

Chapter 601 - To Be Good-natured Like Water

Gu Yanying asked, "What makes no sense?"

Yan Xixin said, "I personally believe I've seen my fair share of battles between cultivators. Li Qingshan's performance is valiant and extraordinary, completely surpassing his cultivation at Foundation Establishment. Even I would not be able to withstand such attacks from Zhu Lie!"

"And?"

Yan Xixin thought about how he should word it and said, "His moves are extremely ingenious, while his usage of and timing with techniques and arcane artifacts is even more meticulous. Even I can only sigh in admiration." He paused for a moment before continuing, "But if it were not for this, he probably would have been defeated a long time ago. The fire element's strengths lie in explosiveness and destruction, while the water element emphasises forbearance and recovery. A direct confrontation like this is very disadvantageous to him."

It was like two armies waging war. Even if one army deployed exceptional tactics, it would be very difficult for them to emerge victoriously if their overall strategy was wrong.

Gu Yanying nodded. "His character is indeed a little staunch."

Yan Xixin opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but he closed it again. He gazed at the Dragon Arena in worry and wondered, He primarily cultivates the water element, so how is his temperament so staunch? Or in other words, how is he able to understand the true meaning of the water element with how staunch he is?

The elemental affinity of cultivators had a very close connection to their character and temperament. Normally, those with talent for the fire element would have a relatively fiery temper. Throughout many years of cultivation and the accumulation of spiritual qi, this special characteristic would become more obvious.

Out of the water element cultivators Yan Xixin knew, they were all relatively gentle people. None of them were as firm and staunch as Li Qingshan, which made him extremely confused.

Little did he know that basically all of Li Qingshan's talent for the water element had come from the Spirit Turtle Transformation. The spirit turtle would already be doing fantastically if it could suppress the ox demon and tiger demon, so how could it still influence Li Qingshan's personality?

The pent-up anger in Zhu Lie became more and more violent. The trident sprayed with flames as he swung it at Li Qingshan wildly.

Li Qingshan matched his attacks with attacks without holding back at all and gradually realised something that was amiss. No matter how brutal and overbearing the Ocean Wielding he used was, his opponent's moves would definitely be even more vicious and violent than his.

A difference in their cultivation existed in the first place, and while his ability to control water was powerful, Fire Devouring folk were also professionals with wielding fire. They canceled out one another,

so the difference they could bring was negligible. And, fire was clearly much more suited for offence than water.

The spiritual qi in his dantian depleted rapidly. Less than thirty percent remained, and that was only because he had the arcane artifact jade tablet accelerating his spiritual qi recovery. He could recover water spiritual qi slightly faster, but it was nothing like several fold faster. The benefits would only become more evident the longer the battle dragged out. If this continued, it would be very difficult for him to win without using the Demon Suppression Statuary.

During the battle, Li Qingshan had also been considering a question that had troubled him all this time—how to merge water and fire!

He only saw two colours, red and blue. One burned and ascended as if it wanted to burn the sky, while the other flowed and descended as if it wanted to fall into an abyss. They demonstrated completely different properties, constantly mixing and surging. There was absolutely no possibility of merging at all.

Fire and water had no feelings. If it were regular fire and water, then so be it, but the spirit turtle's water and the phoenix's fire he wanted to merge together were the most pure powers in the world, so how was he supposed to merge them?

He felt rather vexed. He felt like he had misunderstood something the entire time.

With his mind in disarray, his attacks faltered slightly. Zhu Lie caught the opportunity and swung down with his trident. Li Qingshan could only raise his arm in time and block before falling down and plunging into the lake water. With a thunk, he caused a huge splash, sinking directly to the bottom of the lake. By now, only ten percent of his spiritual qi remained.

Si Bao raised his cup. "Looks like the outcome has been decided, Yanying."

Han Qiongzhi became anxious, while Yan Xixin became even more nervous. He had risked his life to set up this fantastic situation. If he lost, then all of it would go to waste. This Li Qingshan might have some talent, but there's no need for commander Gu to favour him this much!

Si Bao cast his gaze at Gu Yanying as if she was saying, Look at the person you chose! He's nowhere near as powerful as you described him to be! However, she was extremely understanding too. Defeat was much more likely than victory if any Foundation Establishment cultivator of the Ruyi commandery faced the violent and vicious Zhu Lie.

Gu Yanying lowered her head and fiddled around with her cup. "If he wants to win, how can he lose?" It was a simple statement, but it displayed her absolute confidence. Han Qiongzhi shuddered and thought, Can I trust him this much?

Her trust in Li Qingshan came from her feelings, but true trust came from understanding. Gu Yanying's understanding of Li Qingshan completely exceeded Han Qiongzhi's.

The strongest water daemon of the Ruyi commandery, Northmoon, would lose to an otherfolk that had not even undergone the second heavenly tribulation? What kind of joke was that? Even if he could not win with his human cultivation, he only needed to use his daemon abilities slightly, and he could immediately turn the tides.

Zhu Lie followed Li Qingshan closely, pursuing right behind him.

The firelight illuminated the surface of the lake as waves of heat rapidly assaulted Li Qingshan. The trident parted the lakewater, directly plunging towards Li Qingshan's chest.

Li Qingshan shook his head and cast these thoughts aside. Whatever. I'll win this round first! If I lose to a minor figure like this, I'll look horrendous!

He exhaled gently and held back his urge to strike out. Two flows of water suddenly shot out backwards from the shoes on his feet as he charged forwards violently.

"Don't even think about escaping!" Zhu Lie roared furiously. He opened his mouth and sprayed out. A stream of fire pierced the lakewater, extending towards Li Qingshan.

Waves began to surge under Li Qingshan's feet as he used the Wave Treading Form, abruptly accelerating and leaping to one side. The flames brushed past him, not enough to penetrate his protective spiritual qi. And, the water had still adversely affected its power to a certain degree.

Huge waves appeared on the surface of the water. Below the surface, Li Qingshan fled as Zhu Lie pursued. Li Qingshan used the Wave Treading Form to constantly change directions. Zhu Lie was vicious, but there was nothing he could do to him immediately, making Zhu Lie so angry that he cursed aloud.

"You human coward! You looked like you had some balls earlier, but I didn't think you'd cower so soon!"

If I used my true strength, I can reduce you to mince meat with a single punch! Li Qingshan thought.

Hearing such words caused him great dissatisfaction, but he had no plans on breaking the rules he had set down right from the beginning, which involved using the Demon Suppression Statuary and the Traitorous Demon sword. If he wanted to win, then he could only rely on his geographic advantage, make time, and recover spiritual qi.

The more intense the battle grew, the clearer his thoughts became. As he fled, he flicked his fingers randomly and sent water arrows flying out. Zhu Lie became even more furious, pursuing him relentlessly.

As Li Qingshan maneuvered around, the jade tablet on his waist flickered with light. The spiritual qi in his body recovered slowly but surely.

He had used the water element as his foundation for cultivation for all this time, but he mostly relied on the fangs and claws of the tiger demon and the abilities of the ox demon to triumph over opponents.

Even when he assumed his human identity, he relied on his tough body to use Ocean Wielding, to wield the Heavy Water sword and launch powerful attacks to overwhelm the opponent. This was the first time he purely used water element techniques to fight.

In the beginning, it felt extremely repressive. He did not like this style of battle. He still preferred taking his opponent by storm and landing every single attack on flesh. However, he could only silently endure for the sake of victory.

Although Zhu Lie's flames were violent and vicious, they could not last for too long and gradually dimmed. As for Li Qingshan's spiritual qi, he had already recovered fifty percent of it. The scales of

victory had begun to tip. If he actively approached Zhu Lie now and engaged in attacks for attacks like earlier, Zhu Lie would definitely be the first to give way.

However, Li Qingshan was in no hurry to take action. Instead, he seemed to be in thought, vaguely understanding the reason for the problems. Suddenly, he recalled a saying.

To be Good-natured like water. Water benefits all living things while avoiding conflict, occupying a place where all others loathe. It is akin to the Dao.

TL: This comes from the first half of chapter 8 of the Dao De Jing. It's basically an analogy between water and the Dao, drawing comparisons to their similarities. Water is "good-natured" in the way that it benefits all living things—you can't live without water. It occupies a "place where all others loathe"—water is called the "universal solvent" because it can dissolve more substances than any other liquid. You use it for washing and cleaning, taking away and dissolving unwanted filth. Water also always takes the path of least resistance, thus avoiding conflict. It always flows to a "lower" position, which can be interpreted physically and metaphorically. These are all properties of the Dao described in the Dao De Jing.

To be good-natured like water, yet I am vicious and brutal. Water must "avoid conflict", yet I am filled with fighting spirit.

The water element is about triumphing over force with gentleness, remaining discreet and enduring silently. It is about going with the flow, yet I forge ahead valiantly, doing whatever I want. Even if I temporarily shrink back and endure in silence, it's only because of my circumstances. I stop doing that and behave flagrantly as soon as the opportunity arises.

For all this time, my temperament and the temperament of water have been completely opposite.

My temperament is staunch. Even when I practise a water cultivation method, I've chosen the destructive Arts of the Boundless Ocean. Although I have the god-like talent of the spirit turtle, and I control vast amounts of water in the Ruyi commandery, I haven't truly merged with and understood the utmost flexibility and gentleness of water.

It's no wonder that I've become stuck at a bottleneck after I reached the fourth layer of the spirit turtle. I've always wanted to merge water and fire, yet I haven't even merged with and understood the word "water"!

Li Qingshan sighed inside, but he became reinvigorated. He had finally found an answer to what had troubled him for all this time!

Suddenly, his expression became calm and peaceful, while his movements became gentle too. He was like a fish swimming around in a lake.

He stopped intentionally using techniques. As he retreated, he waved his arms around, drawing circles freely. The water flow banded around Zhu Lie like silk bands.

Zhu Lie waved his trident and easily ripped through them, but the water bands wrapped around him endlessly.

Zhu Lie wanted to catch up to Li Qingshan and take him on in a battle to the death, but it became even more impossible for him to get closer with the water bands obstructing him. The flames on his body became even weaker. Even his roars became rather hoarse!

Gu Yanying struck her palm gently with her delicate, jade fan and smiled. "The outcome has been decided."

Si Qing furrowed his brows firmly. Losing this battle had completely taken him by surprise. As he stared at Li Qingshan, he thought, Such an ability to control water definitely isn't something a mere Foundation Establishment cultivator can possess.

A while later, Li Qingshan had already gained the upper hand. Zhu Lie held on desperately, but his fighting spirit had already been mostly eroded away. He did not follow the rules of the arena, so the concept of forfeiting did not exist to him. He only thought of dying here, which would save him from the torture and humiliation the Si Qing outside would give him.

By now, Li Qingshan only needed to approach him and give him a few kicks and punches to emerge victoriously, but he forcefully held back this urge. Since he understood the source of his problem already, he had to find a way to deal with it.

Since his temperament was incompatible, then he would start with his temperament and change the way he acted. He silently swore, From today onwards, I'll do whatever a tortoise- oh wait, it's a spirit turtle. I'll do whatever a spirit turtle does. Sigh, it's basically all the same anyway!

Normally, based on his past temperament, he would have rushed over a long time ago to rip Zhu Lie apart and dig out his organs so that he could vent his anger.

But now, he constantly took in deep breaths as he muttered to himself inside.

Li Qingshan, take it slowly. There's no hurry. There's still plenty of time. This otherfolk might have a foul mouth, but he's just a pitiful person oppressed by that bastard Si Qing. Why do I have to kill him? If I look closer, doesn't he seem quite handsome too?

Zhu Lie's face was contorted. "If you want to kill me, then kill me, but don't even think of humiliating me!"

Chapter 602 - The Outcome Decided, the General's Call

Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow and was about to say, "If you want to die, then I'll give you what you want!" However, when it reached his mouth, it became, "You want me to kill you? Then I'll do the exact opposite! I refuse to kill you!" He muttered to himself, "Handsome, handsome!"

Zhu Lie howled about and charged right over. This time, Li Qingshan did not dodge. Right as the trident was about to reach his waist, he raised his right hand, and a stream of extremely pliable and tough water wrapped around the trident. It followed the pole and wrapped around Zhu Lie, trapping him in the water.

"Hurry up and forfeit, and I'll spare you dog life!"

Zhu Lie cursed loudly. His voice passed through the water, becoming unclear.

Li Qingshan shrugged helplessly. A crude and powerful hand immediately plunged into the water, grabbing Zhu Lie firmly by the throat.

Li Qingshan pulled Zhu Lie closer in a brutal manner and said with a heavy voice, "My patience is limited. Let me ask you one last time. Do you want to live, or do you want to die?"

All of Zhu Lie's hairs stood on end. He stared into Li Qingshan's eyes in surprise and confusion, catching something that seemed like a flash of dark red light. A ruthless malice forced its way into his heart. Originally, he would not show fear even if he died in battle, but he could not help but become slightly afraid from that moment onwards.

This was the fear a weak creature would naturally experience when it faced its natural predator. This person definitely isn't as simple as he seems on the surface!

Li Qingshan completely tossed "to be good-natured like water", "to be flexible and gentle", and whatever that was to the back of his brain. As long as Zhu Lie was bold enough to say he wanted to die, he would rip his head off immediately and kick it around like a soccer ball. When the tiger doesn't demonstrate its might, do you really take me for someone you can simply walk all over?

Finally, his instincts for survival gained the upper hand. Zhu Lie said softly, "I want to live."

Li Qingshan said, "And?"

"I admit defeat," Zhu Lie said reluctantly.

"That's more like it!" Li Qingshan forced out the gentlest smile he could and released Zhu Lie. He thought, I want to fix my temperament for once, yet you still dare to irritate me. How can I let you die so easily?

However, Zhu Lie found his smile much more chilling compared to his vicious expression earlier. He was like an extremely fierce wild beast who forced himself to behave gently. It was extremely eerie.

Li Qingshan stepped out of the Dragon Arena and said to Gu Yanying, "I haven't let you down, fortunately."

"As long as you've won."

"Nicely done. I almost thought you were dead for sure. You do have the right to sit behind me." Si Bao patted Li Qingshan's shoulder and expressed her recognition of him. Li Qingshan glanced around. All the Hawkwolf guards nodded towards him, giving their regards, admitting he possessed the right. Afterwards, his gaze landed on Han Qiongzhi. Joy and pride filled her face.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Si Qing began clapping first. He smiled. "Yanying, your subordinate truly has hidden himself well. I candidly admit my defeat."

E Dan and Jia Zhen's faces were completely sunken. This meant that they had lost their first battle in the Ruyi commandery. The great benefits that regular cultivators could never even imagine had all been reduced to nothing with the outcome of this duel.

Gu Yanying smiled. "It's no problem. As the saying goes, even great external forces cannot triumph over local powers, so there's no need to take it to heart. Si Qing, when do you plan on holding the ascension ceremony? Please let me know so that I can carry out my responsibilities as the host and handle it for you."

Si Qing stowed the Dragon Arena away and put on a tolerant act. "The outcome of the battle is a mere trifle. What matters is that I've witnessed the talents of the Ruyi commandery, and I saw a few fascinating duels. However, I still feel a little unsatisfied."

"Oh? Why's that?"

"The Ruyi commandery spans thousands of kilometers. Who knows how many talents there are. I probably haven't even witnessed a hundredth of them through this duel. I've heard that the Ruyi commandery has always had a tradition of the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures, but because daemons attacked the Clear River prefecture, you were forced to put that on hold. Since I have succeeded the post of Marquis of Ruyi, I should restart the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures, summon the talents of the nine prefectures, and demonstrate the Ruyi commandery's strength to deter the Daemon race!"

Si Qing said as he exchanged glances with E Dan and Jia Zhen. The three of them all smiled. Clearly, they had been planning this excuse for a long time already.

This was the authority of the Marquis of Ruyi, and Gu Yanying had no reason to stop him. However, she did know that the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures probably would not be as simple this time. She sighed inside.

Si Qing has a cruel personality. He's bloodthirsty and murderous. It probably isn't the Ruyi commandery's good fortune to have him as the Marquis of Ruyi.

When the banquet dispersed, Li Qingshan made his way towards Han Qiongzhi after bidding farewell to Si Qing when E Dan suddenly barked, "You little bastard, you better be careful when you go out at night!"

Li Qingshan frowned. Right when he was about to call him "mongrel" a few times, Han Qiongzhi stopped him and shook her head gently at him. Worry filled her face. As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, who knew when life-threatening disasters would descend upon him with how a vicious Golden Core cultivator like E Dan had remembered him.

Sigh, I really have to be good to others as a person. Good-natured like water! What am I bickering with a dead person for?

Li Qingshan thought and stopped paying attention to E Dan, leaving with Han Qiongzhi.

E Dan thought he was afraid, so he let out a wild burst of laughter. His vicious gaze then paused on Han Qiongzhi. Hmph, I'll deal with the Han family sooner or later too.

After all the guests had dispersed, Si Qing's face sank before inviting E Dan and Jia Zhen into a secret room for discussion.

Si Qing said, "I never thought we'd actually get off on the wrong foot. Gu Yanying is just as difficult to deal with as always!"

"I really want to crush her head!" E Dan clenched his hands, and they grinded and creaked. However, he also knew that even if he neglected her identity and the fact that no one was bold enough to touch her, probably nobody could confidently say they could kill her unless they had undergone the third heavenly tribulation.

Jia Zhen shook his head. "From what I observed, Gu Yanying is not necessarily our enemy. She completely focuses on cultivation, with no interest in fame, wealth, power, or influence. Everything she does is to increase her cultivation. As long as we don't go overboard with her, she probably won't actively make problems for us."

Si Qing nodded. "She's always been like that. If it were not for the fact that I was confident we could win this duel, I would have never arranged this banquet. What do you think about her subordinate, Li Qingshan?"

E Dan said, "He's merely an overconfident genius, a minor figure who has no idea about how things work. I'll make him die a graveless death sooner or later!"

Jia Zhen said, "Don't worry. He won't be able to survive past the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures. There's no need for you to take action in a hurry either, just in case you leave behind traces that'll give yourself away. Our priority right now is still to handle that wretched daemon Northmoon."

Si Qing said, "How can we let someone snore away right beside where we sleep?"

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Li Qingshan arrived at the estate of the Han family in the commandery city with Han Qiongzhi, which was also the great general's estate in the past. Gazing over, the scale of the structures were so grand that they only paled in comparison to the marquis' estate. The Han family had occupied it throughout the generations.

Passing through the pavilions, terraces, and halls, Li Qingshan arrived at the depths of the estate and greeted his soon-to-be father-in-law, Han Anjun.

The crystal lights shone brilliantly. Han Anjun's face was as cold as before, standing there seriously like a metal sculpture. After hearing about what had happened during the banquet from Han Qiongzhi, he said, "You have a great future ahead of you, so you shouldn't have openly confronted E Dan. Only true men can put up with humiliation and disgrace, or it's all just foolhardiness."

Li Qingshan said, "Don't worry, general. I'm under commander Gu's care, so he can't do anything to me.

Han Anjun fell silent for a while before responding, "Perhaps he'll be the great general of the Ruyi commandery before long."

"What?" Li Qingshan was mildly surprised, but it made perfect sense upon thinking about it. The position of great general was not hereditary. Han Anguo had died in battle, so they obviously needed a replacement. Since Si Qing could obtain the position of Marquis of Ruyi, he could also obtain a great general. In terms of strength alone, E Dan completely possessed the right.

He said apologetically, "I didn't think I'd get the Han family into trouble." He was a Scarlet Hawk commander, so E Dan could not touch him, but the Han family would be exposed to his forceful control.

"You have to stop yourself from acting so rashly in the future. The Han family isn't as weak as you think. And, even without you, E Dan would never give up on the position of great general. However, for him to obtain this tiger tablet won't be so easy either."

As Han An spoke, he took out a tiger tablet. The tiger tablet was shaped like a black tiger. It was not too big, and the sculpting was not detailed, making it seem very much like a mass-produced product. However, it seemed to leap out of the tablet with its fierce posture.

Like the Marquis of Ruyi's Seal of Mountains and Rivers, the tiger tablet was the representation of the great general, as well as something that had been passed down through the Han family.

The position of great general was not hereditary, but the Han family had an extensive family tree and knew how to raise their descendants. As such, a suitable successor would often appear in the clan before the previous great general had even passed away. Just like this, all the disciples of the school of the Military of the entire Ruyi commandery were connected to the Han family.

As the current patriarch, if Han Anjun lost the tiger talisman, then he would have let down his ancestors. As a result, whether Li Qingshan offended E Dan or not no longer mattered. E Dan had always viewed the Han family as a thorn in his side.

Li Qingshan frowned. "Why can't Foundation Establishment cultivators succeed to the position of great general?"

Han Anjun said, "After you left, I also went on a journey. I went to South Hub city and met with the Great General King. Out of consideration of our past, the Great General King did not agree to E Dan succeeding to the position of great general, allowing the position to remain with my Han family before temporarily dismissing the matter. There's obviously nothing that E Dan can do to our Han family right now."

Li Qingshan smiled. "Obviously."

The "Great General King" was the greatest figure from the school of the Military in the Green province. He was someone impressive who stood on equal footing with the lord of the Green province, leading all soldiers and generals of the Green province. As long as he put out a word, E Dan would never act rashly no matter how vicious he was.

Han Anjun shook his head slightly. "The position of great general cannot be dismissed forever. I plan to enter the Asura Field and cultivate arduously. As long as I can break through to the second heavenly tribulation, the tiger tablet will remain with my Han family."

He recalled what the Great General King had said, Anguo is a dear general of mine, and the Han family has been a clan of generals for many generations. Although you've encountered difficulties, there's no reason for you to give up hope. I can see you possess your elder brother's bearing, so are you bold enough to enter my Asura Field for training?

"The Asura Field!" Han Qiongzhi exclaimed. Clearly, this Asura Field was not a safe place. She wanted to say something, but she decided to straighten out her body and say proudly, "May success come your

way, father. May you undergo the heavenly tribulation soon and revitalise the renown of our Han family!”

Han Anjun said in delight, “Qiongzhi, you’ve grown up.”

“I also wish for success to come your way, general. Be sure to not miss the day of our wedding. This pill can be the engagement present.”

“This is... an Origin Spirit pill! Where did you get this from?”

Even with Han Anjun’s composure, he could not help but be taken aback when he saw the Origin Spirit pill in Li Qingshan’s hand. After all, the pill was far too precious, especially to him right now.

Chapter 603 - Even When Abandoned, To Never Complain

Li Qingshan said, “This was from commander Gu.”

“Sure enough, commander Gu values you extraordinarily. She specially gave this to you for your second heavenly tribulation! You better keep it. I can’t accept such a precious gift.”

Han Anjun calmed down immediately. He shifted his gaze away from the Origin Spirit pill and gazed at Li Qingshan deeply. His explanation did not completely convince him.

“Then that would mean you oppose my marriage with Qiongzhi!”

Li Qingshan said as he shot a glance at Han Qiongzhi. The Origin Spirit pill was not essential to him, but it was quite important to the Han family.

Han Qiongzhi said after some hesitation, “Father, just accept it. You can do it for the sake of the Han family.”

Han Anjun contemplated with his eyes closed for quite a while before letting out a long sigh and accepting the Origin Spirit pill. Afterwards, he bowed deeply to express his gratitude. How could Li Qingshan accept such a great gesture from him? He shifted to the side and avoided the bow.

However, what Han Anjun said after straightening himself left Li Qingshan and Han Qiongzhi completely surprised.

“In the very beginning, I didn’t find the two of you a suitable match. I still stand by my belief right now.”

“The Han family is great and influential, while I’m just a kid from the mountains. Our status is a little striking.”

Li Qingshan furrowed his brows, but in consideration of the spirit turtle’s forbearance and patience, his brows eased up again. He spoke with a smile, but he could not help himself as his tone objected slightly to Han Anjun’s words.

Han Qiongzhi also said with discontent, “Father, so much has happened already, yet you still say something like that. You want to temper your daughter, but has your daughter ever disappointed you...”

Han Anjun raised his hand to stop Han Qiongzhi from continuing. He gazed at Li Qingshan and said, “Qingshan, I don’t hold any prejudice towards you. Actually, I thought you were a talent right from the

beginning, and everything that happened afterwards completely exceeded my expectations. It's even possible to call you a startling genius. You are already on a path to achieving greatness. I'm not belittling myself, but my daughter is a little unworthy of you."

"It's not like I'm looking for a companion to charge into battle with. Are you telling me I'm supposed to find a woman with a similar cultivation?" Li Qingshan said in objection. He held Han Qiongzhi's hand to express his determination.

"Let me finish. With your personality, offending E Dan today was definitely no coincidence, but the Great General King's special treatment was very much a coincidence. The enemies you encounter in the future might not be able to do anything to you, but you can't just neglect the entire family of people behind you. If you constantly challenge the strong while still having to consider for your family, will you find satisfaction?"

Li Qingshan said nothing. He could not help but admit that Han Anjun's words had been very insightful. He had basically dismantled Li Qingshan's character. Even Li Qingshan had no idea how many powerful enemies he would encounter on his way to the Nine Heavens. He was confident he could protect Han Qiongzhi, but what about her family?

He felt Han Qiongzhi's hand tighten slightly. He said, "General, I also think my character has been a little too intense lately. I plan to restrain myself a little and comprehend the flexibility and gentleness of water. I might not necessarily offend a lot of people."

When he said that, even he was slightly unconvinced. Even if he spent another century comprehending, he still would have stepped forward during the banquet today. No matter how far his cultivation of the Spirit Turtle Transformation progressed, it was unable to change his character completely.

Han Qiongzhi stood forward too. "Even if we encounter any risks, we'll shoulder them together."

"Qiongzhi, you're no longer a child. You've made a choice today, and I respect your decision. However, if he ever abandons you in the future, you can't complain."

Han Anjun let out a long sigh and left, leaving behind Li Qingshan and Han Qiongzhi, who stared at one another speechlessly. Just which father would curse their own daughter like this? And, he spoke with so much certainty as if Li Qingshan had already become fickle and faithless.

Something that Han Anjun did not mention was that he had once asked Ma Buyi to tell Li Qingshan's fortune through reading his face. Ma Buyi had said, "This child is ambitious. He definitely isn't someone with flimsy aspirations. However, it's exactly because of his lofty ambitions that he's the exact opposite of the saying, 'The romance of love is everlasting, while the glory of heroes is momentary.'"

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That night, Li Qingshan did not stay at the great general's estate. Instead, he left the Ruyi commandery with Han Qiongzhi and ventured to a tiny mountain with abundant spiritual qi and beautiful scenery. This was the cultivation dwelling Han Qiongzhi had specially carved out after reaching Foundation Establishment.

The two of them embraced one another, gazing at the tiny lake under the moonlight in the distance as it reflected the tranquil, silver light. They said nothing for a long, long time. Originally, reuniting was supposed to be delightful, but Han Anjun's words had cast a shadow over it all.

"Thank you for your Origin Spirit pill."

Han Qiongzhi was originally a straightforward person, but she had been through a lot lately. Right now, her clan was at a dangerous juncture, and her father evaluated the most reliable man by her side as someone who would leave her in the end. She was depressed, nowhere near as decisive as before.

Sure enough, he could not stay here for too long either. He would have to return to the Clear River prefecture very soon to continue upholding his responsibilities as the Scarlet Hawk commander.

"How can the phrase 'thank you' be mentioned between us? And, if you really want to thank me, that's not the way to thank me." Li Qingshan pulled her into his arms with a smile, lowering his head and kissing her on her red lips while his hand rested on her buttocks mischievously. He purposefully wanted to break the silent atmosphere this way.

However, as her delicate body entered his embrace, his lust that he had long suppressed rose up uncontrollably. Han Qiongzhi's response was unexpectedly intense too, wrapping her arms around his waist as she whispered, "Love me!"

Li Qingshan picked her up, abandoning the moonlit scenery and entering the dwelling.

Behind the veils of silk, a desperate entanglement was unavoidable. Only when Han Qiongzhi became absolutely exhausted, having run out of strength and begging for mercy, did he stop, embracing each other as they fell asleep.

This seemed to completely wash away the mild discontent from earlier. However, Han Qiongzhi muttered that sentence incessantly inside. Even when she fell asleep, it continued to haunt her endlessly.

If he ever abandons you in the future, you can't complain.

Li Qingshan had completely cast aside this matter already. After Han Qiongzhi fell asleep, he felt like he was still brimming with energy. He did not feel sleepy at all, so he continued focusing and contemplating the ways of water.

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In the Waterside Pavilion of Listening Wind, Gu Yanying studied her new disciple with interest. "My good disciple, am I supposed to call you Qian Rongzhi or Shangguan Rongzhi?"

"Obviously Qian Rongzhi."

Qian Rongzhi quivered. This was the last secret she wanted people to learn about, but it was not because she felt humiliated by it. Even within the cultivation world, massacring all of her family would incur deep disgust. If Chu Tian knew she had done something like this, she probably could not have fooled him so easily.

“Looks like you really detest the word ‘Shangguan’. Ancient Wind city was destroyed because of the White Lotus cult, but that Shangguan town experienced a great fire without reason and had been razed to the ground. Not even a dog had managed to escape from there. I wonder why.”

“Your disciple is unsure. It must have been some fire element daemon making trouble!”

Qian Rongzhi did not purposefully feign ignorance. She only replied calmly. In order to completely obliterate everything, she had paid another visit to Shangguan town while the war was ongoing.

Gu Yanying stared at Qian Rongzhi for a long time before smiling in the end. She changed the topic. “The hell snake is the gift that the White Lotus Mother gave you, right?”

It took a very long time for Qian Rongzhi to reply. “Yes. She hated me for betraying her, so inflicted me with this vicious curse so that I go through plenty of pain and torture every single day and night.”

Gu Yanying said, “Would you like your master to find a way to relieve you of it?”

“The venomous snake is closely adhered to my soul. It’s immune to everything, so it might be very difficult to remove. I can still put up with this level of pain, so there’s no need for master to go to such lengths.”

Qian Rongzhi trembled inside. The colourful little snake also began to slither across her body restlessly. In the beginning, she had always wanted to get rid of this tiny snake.

But now, the hell snake had already become one of her most important trump cards. In particular, it was vital to her arduous practice of legalist cultivation methods. If Gu Yanying truly managed to remove it from her, it would be quite the loss.

However, she soon stopped worrying. The tiny snake came from the Hell realm, possessing special characteristics that nothing in this world exhibited. Although it was visible to the naked eye, it existed in a completely different plane. Let alone regular weapons, even powerful techniques and arcane artifacts would struggle to harm it. No matter how capable Gu Yanying was, there was nothing she could do about it.

Gu Yanying extended her hand. Qian Rongzhi gazed at her perfect, slender hand, at a loss as for what she wanted.

“I still haven’t tried the sensation of the Venomous Snake hell yet!” Gu Yanying was curious.

“I dare not.” Qian Rongzhi lowered her head.

“Hold my hand. I know you want to do that.”

“Yes, master!” Qian Rongzhi said, You asked for it, so don’t blame me. The affluent you can also taste my pain!

She gently held Gu Yanying’s hand. It was warm and smooth at first touch as if her bones were made of hard jade and her skin was made of soft jade, indescribably pleasant. Killing intent blazed in Qian Rongzhi’s heart. Will I be able to kill her when she’s overcome by pain and loses her composure? We’re in the Waterside Pavilion of Listening Wind, so it’ll definitely take some time before anyone discovers this, while the benefits I can obtain from her are unbelievably great.

As she thought that, she heard Gu Yanying laugh. "It doesn't seem as unbearable as I imagined it to be. Is it because my sense of shame is far too great, and I don't have a lot of hatred? But that makes no sense!"

Qian Rongzhi's eyes widened, gazing at Gu Yanying in disbelief. That was definitely not forced laughter. This was pain that could drive people to death! How could she endure it?

Gu Yanying smiled. "Hurry up and send out the little snake!"

Qian Rongzhi felt indescribable anger. She felt like Gu Yanying was mocking and deriding everything she endured. She made up her mind, and the colourful, little snake slithered out along her arm, biting down viciously between Gu Yanying's thumb and index finger.

Gu Yanying's expression changed slightly. Her smile finally vanished from her face as she said slowly, "You've nurtured it very well."

Qian Rongzhi felt disbelief. She can actually still speak! However, then she heard Gu Yanying say, "I'll remove it for you right now!"

Qian Rongzhi immediately sensed a slight breeze drift over from Gu Yanying's body. The breeze was invisible and untouchable. It could not even blow away a single fallen leaf. As a matter of fact, it was completely unrelated to the flow of air in this world, but she could clearly sense it.

Gu Yanying furrowed her brows. Pain filled her beautiful face as if she was enduring something. Meanwhile, the colourful, little snake released its fangs and wanted to retreat as if it had seen a ghost. However, an invisible force caught it. The little snake squirmed around, unable to break free as it was gradually drawn into Gu Yanying's hand.

Suddenly, Qian Rongzhi pulled her hand back. Looking down, the colourful, little snake was still there. It shrank back into her body, afraid to show itself again.

Chapter 604 - Master and the Snake

"What is this wind?"

Qian Rongzhi's heart was in turmoil. She actually possessed a way to deal with the hell snake. In that case, killing her only became even more difficult.

"You can actually sense it. You truly are my disciple after all. Within the vast, boundless Hell realm, there's a hell called 'Hot Wind'. This is your master's trump card, so don't tell anyone without good reason, or I'll make you taste the power of the Hot Wind hell. You're not the pioneer of using the power of the Hell realm to cultivate. Instead, it's what the school of Legalism is skilled in the most."

"In other words, you..."

Surprised, Qian Rongzhi had even forgotten to call her master. She recalled what she had said, "I still haven't tried the sensation of the Venomous Snake hell yet." If that were the case, she was the same as her. She also endured the torture of hell.

Everything made sense now. That was why she could remain unfazed when the venomous snake bit her. It was impossible for people who had not been through such pain to remain so composed.

Gu Yanying did not describe what the punishment of the “Hot Wind hell” was or what kind of pain she had to endure from it. However, through her behaviour earlier, the pain definitely was not lighter than the “Venomous Snake hell”.

“As long as there are benefits, enduring some hardships is nothing, don’t you think so?” Gu Yanying blinked her eyes and smiled brightly. However, Qian Rongzhi understood very well that there were no hardships at all. It was basically the worst pain there was in the world.

“You think you’re very special and very unfortunate. That’s very normal. Young people are always under that impression, but actually, it’s not just you and me. The school of Legalism has a supreme cultivation called the Illustrations of Naraka. The cultivation method you practise right now is an extension of it, but it only imitates its form and does not bear its true essence.”

When Qian Rongzhi heard that a cultivation method so suitable for her existed, she did not react on the surface, but thoughts filled her mind rapidly.

“Do you know what the prerequisites are to practising the Illustrations of Naraka?”

“That’s right. It’s to draw the power of hell into your body, just like how you’ve drawn the venomous snake into your body. After that, you need to temper yourself through great pain. But if you want to cross through realms and find the true power of hell, it’s anything but simple. Although it’s unfortunate you obtained a hell snake, it’s also your fortune. Right now, your soul and soul sense completely exceeds a regular Foundation Establishment cultivator’s.

“You’ve experienced how it feels, so of course you know it isn’t easy. However, you’re not the only one with such resolve. Throughout history, there have been countless people with great willpower. Your master happens to be one of them.”

“I don’t understand. Why did you choose this cultivation method?”

Qian Rongzhi was confused. To her, Gu Yanying was blessed by the heavens. She was born with everything. All she had to do was open her mouth, and she would obtain any resource or cultivation method that she wanted. Having inherited half of the Hawk God’s bloodline, her talent was already startling. As long as she cultivated step by step, overcoming the third heavenly tribulation would not be too difficult for her.

Why did she have to practise a self-mutilating cultivation method like this? Once she drew the power of hell into her body, it would basically erode away all the pleasures of life even if she could endure it, yet she still managed to smile most of the time.

“Because this cultivation method is powerful enough!” Gu Yanying gazed at the sky. Her sharp gaze seemed to reach an extremely high place. “The hawk wants to fly high. Apart from its own strength, how can I give up on this gust of powerful wind?”

Qian Rongzhi gazed at her beautiful face and finally felt a shred of respect towards this “master” she had obtained so strangely. She said calmly, “Commander Gu, you clearly know I’m not a kindhearted or docile person, so why do you still want me as your disciple? Is it just to amuse yourself?”

All acting and disguises were useless before this woman. Since she already knew about her past, she might as well just lay it bare and directly get to the bottom of this.

Gu Yanying lowered her head and tapped her folding fan on Qian Rongzhi's head gently. "Why have you stopped calling me master?"

It brought Qian Rongzhi great discomfort. Those who knew her true colours either feared her like snakes and scorpions or despised and detested her. Why would she behave with such intimacy? For a moment, she had no idea how to face her. All she could do was say obediently, "Master."

Gu Yanying said seriously, "I don't hate you. As a cultivator, you are more qualified than most people I've seen. Just this aspect alone earns you the right to be my disciple. And, you do bring me a lot of amusement."

"Then all I can do is serve as master's amusement." Qian Rongzhi thought to herself, Everyone who dares to amuse themselves with me is dead.

"From the perspective of a human, you've killed your parents and your siblings. You've already committed all great sins, but you're still missing one, which is killing your master. If the opportunity ever presents itself in the future, you're welcome to try!"

Gu Yanying patted Qian Rongzhi's shoulder with a smile. Within her large, round eyes, she seemed to be already imagining the scene of her baring her fangs at her when her feathers had grown out fully. By then, would the hawk devour the snake, or would the snake rip the hawk to pieces?

When others accepted a disciple, they were tempted to make their disciple swear a stern oath to show eternal loyalty, but she did the exact opposite. Danger to her was a crucial part to the game. The White Lotus Mother had been expelled from her domain a long time ago, while Northmoon who was supposed to pose the greatest threat to her had instead become an important ally.

Qian Rongzhi smiled as meekly as she could. "I'll just do whatever I can to fulfil master's request."

Gu Yanying smiled extremely widely. "Logically speaking, I need to give you a gift since you've become my disciple, but this gift isn't particularly easy to obtain, so I need to prepare a little."

As a result, a few days later, still in the Waterside Pavilion of Listening Wind, Gu Yanying took out the gift she had prepared. "My disciple, look at what this is."

Qian Rongzhi trembled, and all her hairs stood on end. Gu Yanying had taken out several dozen hell snakes sealed in amber. Even though she personally believed she could already withstand the pain of venomous snakes biting away at her, the consequences of becoming entangled with all these venomous snakes were still unimaginable.

She could only grit her teeth and say reluctantly, "Thank you for your great kindness, master!"

"It really hasn't been easy for your master to find so many hell snakes for you. Try it out quick."

Gu Yanying said with an eager gaze. Her smile possessed the naivety of a child's, which made Qian Rongzhi shiver even more. She actually wanted Qian Rongzhi to accept the several dozen snakes into her body at once, not one by one in an orderly manner.

Qian Rongzhi was unable to turn her down. The moment before her mind became completely governed by pain, she heard Gu Yanying say, "If you can survive, I'll teach you the Illustrations of Naraka."

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Han Qiongzhi woke up, only to discover that Li Qingshan was no longer by her side. She could not help but feel like she had lost something. Putting on her clothes and getting out of bed, she arrived outside the dwelling. Gazing into the distance, he currently stood within the small lake between the mountains.

The surface of the lake had become as smooth as a mirror, without the slightest ripple.

Han Qiongzhi tidied her clothes and arrived by the lake. "What are you doing so early in the morning?"

Li Qingshan smiled. "So early in the morning? You've slept for an entire day." A scarlet smear swept past the bottom of the lake below his feet. He split his focus to control his clone, erasing all of his aura as he swam towards the entrance of the lake. With Han Qiongzhi's cultivation, she obviously struggled to notice this.

Han Qiongzhi glanced at the sky, and only then did she realise the sky was already glowing with the rosy colour of dusk. When she remembered their entanglement last night, she could not help but redden slightly. She had truly used up every bit of strength in her. It was not only because of the desire she had built up over these years, but also because of the worry and unease she was unable to put into words.

"What's wrong? You seem all distracted. Are you still thinking about those pessimistic words your father said? Weren't you very energetic last night?" Li Qingshan pulled her into his arms gently and smiled lovingly.

At the same time, his clone left the small lake and accelerated, entering a large river very soon. This was one of the water regions Li Qingshan had already refined. The Water God Seal glowed brilliantly, connecting with all the water again.

His mirror clone did not stay put at all. Instead, he accelerated again, swimming in the direction of the Clear River prefecture. Having been gone for so long, he wondered how the night roamers under his command were doing. He wondered if the sisters Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo were doing well.

When he thought about the intimate contact he had with them in the past, he felt like it had already become an extremely distant matter. Of course, this was not actually a long time ago at all to cultivators.

Although he had also once fallen in love, he would only focus on the thing right before him once he left. Rarely did he ever have time to reminisce about the past.

Like what Ma Buyi had said, a person's energy would always be limited. He spent most of his time with his head buried in cultivation or gazing up at the Nine Heavens. He could not become overly distracted by matters of love.

"You went too far last night!" Han Qiongzhi rebuked and randomly pinched Li Qingshan's waist. Towards the end of the ravishing pleasure last night, she had become completely submerged in the sea of desire, allowing him to do whatever he wanted.

Li Qingshan laughed. "You can't satisfy your husband, so don't blame him for finding someone else!" Through the entanglement last night, he had yet to release all of his desires, so now that he embraced her, it roused his desires again. A certain part of his body immediately responded.

Li Qingshan originally thought she would lose her temper like she did in the past and make him swear he would never have a second woman in his life. However, he never thought she would push him again. "Then go find some pleasure in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain by yourself. Don't come and bother me. I don't have the spare time to do something like that with you. You saved the great boss Qiu of the parlour, so she'll make sure it's free. You can pick the disciples from her sect as you please. Who knows, she might even accompany you personally!"

Li Qingshan had no idea that as soon as the period of watching over the grave of Han Anguo ended, Han Anjun had forcefully ordered Han Tiewi to openly take on concubines. Because it was not a formal marriage, it did not really defy the rule of three years of mourning. He could procreate as much as possible and extend the Han family's lineage.

Li Qingshan instead became rather embarrassed. "Don't misunderstand. I had only lost my temper in the moment. It's not like I'm actually interested in her or anything."

"Hmph, men!" Han Qiongzhi's face was filled with doubt.

Li Qingshan began to daydream. Qiu Haitang was definitely a stunner. If she insisted on pledging herself to him in order to pay him back for his kindness, it would probably be very difficult for him to turn her down. However, when it came to matters like this, he had to admit that the Spider Queen was definitely the one who proceeded the most smoothly and left him the most satisfied.

Right as his thoughts ran amok, he received a punch in the gut from Han Qiongzhi. Li Qingshan put on a painful expression obediently before lingering for a few more days in Han Qiongzhi's dwelling. After deciding when they would meet up again, he returned to the Clear River prefecture in search of a certain person.

This person was also endowed with startling talent, understanding the nature of water extremely well, and she had probably even grown up in water.

Chapter 605 - Chu Tian

Li Qingshan arrived in the Chain mountains first. He called out Ru Xin's name a few times in front of her dwelling, but he received no reply, so he thought, She's probably in the Academy of the Hundred Schools!

Turning around, he returned to his dwelling. As he gazed at the words "Qing Xiao", he could not help but sigh. "I wonder how Xiao An is doing in the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga."

Although he had already returned to the Clear River prefecture, part of his mind was left at the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga. When he recalled the past and contemplated the days to come, his mind became filled with an array of thoughts for a moment, unable to control his emotions.

He exhaled deeply and dismissed all his thoughts and feelings. Right now, she must be working hard towards her breakthrough to the second heavenly tribulation. They would probably meet again before long. He also had to focus on cultivation. He could not allow her to surpass him.

Without entering the dwelling, he turned around and made his way towards the academy. Rising up on a cloud, he arrived above the Lake of Dragons and Snakes in the blink of an eye. As he gazed at the

rippling light, it brought him great ease, as he had already refined the Lake of Dragons and Snakes. All the regions of water here were like home to him.

He stood in the air, raising his head slightly and closing his eyes. The rivers and lakes all appeared in his head. The bodies of water he had refined were all like an extension of his blood vessels. He could sense their existence; they wrapped around him gently, enveloping him.

When he opened his eyes again, they became filled with confidence. This is what I've established through a decade of fighting. My time hasn't gone to waste.

With this as a foundation, he could definitely comprehend the true meaning of water and climb to a higher level with his cultivation.

The cloud dispersed, and he leapt down. He moved faster and faster, the lake filling his vision as the wind whistled past his ears. The sight before him distorted; he had already passed through the Formation of Dragons and Snakes in the blink of an eye. He determined the location of the school of Medicine's Benevolence island and unleashed the Wave Treading Form several times. In merely a few steps, he landed gently on the tallest structure in the centre of the island.

A group of disciples from the school of Medicine all raised their heads and looked at him. Admiration filled their eyes. Most of them had joined the Academy of the Hundred Schools even earlier than Li Qingshan. It could be said that they had personally witnessed how this unlucky disciple of the school of Novels underwent a meteoric rise and climbed to the position of Scarlet Hawk commander.

"Commander Li, are you looking for senior sister Ru Xin?" a young medical disciple asked.

"That's right. Is she here?" Li Qingshan flew down and landed before this disciple.

"Senior sister Ru Xin is currently studying some medical classics with master Hua Ci. They're preparing for the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures. No one is allowed to disturb them, so you might have to wait a while, commander. I'll go make you some tea." The medical disciple bowed in a hurry.

"That won't be necessary. I'll go take a look."

Li Qingshan was unable to sense Ru Xin's aura. She must have been in a formation. However, when he wrinkled his nose, he immediately caught her scent drifting through the air, and he strode away.

The medical disciple wanted to say something else, but in the blink of an eye, Li Qingshan had already vanished. He made his way around a fake mountain, passed through a park, and arrived behind the main hall, in front of a stone door.

Sensing the obstruction of a formation, Li Qingshan called out, "Ru Xin, are you in there? There's something I want to discuss with you." Meanwhile, he thought, Medical classics aren't even that urgent. I'm giving you a mid grade arcane artifact alchemy cauldron, so why don't you hurry up and receive me on your knees?

There was no reply even after a while. Right when Li Qingshan grew impatient, the stone door suddenly opened. He stepped in, and the door slammed closed again.

Before him was a long passageway. Milky-white light hovered on the walls, illuminating the utmost of details.

Li Qingshan followed the passageway all the way to the end and saw a spacious room. Books filled the numerous bookshelves, while the glass containers all held strange organs.

However, none of this managed to draw away Li Qingshan's attention. All of his focus right now was on Ru Xin, no, the naked man behind Ru Xin.

The man was roughly in his twenties. His appearance was nothing special, and his stature could be regarded as sturdy.

Li Qingshan exclaimed, "Chu Tian!"

Indeed, the man was Chu Tian. His eyes were shut, and he did not move at all. It was like he was dead already. He was submerged in a large glass container, completely bare. A light-blue fluid filled the container, which Li Qingshan found slightly familiar.

A string of bubbles appeared in the container. The exterior was covered in inscriptions, reaching all the way to the ground. It was a huge formation.

Apart from Ru Xin, there was a dark-skinned, old man standing in the room as well, the original leader of the school of Medicine, Hua Ci. He currently frowned as he stared at Chu Tian in the container as if he had failed to sense Li Qingshan's arrival at all.

Ru Xin exhaled gently and made her way over to Li Qingshan. She seemed slightly exhausted. A gentle smile appeared on her face. From her outer appearance alone, she was truly the best representation of "as gentle as water", but Li Qingshan knew this was merely a false impression.

Ru Xin studied Li Qingshan from head to toe first before asking in complete surprise, "You're still alive?"

The corner of Li Qingshan's lips twitched. "I'm alive and healthy!"

Ru Xin said with plenty of pity, "The insight of the old monks from the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga truly isn't that special then! I'd thought you'd be purged!"

"Even if I die, I'll pull you down with me!"

"Even though you're so infatuated with me, I can't accept it because- because- I've already seen the body of another man!" Ru Xin's eyes glistened as if she was extremely touched before turning her head away sorrowfully in the end.

At that moment, Li Qingshan felt like he had lost control over all the muscles in his face. He had no idea what expression to make, and his urge to choke her to death bloomed once again. He sucked in a deep breath and asked, "Just what is going on here?"

He had always thought Qian Rongzhi had already sucked Chu Tian dry, but it seemed he still had a breath in him.

Ru Xin laid out her hands helplessly. "Master said that since he's on Benevolence island, he's a patient of the school of Medicine. We have to uphold our responsibilities to the very end."

The two of them walked over together. Li Qingshan asked in wonder, "It's just healing the sick, so why're you doing this all so secretly?"

“We’re obviously afraid of trouble from a certain person. She’s already great commander Gu’s esteemed disciple now. There’s a great future ahead of her. If she learns there’s still a possibility for Chu Tian to be cured, she’ll definitely pay him a visit.”

Li Qingshan agreed very much with what she said. With what that woman was capable of now, even if Chu Tian were alive and kicking, he probably was not her opponent, let alone when he was half-dead. He could not help but walk towards Chu Tian. “Have you always been trying to save him?”

“Yeah, we tried many ideas.”

“Spending so much effort to save an idiot really isn’t worth it.”

“You can treat it as studying medicine for us! And if he truly can awaken, he might not necessarily be an idiot. He might even become smarter than you all of a sudden. Have you noticed what the liquid in there is? Don’t you find it a little familiar?”

“This is... the Water of Recollection! You’re trying to make him recover the memories of his past life?” Li Qingshan suddenly remembered what it was. He had quite a deep impression of the function of the Water of Recollection. “But is it really that effective?”

“Yeah, we increased the dosage, but it’s probably still useless. I’ve checked many books. There have been many incidents of celestials recovering their past memories, but that’s only when their cultivation reached a certain level. I’m only doing what I can and hoping for the best. It might end up working. Who knows.”

“His mind has completely collapsed anyway. If he can’t find his past memories, then even if he awakens again, he’ll be like what you said, a complete idiot or an imbecile, the type that doesn’t even know how to handle his bodily instincts and functions.”

Li Qingshan turned around and asked, “Can it work?”

Ru Xin shook her head. “Who knows! Let’s go. We’ll talk outside.” Without even notifying Hua Ci, she told Li Qingshan that and made her way out.

Li Qingshan gazed at Chu Tian for a while longer. He waved his hand to bid farewell, about to turn around and leave.

Chu Tian’s eyes suddenly snapped open, staring straight at Li Qingshan. His gaze was so stubborn, completely fixed on him.

Li Qingshan called out, “Hey, hey! He’s awakened!”

Ru Xin had already entered the passageway. She said without even looking back, “This is merely a momentary reflex of his muscles. Let’s go. Stop dilly-dallying.”

Li Qingshan looked closely. Chu Tian’s gaze was blank and hollow, and his eyes closed up slowly again a while later.

He could not help but curl his lip and say to him with his soul sense, “You might have offended me a lot, and you well and truly deserved it to be reduced to such a state. However, I still hope you can come

back to life. Hehe, I'm such a good person. Looks like I've already understood some of the true meaning of being 'good-nature like water'."

Li Qingshan turned around and caught up with Ru Xin, but unbeknownst to him, the voice expanded through the depths of Chu Tian's sea of consciousness, kicking up a ripple in a pool of stagnant water.

Hua Ci and Ru Xin had also tried this method numerous times in the past to awaken Chu Tian, but it had never achieved anything. Li Qingshan's soul sense was so powerful that even Golden Core cultivators paled in comparison. Ru Xin and Hua Ci's soul senses were far inferior.

Hua Ci gazed at Chu Tian for a while longer before shaking his head. He had basically done everything he was capable of already. Although the school of Medicine had even more methods, this was all he could do with his current cultivation. He was not a stubborn old man who had to save Chu Tian no matter what. Just like how doctors could not cure death, he could only do his best.

The room dimmed down, and Hua Ci made his way to the entrance too. The milky-white lights on the two sides of the passageway gradually dimmed with his footsteps.

In the end, only the glass container of Water of Recollection remained behind, shining with a dim, blue light. Chu Tian was submerged there, without moving at all, just like before.

Of course, Hua Ci still did not know that the treatment they had persisted with for all this time was not all useless.

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Li Qingshan arrived in Ru Xin's alchemy room with her and took out the Jade Melting cauldron, tossing it at her. "Here!"

Ru Xin's eyes lit up immediately. As someone skilled in alchemy, a cauldron like that was basically something she could only dream of.

"This is the Jade Melting cauldron!"

"How did you know? Oh, you must have visited the Arsenal of Arms in the commandery city too!"

Li Qingshan remembered that the Arsenal of Arms was only a store, and the Jade Melting cauldron had originally been one of their products for sale.

Ru Xin was extremely skilled in alchemy. In order to increase her efficiency, she had obviously spent plenty of time examining the various alchemy cauldrons available on the market. The Jade Melting cauldron was the best cauldron she could find, but it was far too expensive.

Although she had helped Li Qingshan refine pills and accumulated a sum of resources over the years, these renowned and precious pills could not be sold off so easily either. In particular, most of their original materials were spiritual herbs from underground, which made her even more afraid to sell them en-masse.

She fiddled around with the Jade Melting cauldron in surprise and joy. "You're giving this to me!"

Li Qingshan said, "Of course not. I'm only taking it out to show you. I'll be taking it back afterwards."

“That’s fantastic!” Ru Xin ignored what he said and revealed a happy smile like a child. Just like that, Li Qingshan felt it had all been worth it. He smiled. “As long as you like it!”

Ru Xin stared at Li Qingshan. She controlled her turbulent emotions and seriously contemplated her next words.

“Filial piety... can truly even touch the heavens!”

Chapter 606 - Planning and Preparing

“Filial piety your mum’s head! Give it back!”

Li Qingshan cursed aloud, extending his hand to take back the Jade Melting cauldron. How dare you take advantage of me even at a time like this.

Ru Xin turned around and coughed twice, speaking with an old, hoarse voice, “My dear son, your mum’s headache feels much better with the bit of filial concern you’ve shown.”

Li Qingshan grabbed her shoulder. There was a flash of light near her shoulder, and it gave off a pliable, soft blue glow. He was unable to grab her firmly, his hand sliding off.

Ru Xin’s feet slid away, moving seven or eight steps away from him. She rebuked loudly, “You’ve given it away already, and you’re still trying to take it back! Is this what a proper man would do?”

“Whether I’m a proper man or not is not for you to decide.” Li Qingshan extended his hand. The centre of his palm glowed with light, expanding like a vortex and producing a great suction force.

Ru Xin swayed towards him. She grabbed the Jade Melting cauldron in one hand and casually swung the other backwards. A band of blue light also flew towards the centre of the swirl, and it collapsed immediately.

Li Qingshan called out, “Alright! Then watch this!”

Within the narrow space, the two of them moved about, unleashing various techniques.

Li Qingshan completely unleashed everything he had comprehended about water during the past few days. He used the water spiritual energy to conjure a myriad of things. Whether it was entanglement or powerful attacks, Ru Xin ingeniously nullified them all one by one. The bottles and jars in the room remained untouched.

Of course, this was also because Li Qingshan had not used his full strength. This was not a spar. He only wanted to see Ru Xin’s comprehension of and capabilities with water. Sure enough, Li Qingshan was not disappointed. If she assumed her Merfolk form, she would probably be even more skilled.

The two of them scrambled around the alchemy room for a while, but in the end, Li Qingshan’s reactions were still a little faster. He managed to trap her. In order to prevent her from escaping, an arm wrapped around in front of her, while the other reached towards the Jade Melting cauldron. He laughed. “I’d like to see where else you can escape to!”

Suddenly, Ru Xin called out for him to stop, which stunned Li Qingshan. He discovered that they were currently a little too intimate. With his hand around her, it was as if she was leaning against him in his

embrace. Her black hair drifted about like clouds as her slender, beautiful nape seemed like it was made out of jade. All of it was inches away.

Li Qingshan wrinkled his nose and caught the heavy fragrance of medicine, together with an indescribable, faint scent.

Ru Xin asked with a smile, "Does it smell good?"

Li Qingshan released her in a hurry. She turned around with a face of mischief. At a time like this, shouldn't it be the woman who was embarrassed? Why did he feel a little embarrassed instead?

Ru Xin used her slender fingers to tidy her black hair. "Don't tell me you've become carried away by lust, making you second-doubt yourself now that you've seen someone else, wanting the new after having grown tired of the old, wanting to be faithless? You want to let down the first young miss of the Han family!"

Li Qingshan said, "Definitely not. I never second-doubt myself when I see someone else, nor do I grow tired of the old when I want the new. Although I do get a little carried away by lust, I'm not exactly faithless. In around another three years is the day of our marriage. I'll definitely send you an invitation when that time comes around."

The smile on Ru Xin's face faded slightly as she gazed at Li Qingshan with her eyes that were as gentle as water. Li Qingshan felt like something had changed in there, but he was unable to grasp it.

Ru Xin asked, "Will that be fine?"

"What fine?" Li Qingshan was confused.

"Nothing. Well, you've given away your alchemy cauldron, you've taken advantage of me, so it's also about time you left." Ru Xin waved her hand like she was driving away sheep.

"You want to chase me away right after benefiting? And who's taken advantage of who! I still have something else I need your assistance with."

"What?"

"I want to deepen my comprehension of water."

"Isn't your comprehension much greater than mine?"

"That's merely using brute force through my talent. In terms of actual comprehension, I'm nowhere close to you."

After several days of consideration, Li Qingshan understood why he still lacked a comprehension of water despite reaching the fourth layer of the spirit turtle. That was because the talent that the spirit turtle had brought was far too powerful. He could control water as easily as controlling his own limbs and fingers.

It was exactly because everything had come too easily that he lost the desire to explore it. He spent most of his time and effort on how to refine even more regions of water so that he could increase his strength.

Instead, it was those regular cultivators who possessed insufficient talent that were forced to constantly refine their understanding and comprehend diligently. This could also be regarded as a trade-off, but he believed making up for what he paid as the price would not be difficult.

Ru Xin glanced at the Jade Melting cauldron in her hand. "Alright, for the sake of the filial love you've shown me."

Li Qingshan said, "I feel like I'm going to choke you to death in person sooner or later."

At this exact moment, Liu Chuanfeng's calls rang out from outside the alchemy room. "Qingshan, are you in there? If you are, please answer. There's something I want to discuss with you."

Ru Xin said, "It's probably related to the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures. You better go. I'll refine the Jade Melting cauldron for now. Once you've handled all your matters, we can find a suitable place to cultivate."

"Can you stop being so strange? Forget it, I'm going!"

Li Qingshan shivered. When she decided to be gentle, her voice, tone, and expression would all be as gentle as they could get. It could basically melt people's hearts. However, having grown accustomed to her foul mouth, he felt very unaccustomed to when she behaved like this.

Ru Xin smiled. "My good son, you better piss off!"

Li Qingshan shook his head with a bitter smile. He had truly asked for that this time.

Watching Li Qingshan leave, Ru Xin sat down and began refining the Jade Melting cauldron, but she was unable to find peace mentally. She murmured, "Is this fine?"

Li Qingshan arrived outside the door and discovered it was not only Liu Chuanfeng who had been waiting here all this time. Sun Fubai stood to one side cheerfully with a radiant vigour.

"Fubai, you've reached Foundation Establishment! Congratulations, congratulations!" Li Qingshan paced over and congratulated him.

"It's all thanks to your assistance, Qingshan."

"May I ask why all of you are looking for me?" Li Qingshan asked with a smile.

Li Qingshan looked around and saw Liu Zhangqing, Hua Chengzan, Chu Danqing, Han Tieyi, and so on.

When Li Qingshan descended from the sky, the entire academy learnt that he had returned. He was no longer the insignificant minor figure of the past anymore. As a matter of fact, many matters had to involve him.

Hua Chengzan had come so that he could handle the matters of the Hawkwolf Guard. As the vice commander, he could handle affairs in his place, but there were still many matters that required his decision as the commander.

Liu Zhangqing had come to discuss the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures with him. This was something major that had to do with the glory of the Clear River prefecture, so he had to be involved as the Scarlet Hawk commander.

A great group of Foundation Establishment cultivators huddled around him, wanting to pull him aside first to discuss important matters. There was also Han Tiewi who remained silent and Chu Danqing who faltered, as well as a few familiar faces standing in the distance, which included Hao Pingyang, Li Long, and so on. Clearly, their cultivations were too low, so they were too afraid to gather over and stand with these school leaders.

Li Qingshan shook his head inside. Sure enough, he had a lot of matters he had to deal with during his return this time. He said after some thought, "How about this, everyone? I'll return to the Cloudwisp island first, and then I'll visit you individually." He greeted Hao Pingyang and everyone else in the distance with a nod.

Liu Chuanfeng felt utterly honoured. He felt like Li Qingshan truly had a kind heart and a strong sense of personal loyalty.

Returning to Cloudwisp island, bamboo still covered it, but the pathway was completely clean. As they approached the bamboo loft, they heard the murmur of people. The school of Novels had gained many more disciples again, becoming much more lively. It was no longer as desolate as in the past.

Sun Fubai recalled the past and could not help but sigh a little. They had gone from the miserable circumstance where they had no disciples and even their school leader was a Qi Practitioner to three Foundation Establishment cultivators present in the school. Even the disciples began accumulating. The situations were basically worlds apart.

"This is all because of you, Qingshan!"

Li Qingshan smiled. "I only came up with a few ideas. You had a hand in this too with your skillful management."

Liu Chuanfeng said, "We're going to hold the entrance examination soon. We'll rope in a few more disciples then, and it'll probably be even more lively."

Li Qingshan said, "Really? I feel like it has already been so long since the last entrance examination."

Because of the Marquis of Ruyi's death, Liu Zhangqing had to continue with his role of prefect at the end of the day. Under his control, the various schools banded together and reorganised the entire prefecture.

The school of Mohism repaired those damaged cities, rebuilding the homes of common folk. The disciples of confucianism took on roles of district magistrates, restoring order and governance. The schools of Legalism and the Military worked together to strengthen their suppression of active bandits.

The school of Agriculture passed out various seeds. These seeds had all been rinsed in spiritual qi, so their first harvest yield would be extremely startling. They also sent out disciples of agriculture to help with the farming and pass out grain to ensure that no one would starve.

The Clear River prefecture walked out of the shadow of war. The common folk all recovered their peace and quiet, so Liu Zhangqing wanted to restart the entrance examinations and accept disciples from abroad so that they could replenish the forces they had lost through the war.

Liu Chuanfeng said, "Yeah. We have to take it up a notch with the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures this time. That's the only way for us to accept even more disciples in the upcoming entrance examination."

"How will these exhibition matches work?"

Sun Fubai said, "The various schools will first separate and compete in their respective fields. The school of the Military will perform military formations, the school of Music will compete with music, and so on. As for our school of Novels, it'll obviously be our ability to turn fiction into reality. The main competition comes after."

Li Qingshan asked, "How powerful are the school of Novels from other prefectures?"

Liu Chuanfeng sighed heavily. "Originally, they were basically the same as us in the past. They were all pitiful. Some prefectures didn't even have formal school leaders. If it had not been one of the ten standard schools the founding emperor designated, we would have been abolished a long time ago. But in recent years, they've copied our idea, and their situation improved as well."

"On the other hand, the Clear River prefecture had been at war for several years, so instead of developing, the Cloudwisp association shrunk. I really can't say that victory is guaranteed for us this time around."

Li Qingshan smiled. "You can call this bringing prosperity to one, bringing prosperity to all. It's not necessarily bad if the school of Novels can restore its reputation."

Sun Fubai said, "Yeah. I've already contacted the various prefectures. We want to establish an association that spans the entire Ruyi commandery. The larger of an audience we have, the closer to the limit we can push the power of the school of Novels. They're quite interested too. As a result, the battle has become even more important. It's not only for the entrance exam. It'll also determine which prefecture can occupy the dominant position."

With the books Li Qingshan had plagiarised so far, if he could publish them across the entire Ruyi commandery, the rate at which he gathered the power of belief would definitely multiply. Because of the war, the population of the Clear River prefecture had fallen drastically, while the eight other prefectures were not particularly affected. It was an extremely vast market.

But thinking about it the other way, the schools of Novels in other prefectures must also want to expand their influence. By then, just publishing whose work first would be an issue. If this was handled badly, it could lead to a dispute, so the dominant position was relatively important.

As they spoke, the three of them arrived before the bamboo loft. Li Qingshan said, "Let's go in and properly plan and prepare!"

Chapter 607 - The Secret of the Painting Tomb

Chu Danqing paced around the room anxiously, opening the window and glancing in the direction of Cloudwisp island from time to time, constantly sighing. He had always been an excitable person, but there was no one else he could discuss it with apart from Li Qingshan with how important the matter was.

“Danqing, what have you encountered that has made you so anxious?”

Li Qingshan’s voice suddenly rang out from behind. Chu Danqing turned around in joy, only to see Li Qingshan stride into the room and sit down before the window without holding back, leaning against the small table.

He discussed with Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai for a while and came up with a few ideas before leaving Cloudwisp island. He understood his strengths and weaknesses very well. In terms of attachment to and understanding of the school of Novels, he paled in comparison to Liu Chuanfeng. In terms of meticulousness and dealing with matters, he paled in comparison to Sun Fubai. He would not be of much help even if he stayed behind, so he was better off dealing with all these matters before learning about water from Ru Xin.

“If you require me to fight anywhere, I can guarantee victory. As for everything else, I’ll leave it all to you.”

With that, Li Qingshan bade farewell and took his leave, visiting the school of Painting that was relatively closer first.

“Qingshan, your cultivation has progressed yet again!”

Chu Danqing sighed as he sat down on the other side of the table. He wanted to pour some tea, but Li Qingshan had already picked up the teapot, pouring a cup for himself before downing it all. He smiled. “It’s been a while. You’ve picked up on these civilities.”

He could still vividly recall Chu Danqing’s tactlessness when he first met him. Now that he had been through matters of the world, his innocence and gullibility had faded away. In particular, with how his eyebrows were pinched in worry, he seemed much more mature.

“This isn’t civilities. Your cultivation... Forget it, let’s not talk about this for now. I have... Sigh, I really don’t know where to start.” Chu Danqing had originally made up his mind about asking Li Qingshan for help, but he had never asked for assistance before, so he had no idea how to mention it to Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan’s smile receded. He placed the teacup on the table. “I still haven’t forgotten the kindness that master Chu has shown me. If you have any difficulties you need my help with, just mention it. I won’t object at all. Honestly, what I hate the most is never forgetting about the great kindness someone has shown me, let alone clinging onto favours owed even until death. It feels horrible to be in debt to someone. I’d prefer paying back their kindness straightforwardly.”

Chu Danqing ruminated for a while. “You know that my master had more than just me as his disciple...”

A wisp of steam rose up from the teacup, coiling and dispersing. Chu Danqing explained with his eyebrows furrowed as Li Qingshan listened attentively and quietly.

As it turned out, Chu Shidao had many more disciples other than Chu Danqing. There were three who were the most outstanding, all having undergone the first heavenly tribulation and reached Foundation Establishment.

But ever since then, they set up their own schools and sects. They personally believed they had already obtained Chu Shidao’s true legacy, so they no longer treated Chu Shidao with much courtesy. As a

matter of fact, they became envious of Chu Shidao's reputation and status, so they secretly brought up misdeeds of the past and spread rumors.

Chu Shidao was dispirited. He refused to argue with his disciples, which was why he retired deep into the mountains, taking on Chu Danqing as his last disciple and diligently guiding him to adulthood.

Li Qingshan slapped his thigh. "If I were to meet such ungrateful scum, I'll definitely turn them into pulpy scum for real!"

"For real?" Chu Danqing was unable to understand what Li Qingshan was implying. He had no idea that Li Qingshan could crush people into pulp.

"Keep going. Since you don't have any contact with them anymore, what's it got to do with them?"

"A few days ago, they suddenly came and visited master's grave. I thought they had finally realised their errors and decided to change, but I never thought they would begin discussing how to split up master's estate afterwards. They hadn't even participated in master's funeral!" Chu Danqing was extremely furious.

When Chu Shidao was buried, the war between the humans and daemons still raged. No cultivators were bold enough to enter a place as dangerous as the Clear River prefecture. Now that the situation had gradually settled down, the people that needed to come obviously came.

Li Qingshan nodded. Chu Shidao's primary estate was obviously paintings. Any single painting from him could be used as a spiritual artifact, and some of his finer works were even equivalent to arcane artifacts in power. Importantly, they did not have a particularly high demand on the cultivator's strength and cultivation.

For example, the Heavenly Maiden Scatters the Blossoms Li Qingshan had won, even Qi Practitioners could use it and summon out the heavenly maiden, yet it could rival the power of Foundation Establishment cultivators, which made it worth even more than regular arcane artifacts. With property like that up for grabs, it was no wonder that Chu Danqing's senior brothers and sisters would become restless.

Chu Danqing took out an invitation card created from ink. "I managed to evade this situation that day, but I really won't be able to evade it this time."

Li Qingshan took the invitation card and studied it. An ink-black carp suddenly became alarmed and swam around. He said in confusion, "Do they really deserve a piece of the estate just because they asked for it? And, you're in the Clear River prefecture, so with the support of prefect Liu and other fellow cultivators, where would the three of them find the courage to touch you? Why must you be so worried?"

Chu Danqing said, "This is a matter between my seniors and I. It has never been a matter where outsiders should become involved in. Qingshan, you might not be a part of the school of Painting, but my master trusted you very much. Sigh, my three seniors are all people with a certain level of status identity now, so they would never stoop to the level of fighting if it were only for these paintings. However, this is connected to a secret treasure too. If I insist on ignoring them, it'll lead to great trouble if they divulge the secret out of anger."

Li Qingshan became curious. "What secret treasure?"

Chu Danqing sucked in a deep breath. "The secret of the Painting Tomb!"

"Painting Tomb?"

"In the past, the Five Absolutes Immortal left behind everything he had learnt in the five absolute tombs of the sword, zither, chess, calligraphy, and painting for people who were destined to find them. This is an extremely-widespread legend across the nine provinces. Actually, you can't even call it a legend anymore, as fortunate cultivators will enter one of the tombs and obtain a legacy every few decades or centuries, allowing them to rise up meteorically."

Anticipation filled Chu Danqing's eyes, but it was not exactly for a meteoric rise. It was rumored that the only reason the school of Painting could survive until now was because of the Five Absolutes Immortal. As a disciple of the school of Painting, it would be his great fortune to see one of his paintings.

As soon as Li Qingshan heard Chu Danqing mention this person, he gathered his focus. Even the murals in the grand hall of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga were by him, which made it evident how powerful he was in the past. The legacies he left behind would basically be priceless. Even his heart skipped a beat when he heard about it.

"In other words, you know where the Painting Tomb is?"

Chu Danqing shook his head. "No one knows where it is. Actually, the five absolute tombs don't exist in this world, or they would have been thoroughly explored and emptied out a long time ago. Why would we ever get a chance?"

"Rumor has it that the five absolute tombs each have a space of their own, drifting through the nine provinces. No one knows where they are, nor does anyone know how to enter them. Even those great masters past the third heavenly tribulation cannot force their way in. They can only rely on their luck. Even if cultivators are fortunate enough to enter the place, they'll often only catch a glimpse of the entire place before being teleported out."

Li Qingshan said, "In other words, master Chu found some clues as well?"

"Yeah, they're merely some groundless clues, yet they somehow managed to reach my three seniors' ears. If I knew where the Painting Tomb was, I would have entered the place and accepted a legacy a long time ago. Would they still be able to trouble me?"

Chu Danqing smiled bitterly, but Li Qingshan noticed that his expression was rather unnatural. Clearly, he was not telling the truth. This definitely was not everything Chu Danqing knew about the Painting Tomb. However, he soon came to a realisation.

This was connected to such a great sum of wealth, so great that even brothers connected by blood would be willing to turn against one another. He was not close to Chu Danqing at all, so caution was essential. He only had to help him deal with his seniors, and that would basically be paying back Chu Shidao. He had no need to worry about anything else.

Right as he thought like that, Chu Danqing's voice directly rang out in his mind, communicating with him through soul sense. "Actually, I know when and where the Painting Tomb will appear next, as well as the

method to enter. I'm only afraid they're eavesdropping somehow, so I specially said that to mislead them."

Li Qingshan could not help but laugh. Would you call that being sharp-witted or honest? He felt much better inside, and he also used his soul sense. "Aren't you afraid I'll turn against you when the opportunity arrives and steal your legacy?"

"Master said you're heartless and cruel, but not someone who forgoes friendship in the face of benefits. And, the Painting Tomb is large enough. By then, we might be able to enter together and take a look, but I can't guarantee that." Chu Danqing laughed, bearing some resemblance to his innocence of the past. He also seemed even more honest.

Li Qingshan slammed the invitation card against the table. "Since they want a discussion, then let's discuss with them!"

Chu Danqing said, "Even if I die, I won't let them have this!"

Li Qingshan left the school of Painting. After a moment of consideration, he visited the school of Legalism and saw Hua Chengzan.

Hua Chengzan remembered Li Qingshan's other identity, Northmoon, as soon as he saw him. However, he also remembered how he had saved his life, as well as how the Clear River prefecture would have never returned to peace if it were not for him. And, he had saved Qiu Haitang in the marquis' estate a few days ago.

With the kindness he had shown, even if Hua Chengzan had to pay him back with his life, it would be worth it. He secretly made up his mind to tell no one about this.

"Qingshan, you've finally come! Let's go to the Parlour of Clouds and Rain!"

"Why're we going to the parlour?"

"Haitang told me to contact her as soon as you got back. She's holding a banquet to thank you in the parlour."

Sigh, so it's only a formal thank-you in other words. Those stories about pledging yourself to your savior are all a lie!

Li Qingshan lamented inside, but it was only a man's daydream at the end of the day, so he did not truly feel any disappointment. He smiled. "Since that's the case, then let's invite a few more people and have a good time!"

As a result, Li Qingshan invited Hao Pingyang, Li Long, and so on to the banquet. Apart from Han Tieyi, everyone attended the banquet happily.

Hua Chenglu learnt about it and grumbled about going, so Li Qingshan obviously invited her along. Upon considering how he had never handled any matters nor was he close with his subordinates despite being a commander, he simply invited along all the Hawkwolf guards in Clear River city.

As a result, it became quite an event. Even the various school leaders who were on friendly terms with Li Qingshan caught wind of it and went to check it out. In the very end, a great group of people had already gathered around him when he visited the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

Standing before the parlour again, he recalled his past few visits. Both his status and mentality had changed drastically now. The parlour was ablaze with lights, illuminating the surroundings. Qiu Haitang had already come out in person to receive Li Qingshan.

Seeing how so many people had come, Qiu Haitang was surprised as well. She only saw Li Qingshan standing in front of the crowd, with respected Foundation Establishment cultivators of the academy all standing beside him as if they were following him as their leader. Even prefect Liu was among them, which made her sigh inside.

In the blink of an eye, of course he has become someone else altogether!

Chapter 608 - In the Parlour of Clouds and Rain

Qiu Haitang was dressed in splendid attire. She bowed gracefully. "Thank you for saving me, commander. The great kindness you've shown me is vast as the sea, something I'll never forget. Please let me know if there is any area I can be of use in the future. I will hold onto the kindness you've shown even until death."

Li Qingshan and Chu Danqing exchanged glances. They could not help but laugh aloud.

Qiu Haitang asked in confusion, "Commander, why do you laugh?"

"You've said everything I hate in a single breath." Li Qingshan waved his hand and laughed loudly. "There's no need to thank me! After all, 'thank-yous' mean nothing before great kindness! Since you won't pledge yourself to me, it's useless even if you thank me a thousand times."

The surroundings fell silent. Just who would bring up things like "'thank-yous' mean nothing before great kindness" and "pledge yourself to me" again and again after doing some good? Qiu Haitang was completely taken aback. She reddened slightly and stared at Li Qingshan with a mixed gaze, thinking to herself.

Don't tell me he's interested in me? Yeah, so much for fancying myself as clever, I completely missed this point. If he wasn't interested in me, why would he take on so much risk to help me? If he only stopped E Dan, then so be it, but he even went as far as to fall out with him completely. He was clearly standing up for me!

Sigh, he has offended E Dan for my sake, so he really might die to a scheme before long. Even if I do pledge myself to him, he well and truly deserves something like that, though from what Chengzan said, isn't he already engaged to the young lady of the Han family?

Qiu Haitang thought quickly. Li Qingshan had once put everything on the line to stand up for her, refusing to let her be humiliated before everyone no matter what. Right as she contemplated how she would reply, she heard Li Qingshan continue.

"There's no need to say anything more. All you have to do is serve up some good alcohol and good meat so that I can have a jolly session with everyone, and we'll be in the clear. There's alcohol tonight, so we'll

get drunk tonight. By the time you really approach your last breath and become an old granny, what's the point even if you still remember it?!"

There was a roar of laughter. Everyone had heard how he completely fell out with a powerful Golden Core cultivator from the Dragon province for the sake of Qiu Haitang in the marquis' estate. If they had been in his shoes, they definitely could not smile so easily even if they did not go as far as losing their appetite from worrying day and night. They secretly admired his courage.

Only now did Qiu Haitang realise that she had been overthinking. He had no interest in her paying him back at all. He merely had a reckless mouth, bold enough to do whatever he wanted. He did not disguise his inner desires, but he was not bound by them either. To have chosen such a bold and frank man, Qiongzhi's insight truly is far better than mine!

With some hidden bitterness, she glanced at Hua Chengzan. Hua Chengzan lowered his head and cleared his throat. She smiled. "Commander- no, Qingshan, if you truly are interested, how can I hold myself back? Though, I do have to be married to you in a formal manner, under the witness of our friends and family. Only then can we become cultivation partners."

Basically all the men present become envious. Qiu Haitang's beauty was renowned. There was basically no one who did not know about it within the cultivation community of the fifteen hundred kilometers of the Clear River prefecture. Never had anyone managed to get close to her. As a matter of fact, some people thought that even if they had to fall out with E Dan, it was not completely unacceptable if something as great as this was on the line.

Li Qingshan shook his head firmly. "That won't work. Qiongzhi will kill me!"

Everyone laughed aloud again. Qiu Haitang laughed too. "Then you can't blame me for refusing to pledge myself to you."

She felt a tinge of regret the moment she said that earlier, but when she saw how Li Qingshan turned her down without the slightest hesitation, she could not help but become slightly disappointed. Though, that was not exactly because she was interested in Li Qingshan, but purely because of her instincts as a woman.

"It's fine, it's fine. As long as there's alcohol and meat."

Li Qingshan entered the Parlour of Clouds and Rain with everyone and glanced upwards. When Qiu Haitang mentioned how she could agree to his demands, he immediately felt a sense of hostility, but the hostility vanished as he turned her down publicly.

The Parlour of Clouds and Rain is hiding a Golden Core cultivator. I wonder who they are. Don't tell me E Dan has come for revenge?

As a result, he raised his guard and immediately made his mirror clone hurry over so that it could provide assistance at crucial times. E Dan probably would not take action in the eye of the public. He could definitely strike when he was alone; no, he did not even have to be alone. He only had to kill all eyewitnesses. He definitely possessed the strength and cruelty to do something like that. If that happened, Li Qingshan would not be able to maintain his disguise anymore. He would be forced to show his true form and cooperate with his clone to see if he could kill E Dan on the spot!

Like in the past, the banquet was arranged on the rooftop of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. It was possible to admire flowers and the moon and see the entire glow of the prefectural city from there.

Everyone sat down in their seats, and Li Qingshan obviously occupied the seat of honour. Qiu Haitang had arranged this banquet to thank him after all. In the past, Qiu Haitang would carry out her responsibilities as a host and go around toasting to the school leaders so that everyone would be happy, but she sat with Li Qingshan today, specially serving him and keeping him company.

Li Qingshan did not hold back, emptying his cup the moment she filled it with alcohol. Although he would not grope around, it was still extremely delightful to have a great beauty with such a mesmerizing figure and charming bearing to fill his cup and urge him to drink. He incurred everyone's jealousy.

Sure enough, Qiu Haitang did not mention another "thank you". She only mentioned how they first met. "Back then, I thought you were just an ignorant country bumpkin, but I never thought..."

"You never thought there would be a time when you drank with me, right?" Li Qingshan smiled as he clinked cups with her.

The unhappy experiences of the past sounded more like interesting stories now. Qiu Haitang did not do everything to please him, but she was docile and meek. It was not only because she owed Li Qingshan, but also because of his extraordinary strength. Originally, his young age was worth despising, but now, it accentuated his extraordinary talent instead.

By the time they had become familiar with one another, Qiu Haitang had become somewhat tipsy. Her plump, smooth cheeks were slightly flushed, making her even more charming. She said gently, "Be honest with me. Did you kill the West Gate Granny and the others?"

"Well that's not something I can tell you!"

Li Qingshan laughed. Having reached this point, it did not matter even if he admitted it. As the Scarlet Hawk commander, defeating those stronger than him and killing a few Qi Practitioners who dared to oppress him in the past was nothing bad at all. Instead, it brought him glory.

But in that moment, he felt the sense of hostility appear again before vanishing very soon once more.

"Forget it. I knew you wouldn't tell me. It's not like we needed them anyway." Qiu Haitang did not care. In the past, she had even used Li Qingshan's strength to kill Wei Zhongyuan, who was scheming after her. The lives of a few measly Qi Practitioners truly were nothing.

After several rounds of toasting and drinking until they were tipsy, Liu Zhangqing walked over and toasted. "Qingshan, I've yet to discuss the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures with you!"

Li Qingshan said, "What's there to discuss? Just make your arrangements, sir prefect. I can guarantee I'll emerge victoriously wherever you need me to fight."

This was not a boast from Li Qingshan. He also had a slight understanding about the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures. It was primarily for the disciples of the hundred schools to compete with one another. At most, it would be some Foundation Establishment cultivators. How could he lose?

Liu Zhangqing shook his head inside. He felt like Li Qingshan had become slightly carried away with his success and began to overestimate himself. The Academies of the Hundred Schools in the various

prefectures were filled with talents and powerful people. With his cultivation at mid Foundation Establishment, how could he claim certain victory?

He had also heard a little bit about Li Qingshan's battle with the fire devourer. He had a geographic advantage during that battle, and he still almost lost. He had only managed to turn the tides in the end after quite some difficulty. He did not feel like Li Qingshan was particularly powerful.

"Qingshan, please hear me out as your senior. It's good to be young and aggressive and motivated, but conceit leads to easy failure. You also have to learn to hide your edge at times."

"What do you mean, sir prefect?" Li Qingshan sensed that Liu Zhangqing was implying something the moment his cup reached his lips.

"You stood forward for a just cause and saved fellow Qiu, which was for the best. I can also feel your glory! However, there was no need for you to fall out with E Dan so much."

"It has happened already, so what can I do?" Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow.

"Grievances are better resolved than deepened. To be able to reach his realm of cultivation, he definitely won't be someone unreasonable. If you could speak through commander Gu and give him an apology, it'll cause you some embarrassment, but it'll save you a great deal of trouble. Sigh, he is a trusted subordinate of the prince after all."

Liu Zhangqing said earnestly, but it was not just for Li Qingshan to consider. The Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures were happening soon. The Clear River prefecture had just been through a war, so it was already extremely disadvantageous for them. Li Qingshan had offended an important figure beside prince Si Qing, making matters even worse. E Dan only needed to pull some strings, and they would be in great trouble.

Qiu Haitang said with deep concern, "Prefect Liu speaks with great reason. Real men are flexible, able to stoop down or stand tall depending on the situation. Once you undergo the second heavenly tribulation, you'll always be able to stand tall. I know you're a real, proper man."

Li Qingshan began laughing aloud, drawing over everyone's gazes. Actually, Liu Zhangqing had not been speaking loudly earlier, but basically everyone present had sharp ears. They had all been listening along attentively. They were all waiting to see how Li Qingshan would answer him, but they never expected him to laugh aloud.

"Thank you for your concerns and kind intentions. Prefect Liu is knowledgeable and well-experienced with this world, so if you don't mind answering me, if a Qi Practitioner were to insult you publicly, would you be able to endure it? Sect master Qiu has personally seen E Dan, so do you think he's an open-minded and forgiving fellow?"

Liu Zhangqing and Qiu Haitang both became speechless. Liu Zhangqing seemed gentle and polite, but that was to Li Qingshan. Normally, when he governed the Clear River prefecture, he could kill without batting an eye. If someone happened to be bold enough to insult him publicly, he would definitely kill them in a single strike. Even if he could not kill them on the spot, he probably would not drop the matter, which led to a heavy sigh from him.

Qiu Haitang also felt that getting a vicious and uncivilised bastard like E Dan to let go of his grievances was completely impossible. "It's all because of me..."

"Even if it weren't you, I wouldn't have just sat tight and watched on. And, even if he can forgive me, I won't forgive him. There's nothing for you to worry about. Just that old dog won't be enough to take my life." Li Qingshan squinted his eyes. Killing intent vaguely appeared.

"You little animal, how dare you insult my master!" With a bellow, several cultivators in black descended from above, dispersing the lively atmosphere and pressing against their weapons, glaring at Li Qingshan.

Qiu Haitang recognised them. They sat behind E Dan during that day in the marquis' manor. As it turned out, they were E Dan's disciples.

The music stopped, and the cultivators all stood up. The atmosphere on the rooftop immediately became tense.

Only Li Qingshan remained seated, drinking by himself. He said, "So it's the group of pups led around by the old dog!"

"Some esteemed guests have arrived. Forgive me for failing to anticipate your arrival. Haitang, why don't you show the esteemed guests their seats?"

At this moment, an old woman with a face full of wrinkles and a head of grey hair suddenly appeared, all amiable and polite. Apart from Li Qingshan, no one had managed to see where she had come from.

She carelessly revealed her aura, stunning everyone present. A Golden Core cultivator!

Chapter 609 - My Heart Already Belongs to Someone Who Goes by the Name of Northmoon

Qiu Haitang went up and bowed rather reluctantly. "Sect master."

The cultivators in black were all dressed in casual wear, radiating with murderousness. A single glance at them was enough for one to tell that they were people who had been through struggles of life and death. Their leader was a fierce man in his thirties, who studied the old woman.

"My surname is E, and my name is Feng. You must be sect master You of the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Sure enough, you do have a bit of a bearing, well beyond what a certain little animal can match!" He glanced at Li Qingshan as he spoke. Li Qingshan drank by himself as he thought, These people probably didn't come specially to deal with me, or they wouldn't have stayed calm for so long. Let's see what they want.

"What sect master You? You can just call my granny You. You've taken the trouble of traveling a great distance to pay a visit to my Sect of Clouds and Rain, so may I ask just what is the matter?"

E Feng spoke rudely, which irritated granny You slightly, but she remained friendly on the surface; this was because she knew the person standing behind them was E Dan and prince Si Qing to a certain extent.

She had managed to undergo the second heavenly tribulation after quite some difficulty, but she was the weakest kind of Golden Core cultivator out there. Because her beauty had withered away with her age, she was no longer able to make much use out of the arts of charm she was most skilled in. She

knew she had no more chance at advancing any further, so why would she be bold enough to offend some of the most powerful people of the Ruyi commandery?

Seeing how Li Qingshan did not talk back, E Feng even thought he had grown fearful. He thought, This little animal is going to die sooner or later anyway, so wasting words on him here really isn't worth it. Today, I'll show you that the person you wanted to save won't be able to escape from our clutches at the end of the day. We'll slap you across the face viciously before so many people!

"A woman of your Sect of Clouds and Rain has caught our master's fancy. These are the betrothal gifts, so have her return with us immediately so that she can get married to master. We'll even have to call her young mistress by then."

The cultivators in black let out a roar of laughter. As E Feng spoke, he took out a great pile of gold, silver, and jewels, forming a small mountain in the blink of an eye. The resplendence they shone with was dazzling.

Even granny You who had decided to treat them with courtesy could not help but change in expression slightly, while the cultivators of the Clear River prefecture all frowned. These precious jewels and metals might have been priceless to mortals, but they were basically no different from muck to cultivators. They could get as much of it as they wanted to.

In the world of mortals, it was equivalent to offering a pile of scrap to marry their daughter. It was basically a naked insult to the face. Qiu Haitang had publicly turned down E Dan before Li Qingshan insulted him. They were simply unable to accept this, so they came to avenge their master.

As the person in concern, Qiu Haitang said coldly, "I've already said that I won't marry your master. You better take these things and leave!"

"You won't marry our master?" E Feng shot a glare at her. He had truly inherited E Dan's legacy with that vicious expression of his. "Granny You, what do you have to say?"

"About this..."

"Our master will become the great general of the Ruyi commandery soon. We've already shown your Sect of Clouds and Rain plenty of respect by offering up a betrothal gift in person. Do you really want to disappoint our master?"

E Feng glanced at granny You, completely unfazed by her identity as a Golden Core cultivator. He did not even try to hide his threat.

"How are they cultivators? They're basically no different from common thugs! With disciples like this, I can already imagine what their master is like. Qingshan, you were right. I've been too naive."

Liu Zhangqing frowned heavily and communicated with Li Qingshan. The school of Confucianism had always placed great focus on etiquette and courtesy. These people were the most unforgivable.

Li Qingshan only smiled. Who said cultivators were supposed to be cultivated and courteous? The demonic cultivators that once ran amok through the nine provinces had done plenty of inhumane things without a shred of conscience.

Cultivation was about seeing your own nature. Nobody was born a virtuous gentleman of great morals. From a certain perspective, people like E Dan could be regarded as staying true to their own nature too.

As for me, I'll obviously stick with my own nature and completely slaughter these eyesores!

"H- h- how could I dare to do something like that!?" Granny You personally believed she was a resourceful smooth talker, but she could only hold onto her anger when met with such vicious and unruly people. She was absolutely helpless.

"Granny You, the fate of your Sect of Clouds and Rain is completely at our whim. If you can't give up on this disciple right now, then you'll lose much more than her in the future. Are you going to agree to it or not?"

E Feng took it a step further, actually pressuring a Golden Core cultivator as a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

He was not entirely strutting around under his master's influence either. He was at late Foundation Establishment. Although Golden Core was a major realm of cultivation away, granny You had never been skilled with open conflict. She basically devoted her entire life to scheming and plotting, so there had only been a handful of times when she truly fought. Now, not only did her beauty fade with age, but her body had weakened with age as well.

E Feng, on the other hand, was in the prime of his life. Who knew how many times he had fought in arenas, and he was geared with arcane artifacts. If they actually began fighting, he was confident he would not lose to this old coot.

"Sigh, I'll agree to it then!"

Sure enough, granny You was absolutely spineless. She was becoming more and more afraid of dying. She had made it to Golden Core after so much difficulty, so why would she ever be willing to die just because of E Dan's fit of rage?

With that, not only did everyone present sigh, but Qiu Haitang even cried out, "Sect master!"

"Haitang, how has my Sect of Clouds and Rain treated you?"

Granny You spoke softly, sounding as kindly as an old grandmother. She basically radiated with kindness, silently using her arts of charm. At the end of the day, she had not gone through the second heavenly tribulation for nothing. The way she used it was basically flawless and unconscious. Even Qiu Haitang who was skilled in this exact art failed to sense it. Only Li Qingshan's eyes turned cold.

Qiu Haitang lowered her head. "The kindness that the Sect of Clouds and Rain has shown me is as lofty as mountains and as deep as seas. If it were not for the Sect of Clouds and Rain, I would have sunken into the fiery pits of brothels long ago, with my youth sapped and my beauty withered away. I might be dead already."

Granny You said, "Right now, you're not doing this for me, but for the entire sect. Your cultivation has come to a standstill because you don't have a dual cultivation partner to balance out yin and yang. If you are married to great general E, you will have endless resources, and your cultivation will definitely

progress drastically. I'm only temporarily occupying the position of sect master right now. The Sect of Clouds and Rain will still be returned to you in the future."

"I- I- I-" Qiu Haitang faltered as her expression changed again and again, clearly in great mental conflict.

The surroundings fell quiet. Even a pin drop could be heard. No one said anything. The Sect of Clouds and Rain was not a part of the academy, so they did not have many ties with them. And, this was an internal matter of the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Since even their sect master had already said something like that, were they supposed to oppose a Golden Core cultivator? Not to mention that there was an imposing figure like E Dan behind all of this.

Qiu Haitang cast her gaze towards Hua Chengzan instinctively. She said she had already let go of him, but he had still been the man she had been infatuated with for all these years after all. Hua Chengzan straightened himself out and faltered a few times. He glanced at Hua Chengzan before still choosing to lower his head in the end, avoiding her gaze.

If he were alone, then even if it would cost his life, he would still stand on Qiu Haitang's side. However, he was not alone. He represented the entire Hua family. If he offended E Dan, it was very likely to bring unimaginable disaster to the Hua family. By then, his younger sister and even his parents would be dragged in.

If he did this for the sake of a single woman, that would be far too selfish of him. Although he enjoyed the authority and resources brought on by his family, it also came with responsibilities and duties. However, he could not help but ask himself what he would do if Gu Yanying faced the same situation. There was no other answer. He would definitely stand forward without any regard.

Qiu Haitang was dejected and extremely disappointed. She had truly given her heart to the wrong person after all! Her master had been right. Throughout the ages, those who possessed the Aspect of Peach Blossom Beauty were all women who suffered from love-sickness, and they were fated to never have their love reciprocated, dying in melancholy. She was simply unable to escape this curse.

"You can stop with the 'I- I- I-'. Come with us!" E Dan looked at Li Qingshan complacently. "How's that? The woman you risked your life to save is still going to end up being fucked by our master. Hahahaha!"

Li Qingshan laughed as well. He laughed louder and louder, shaking up the surroundings and reaching high into the sky.

Bang! Bang! The cups, bowls, and plates all exploded. The weaker Qi Practitioners all covered their ears.

Qiu Haitang instead felt her mind clear up. Her face was moist; she had been cursing with tears before she knew it. She understood she had fallen for granny You's arts of charm and anger filled her.

"Sect master You, you're a senior, yet you use something like this against a junior to ingratiate yourself with an outsider. Don't you feel any shame at all? Today, even if I have to die, I'll never agree to it. If E Dan insists on marrying me, all he'll marry is a corpse!"

"Age without morality only makes you a pest. The ancient sages really haven't been trying to deceive me!" Li Qingshan's laughter vanished, and his expression turned cold.

TL: "Age without morality only makes you a pest" comes from the Analects of Confucius. He is the ancient sage Li Qingshan is referring to.

"Here's not a place for you to make trouble!"

Granny You was furious. She extended her hand that resembled a rat's claws and grabbed Qiu Haitang by the shoulder. She glanced at Li Qingshan, but she refused to burst out with anger. E Dan stood behind E Feng, while Gu Yanying stood behind Li Qingshan. She had to be careful; she was afraid of offending either one of them, so she poured all of her anger at Qiu Haitang.

Qiu Haitang was unable to put up a fight at all. She immediately felt her body soften as she became bitter with anger inside. She felt like there was no one in the world that could help her anymore. Even if Li Qingshan was willing to risk his life for her, how could he contend against a Golden Core cultivator?

A figure suddenly appeared in her head. That person was so powerful and arrogant. If he were here, then even if E Dan paid a visit in person, they would not be bold enough to do whatever they pleased!

"My heart already belongs to someone. If you dare to use any more force against me, he'll never spare you!"

E Feng said, "Heh, I'd like to see just who will never spare my master."

Qiu Haitang said firmly, "Northmoon!"

"What North- You mean that wretched daemon, Northmoon? You're colluding with wretched daemons! Do you know the crimes you've committed?"

E Feng suddenly paused, remembering who Northmoon was. He was the number one enemy of prince Si Qing in the Ruyi commandery. He had learnt many things about him through the various pieces of information. Although he had never seen him in person, he had a deep impression of his horrifying strength. He had basically heavily injured all the Daemon Commanders in the Ruyi commandery alone. What kind of strength was that?

As a result, while he said the second half like he was unconcerned, he could not help but stifle his voice a lot. He became much less imposing.

"Now don't you be pigheaded!"

However, granny You could not help but loosen the hand she grabbed Qiu Haitang's shoulder by. Although she did not believe Qiu Haitang's words, it would be bad just in case she was telling the truth. Northmoon would come knocking and what was she supposed to do by then?

The word "Northmoon" seemed to possess wondrous magic, making everyone's expressions change. Surprise, fear, worry, and unease was written across all of their faces.

Even the Lake of Dragons and Snakes had been refined by Northmoon, so the disciples of the academy's impression of him went without saying. Some Qi Practitioners could not help but glance around as if Northmoon would suddenly leap out of the darkness.

Chapter 610 - Waiting for a Tsunami

Hua Chengzan could not help but look at Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan lowered his head and rubbed his nose as he sighed inside, So someone has actually been crushing on me! He could not help himself as his lips curled into a mysterious smile. Of course, he knew Qiu Haitang had reached the end of the rope and had resorted to some desperate means, but he might as well feel good about it first.

“Do you think I’ve been frightened?” E Feng recovered his composure very soon. He could not retreat in defeat from hearing just a name after all. If that happened, then even without Northmoon, E Dan himself would butcher him. Even if Qiu Haitang was telling the truth, Northmoon was nowhere to be seen, so what could he do? As long as he handed her to E Dan, he no longer had to care about what came next.

Qiu Haitang took advantage of this to break free from granny You’s “rat claws”. She took out a jade tablet and held it high into the air. “As long as I crush this jade tablet, he’ll come and save me immediately!”

It was merely an ordinary, white piece of jade, but in that moment, it was like a magnet, drawing over everyone’s gazes firmly.

E Feng shivered inside. The jade tablet flickered with light. It was indeed a transmission tablet, but he had no idea whether Northmoon really was on the other end. He could only closely study Qiu Haitang’s expression.

However, women had always been born with natural talent for acting, while Qiu Haitang was among the best of the best. She had practised the arts of charm for several decades now, so she gave nothing away through her expression or bearing. Even E Feng could not help but become slightly hesitant.

Seeing how she had managed to fend off E Feng with this, Qiu Haitang eased up slightly inside. She had to find a way to get out of here as quickly as possible. She could not remain in the Ruyi commandery anymore, but how was she supposed to get out of here?

E Feng and his fellow juniors were like voracious wolves. Why would they let prey that was already in their hands escape?

Qiu Haitang said to Li Qingshan through her soul sense, “I have one last unreasonable request.”

“Feel free to mention it.”

“I’ll find a way to get away from here later. If the situation is bad, please cover for me. If it doesn’t work out, then I’ll slit my throat on the spot. I refuse to be disgraced. If I manage to escape here alive, you’ll definitely get what you want in the future. Don’t worry, Qiongzhi won’t know.”

Qiu Haitang had become rather dispirited. She felt that while Li Qingshan was not the one she loved, he was far better than E Dan at the very least. She had nothing she could pay him back with except for herself for getting him to risk his life repeatedly for her.

“Since you like someone else, how can I take advantage of you? You just have to last until Northmoon arrives,” Li Qingshan obviously replied resolutely, but he thought inside, Feel free to pick any one of us. I don’t mind.

Qiu Haitang could not help but smile wryly inside. Do you really believe I have some sort of connection with Northmoon? Apart from that momentary meeting through chance a few years ago, I only saw him once from afar after that.

E Feng suddenly shuddered. Disbelief filled his face as he pointed behind Qiu Haitang, towards Li Qingshan. He cried out, "Northmoon!"

Everyone looked in the direction E Feng pointed in, at Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan shuddered all over. How did this guy see through my identity!?

Qiu Haitang was momentarily distracted. With a fierce gust of wind, E Feng directly snatched at the jade tablet in her hand. Qiu Haitang hesitated. If she truly crushed the jade tablet, then her lies would all be revealed. With her hesitation, the jade tablet ended up in E Feng's hand.

Only then did everyone realise E Feng had purposefully tricked Qiu Haitang. They secretly cursed him as shameless, but their hearts that rested in their throats also settled back down again. Apart from Hua Chengzan, no one knew E Feng's gesture had just revealed the truth.

E Feng tossed the jade tablet around in his hand and said complacently, "Looks like I was wrong. Though, animals have always been the same as wretched daemons. You thought I actually believed this could summon Northmoon? Do you truly think I didn't do my research about you beforehand? You better return obediently with us! Even if Northmoon comes, all he can do is flee in defeat against my master!"

Although he seemed like a common thug, he was meticulous and prudent, or he never could have survived until now.

Qiu Haitang sneered. "If you have the balls to, just crush it then!"

"Do you really think I'm afraid to?"

"I think that's exactly what you are, afraid!"

"Hmph, do you take me for a fool? Cut the nonsense! Get over here!" E Feng suddenly struck, casting a silver net that loomed over Qiu Haitang.

With Qiu Haitang's cultivation, facing E Dan was basically no different from a Qi Practitioner facing a Foundation Establishment cultivator. There was no room for her to fight back at all. She could only use the arts of charm to captivate E Feng.

E Feng was thrown into a slight trance. He found the woman before him to be utterly pitiful such that he was unable to bring himself to do something like this. However, his willpower was far greater than regular Foundation Establishment cultivators. He bit the tip of his tongue, and his mind immediately cleared up, but a water vortex whistling over met him. Li Qingshan had finally taken action.

E Feng completely disregarded it in disdain. Two cultivators in black leapt out from behind him and struck the water vortex violently. Their cultivations paled in comparison to E Feng's, but they were still Foundation Establishment cultivators. However, they shuddered the moment they came into contact with the water vortex, discovering an uncontrollably great force that was endless, cascading like waves.

They could not help but stagger backwards, where they would leave behind a deep pit with each step. They retreated to before E Feng in the blink of an eye, both filled with shock. It seemed nothing special when he clashed with the fire devourer, but they never thought he could unleash the violent side to gentle water to such a degree.

Seeing how their companions were unable to stop it, another two cultivators in black took action. They pressed their hands against their backs, cooperating flawlessly to use the strength of four people against the lone Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan suddenly remembered how Ru Xin had defeated his water vortex. He raised his hands, and the water vortex spun rapidly in the opposite direction, erupting with its greatest might.

Boom!

The four cultivators in black staggered backwards. Li Qingshan cut right to the chase and threw a punch at E Feng.

He was fighting five people alone, yet he could still maintain the upper hand. This was no longer merely a matter of strength and technique, but also a raging bearing of invincibility.

Everyone could not help but cheer, and the Hawkwolf guards called out the loudest.

“You little animal!

E Feng cursed furiously as he drew his blade to receive Li Qingshan’s attack. Li Qingshan suddenly pulled back his aura, and all of the glow gathered in his right hand, turning into a perfectly transparent bead of water. With a flick of his finger, the bead of water shot out, piercing through E Feng’s protective spiritual qi and striking the jade tablet with great precision. The jade tablet immediately shattered.

Ocean Wielding, the Water Bead Form!

He condensed the power of the boundless ocean into a single bead of water, unleashing startling might. Li Qingshan had studied this move a long time ago, but he had never been able to grasp its main points. With a flash of inspiration today, he used it on the spot. Originally, there was an eighty or ninety percent chance of failure, but he happened to succeed.

Li Qingshan let out a loud laugh. “Since you’re afraid to, I’ll help you out!”

E Feng’s heart leapt in fright as he became furious from embarrassment. His blade spat out a streak of light several meters long as he swung it towards Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan waved his hands madly and random streams of blue light immediately filled the space before him.

As the blade passed by each stream, it would be drawn away. E Feng felt like he was losing control over his blade. In the end, the strike landed on the floor beside Li Qingshan, producing a crack over thirty meters in length. If the Parlour of Clouds and Rain had not been constructed from special materials by mohist craftsmen, he basically would have split the whole place into two.

Ocean Wielding, the Turbulent Flow Form!

The ocean surged turbulently as the billows churned wildly. The more vicious and powerful the enemy's attack was, the harder it was to control. When they entered the turbulent flows of the ocean, they could not help but lose their original target.

By the time the combined attacks of the four cultivators in black arrived, Li Qingshan had already pulled out. He did not show the slightest hesitation when he advanced and retreated, making the difficult task of destroying the jade tablet in E Feng's hand seem easy. It led to another wave of cheers.

E Feng raised his hand and stopped his junior brothers. This little animal's powers were startling, and the identity of Scarlet Wolf commander protected him. They could not kill him here, nor were they able to.

The matter at hand right now was that the jade tablet had been destroyed. Would Northmoon be coming or not?

This also happened to be the question that everyone wondered about!

Li Qingshan smiled at Qiu Haitang, but Qiu Haitang only smiled even more bitterly inside. You might as well have come up with an idea to escape with me! However, she showed none of it on her face. Instead, she sneered. "Just you wait!"

E Feng laughed madly. "Do you really think I'd be afraid of a measly wretched daemon, mentioning him again and again to frighten me?" However, he did seem a little like he was only putting on a tough front.

"If you're not afraid, then just wait here with me."

Having reached this point, Qiu Haitang had no other choice but to brave it out. She obviously knew that even if they waited for a few years, Northmoon would not come.

"I have matters to attend to, so why would I have time to waste here?" E Feng made his way towards Qiu Haitang. There was a flash before her, and Li Qingshan's tall, large figure shielded Qiu Haitang.

E Feng knew that it was impossible to take down Li Qingshan quickly, so he said to granny You, "Sect master You, this is an internal matter of your Sect of Clouds and Rain, so how can you let an outsider butt in?"

"Haitang, stop being so stubborn!" Granny You barked, about to take action.

Li Qingshan stood with his arms crossed and said in an unconcerned manner, "Just wait until Northmoon gets here. If he asks what happened here, I wouldn't mind telling him about it."

Granny You's courage immediately evaporated.

E Feng said, "You're a mighty Scarlet Hawk commander, yet you're actually colluding with wretched daemons. If this woman is lying, then so be it, but if she is telling the truth, then you're protecting a wretched daemon's ally!"

Li Qingshan sneered. "Why don't you file a complaint then?"

E Feng ground his teeth in hatred, but there was nothing he could do. Hawkwolf guards had a special status. In the Ruyi commandery, no one had the right to judge him apart from Gu Yanying, but no one

knew that this commander Gu's relationship with this wretched daemon was much deeper than any other cultivator in the Ruyi commandery.

"You really are a foolish animal. You've been all wrapped up in a woman's lies. I'll wait here then! I'll wait for that Northmoon!"

E Feng made up his mind and cast aside all of his worries. He was confident Qiu Haitang was only trying to stall. He refused to believe that Northmoon would actually come.

Time passed by slowly. The crescent moon hung quietly in the sky as the rooftop was frighteningly silent. Some people even became covered in sweat, wanting to take their leave early, but they were also afraid of others mocking them.

Let alone the others, even the mighty prefect, Liu Zhangqing, felt uneasy. Even if Northmoon comes, surely he won't butcher everyone, even those uninvolved, right?

The night breeze drifted by. The prefectural city bustled with human activity and blazed with light everywhere. However, the rooftop was like a dark island floating on the ocean, trembling gently and waiting for an unforeseen tsunami to arrive.

PS: Legend has it that you can summon a certain dragon by assembling seven Alliance Heads~ Woah, he actually appeared! Dragon, oh dragon, please make my wish come true! I want to write ten- no wait, I want ten Alliance Heads!