initial results with his investigation of all the Foundation Establishment cultivators within the Clear River prefecture. Some had been questioned personally, while others had clear evidence that they were not present. However, there were also a few Foundation Establishment cultivators who refused to cooperate, and they all belonged to the academy. In the end, there were a total of seven suspects, with the prime suspect being Li Qingshan.

As if he had just been spared, the master of the Vermillion Clothes sect let out a long sigh of relief. As it seemed, Fu Qingjin was not investigating that matter.

“You were engaging in trade with the night roamers, weren’t you?” That one sentence from Fu Qingjin made the master of the Vermillion Clothes sect’s heart lurch violently. “Liaison, you must listen to me...”

“Colluding with otherfolk and assisting the enemy is taboo in the Daemon Suppression alliance. Oh right, your disciple that killed Hawkwolf guards from three years ago is still around. Don’t let him run off. I might have a use for him soon.”

With that, Fu Qingjin turned into a streak of green light and flew off, leaving the master of the Vermillion Clothes sect standing there in daze.

Leaving the Vermillion Clothes sect, Fu Qingjin arrived in the sky. He did not go off to find the suspects one by one for questioning. Instead, he found his bearings and took off in the direction of the Boundless mountains.

Those directly connected to the Soaring Dragon Elder’s death were the Dark Queen’s cat daemon and Gu Yanying. Neither of them were existences the Sword Collection palace could investigate. However, there must have been other witnesses deep within the Boundless mountains.

These witnesses definitely would have been daemons. Constrained by the treaty, it had been very difficult for the Sword Collection palace to do anything. Coupled with the Divining Elder’s warning, the entire matter came to a grinding halt. But now, the treaty had been lifted within the Clear River

prefecture, and the Diving Elder had confirmed that the power not of this world no longer interfered. They could finally undertake a large, formal investigation.

They would definitely be able to get to the bottom of the Soaring Dragon Elder's death by approaching the matter from two directions.

Arriving near the edge of the Boundless mountains, he discovered that the huge crater left behind from the destruction of the Green Vine mountain had already turned into a city. It was enveloped by various formations with many human cultivators moving around in there. It was even busier than the Town of Flowing Clouds of the past.

Ever since the treaty had been lifted, many human cultivators chose to enter the Boundless mountains and not anywhere else. They would still be able to kill daemons, and clearly, being above ground brought people relatively more relief. There were many more spiritual herbs in the Boundless mountains that bathed in sunlight too.

Fu Qingjin's gaze then shifted to the east. Milliped had blown up his daemon core there, leaving behind a pit. It seemed desolate on the surface, but Fu Qingjin knew that a city of night roamers was prospering below the thick rock and soil. It was rumored that these night roamers did not attack humans, remaining neutral instead.

And, according to the information Fu Qingjin had received, the governors of the city were two night roamer sisters. The people that the master of the Vermillion Clothes sect traded with should have been them too. This was not a coincidence. Compared to facing life-threatening risk to kill and plunder, obtaining the scarce resources from underground through trade was much more favourable.

The prosperity of the city in the Green Vine mountain's crater was very closely linked to the stance they had taken. Who knew how many resources had been exchanged through these two cities.

Centred around Li Qingshan's "throne", the web-like tunnels were flattened and smoothed out under the efforts of the night roamer craftsmen, just like long, underground corridors.

The slender tip of a finger brushed past the smooth walls. Ye Liusu walked through there with a deep sense of pride. This was the fruit of her efforts over the past three years.

Ye Liubo followed alongside her, fiddling around with a formation banner. "Sister, I didn't think the human would even be willing to sell a formation like that to us. He even seemed to be a member of some Daemon Suppression alliance. Aren't they the enemy of our underground world?"

"It's not like we're daemons, so what's wrong with that? Black Gold ore is very useful for forging artifacts. The Daemon Suppression alliance is incapable of excavating and mining underground, so of course they'll have to rely on us."

As they conversed, the two of them arrived in a cavern. This was a newly-established village of night roamers. Every single night roamer bowed deeply towards Ye Liusu when they saw her. This was not just out of a fear for power, but also out of respect for Ye Liusu.

Beyond Li Qingshan's territory, the internal strife between the night roamers had never stopped. Instead, it intensified, extending all the way to the surface and upholding the Spider Queen's wishes. As they assassinated human cultivators, they also became each other's prey.

However, under Ye Liusu's rule, this place completely upheld Li Qingshan's will. All internal conflict had stopped, making it a unique region of peace.

Many night roamers who had grown tired of fighting or lacked the ability to fight gathered here, becoming Sir Northmoon's servants willingly, which was equivalent to leaving the control of the other clans. During the time Li Qingshan spent in secluded cultivation, his servants under him had already reached five figures.

Ye Liusu smiled. She had proven that night roamers did not have to kill one another in order to survive, that they too could live their lives in peace and happiness.

"Liubo, set up the formation!"

Ye Liubo deployed the formation, and a spherical barrier enveloped the cavern.

Ye Liusu nodded in satisfaction. Now, even if they were under attack from ignorant human cultivators, they would still have enough time for reinforcements to arrive.

"Just when is master going to emerge from seclusion?" Ye Liubo kicked a pebble.

"Don't fret. He'll rouse sooner or later." Ye Liusu's eyes flashed. When he roused, she wanted to personally thank him and tell him, "You're right. I am special."

The pebble flew into the darkness, but it did not produce any sounds after that.

Ye Liusu's expression changed. "Be careful, Liubo!"

The pebble shot back with ten times the speed, but it shattered against the barrier of the formation.

Strongboulder emerged from the darkness and bellowed, "Where's Northmoon!?"