

## Stranger 261

Chapter 261: This Isn't Good

"Thank you for saving my life, Reverend."

A short rest later, after confirming that they were truly out of danger, Ye Qing saluted and thanked the old man.

"You're welcome. I just happen to be at the right place at the right time."

On a wooden log, the old Taoist regained his graceful poise after his disciple helped him into an upright posture. "Also, please don't address me as a Reverend. It's such an estranged term, don't you think? Just call me Yi Pin[1]."

"Well met, Reverend Yi Pin," Ye Qing replied smilingly.

Yi Pin paid it no heed and asked curiously, "Brother, I have a question. How did you anger the spirit of that forest? Generally speaking, the spirit of a land is very gentle. Unless you do something that threatens the entire forest or something else on that scale, they wouldn't even bother showing themselves, much less fly into a murderous rage."

"So, what on earth did you do to it, brother?"

"Ahem..." Ye Qing scratched his nose embarrassedly. "Would you believe me if I told you that I was tricked by an apple?"

Hmm? I was tricked, but I didn't lose anything. In fact, I got one of the best rewards I could ever ask for. Does that still count as being tricked? Hmm...

"A likely joke, brother." Yi Pin shook his head wryly. "Since you're unwilling to tell me, I shan't press further."

Ye Qing shrugged. I was telling the truth though. Not my fault you didn't believe me.

"Oh right, do you feel tired or sleepy, brother? We've run for a while, haven't we?" Yi Pin asked suddenly.

His question came out of nowhere, but Ye Qing suddenly felt a wave of fatigue washing over him. He immediately fell into a deep sleep.

"It's done." Yi Pin let out a proud chuckle when he saw this. "You're still a little too young to trick me, boy."

"What happened to him, master? Why is he asleep?"

Beside him, Li Longxiang looked at Ye Qing in confusion. "Should I wake him, master? This place is dangerous."

Yi Pin rolled his eyes and gave his disciple a kick[2]. "Of course not! I'm the one who put him to sleep using my Hypnosis."

“Ah...” Li Longxiang scratched his head dumbly. “You’re the one who put him to sleep? When? How did I not know about this? And why have you never taught me this spell, master?”

“Teach you? With that half-baked brain that’s half water and half flour of yours?” Yi Pin shot him a disdainful look before explaining, “Hypnosis is a technique that I invented. To be specific, it’s a combination of the Dreamy Flower’s pollen and the Dream spell. Once the victim has inhaled the Dreamy Flower’s pollen, I could put him to sleep no matter what cultivation level they are any time I want to. It’s impressive, isn’t it?”

“It really is!” Li Longxiang praised with shining eyes.

Yi Pin was clearly very pleased with his disciple’s honest compliment. “Do you know when he inhaled the Dreamy Flower’s pollen? Actually, forget it. With brains like yours, it’s a miracle that you know anything.”

Li Longxiang: “...” You’re the one who asked me that question despite knowing that I’m stupid.

Unaware of his disciple’s monologue, Yi Pin continued, “I did it when we were escaping the forest. It was pure chaos, and we were all busy escaping for our lives. That was when I released the pollen. Considering the situation, there is no way he could have anticipated it, haha!”

“You truly are a devious bastard, master!” Li Longxiang said what he thought was a compliment.

Yi Pin’s smile dropped instantly. Who are you calling a devious bastard, brat? Whoever told you that that’s a compliment?

Li Longxiang didn’t notice his master’s right leg was twitching again. Instead, he scratched his head and asked, “But why did you put him to sleep, master?”

Yi Pin was used to his disciple’s stupidity, but this was so stupid that even he was speechless for a moment. How did I, a man of unparalleled genius and looks, have a disciple like him? I really was too young back then. I saw all this potential inside him but failed to realize that it also came with an ocean of stupidity!

Instead of answering immediately, Yi Pin asked, “Do you know why the spirit of the forest was chasing him?”

Li Longxiang scratched his head. “Didn’t he say that he was t—”

“Enough. Just listen to me.” I can feel myself getting stupider just listening to you.

Yi Pin began, “The reason the spirit of the forest chased him was very simple. It was because he stole its most priceless treasure, Nature’s Water.”

And judging from how bright the sonuvabitch is shining, most of it is inside its stomach. I’m surprised his belly hasn’t exploded yet.

“Nature’s Water? What is it used for?” Li Longxiang asked.

“Nature’s Water is a product of nature and time. It possesses many miraculous abilities.” Yi Pin’s eyes turned distant for a moment. “I spent half my life searching for the Demon’s Tomb because I knew it contains the Nature’s Water. It’s also why I rushed over as soon as I divined its location. The bad news is that we’re a little too late. The good news is that we’re not too late.”

“I see.” Li Longxiang finally understood what Yi Pin was saying but frowned deeply. “This isn’t right.”

“This isn’t right?” Yi Pin’s eyebrows furrowed. “Are you saying that I shouldn’t be resorting to such despicable methods to get what I want?”

Li Longxiang nodded. “You taught me to be an honest and upright person since I was young. This is definitely not honest or upright.”

Yi Pin narrowed his eyes. “And if I tell you that I was searching for Nature’s Water for you? Do you still think that what I’m doing is wrong?”

Li Longxiang took a moment to chew on his words. In the end, he said, “No. If I was the reason you went against your principles, then... I would rather not have it.”

“You...” Yi Pin got angry and raised a hand to slap his disciple. But when his hand fell down, he caressed Li Longxiang’s head instead and sighed. “You’re right. We should lead an honest and upright life. We should live without any regrets.”

“But once you’ve fallen into this pool of mud we call the jianghu, there’s no escaping its corruption, boy. And if you’re not corrupt, then you would just be dead.”

“You’re still young. You’ll get it someday.”

Li Longxiang clutched his sleeves tightly and bowed his head. “Will you kill him, master?”

Yi Pin shot Li Longxiang a smile. “Do you want me to kill him?”

Li Longxiang mulled over the question seriously before shaking his head. “No...”

“And if I tell you that he will come back for revenge if you don’t kill him today, will you still choose to let him live?”

Li Longxiang shook his head again. “Yes...”

“Hahaha! Okay. Then we won’t kill him.”

Yi Pin laughed. “Plus, have you ever seen me taking a single life? I have divined the world my whole life, and I have never killed a single person. I’m hardly going to start now. I just want a bit of Nature’s Water, that’s all.”

After that, Yi Pin walked over to Ye Qing and said, “Please don’t blame me for this, brother. All meetings in life are destined, and it’s perfectly fair to share something with your person of destiny, right?”

Yi Pin reached out to grab Ye Qing's Nature's Shell. He could clearly sense the aura of Nature's Water from it, meaning that the young man hadn't just drunk the water until he was full. He had stored a lot of Nature's Water as well.

How greedy! How ruthless! It would certainly explain why the spirit of the forest was so pissed! This was good though. He didn't want to bleed the guy and get his hands dirty.

"Hey Reverend. It's stealing to take without asking for permission from the owner, you know that?"

Yi Pin's hand was about halfway to Ye Qing when suddenly, he saw a hand catching his wrist in a vice grip. He instinctively looked at Ye Qing and saw that the young man was grinning at him.

"You're awake?" Yi Pin asked subconsciously.

Ye Qing chuckled. "What do you think?"

Ye Qing was on his guard the moment he recognized the duo. Even if they were strangers, he wouldn't have let down his guard. The Strangers and Anomalies of the Demon's Tomb were scary, but the human heart shouldn't be underestimated either. It was why people said that one should never let their guard down around anyone.

From the moment he saw Yi Pin, Ye Qing had been using the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method" to protect his mind. That was why he noticed what happened as soon as Yi Pin used his Hypnosis[3].

The reason he didn't blow his top immediately was because he wanted to know what Yi Pin was plotting. The Hill Mover Bell was an interesting Strange Artifact, and if Yi Pin hadn't saved his life, then he might have been tempted to make the first move. But Yi Pin did save his life even though his motive was impure, so he was going to give the old man a second chance. If Yi Pin tried to kill him, he would have the perfect justification to kill him in return. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

Ye Qing changed his mind after listening to the duo's conversation though. He was going to say something when suddenly, the old Taoist disappeared with a pop, leaving only his clothes behind.

"You killed my master!" Li Longxiang roared in shock and outrage. He thought Ye Qing had killed his master, so he immediately jumped to his feet and charged toward Ye Qing.

As soon as Li Longxiang came within range, Ye Qing grabbed him by his shoulder and pushed. The disciple was driven into the ground like a stake.

If Li Longxiang was an ordinary warrior, this move alone would have incapacitated him. However, Li Longxiang didn't seem to feel anything. He continued to struggle with such strength that even Ye Qing at his current level was surprised by it.

"What an incredible innate physique!"

He could see that Li Longxiang had never cultivated any body tempering martial arts in his life. His super strength was completely natural.

After struggling for a long time to no avail, Li Longxiang's eyes slowly turned bloodshot. Mysterious, demonic-looking patterns started appearing on his face, and the skin on both sides of his head split apart to grow a pair of crescent horns. The horns burst into bright, bloody flames, and scales started sprouting all over his body. His whole appearance promised unbridled murder and bloodthirst.

“RAAAAAAAAAAARGH!”

Li Longxiang let out a titanic roar that wasn't quite like anything Ye Qing had ever heard. It was so loud that Ye Qing's eardrums hurt, and the surrounding plants were annihilated by the shockwave.

The next moment, Ye Qing felt a power greater than a dragon elephant pushing back against him. Such was his strength that the ground beneath Li Longxiang's feet were breaking under pressure.

“This is... the appearance of an ancient Crimson Dragon Demon Ox? You have the bloodline of a Crimson Dragon Demon Ox in you?” Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise.

The Crimson Dragon Demon Ox was an extremely powerful Stranger in ancient times. It had an ox's head and a dragon's body. Its roar sounded almost like a dragon's, and it fed on evil spirits and drank from the Yellow Spring. Impossibly strong, it could wrestle gods and demons with pure strength.

The bloodline of the Crimson Dragon Demon Ox was incredibly potent. So potent, that Li Longxiang actually gained the strength of a dragon elephant, and the power to go up against an Astral Refiner despite being a Vessel Augmentor only.

However, Li Longxiang's cultivation level was too low. As soon as he activated his bloodline, he immediately lost his mind and reason.

If his bloodline wasn't suppressed quickly, Li Longxiang's personality might disappear just like that. He would transform into a mindless puppet who knew only murder.

“Stop, you stupid boy! Are you trying to kill yourself?”

Yi Pin was gone, but he suddenly reappeared with the Hill Mover Bell in hand. He did a little wave and summoned the silhouettes of several hills above Li Longxiang's head. It looked like he was planning to suppress his disciple, but Li Longxiang merely roared and burst into flames. As he pushed out with both arms, the hills wobbled once and crumbled into nothing.

The next moment, Li Longxiang threw a devastating punch at Ye Qing. Such was the punch that the wind howled, and space itself shattered like glass.

“Dodge! You won't be able to block it!” A pale-faced Yi Pin hurriedly shouted while shoving a pill that recovers true qi into his mouth. He was going to use the Hill Mover Bell again to suppress Li Longxiang.

## Chapter 262: Settling Scores

Yi Pin had just raised his hand about halfway when his jaw suddenly hit the floor. It was because Li Longxiang's punch—a punch that could've shattered a hill—was caught firmly in Ye Qing's palm. He made it look so easy it was like he was catching an apple.

Then, Ye Qing took one step forward and clamped his right hand down on Li Longxiang's shoulder, causing his legs to sink into the ground just like before.

"What were you saying, Reverend?" Ye Qing shot Yi Pin a knowing smile.

Yi Pin: "... Did I say something? Nah, I didn't!

After Li Longxiang was immobilized, Yi Pin ran up to the young man and conjured a wine glass. It wasn't wine inside the glass, however. It was wisps of refreshing qi.

The qi was bluish and pure, light and gentle. It was also giving off some sort of air of Dao.

Yi Pin swirled the glass until a wisp of qi floated out of the container and into Li Longxiang's mouth. The demonic patterns on his face and the horns on his head immediately started vanishing bit by bit, and the violent aura permeating the young man gradually faded as well. It wasn't long before reason returned to his eyes.

"Phew... thank goodness." Yi Pin let out a sigh of relief before slapping Li Longxiang on the back of his head with an accuracy that came with countless practice, yelling, "You little shit! How many times have I told you not to get angry or let your impulse get to you? But you just won't listen! That's another Qi of Ultimate Purity that I have to waste because of you! I'm going to beat you to death, you little shit!"

"I'm sorry, master!" Li Longxiang dropped his head and allowed Yi Pin to beat and scold him as he pleased. "I'm so glad you're fine, master."

"You..." Yi Pin's anger abruptly disappeared when he heard his disciple's heartfelt words. In the end, he could only let out a dejected sigh.

That was the Qi of Ultimate Purity? Ye Qing was surprised to hear this. The Qi of Ultimate Purity was a natural spiritual qi and possessed the ability to calm one's mind, ward off the Demon's Temptation, and maintain one's clarity of mind. It didn't sound like much, but in reality it was the opposite. To a warrior, their heart demon and accumulated karmic hindrance—which were known together as the Demon's Temptation—was one of the greatest obstacles in their paths.

The higher one's cultivation level, the harder it was to eliminate the Demon's Temptation. It was all too easy to be seized by one's heart demon or be hindered by one's karmic hindrance while cultivating. A warrior who was obstructed by their Demon's Temptation would be unable to make any progress at best, or fall to depravity and transform into the puppet of their heart demon at worst.

However, the Qi of Ultimate Purity could eliminate the Demon's Temptation. So long as there was even a wisp of Qi of Ultimate Purity, they would be able to calm their mind, ward off the Demon's Temptation, and protect themselves from all evils.

Besides that, the Qi of Ultimate Purity could restore a confused or insane person back to normal so long as their mind was still alive. This was why the Qi of Ultimate Purity was so valuable. It was particularly priceless for warriors of higher cultivation.

Ye Qing didn't think that Yi Pin would be willing to sacrifice a Qi of Ultimate Purity to suppress Li Longxiang's rampaging bloodline and restore his mind. Clearly, Yi Pin cared deeply for his disciple despite his endless complaints about the young man.

“Heh. Are you done, Reverend Yi Pin? If you are, then let us settle some scores, shall we?” Ye Qing said while putting a hand on Li Longxiang’s shoulder, smiling.

Yi Pin was just grabbing a talisman and getting ready to escape. When he saw this, he temporarily extinguished the thought and put on a fake smile. “Settle some scores? Oh, right! Thank you so much for saving my disciple’s life, brother!”

“Reverend, you know there’s no point in pretending, right?” Ye Qing patted Li Longxiang’s shoulder, and Li Longxiang shot him a simple smile in return.

Knowing that there was no way he could escape so long as Ye Qing was holding Li Longxiang hostage, Yi Pin let out a bitter chuckle. “Fine. I admit that I rescued you and put you to sleep because I wanted to get my hands on your Nature’s Water. However, please trust me when I say that I wasn’t planning to harm you. If I did, I would’ve used something far more deadlier, wouldn’t I? The Dreamy Flower’s pollen and the Dream spell would only put you to sleep.”

“Besides that, I purposely chose a resting spot that is devoid of all spiritual energy, meaning that no Stranger would frequent this place. You would’ve been safe even if you were vulnerable for a time.”

“I believe you.” Ye Qing smiled. If he did not, he would’ve attacked them already. “But that doesn’t change the fact that you were plotting against me. So, how are you going to compensate me?”

I may have chosen not to kill you, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to take this attack lying down!

“Haha! You have a big heart, brother. I am very impressed by your generosity,” said Yi Pin, realizing that Ye Qing wasn’t planning on killing them. “As you wish, I shall speak scores with you then.”

“It is true that I harbored malicious intentions toward you, but it is also a fact that I saved your life.”

“Everyone knows that a life debt is bigger than the heavens. If we really want to nitpick, then you’re the one who owes me a huge favor, don’t you think?”

“Had you died, then you wouldn’t be able to make use of your Nature’s Water. You could have had all the treasure in the world, and it’ll still be completely pointless. Surely your life is worth at least a couple of bottles of Nature’s Water, right?”

“But since I am your elder, I shan’t take advantage of you. Just give me eight or so bottles of Nature’s Water, and I’ll be fine. In fact, I insist that you give no more than ten bottles!”

Yi Pin ended his speech and clasped his hand behind his back in a pretentious manner.

Ye Qing: “...”

Li Longxiang: “...”

Li Longxiang's mouth opened and shut repeatedly for a moment. In the end, he could only bow his head in shame and thought, I don't know this guy. My master isn't someone like this.

Ye Qing wanted to laugh. The guy had tried to rob him, and instead of repenting his actions he flipped it around and claimed that he was the one who should compensate them. He wanted to laugh so bad his hair was standing on end, and his heart was throbbing with the desire to pound someone's head into the dust.

"If that is how you want to play it, then so be it. You said that I saved your life, but I also saved your disciple's life. Plus, you didn't exactly save me for altruistic reasons, did you? I'm pretty sure we don't owe each other!"

"Excuse me? My Qi of Ultimate Purity is what saved my disciple's life. Your role in the rescue attempt was minor at best."

"That is not to say that your assistance isn't appreciated, of course. I suppose I can give you a 30% discount. Just give me five bottles of Nature's Water, and we're settled. Am I not the most reasonable person you've ever met?"

More like the most shameless bastard ever.

"Now we're talking about semantics, are we? Okay! You did save my life, I admit, but did I really need you to lend me a hand? I could have saved myself without your aid, you know."

When he saw the skeptical look in Yi Pin's eyes, Ye Qing chuckled and leaked the Boundless Mara Buddha's presence just a smidge.

"You have a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact?!" Yi Pin exclaimed in surprise.

Ye Qing smiled. "Do you believe me now?"

"I see..." Yi Pin stroked his beard irritably. "You're right. With a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact at hand, you definitely don't need my aid."

Of course, he could've argued that it didn't change the fact that he still saved Ye Qing's life. The problem was that Ye Qing hadn't really revealed his Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact to argue that fact. He was doing it to tell him to shut it, or else. So he did. He was fairly confident he could escape with his disciple given the right opportunity, but a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact as well? Now that was risky.

"Good. So the score is settled then." Satisfied with Yi Pin's reply, Ye Qing said, "Let's talk about another score then."

"What score?" Yi Pin looked confused.

"Do you know who I am, Reverend?" Ye Qing smirked.

"Oh right! I haven't even asked for your name! Who are you, brother?" Yi Pin asked.



Ye Qing slowly withdrew the golden light masking his face and said, "I am Ye Qing. You may also call me Joyless!"

"It's you!?" Yi Pin's eyes bulged in shock and disbelief. He was having a bad feeling about this.

"Good. You do recognize me." Ye Qing smiled. "If I remember correctly, you were plotting to kill me just like those jianghu warriors, but you managed to escape with your life. Regardless, you're the one who owes me a life debt now."

"Who's the bastard who told you that? Who!?" Yi Pin looked livid as he defended himself, "I'm a humble, cultured, and upright Taoist. Why would I ever try to hurt a respected and patriotic hero like you, Lord Ye? I was there to protect you, not kill you!"

"Heh."

Ye Qing let out a chuckle and stomped the ground suddenly. It caused a small wave that shattered a ball of light that just appeared underneath Yi Pin's feet.

"Reverend, I don't mind you lying to my face, but please don't move your legs willy-nilly."

Just now, Yi Pin had tried to draw a rune from right under his nose. He would've missed it if his spirit wasn't as strong as it was. The old man was one cunning bastard for sure.

"Hehehe. I wasn't lying though! Everything I said came straight from the heart!" Yi Pin didn't look frustrated even though Ye Qing had foiled his escape attempt. In fact, he was pretending like nothing had ever happened.

"Haha! Well, it's your right to lie to my face, just as it is my right to disregard all of them." Ye Qing's smirk turned a smidgen devious. "Right now, all I care about is that you now owe me a life debt. What were you saying just now? A life debt is bigger than the heavens. So, how are you going to repay this debt? Will you give me your money or your life?"

Yi Pin opened his mouth but couldn't say anything for a time. For once, the hunted had triumphed over the hunter. Why did he get greedy and try to swindle the bastard? Why didn't he just admit his mistake and apologize? He could've gotten away with it with minimal loss, but now he was going to cut a hole in his wallet. What a fool he was!

As if that wasn't enough, his stupid disciple still didn't realize that he was being held hostage, and his latest trick had just been dismantled. He literally couldn't leave even if he wanted to. No wonder people said we ourselves are our worst enemies!

Oh, screw it. I'll just come clean and see what he wants. Not even my face is thick enough to keep up this charade.

"What do you want, my lord?"

“Your Hill Mover Bell looks like a fine Strange Artifact, and your Qi of Ultimate Purity ain’t too bad either. Just give me one to two hundred wisps, and we’re settled. In fact, I insist that you give no more than two hundred wisps!” Ye Qing beamed.

Yi Pin: “...” The Hill Mover Bell? You might as well kill me. One to two hundred wisps of Qi of Ultimate Purity? Do you think they grow like cabbages or something? How about one or two hundred slaps to your smug face?

Dammit, if only I have the courage and more importantly, strength to say it to his face!

“Please be serious, my lord.” Yi Pin let out a wry chuckle. “The Hill Mover Bell is my temple’s legacy relic, and it must never go to an outsider’s hands. Moreover, it takes a special imprint to use it properly. You wouldn’t be able to use it even if I gave it to you.”

“Oh, that’s fine. I’ll be satisfied with just one to two hundred Qi of Ultimate Purity.” Ye Qing wasn’t disappointed. He never really expected Yi Pin to give it in the first place. It would be like someone telling him to give up the Annon Sutra.

“I don’t have one to two hundred wisps of Qi of Ultimate Purity either.” Yi Pin produced the wine bottle that held the qi and handed it to Ye Qing. “To be precise, I only have six left. If you think it’s acceptable, then take it. If not, then feel free to take my life.”

There was a kind of fatalistic determination in Yi Pin’s voice. He was even shaking it slightly as if to say that he wouldn’t mind breaking the bottle and wasting the qi if Ye Qing decided to push the issue.

“Fine.”

Ye Qing didn’t push the issue. Some lines couldn’t be uncrossed once they had been crossed. Moreover, he had this strange feeling that Yi Pin was hiding his strength. He was almost certain that he wasn’t “just” a Vessel Augmentor.

After all, how could an ordinary Vessel Augmentor possibly own a priceless treasure like the Hill Mover Bell or the Qi of Ultimate Purity? And how stupid would he have to be to enter the Demon’s Tomb as a Vessel Augmentor?

The simplest and most reasonable explanation was that Yi Pin was hiding his strength. If not, he at least had a trump card that would guarantee his safety. Ye Qing had zero intentions of risking his life unnecessarily.

“I hope you’ll keep your promise, Lord Ye.” Yi Pin handed the wine bottle to Ye Qing with a reluctant look on his face.

Ye Qing put it into his Nature’s Shell and released Li Longxiang as promised.

“Alright. If there is nothing else, then I’ll be taking my leave. May we meet again, Reverend, Brother Li!”

There was no reason for him to say now that he had gotten what he wanted. He also needed to find a safe place to refine his Nature's Water and to find the exit. As usual, there was no rest for the wicked.

## Chapter 263: Cooperation

"Brother, wait!"

Ye Qing had just lifted his foot when Yi Pin suddenly called out to him.

"What? Oh, are you feeling guilty because you feel like you underpaid me or something?" Ye Qing's eyes glittered with humor. "It's fine! I'm the kind of guy who's satisfied with what he has. I appreciate the gesture, but really, you don't have to!"

Yi Pin: "... Can we have some shame, please?"

He had to admit that the brat was the spitting image of him in terms of shamelessness though.

Yi Pin said, "Well, what can I do? I'm a humble, cultured and upright Taoist, but because I was too weak to help you when we were outside, you mistook me as one of your murderers. That is why I want to negotiate a deal with you to make up for it. I promise you it's a win-win situation for everyone."

"A deal? Tell me," Ye Qing replied curiously.

Yi Pin smiled. "You may not know this, but I have a skill that allows me to observe the stars, divine qi, measure heaven and earth, and search for treasures. It wasn't a coincidence that I am here. I came because I knew there would be a treasure in this place."

"So?" Ye Qing looked unimpressed.

Yi Pin continued, "So, I want to team up with you. I am a walking treasure seeker, and you are a destroyer. If we work together, our profits will be sizable to say the least. What do you say, my lord?"

Destroyer, he says. He really just wants a bodyguard. Does he think I'm stupid?

Ye Qing shrugged and replied, "Not interested." It's way too dangerous. Searching the exit is far more important.

Besides, he already had the Qi of Ultimate Purity and Nature's Water. A man should be satisfied with what he had.

"Not interested?" Yi Pin looked surprised. Considering the young man's personality, he never thought that he would turn him down. "But why?"

Ye Qing smiled politely. "I think life is more valuable than opportunities and treasures."

"Ah!" Yi Pin wasn't his stupid disciple, so he understood Ye Qing's meaning immediately. "That makes sense. There are a surprising number of people who would risk their lives over some opportunities and treasures. They might appear brave, but they're really just shortening their lifespan. What are treasures and opportunities if you can't live to enjoy it?"

“Remember this lesson, my stupid disciple. If you can’t control your anger and impulse, then you’re going to live a short, unhappy life.”

“Got it master.” Li Longxiang scratched his head smilingly. It was impossible to say if he understood his master’s advice, or if he was just pretending to.

Ye Qing nodded. “I’m glad we are in agreement. If there’s nothing else, I shall take my leave.”

“Give me a minute, will you? I’m not finished yet!” Yi Pin grabbed Ye Qing’s sleeve and said, “If you’re worried about finding the exit, you have nothing to worry about. I made a divination after entering this place, and I can tell you with absolute certainty that it lies to the north. So long as you proceed toward the north, you will find the exit eventually.”

“Hmm? The north?” Ye Qing wore a dubious expression, but he was really surprised on the inside. He didn’t think that Yi Pin’s answer would be exactly the same as the Annon Sutra’s. This proved that Yi Pin wasn’t an ordinary Vessel Augmentor—but then again, of course someone who dared to enter the Demon’s Tomb wouldn’t be ordinary.

Now that he thought about it, they were running toward the north when they were escaping the Demon’s Tomb earlier. He had thought it was a coincidence, but now he knew it was a deliberate move.

“Do you understand now? You don’t need to worry about being unable to leave the Demon’s Tomb. We can seek out our treasures and opportunities as we move toward the north, killing two birds with one stone. What’s not to like?”

Yi Pin asked in a tempting tone, “So? What do you say, my lord?”

“You’re not lying to me, are you?” Ye Qing pretended to hesitate.

Seeing that Ye Qing was tempted, Yi Pin hurriedly said, “Of course not! Why would I lie about this when my own life is at risk?”

“My lord, some opportunities will never come again once you miss them, so don’t let it escape! Do you agree to a fifty-fifty split?”

Ye Qing thought for a moment before answering, “Very well.”

He had no qualms earning a quick buck while on his way toward his primary objective, and if he remembered correctly, the silver page he got from the Strangers was related to a so-called Demon Lord’s inheritance somehow. If he could run into it on the way out, then why not?

“Haha! Smart lad! You won’t regret this!” Yi Pin laughed loudly while hiding his smugness. I knew he wouldn’t be able to resist temptation. No way I was going to let him go scot free after robbing my Qi of Ultimate Purity!

“Without further ado, let’s go!” Yi Pin urged.

“Patience. Give me a moment to deal with my condition. You don’t want me to attract every human and Stranger within ten kilometers of me, do you?”

“Ah, that’s true. You’re way too conspicuous right now. A concealment Strange Artifact should do the trick,” Yi Pin echoed in agreement.

“A concealment Strange Artifact? Nah. Just give me a moment.”

Ye Qing identified a suitably big rock and sat on top of it. Then, he began refining the Nature’s Water.

What is he thinking? It’ll be days before he fully refines its power. At that point, we’ll have to make a beeline for the exit or risk being trapped here forever!

Disapproving of Ye Qing’s decision, Yi Pin stepped forward to persuade him out of his folly. However, his words died in his throat when he heard a series of thunderous pops from Ye Qing’s body and saw his muscles and vigor flowing in a rhythmic yet harmonious manner.

The golden light shrouding Ye Qing’s body began vanishing at a visible rate, while his cultivation level rose slowly.

“What the... his body is insanely strong! It’s a living furnace capable of refining anything and everything!” Yi Pin’s mouth fell open. Even considering Nature’s Water’s gentle qualities, it took a truly powerful body to refine this much power in a short time. An ordinary warrior would have to refine it bit by bit or risk blowing up their blood vessels and bodily points. Those who pushed themselves too far would be crippled at best or killed at worst.

“This boy is destined for greatness assuming he survives the way there.”

Yi Pin sighed and glanced at Li Longxiang, who was looking at Ye Qing with envy and admiration. “You don’t need to envy him. With your Crimson Dragon Demon Ox bloodline and innate Dragon Elephant Physique, your starting point is so much better than most. Assuming that I could find that item for you, then your future would be just as bright as the boy’s, if not brighter.”

“Hehe. Thanks, master.” Li Longxiang let out a simple chuckle. “I don’t really care about growing stronger though. I just want to keep you company until you die.”

Mentally, Yi Pin knew that he meant well. Emotionally, he felt like his disciple was cursing him to an early grave. “What the fuck do you mean by that? Do you want me to die? Are you vying for my inheritance, You little shit?”

Yi Pin was so pissed he kicked Li Longxiang in the thigh only to gasp in pain. It was like kicking a block of steel. Seriously, this boy!

An incense stick later, Ye Qing suddenly opened his eyes and discharged a terrific shockwave. Caught off guard, both Yi Pin and Li Longxiang were pushed tens of meters away from him. The trees were snapped in half, and a massive clump of earth was kicked into the air. It was like the scene of an explosion.

A few breaths later, when the gale finally stopped, Ye Qing slowly walked over to the duo. His skin was as milky as a baby's and as smooth as silk. There was also a tinge of gold that made him look like he was covered in a curtain of morning sun. From Yi Pin's perspective, every muscle and every organ in Ye Qing's body looked like the most perfect creation of the world.

Ye Qing didn't possess particularly huge muscles or a large physique, but there was so much power contained within his average frame that the earth seemed to tremble a little every time he took a step. His body also seemed to be in perfect harmony with the energies of yin and yang and his surroundings.

"Perfect harmony with nature, yin and yang? If you don't mind me asking, Lord Ye, but how strong is your boy right now?" Yi Pin gulped and asked instinctively.

Ye Qing replied blithely, "Five Dragon Elephants, and I've reached the pinnacle of the late-stage Astral Refinement stage. I could have achieved six dragon elephants if the spirit of the forest hadn't interrupted me, but eh! Can't complain about it."

When he got back, he would find a way to enter the Spirit Purification stage.

Yi Pin: "... Five dragon elephants? That's stronger than some Spirit Masters and even Grandmasters. Are you a monster?

"What's wrong, Reverend?" Ye Qing asked when the silence stretched.

"I don't want to talk because I'm feeling a little depressed. Is that illegal?" Yi Pin rolled his eyes at Ye Qing.

Ye Qing shrugged. "Well, we can't stay here forever. You can be depressed on the way toward the exit. Which way?" I can't help that I'm too strong.

Yi Pin sucked in a deep breath and calmed himself. If he envied everyone who ever got an opportunity or fortune he didn't get, then he would be crushed by his jealousy a long time ago. One should always focus on what they could get.

"This way. I did a little calculation and observed the weather earlier. The clouds about five kilometers ahead of us are wispy, and the geography is solid. It's a great fengshui location, which probably means there is something good there. It's probably worth it to take a look."

"I don't see a problem with that," Ye Qing replied affirmatively. "Oh right, you don't need to address me as 'my lord' or 'Lord Ye'. Just call me Joyless."

Yi Pin laughed. "In that case, I shall simply address you as brother. Feel free to do the same. Longxiang, come greet your senior uncle properly, will you?"

Ye Qing: "... I didn't fast forward in time, did I?

"Senior uncle!" Li Longxiang greeted Ye Qing as requested. Not a sliver of dissatisfaction could be detected in his voice whatsoever.

"Alright. Let's go, Brother Ye!" Yi Pin smiled and took the lead.

.....

“Master, why does that flower look like a rock?”

“Don’t touch it. That’s the Stone Grass. It might look like a rock, but it’s really a type of plant. It could be used as a medicinal ingredient, but it must be foraged through a physical object. If you touch it with your flesh and blood, you will turn into a rock as well.”

“Master, that rock looks incredible!”

“Keep your hands to yourself, you little shit! That’s the Tear Rock. It might look pretty, but you will cry non-stop if you get within a meter of it, so stay away!”

“Oh, okay. What is that strange cloud up there? Do clouds normally have wings?”

“Idiot. That’s the Hatred-class Stranger called the Winged Cloud. It has a pair of wings that allows it to travel hundreds of kilometers in a single day, and it normally does not attack a human of its own volition. But if you provoke it, then it will fly above your head and drop rain and thunder on you. I guarantee that you will hate it long before it’s done with you.”

“Don’t eat that! Are you a hungry ghost incarnate or something? That’s called the Bitterest Fruit. It might smell fragrant, but I promise that you will vomit your gut out as soon as your tongue touches it. It is that bitter. Give it to me. I’ll make a Bitterest Pill with it and feed it to that old fuck Heartless when I’m back. He deserves to taste the bitterest taste of humanity for stealing my wine.”

.....

Once again, Ye Qing was treated to a glimpse of Yi Pin’s greatness. He possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience that was so massive that it impressed even him, a man who had Wawa to cheat for him. He could always identify a Stranger or a strange object and give a brief but accurate summary of their background. He could always identify an incoming danger and avoid it no matter how well hidden it was. Forget Li Longxiang, even he felt like he was learning a lot just listening to him ranting away like a tour guide.

Suddenly, Li Longxiang pointed at a point above the lake that was shrouded by fog, “Master, look! That lake is shining all of a sudden. Does that mean a treasure is about to appear?”

#### Chapter 264: Seven Star Blue Lotus

Ye Qing had seen the odd phenomenon before Li Longxiang. There was a giant lake where the phenomenon was happening. Because it was shrouded by thick fog, it was impossible to say how big it was. Blue lotuses were floating on its surface.

A gigantic blue lotus was floating in the air at the center of the lake. It was also blooming. Literally, it was in the middle of unfolding its petals while the rest of the blue lotuses followed suit. It was a

beautiful, calming sight that soothed the soul just looking at it, not to mention the sweet floral scent that filled the air.

“Is that... the Seven Star Blue Lotus?” Yi Pin took a look at the massive lotus and sucked in a deep breath. When he felt his fatigue being washed away like a dream, he confirmed, “It has seven petals with starry patterns on it. It’s definitely the Seven Star Blue Lotus.”

“Is that the plant that could strengthen one’s God and increase one’s spirituality?” Ye Qing’s eyes lit up.

“Strengthen one’s God” meant strengthening one’s Yin God, while increasing one’s spirituality meant purifying and strengthening the spirit and mind. Both were things that all Spirit Purifiers and Spirit Masters sought.

“You’re quite knowledgeable yourself, aren’t you? That’s right!” Yi Pin said excitedly, “The Seven Star Blue Lotus only grows in clean, pure places with great spiritual qi. It takes forty nine years to grow its leaves, and another forty nine years to grow its flower. However, it takes only a single day to go from full bloom to wither. When a day has passed, every lotus flower in the lake would wither, and the pocket of spiritual qi around it would dissipate completely. It’s literally the opportunity of a lifetime!”

“Yeah.” Ye Qing nodded understandingly. Obviously, the Seven Star Blue Lotus could only be harvested when it was in full bloom. If it withered, then it would lose its effects.

“So, should we go, master, senior uncle?” Li Longxiang asked.

“What do you think, Brother Ye?” Yi Pin looked at Ye Qing.

Ye Qing replied, “It’s bad karma to reject a gift from the heavens. I see no reason to pass over it.”

“That said, there’s no hurry. We can make our move after someone has done the scouting for us.”

“Good idea!” Yi Pin laughed.

“The Seven Star Blue Lotus! It’s the Seven Star Blue Lotus!”

As if on cue, a couple of warriors suddenly rushed out into the open and toward the Seven Star Blue Lotus. When they got close to each other, a man in black outfit yelled, “Fuck off! You scums dare to covet the Seven Star Blue Lotus?”

A black light flew out of his sleeve and beheaded three jianghu warriors before they could react. It was a saber. The only person who managed to block it was a white-robed scholar who wielded a fan. When the saber force got close, he tapped it with his fan and shattered it into pieces.

“Don’t you think you went a little too far, Wei Yifang?” The scholar rebuked the man in black outfit with an unfriendly tone.



Although the man in black outfit didn't follow up the attack, he scoffed disdainfully, "Quit pretending. Your body count is no less than mine, Yu Shuiqing."

"The Seven Star Blue Lotus is mine, so you better stay the fuck away from me. Otherwise, don't blame me for what comes next."

Wei Yifang took off toward the center of the lake after leaving behind that threat.

For a time, Yu Shuiqing simply stared at Wei Yifang's back with cooling eyes. Then, he glanced at the three bodies on the ground and flipped open their shirts to reveal the Nature's Shell. He didn't claim it, however. He simply let out a cold chuckle before dashing into the fog.

"Man oh man, no wonder they say that scholars are the worst scums of them all. Watch and learn, silly boy," Yi Pin clicked his tongue disdainfully.

"Learn what?" Li Longxiang didn't understand.

This time, Yi Pin didn't give him an answer. "You'll find out in a moment."

"Do you recognize those two, brother?" Ye Qing asked. The two warriors were both late-stage Astral Refiners, and they were both pretty strong.

"Yeah," Yi Pin explained, "The guy in black is called Wei Yifang, and he is the only son of Wei Tianlang, a Grandmaster. He is famous for his 'Eight Sabers of the Heavenly Wolf' and is nicknamed the 'Little Wolf King'."

"The scholar is called Yu Shuiqing, and he is a scion of the Yu Clan of Qing He[1]. The Yu Clan styled themselves a literary clan and the students of Confucianism, but in reality every single member in that clan is more devious than the last."

"Here comes five unfortunate bastards."

Five men wearing form-fitting outfits appeared as soon as Yi Pin said this.

"Boss, we have bodies," said one of the guys while staring at the three corpses warily.

"Huh? They still have their Nature's Shells."

"Whoever killed them probably forgot to take them or was in a hurry. That's good for us," said another guy before walking over to grab the Nature's Shell. However, as soon as his hand touched the Strange Artifact, he abruptly let out a bloodcurdling scream.

His entire palm blackened in an instant, and the three bodies suddenly exploded at the same time. As the group of five was standing too close to the bodies, everyone was caught in the shower of blood and gore. The next moment, every body part that was touched by the flesh and blood started blackening as well.

There was no miracle. As they screamed, the black spots spread wider and wider until it covered their entire body. They were dead in just a matter of breaths, and when a breeze blew past them,

they abruptly crumbled into black dust. The only proof of their existence was their clothes, their weapons, and their Nature's Shells.

"Master... what..." Li Longxiang couldn't help but swallow loudly. His complexion was as pale as a sheet.

Yi Pin chuckled. "See? Now you know how dangerous the jianghu is."

"Remember this lesson well, Longjiang. There is no such thing as a free lunch in his world. If there is, then it's either a trap or comes with strings attached. You must be careful."

"I will remember your teachings, master." Li Longxiang nodded solemnly.

Yi Pin sighed. "I wonder how many more people are going to fall for this? The Black Fiend Poison isn't something that'll dissipate with just a few deaths. Anyone who gets greedy will save themselves a burial or a cremation, though that is certainly not something to be proud about."

A few breaths later, a strange cackle suddenly broke the silence. "Kekeke! The Seven Star Blue Lotus? Today must be my lucky day!"

The strange cackle belonged to an old man covered in dark green phosphorous fire and flying atop a human skull. Yes, a human skull. As he was passing by the Nature's Shells that was poisoned with Black Fiend Poison, he exclaimed with excitement, "Oooh, Black Fiend Poison! I haven't tasted one for a very long time! What a great day today is turning out to be!"

The old man pulled the Nature's Shells into his hands—the poison seemingly having no effect on him whatsoever—and held them in front of his face. Then, he inhaled deeply. What looked like a wisps of black smoke immediately flew out of the Strange Artifacts and into his nostrils. Not only did he look completely fine, he looked intoxicated as if the Black Fiend Poison wasn't poison, but fine wine.

"Ah, shit. This bastard's here too? This is going to be troublesome." Yi Pin frowned when he saw the old man.

"You recognize him, brother?" Ye Qing asked again.

The old Taoist explained in a worried tone, "That's the Poisoner, Tong She. He's an independent middle-stage Spirit Purifier with no background. The reason he came to be so powerful is because he accidentally came across the ultimate art of the Myriad Poison Palace, the 'Myriad Poison True Scripture', and cultivated a Body of Myriad Poisons. As its name might suggest, he is a bag of poison in human shape and not someone you want to trifle with."

It was clear that Yi Pin was incredibly wary of Tong She.

"Master—"

Li Longxiang wanted to ask a question, but he never managed to finish it. It was because Poisoner suddenly turned toward their hiding spot and chuckled. "Oh? There are some mice over there."

As soon as he said this, he unleashed a palm strike in their direction. The dark green flames immediately formed a gigantic palm that gave off a sickly sweet stench and killed every plant that was even remotely close to it. It was clear that the attack was deadly poisonous.

“Shit! Get away from it!” Yi Pin yelled and grabbed Li Longxiang’s shoulder.

Before he could move away though, Ye Qing said, “It’s fine.” While pinning the duo in place so they wouldn’t run off somewhere he couldn’t protect them, Ye Qing swept his sleeve at the incoming attack.

Buzz!

Space shook, and the clouds parted. A powerful gale appeared out of nowhere and trapped the entire area inside an invisible furnace. As the Burning Wind swayed, the dark green flames that were less than ten meters away from the trio suddenly disintegrated into nothing. Then, it surged toward Poisoner while crushing everything in its path.

At the distance, Poisoner blanched when he felt the torrent of Burning Wind surging toward him. The counter attack hadn’t even reached him yet, and already his blood was boiling, and his mind was quaking in terror. He didn’t hesitate to turn around and plunge head first into the fog. After Poisoner was gone, Ye Qing clenched his hand and canceled his power just like that. “Spirit Purifier my ass. What a coward!”

“You’re incredible, senior uncle!” Li Longxiang exclaimed with heartfelt amazement.

“You’re a goddamn monster, you know that?” Yi Pin shook his head. Unlike Li Longxiang, he knew exactly why Poisoner had decided to retreat. It was because Ye Qing’s counterattack was as strong as a middle-stage or even late-stage Spirit Purifier’s full-powered attack. It was unthinkable that Ye Qing was still an Astral Refiner.

Of course, the world wasn’t lacking in geniuses. It was entirely possible that there was a monster out there whose cultivation in astral qi was greater than Ye Qing. However, Ye Qing didn’t just possess an unbelievable amount of astral qi, his body was stupidly strong as well. Five dragon elephants, man. Is he actually a dragon elephant in disguise?

The trio decided to wait a little while longer, and a dozen more people entered the lake during this time. But for some reason, they could not hear or felt anything from the lake. It was almost as if the jianghu warriors had vanished into thin air.

A moment of consideration later, Ye Qing decided to stop waiting. “Let’s go. It would be annoying if someone actually got the blue lotus before us.”

The lake was pretty huge, and the jianghu warriors could’ve left from the opposite direction for all he knew. Assuming one of them took the Seven Star Blue Lotus, what were the chances that they would go back the way they came and risk running into a fellow competitor? It was nice to dream about getting the drop on a stupid warrior, but a dream was a dream. In the end, the only real way to obtain the Seven Star Blue Lotus was to venture into the lake themselves.

The reason he hadn’t entered the lake immediately was one, he wasn’t sure if the lake was safe, and two, there was still some time before it reached its full bloom. If they went in too early, there was a

high chance they might have to clash against multiple jianghu warriors. There was just no need to take such a risk.

For now, it looked like the lake was safe, and it was about time the Seven Star Blue Lotus had reached its full bloom. If they waited any longer, then they would truly miss their treasure.

“Agreed.” Yi Pin nodded in agreement as well. After they reached the edge of the lake, Yi Pin produced a paper boat from his sleeve and tossed it into the water. The paper boat swelled in size and became as big as a normal boat in just one breath.

“Hop on!” Yi Pin beckoned before jumping onto the paper boat first. Ye Qing and Li Longxiang were right behind him. After everyone was aboard, the paper boat moved toward the center of the lake on its own.

The fog shrouding the lake was incredibly thick. At first, they could still see a distant object. But as the fog grew thicker, not even Ye Qing could see through the fog completely.

Strangely, the deeper they went into the lake, the colder and deader the environment became. The lotus leaves were either withering or outright rotten, and the stems were pitch black in color. The way they were strewn haphazardly across the surface of the lake felt both oppressive and unsettling.

“Something isn’t right. Keep your eyes open.”

Yi Pin too noticed the oddities and frowned. “When a Seven Star Blue Lotus blooms, you should be able to smell its fragrant scent from far, far away. The plants would sway as if rejoicing, and the animals would roar with joy. It makes no sense for this place to be so cold and silent.”

“Strange. How strange!”

Chapter 265: Sky Devouring Fish

Li Longxiang was leaning against the edge of the paper boat and observing everything around him. It was at this moment he noticed something strange and chirped in excitement, “Master, there are fishes inside the lake! But er, they all look pretty strange!”

“Of course there would be fishes inside a lake.” Yi Pin didn’t notice the strange way his disciple had worded his discovery because he was still absorbed inside his own thoughts. “Catch two for dinner later, will you?”

“Okay!”

Li Longxiang replied affirmatively before reaching out to catch a fish from the lake. He was about halfway there when suddenly Ye Qing caught his hand and warned, “Stop. Those are Snake Fishes. They’re inedible.”

“Wait. Snake Fishes?” Yi Pin jolted back to reality when he heard this. “You’re right! But how can there be Snake Fishes in this lake?”

A Snake Fish was a Malice-class Stranger with a fish’s head but a snake’s body. It was covered in spots and classified as a kind of parasitic fish. Unlike a normal fish, it couldn’t be found in a river or

a lake. It was born inside the maws of a giant creature and fed on the remains stuck inside the creature's mouth to live, effectively acting as its mouth cleaner.

This was why Yi Pin was puzzled, and Ye Qing was wearing a deep frown on his face. The atmosphere aboard the boat was solemn as no one said a thing for a time.

The paper boat sailed forward some more, and Li Longxiang cried out, "Master, senior uncle, look! There are people ahead of us."

Ye Qing looked. As Li Longxiang said, a lot of people seemed to be standing just above the lake.

"Should we be careful?" Yi Pin asked warily.

"No." Ye Qing closed and opened his eyes before shaking his head. "They're all dead."

Due to how thick the fog was, it wasn't until they got close that they saw exactly the warriors had died. They were skewered by lotus stems from bottom to top and hung above the waters like tanghulu, every single one of them. That was why they looked like they were standing on the lake.

"These people... died not long ago, I think. Even their bodies are still warm," Ye Qing commented after a moment of observation.

Yi Pin nodded in agreement. "That's right. Look over there. Those are the warriors we saw heading into the lake earlier. Yu Qingshui is over there."

A thought occurred to Ye Qing, and he urged immediately, "Oh shit. We need to go. We need to go now! This is a trap!"

Since the beginning, he had thought that something was off. Normally, the appearance of such a treasure would draw countless Strangers to it. However, he hadn't seen any Stranger besides the Snake Fishes, which shouldn't be here in the first place.

There were only three possibilities. One, the Seven Star Blue Lotus was a fake. Second, this lake was the dwelling of a terribly powerful Stranger. Or third, it was all of the above.

Judging from the lake's unusual oddities and the dead people, Ye Qing was certain that it was the third possibility. As Yi Pin said, there was no way a place that could give birth to the Seven Star Blue Lotus could be overflowing with taint and evil. In other words, a tainted and evil place could never give birth to the Seven Star Blue Lotus.

That was why this was a trap, a trap that a Stranger had set up for its prey.

Besides that, the presence of the Snake Fishes were giving him a bad, bad feeling about this whole thing. If he was right, then they were in big trouble.

Ye Qing had just finished speaking when the lake water suddenly trembled unnaturally. Then, the people hanging above the lake slowly turned around to look at them. The people who should've been dead.

"Watch out!" Ye Qing growled, grabbed Li Longxiang's shoulder, and tossed him into the air before jumping himself. Yi Pin didn't hesitate to jump as well.

As if on cue, countless lotus stems pierced through the paper boat. They looked soft, but in reality they were as sharp as blades. They continued to stretch upward and chased after the trio.

Clearly, this was how the people before them were killed.

Ye Qing punched down in an attempt to crush the lotus stems into smithereens, but it was his force that was torn apart as easily as paper. Forget crushing them, it couldn't even delay their advance even a bit. His Burning Wind was the only thing that could deal some damage.

"These things are afraid of fire!" Ye Qing warned before sucking in a deep breath. Then, he threw a punch that was overflowing with astral qi.

"Cloud Vaporization Style"

Boom!

Fifty meters of water abruptly disappeared as if a giant spoon had scooped them out of the lake. The lake boiled, the steam displaced the fog, and countless lotus stems burst into invisible flames and withered.

Yi Pin brought out a horsetail whisk and launched silver lightning at the lotus stems. Surprisingly, it did just as much damage as Ye Qing's Burning Wind.

Whoosh whoosh!

Unfortunately, their resistance seemed to have angered the lake. A loud, terrifying noise shook the whole place, followed by a series of loud booms. At the same time, the lake water rose from every direction and pressed toward the trio like tidal waves. A gigantic shadow also seemed to be lurking underneath the lake.

"STAY CLOSE TO ME!"

Ye Qing shivered involuntarily as a kind of primordial fear gripped him. While holding Li Longxiang with one hand and Yi Pin with the other, he pushed "Illusionist's Grace" to its limits and flew toward the entrance.

"Brother Ye, stop! This is too dangerous!"

Yi Pin's eyes widened in shock and terror as the giant wave came closer and closer. He could already imagine how the wave was going to crush them.

Ye Qing paid the impending danger no heed, however. He continued to sprint across the lake like he was running on land; his footsteps only leaving behind faint ripples.

When he was about six meters away from the wave, Ye Qing abruptly tossed the duo forward.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

Both Yi Pin and Li Longxiang screamed uncontrollably as they flew helplessly toward death. Was Ye Qing sacrificing them so he could escape himself!?

Yi Pin's eyes abruptly turned purple. No one saw it, but it looked like it could destroy the world itself.

Suddenly, the unnatural purple and the power that threatened to burst out of Yi Pin's body abruptly faded into nothing. The next moment, Ye Qing dashed past them at top speed. His intent and force was at their peak, his vigor and astral qi were circulating rapidly throughout his body, and he let loose a bestial roar that sounded like it came from a dragon elephant. Then, he threw his fist.

His dragon elephant strength was fully activated, his astral qi was fully unleashed, and his mind and spirit were flying together with his fist force.

“Break Through”

Yi Pin and Li Longxiang looked stunned as Ye Qing punched a massive hole through the tidal wave. Not only did the lake water fail to fill up the hole, it was expanding at a visible rate.

The trio flew through the hole and hit the ground. Such was their momentum that they couldn't arrest themselves until they had rolled across the ground for tens of meters.

Meanwhile, the giant waves finally collapsed and caused a noise that sounded like a massive avalanche. Then, the trio was treated to a sight that stole their breath away before they could even let out a sigh of relief.

“What... the hell is that?”

As it turned out, the lake wasn't a lake at all. It was a giant maw so wide it was scarcely imaginable how big the actual creature was. The “lake water” was really just the creature's saliva, and the “tidal waves” were caused by the creature closing its mouth.

The giant maw was still closing when the earth started shaking and breaking apart violently, revealing pitch black scales that were as big as hills and covered in light. They also saw long, massive tendrils that were as big as giant pillars wriggling underneath the earth.

“Are those its... whiskers?” Yi Pin asked in a fearful, trembling voice.

“I... think so?” Ye Qing couldn't be certain either. After all, he had never seen a fish whose whiskers were as thick as a pillar of heavens.

“Wait, I think I know what it is! It must be the legendary Sky Devouring Fish!” Yi Pin abruptly blurted in realization.

“The Sky Devouring Fish?” Ye Qing asked.

“According to the ancient text ‘Records of the Mountains and the Sea’, there exists a strange, indescribably huge fish who lives underground. It is pitch black like coal, and it dreams of devourings the celestial bodies. When it turns, an earthquake would happen, and when it opens its mouth, it would form a large lake. Hence, it is named the Sky Devouring Fish.”

“The Sky Devouring Fish is slothful by nature and so prefers to stay idle as much as possible. Its preferred method of hunting is opening its mouth to make a lake and conjure all sorts of auspicious treasures to draw prey to it. When a sufficient number of prey has gathered, it would close its mouth and devour them all.”

“Obviously, I have never seen the Sky Devouring Fish before, but what we're seeing fits what is recorded in the record. There is good reason to believe that the creature before us is the Sky Devouring Fish.”

“The Sky Devouring Fish indeed!” sighed Ye Qing as he wiped the beads of sweat on his forehead. This would explain why there were Snake Fishes inside the so-called “lake”. To think that they had been fooling around inside the Sky Devouring Fish’s mouth this whole time! If they hadn’t escaped quickly...

Meanwhile, the fish’s mouth had shrunk to just tens of meters in radius. As it swallowed, it unintentionally revealed a ton of sharp teeth that were shaped like spikes and as big as mountain peaks. It was horrifying to look at to put it mildly.

“Kekeke! You’ll need more than that to devour me!”

It was at this moment an old man covered in dark green flames suddenly flew out of the water. He was also laughing like a madman. The reason he was able to escape was because his phosphorous flames were burning the lotus stems—or more accurately, the Sky Devouring Fish’s organ—to charcoal. He was none other than the Poisoner, Tong She.

Despite his triumphant words, he didn’t look nearly as triumphant. The skull he was riding on was nowhere to be seen, his clothes were tattered rags, and his presence was incredibly weak.

“Poisoner? I can’t believe that old fuck managed to survive the Sky Devouring Fish...” Yi Pin mumbled in disappointment. Poisoner wasn’t completely out of danger yet, but it looked like he would make it out before the Sky Devouring Fish could close its maw. He should’ve done us all a favor and just die.

“Don’t worry, he’s going to die in a moment.” “What?”

Yi Pin turned around to ask what Ye Qing meant, but he abruptly realized that the Ye Qing next to him was an illusion. The man himself was gone before he knew it.

“I’m almost there!” Poisoner let out another cackle after striking down a bunch of tentacles that were trying to block his way. His tone was full of delight and relief. He was so close to escaping this death trap. So close...

“You can’t escape.”

It was at this moment an indifferent voice rang above him. It sounded determined, confident and certain like it was stating an irrefutable fact.

The next thing he knew, he felt a tremendous fist force pouring down on him like a waterfall.

“It’s you! But why?”

Poisoner was really just hanging to life by a thread. Horribly weakened and caught completely by surprise, there was nothing he could do but be pushed back into the maw.

“Seriously? Do you really not know why I’m doing this?”

Ye Qing watched as the Sky Devouring Fish’s tentacles wrapped around Poisoner and dragged him into the eternal shadow below. Then, he dodged the tentacles flying toward him and returned to the shore.

I didn’t provoke you, and yet you tried to kill me. So why on earth would I let you live?



## Chapter 266: Bird of Riddles

“Remember this, disciple. A man should be careful with their words and conduct. Take Poisoner for example. If he hadn’t tried to kill us and pissed off Ye Qing earlier, he wouldn’t have died today.”

“I will remember, master.”

“Also, a man should be kind, generous, and forgiving. It’s not good to be petty and calculating in everything like your senior uncle.”

“I will remember, master.”

Ye Qing: “...” I don’t mind you teaching your disciple, but why are you using me as a negative example?

“Ahem...”

When Ye Qing showed himself, Yi Pin abruptly stopped talking and ran up to him with an obsequious smile. “Well done, brother! Poisoner is an absolute bastard who committed countless crimes when he was still alive. You saved the people much pain and suffering by taking him out.”

“Har har...” Ye Qing let out a monotonous laugh and went over to Li Longxiang. Then, he said, “Longxiang, allow me to teach you a life lesson today.”

“Do tell, senior uncle!” Li Longxiang hurriedly straightened up and saluted Ye Qing.

Ye Qing glanced at Yi Pin meaningfully and began, “A man should practice as they preach, meaning that they shouldn’t talk behind someone’s back. A man should especially avoid being sanctimonious, high-sounding, two-faced, despicable, shameless, juvenile—”

Yi Pin: “...” I was just teaching my disciple, bro. Sure, you were caught in the crossfire, but do you have to slap all those negative adjectives on my person?

“Ahem, that’s enough. Just... remember what your senior uncle said, disciple,” Yi Pin interrupted with a disgruntled expression before changing the subject, “Let’s take a look at the Sky Devouring Fish, shall we?”

“Heh...”

Ye “Petty” Qing felt much better after lambasting a certain old man indirectly. Since Yi Pin thought he was petty, he decided to oblige him. That was what he wanted, right?

Of course, Ye Qing knew better than to push things too far. He stopped prodding Yi Pin and gazed into the distance.

The Sky Devouring Fish slowly opened its mouth after devouring its prey. It wasn’t long before a massive, bottomless pit appeared before their eyes. A short while later, saliva started rising from the bottom of the pit. When the pit was completely filled, the clear lake they had seen earlier appeared before their eyes once more.

Had it not been for his earlier experience and what was happening right before his eyes, he would never have believed that the lake was the Sky Devouring Fish's mouth and saliva.

This wasn't the end, however. After the "lake" was formed, the Sky Devouring Fish started manifesting an illusion. This time, it didn't create the Seven Star Blue Lotus and the lotus flowers. Instead, it manifested a small island that was covered in jujube trees. The jujube fruits were as big as a human's fist and fiery red in color. It looked extremely enticing and smelled very fragrant.

"Fire Jujube?" Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise. The jujube fruits on the island were called the Fire Jujube, and the Fire Jujube was a kind of fruit that flowered and fruited only once every one century. It was even rarer than the Seven Star Blue Lotus.

It was said that a mature Fire Jujube could be consumed by humans, animals, and spirits alike. A single fruit could increase their cultivation by ten years and save them ten years of hard work. It was a priceless treasure to say the least.

There were at least a dozen Fire Jujube Trees on the island and hundreds of Fire Jujubes. If they were real, there might be enough Fire Jujubes to create a Grandmaster. Ye Qing had no doubt that this lake was going to be a hotspot for the next three days to come.

"Damn... this Sky Devouring Fish sure knows how to lay a bait," Ye Qing said with a sigh. He could already imagine the conflict that was going to happen, and how it would all benefit the Sky Devouring Fish in the end.

The Stranger was clearly intelligent. The best thing they could do was to get the hell away from this place as soon as possible.

He said as such, "Let's leave. There is nothing for us here."

"Agreed."

Yi Pin's eyelids were twitching violently from what he just saw. He did not hesitate to grab his disciple's hand and walked away. It was just too dangerous to linger.

On their way away from this place, Ye Qing asked with a dubious tone, "Brother, was the Seven Star Blue Lotus the so-called opportunity you divined earlier?"

If it was, then Yi Pin's so-called ability to "observe the stars, divine qi, measure heaven and earth, and search for treasures" was unreliable at best and deadly at worst. He would have to consider leaving their group.

Knowing what Ye Qing was implying, Yi Pin shot him a reassuring smile. "Of course not. The lake isn't the location I divined where the treasure should be, so relax. I'm not trying to trick you."

The fact that a trickster like you is telling me that only makes me even more suspicious!

"Help! Help!"

They had just circled around the lake that was the Sky Devouring Fish and approached a forest when suddenly, a man bolted out of the forest. He made a beeline for them as soon as he caught sight of them.

Ye Qing frowned. It was clear that the guy was trying to lead whatever was chasing him to them.

The good news was that the guy never got close. A strange bird with a human's face abruptly descended on top of the guy and clung to his head.

The strange bird was about the size of a goshawk and had hook-like claws. Its feathers were a mix of black and white. However, a closer inspection would reveal that the black patterns on its feathers were really tiny scripts. It looked ancient and full of meaning.

As soon as the strange bird landed on the man's head, he abruptly stopped moving as if a spell had been cast on him. His energies disappeared into nothing, and the only thing he could move was his head.

"Please, brothers! Please save me!" The man begged Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang with a terrified expression.

"Coo coo..."

Before the trio could react, the Stranger cooed twice and spoke using a human's language, "Five brothers live together in a house. Their names and heights are different. What are they? Coo coo..."

The man started trembling involuntarily. Large beads of sweat slid down his forehead and dripped off his chin. His lips were shaking, but he didn't dare to make any sound whatsoever.

"Coo coo..."

Seemingly impatient, the strange bird cooed at him. Even more sweat pooled on the man's forehead, and his face was completely contorted from how afraid he was. There was even more confusion and despair on his face, however. He seemed to have no idea what to do.

"Coo coo!" The strange bird cried out again as if giving the man a final warning, but still he didn't say a word. Seemingly furious, he abruptly split the man's head in half and stretched its thin, long tongue into his brain. Then, it started suck his brain juice like its tongue was a straw.

"Heavens... that can't be tasty, can it?" Ye Qing muttered to himself while scratching his nose.

Yi Pin: "..."

Li Longxiang: "..."

Is this the time to think about such things? Actually, there's never a time to think about sucking brain juice, is there?

"Brother, let's leave while the Stranger is still distracted!" Yi Pin muttered while feeling sweat pooling on his forehead himself.

The strange bird's abilities were just too strange. Not only could it freeze someone by landing on their head, it could also speak like a human. Besides that, it seemed to want an answer from its victim, but how could they give it an answer when its question made no sense to them whatsoever?

"It's too late. Look."

Ye Qing motioned with his eyes, and Yi Pin subconsciously followed his gaze. He immediately saw a tree that was crawling with countless human-faced birds. They were all looking at them, and Yi Pin could practically hear the threat that was implied: Take a single step, and we'll rip y'all to pieces!

Yi Pin immediately broke out in cold sweat. This was a scene straight out of a nightmare!

"Don't be afraid. These birds are a kind of Hatred-class Stranger called the Bird of Riddles," Ye Qing said.

He was trying to assure Yi Pin, but his assurance only caused the old Taoist to panic even harder. Don't be afraid? With these numbers, they could threaten Spirit Purifiers and even Spirit Masters. How can I not be afraid?

"The Bird of Riddles is a human-faced goshawk who is capable of human speech and flying at extreme speeds. When it encounters a human, it would descend on their head, freeze them in place, and ask them a riddle. If you can answer the riddle, then they would leave alone. If not, or if you choose not to answer the riddle, then the Bird of Riddles would rip your head open and suck on your brain juice."

Ye Qing continued in a casual tone, "The guy just now didn't dare to speak, probably because one of his companions gave the wrong answer and was killed as a result. Unfortunately, he didn't know that keeping silent would result in his death as well."

"In any case, we have nothing to worry about. We only need to answer its riddles to be able to escape safely."

"The Bird of Riddles?" Yi Pin exclaimed in realization, "Now that I think about it, the bird was asking that poor guy a riddle earlier. You're seriously knowledgeable, brother!"

Phew. I should be able to answer a riddle without problems.

Ye Qing smiled. Every time he was idle, he would ask Wawa to recite to him books regarding Strangers. That was why his knowledge wasn't necessarily poorer than those experts who had researched Strangers their whole lives.

"Coo coo..."

After the Bird of Riddles was done sucking the guy's brain, it appeared on top of Ye Qing in the blink of an eye and asked, "I have a face but no mouth, legs but no hands, and I cannot walk despite having four legs. What am I? Coo coo..."

Ye Qing thought for a second before answering, "A table."

"Coo coo..."

The Bird of Riddles cooed in satisfaction. Then, it flew over to Li Longxiang's head and asked another riddle, "A girl is born in a pool of water. She is dressed in pink and sitting on a green boat. What is she?"

Li Longxiang immediately scrunched together into a deep frown.

“Idiot, it’s—” Yi Pin was just about to tell Li Longxiang the answer when the Bird of Riddles abruptly looked at him and spat. Its saliva landed squarely in Yi Pin’s mouth and filled his nostrils with a disgusting stench.

“Blaaaaaaargh!” Yi Pin immediately started throwing up uncontrollably. It was clear that the Bird of Riddles was punishing him for trying to spoil the answer.

It took the old Taoist a while before he finally recovered. As soon as he recalled the situation, he immediately looked at his disciple with panic. Spoiling the answer was a no-go, and he doubted that a hint would fly with the Bird of Riddles either. Even if that wasn’t the case, he couldn’t risk it. After all, there was an entire horde of Birds of Riddles watching from the sidelines.

But if he didn’t try to give a hint, could his stupid disciple really answer the question?

The next moment, Li Longxiang suddenly broke into a grin and said, “It’s a lotus flower!”

Yi Pin blanked out for a moment. When did Li Longxiang become smart? Or did his ancestor suddenly come back to life and send him a revelation?

“Coo coo...”

The Bird of Riddles cooed in satisfaction and took the sky once more. However, it didn’t land on Yi Pin’s head. It simply flew circles around him for a bit before flying back to its brethren.

Yi Pin: “...”

Ye Qing: “...”

Did it go away because Yi Pin smells horrible?

After the Bird of Riddles was out of earshot, Yi Pin immediately flew into a rage, “How dare you overlook me, you stupid bird!”

Also, you’re the one who spit on me! You should’ve reaped what you sowed!

After he was done ranting, Yi Pin looked at Li Longxiang and Ye Qing—the two men were currently standing far, far away from the old Taoist due to how smelly he was—and asked curiously, “Did you figure out the answer yourself, stupid boy?”

Li Longxiang shook his head. “No? Senior uncle’s the one who told me!”

“He did? I didn’t hear anything though?” Yi Pin looked confused.

“That’s because he told me the answer through sound transmission, master!”

“Sound transmission?” Yi Pin stared blankly at Ye Qing.

Ye Qing smirked as he explained, “Oh, I totally forgot to say this, but you cannot interfere with a riddle or even speak until it’s over. Otherwise, it would spit on you as punishment. That said, the Bird of Riddles’ intelligence is limited, so it could be fooled via sound transmission.”

Yi Pin: “...” And why didn’t you tell me sooner? You’re totally doing this for revenge, aren’t you?

Ye Qing ignored Yin Pin's resentful gaze and continued, "Don't worry, brother. The Bird of Riddles' saliva is harmless, so you're in no danger of dying. At worst, you'll stink for the next two or three days."

Yi Pin: "... He absolutely did this for revenge.

I apologize for everything.

Chapter 267: Bones Beneath The Flowers, The Four Seasons of Reincarnation

"Don't be sad, brother."

Ye Qing smirked when he saw Yi Pin looking gloomy. "The stink you're currently afflicted with is more useful than you think."

"Not only can the stink of a Bird of Riddles' saliva keep most Strangers away, it could keep the Bird of Riddles itself away."

"The location where we might find an opportunity is in this forest, isn't it? And this forest is filled with the Bird of Riddles. It would be suicide for almost anyone else to venture into this place, but you can waltz right in like you own it. We would be able to search for this opportunity without their interference. How good is that?"

"That's true," Yi Pin agreed before realizing something. "Wait a second. You haven't planned this from the beginning, have you?"

Ye Qing smirked. "Of course not. It's just your destiny to be our... walking repellant today."

"..."

"Don't be mad! It's for the better good, isn't it?"

"Oh yeah? Then why don't you let the Bird of Riddles spit you in the mouth?" Yi Pin grunted.

"Because I don't want to smell, duh!" Ye Qing answered matter-of-factly. "Besides, there's no need for a second repellant, is there? Thanks for the trouble, brother!"

"Thanks for the trouble, master!" Li Longxiang echoed in agreement.

"Get lost! What are you butting in for?!" Yi Pin scolded Li Longxiang before looking at the forestful of birds uncertainly. "Are you sure it would work, brother?"

"If you don't trust me, then we can just leave. After all, we won't get the chance to regret it once we enter the forest." Ye Qing wanted to give Yi Pin an assuring pat on the shoulder until he recalled the smell and gave up immediately. "It'll be fine though, so c'mon!"

Ye Qing had long since sealed off his sense of smell to avoid catching a whiff of the stench. He had also covered himself in a sheen of light to prevent the smell from clinging to him. The stench of a Bird of Riddles' saliva was that bad.

Yi Pin: "...” His words are sweet, but his actions are treacherous. Men!

After repeated urgings, Yi Pin eventually took the lead and slowly walked toward the forest. When they were about ten meters away, the Birds of Riddles grew restless and started cooing and flapping their wings like crazy. When Yi Pin forced himself to control his fear and took a couple more steps forward, the Birds of Riddles abruptly scattered and flew away.

Ye Qing immediately reached out and caught a handful of black-and-white feathers that looked to be of excellent quality. When Yi Pin saw this, he asked, "What are you doing?"

Ye Qing gave him a vague answer. "The feathers of a Bird of Riddles is an excellent material that can be used to sew clothes, cloaks, fans and more."

The real answer was that it was one of the main ingredients to make the Incense of Misfortune.

Yi Pin curled his lips in disdain as if he couldn't stand Ye Qing's miserly behavior, but as soon as Ye Qing turned away, he kicked his disciple in the leg to command him to pick up the rest of the feathers. After that, they ventured deeper into the forest.

As Ye Qing claimed, every animal and Stranger they came across stayed far, far away from Yi Pin because the stench was horrible. About half a teatime later, they arrived at a garden of flowers.

The flower garden was about 666 square meters wide and covered in fragrant, colorful flowers. A single shed stood in the middle of the field.

"Is this the opportunity you speak of, brother?" Ye Qing asked. "I believe so." Yi Pin nodded after a moment of observation. "If I'm not mistaken, this is the resting place of a powerful warrior or something."

"Yeah," Ye Qing echoed in agreement. "Since you're the one who found this place, you may explore it first."

"Oh no, it is all thanks to you that we were able to make it this far. Of course the privilege of exploration goes to you first, brother."

Four eyes met, and two men chuckled. Li Longxiang was the only one who didn't get what was going on.

Ptooeey! You think you can manipulate me into being your mine sweeper? Think again!

Hmph! You're not very generous, are you kid?

"In that case, why don't we observe the place first? Who knows, there might be unseen danger!" Ye Qing coughed.

"Yes, that seems like the best idea," Yi Pin echoed in agreement as if that was his plan all along.

In fact, Ye Qing was pretty damn sure that there was invisible danger lurking right around the corner. This place looked like a small slice of paradise, but they were inside the Demon's Tomb. True paradise might exist somewhere, but it shouldn't be found in the depths of hell. Even if it did,

it should've been destroyed by the Strangers living in the forest a long time ago. However, the garden in front of them looked perfectly pristine.

"What are you waiting for, master, senior uncle? This way!"

The two men were still observing the surroundings for dangers when suddenly, they heard Li Longxiang calling out to them. When they looked, they saw Li Longxiang standing in the middle of a small path leading toward the shed. They had no idea when the path had appeared or how Li Longxiang had stepped on it without them noticing.

"Are you trying to kill yourself, idiot? Get back here!" Yi Pin shouted as the blood drained away from his face.

"What do you mean, master? It's safe here!" Li Longxiang scratched his head, puzzled.

"Calm down, brother. He seems to be fine for now," Ye Qing also chimed in.

Yi Pin calmed down after confirming that Li Longxiang really was fine. He sighed both in exasperation and relief, "You brat..."

He was just about to rebuke his disciple when suddenly, a silhouette shot out of the forest and toward the shed at high speed. It was a man, and he wore a delighted expression on his face.

He was able to elude the Birds of Riddles' senses using Wood Escape, and he had arrived at this field of flowers way earlier than the trio. However, he didn't dare to venture deeper because he was afraid that some unseen danger might lurk in the field of flowers. But seeing as Li Longxiang was able to walk through the flowers safely, he believed that that meant that there was no danger. Unable to hold back his greed any longer, he made a beeline for the shed hoping to obtain whatever treasure lay within it before anyone else.

Just like Ye Qing and Yi Pin, the man had come to the conclusion that this was the resting place of a powerful warrior or Stranger. This meant that the shed most likely contained the deceased's possessions and even inheritance. At his level, even the leftovers were more than enough to empower him. And assuming that it was an inheritance, then this could be the moment where his life was changed forever for the better.

Naturally, he couldn't allow anyone else to claim it before him.

Afraid for his disciple's safety, Yi Pin intended to rush into the field of flowers himself. However, he had just raised his foot when Ye Qing stopped him.

"Wait, brother. Look!"

Yi Pin looked. He observed how the man landed both feet on the flower every time he ran out of energy, but only bent its petals slightly. It was as if he was as light as a feather. Then, he would kick off and launch himself even faster toward the shed.

"Swallow Taps The Water Three Times? He's probably a Swallow Bandit, but why should I care about his background?"

"I never said to look at the guy! I'm talking about the flowers!" Ye Qing rolled his eyes.



“Ahem...” Yi Pin scratched his nose to conceal his embarrassment and did as Ye Qing said. As the man ventured deeper into the garden, the flowers started growing brighter and more colorful. But at some point, they slowly withered as if they were going through the seasons. When summer came, the flowers bloomed their brightest. When autumn came, they all started to wither.

The flowers weren't the only things that changed, however. The man's qi, essence and spirit had changed as well. At first, his energies became stronger than ever before as if he was entering his prime. Then, it weakened drastically as if he had aged decades in but a moment. In fact, he had aged decades and turned into an old man with flabby skin and white hair.

The flowers fully withered and started dying en masse. It was as if they had entered the winter.

The man realized something was wrong as soon as his energies started changing against his will, but by the time he tried to leave, he had already transformed into a weak, decrepit old man whose vigor could barely keep himself alive, much less leave where he came. As he fell toward the ground, his body started rotting as if time moved far faster for him than it was everyone else. His flesh turned to bones, and his bones eroded into ash as he fell from the sky.

That still wasn't the end of Ye Qing and Yi Pin's shock, however. When the ash was seconds away from hitting the ground, a breeze blew past it and scattered it all across the garden. Countless saplings started bursting out of the earth, and the spring wind turned into a rain that nourished their growth. The saplings fed on the nutrients contained within the ash and rain and grew at an exponential rate. It wasn't long before the whole garden was filled with lush leaves and colorful flowers once more.

It was like the garden had undergone all four seasons in just a matter of breaths. They went from life to death, then from death to life as if emulating the eternal cycle of reincarnation.

It was both beautiful... and utterly horrifying to Ye Qing and Yi Pin. They had just witnessed a man aging to death right before their eyes, and his ash was used to reborn the flower garden anew. It was a stunning sight to say the least.

Ye Qing had only witnessed this method of death once in his life, and it was when the Heptachromatic Fog of Aging killed a guard right before his eyes. The only difference between the two was that the Heptachromatic Fog of Aging aged only one way, and only when it changed colors, while this field of flowers went through the cycles again and again.

“I believe this field of flowers is affected by the power of time, brother.” Ye Qing subconsciously took a few steps away from the garden.

Yi Pin did the same thing and replied in a hesitant voice, “I think so too. The way the guy died wouldn't make sense otherwise. Thank goodness we didn't step in willy-nilly.”

“Your disciple did though. Wait a second. Why is he...?” Ye Qing's voice grew puzzled.

“Oh yeah!” Yi Pin finally recalled his disciple and looked. Right now, Li Longxiang looked completely gripped by fear and confusion, which was understandable considering what he just saw. He was about to make his way out of the garden when Yi Pin hurriedly stopped him, “Don't move! Just stay there!”

After he was done placating Li Longxiang, Yi Pin frowned and voiced his doubts, “But why is Longxiang unaffected by its power?”

Ye Qing shrugged. “Don’t look at me. I have no idea what’s going on here. Maybe we can ask him to walk around for a bit and see what happens?”

“Do you think he’s a dog? Why don’t you walk into the field yourself then?”

Yi Pin rolled his eyes at Ye Qing and returned his focus to the flowers. A while later, Yi Pin suddenly jumped on his feet and cried, “I got it! It’s the Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons!”

#### Chapter 268: The Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons

“The Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons?” Ye Qing repeated with a frown. He had never heard of it.

Yi Pin didn’t keep him in suspense. “I heard this from an acquaintance, but the Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons is a plant-type Stranger that is left unclassified due to how special it was. It possesses the power of the four seasons of reincarnation and is supposedly immortal and eternal. Literally, it will never die unless a certain condition is met.”

“If a sinful, impure, and unworthy being were to make contact with the Reincarnating Flower of the Four Seasons, then it would wither and die. The people who made contact with it would also be afflicted with the power of time and reincarnation and perish along with the flowers.”

“Once they are dead, the flower would be reborn from their ashes and undergo a new cycle of reincarnation. It was said that every death creates a new Reincarnating Flower of the Four Seasons. Since there are enough flowers here to make up a whole field, that means...”

Ye Qing understood his meaning. There had to be thousands of flowers in this garden, meaning that at least thousands of living creatures had died here. Now he understood why there were no Strangers in the area. Everyone who got close had died and become a flower themselves.

Ye Qing and Yi Pin exchanged a glance and saw the severity in each other’s eyes. There was no way they were getting close to this flower, ever.

“By the way, you said that only sinful, impure, and unworthy beings who made contact with the Reincarnating Flower of the Four Seasons would die, right? Does that mean the opposite kind of person would be safe from its power?”

Ye Qing abruptly caught onto Yi Pin’s subtler point.

“I think so,” Yi Pin confirmed, “Longxiang is fine, isn’t he?”

“Despite having experienced the jianghu with me, Longxiang remained childlike and pure-hearted because he was born with an impaired mind. Forget committing a

crime, he had helped many others during his journey. That's most likely why he wasn't affected by the flowers' power of reincarnation."

Ye Qing nodded in agreement when a devious idea suddenly occurred to him. "Brother, you're a man who is untouched by the mortal coil, right? I am sure you wouldn't be affected by the flower's power of reincarnation either. You should go ahead and join your disciple."

Does he think I'm stupid!?

Yi Pin hurriedly shook his head and argued, "Oh no, I don't fit the bill at all. It is true that I'm a handsome, well-respected and greatly loved man who often lent a hand to those in need and performed countless good deeds, but I was also a young fool who committed many sins that I came to regret when I'm older. I may be a good person now, but I certainly didn't fit the bill when I was younger, so no, I dare not test the flowers."

"You though, you're a Patrolman of the Pacification Bureau who had slain countless evils, protected the people, and saved not one, but two territories from disaster. I am sure that a noble and pure-hearted man like you would be safe from the flowers. Why don't you go ahead and keep my disciple company?"

Handsome, well-respected and greatly loved? More like sanctimonious and fake as hell! Ye Qing thought scornfully, but he said, "You are completely right, of course, but my hands are also coated in blood. Sinful blood, mind you, everyone I killed is deserving of death and worse, but a sin is a sin, so I don't think that the flowers would overlook my sin of murder. It is a shame, but I will have to give up on this opportunity."

How can someone be so shameless? Yi Pin thought scornfully as he met Ye Qing's eyes. The duo stared at each other for a moment before exchanging a smile and backing a few steps more away from the garden. No one here was stupid enough to fall for the obvious.

Meanwhile, Li Longxiang finally couldn't hold himself back any longer and cried out, "Master! Senior uncle! What should I do? Should I leave?"

Can you guys stop chatting and focus on more important things? Like me?

"Should I tell him to come out?" Yi Pin asked.

"No, wait." Ye Qing explained, "The owner of the shed is obviously the one who planted the Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons, and their goal is to protect the shed. But if it's really just a normal shed, then there is no reason for them to enact such a... robust security. Therefore, I'm guessing that the shed is the owner's grave and/or the place where he left his inheritance."

"Since Longxiang isn't affected by the Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons, we should let him enter the shed. Who knows, that might be where his opportunity lies."

"I..." Yi Pin hesitated. On one hand, he was worried for his disciple's safety. On the other hand, he didn't want his disciple to miss his opportunity simply because he was overly cautious.

More importantly, Ye Qing was here. He didn't mind giving up his opportunity to his disciple, but could Ye Qing bear to do the same?

Ye Qing knew what Yi Pin was worried about, of course. He assured the old Taoist, "Don't worry about me, brother. I have no interest in this particular opportunity. Just consider whether the risk is worth the reward for you and Longxiang."

Yi Pin wrangled with himself a while longer before finally deciding that the reward was worth the risk. He didn't tell Li Longxiang to head in immediately, however. Instead, he sat down on the floor and brought out his three magical Tongbao coins.

The three Tongbao coins were round-shaped with a square hole at the center. Their shape and size were almost the same as the strand Chu Tongbao coin, but these three were inscribed with ancient scripts and overflowing with an air of Dao. Anyone could tell that they were extraordinary.

Even better, there were a pair of invisible, cloud-like wings floating about the edges of the coins. They might be invisible to the mortal eye, but Ye Qing could see them as clear as day. The wings themselves were covered in mysterious runes that reminded Ye Qing of the Eight Trigrams or the Luoshu Square.

After the three coins manifested into existence, the wings flapped, and they slowly floated into the air. Yi Pin wore a serious expression on his face as he performed all series of hand gestures. The gestures made no sense to Ye Qing, but he could tell that there was a certain cadence and order to it. He was also mumbling something that sounded like some sort of edict of calculation.

The three coins began ringing and vibrating slightly as a profound energy spread across the air. They quickly formed the shape of a mysterious trigram and displayed the threads of fate itself. Theoretically, anything and everything could be divined from it.

Ye Qing took one look and felt unbelievably dizzy. He felt like he was caught a glimpse of some sort of book that contained an infinite amount of information.

Yi Pin didn't break eye contact with the trigram, however. By now, his hands were moving so fast that they were a blur even for Ye Qing. However, the divination attempt seemed to take a lot out of Yi Pin because his eyes were bleeding, and his face had turned as white as a sheet in just a matter of minutes.

"Pwack!"

In the end, Yi Pin spat out a mouthful of blood, and the trigram abruptly shattered into pieces. The three coins also fell to the floor looking far less profound than they were before.

"Are you alright, brother?" Ye Qing voiced his concern.

"Cough! Cough... I am fine." Yi Pin waved him off and put away the three coins on the ground. "I was trying to divine the outcome of this encounter using Thirty Six Methods To Divine Fate, and..."

"And?"

"I got nothing. This place is completely shrouded from the rivers of fate, and I am unable to divine if the house contains some sort of danger."

Ye Qing: "... You put on a fabulous light show and even spat blood in the end, and all you got for your pains is nothing? Are you serious right now?

"Cough... That is why I changed my method and calculated Longxiang's destiny next. This time, it told me that it will be a frightening but ultimately harmless experience," Yi Pin continued.

"Huh. You can divine a person's destiny and even look into the rivers of fate? I'm impressed, brother!" Ye Qing flattered.

"It is nothing, nothing!" Yi Pin replied humbly, but it was obvious from his expression that he was proud of his abilities. Then, he seemed to recall a certain memory and grew forlorn all of a sudden. "To be honest, divination is just the ability to catch a glimpse of one or several ways the future might unfold. It is hardly omniscient, much less omnipotent. Otherwise, there wouldn't be the saying, 'One mustn't look into fate, just as one mustn't peer into one's destiny'."

"I and all others pursuing this art are but ants who are trying to catch a peek at the skies. But even if we succeed, how can an ant truly comprehend the totality of the sky?"

"Brother..."

Ye Qing frowned. He could tell that Yi Pin was a man with a past. He was about to give him some words of consolation when Yi Pin returned to his casual self and waved him off, "Don't worry about me. My age is getting to me, is all."

He then rose to his feet and called out to Li Longxiang, "You may enter the shed and check out if there's anything good, disciple! But remember! If you find a person's remains or a grave, you must kneel three times, kowtow nine times, and perform a junior's salute wholeheartedly. Two, you may take what is out in the open, but not those that are hidden within. Three, you must never damage any items inside the shed."

"Finally, just be careful. Don't hesitate to leave if anything feels even remotely off."

"I will remember!" Li Longxiang responded obediently. He had always listened to his master's words faithfully, so he obediently walked up to the shed and put a hand on the wooden door. But before he could even exert his strength, the wooden door abruptly opened on its own. Then, a gigantic hand reached out of the darkness, grabbed Li Longxiang, and pulled him into the shed! The door slammed shut right after that.

"Longxiang!"

Outside the garden, Yi Pin turned as white as a sheet when he saw this. He was about to charge in and fuck the consequences when Ye Qing stopped him and forcefully turned the old Taoist toward him. "Longxiang is fine! I couldn't sense any killing intent from the giant hand, and if it really

wanted Longxiang dead, it could have crushed him on the spot. There is no need for it to pull him into the shed, is there?"

"Also, didn't you say it yourself that Longxiang will have a frightening but ultimately harmless experience? There's nothing to be afraid of."

"I know, but..." Yi Pin still looked scared and worried.

"No buts. Even if we assume the worst case scenario, this whole place is surrounded by Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons. If you charge in, you would only lose your life. Do you think your disciple would want that?"

"What should we do?" Yi Pin looked like he was burning with anxiety. "Are we really just going to do nothing and wait for Longxiang to come out?"

"Unfortunately, yes. That is all we can do from the looks of it," Ye Qing said with a sigh.

He didn't really have any evidence to back up his theory, but Ye Qing strongly believed that Li Longxiang would be fine. In fact, he was certain that the disciple would come out with an opportunity that would earn everyone's envy. The only reason Yi Pin hadn't figured it out himself was because his emotions had gotten the better of him.

"Relax. Longxiang is a pure-hearted man. The heavens will not punish such a person."

Finally, Yi Pin calmed down and stared at the shed for a moment. Then, he let out a sigh and said, "I hope so..."

.....

Creak...

About half a teatime later, the wooden door suddenly creaked open. Yi Pin, who had been stewing in anxiety this whole time, immediately looked to the entrance.

Two or three breaths later, a brawny figure swayed out of the entrance like he was drunk. He was also carrying a few items. He was Li Longxiang of course.

As soon as his foot left the threshold, the door swung shut once more. Li Longxiang placed the items he got on the ground, faced toward the shed, and kowtowed three times with respect. He said, "Thank you, senior."

After he was done, he picked up the items and slowly made his way out following a small path; a path that did not exist until he was about to set foot in the flowers.

"Are you okay?" Yi Pin rushed forward and asked with a voice that was full of concern after Li Longxiang finally left the garden.

"I'm fine. Thank you for the concern, master." Li Longxiang shot him a simple smile before praising him, "You truly are a master diviner, master. Senior's deceased body is

inside the shed, and once I performed a junior's salute as per you told me, those items suddenly appeared in front of me!"

Chapter 269: The Nine Impetus of Tai Chi

"Oh! What did you get? Show me."

Yi Pin relaxed considerably after confirming that Li Longxiang was safe and sound.

"This is everything. I got a bottle of pills, a sword, a martial arts manual and a cultivation art."

Like a child eager to share his spoils, Li Longxiang revealed everything. "There were more items in the shed that looked quite extraordinary, but I remembered your teachings and only took those that were out in the open."

"Well done."

Yi Pin nodded in satisfaction and checked out the bottle of pills first. When he pulled out the stopper and took a sniff, he exclaimed in surprise, "It's the Jade Skin Bone Purifying Pill! And just look how round, unblemished and translucent the pills are. They are of superior quality for sure."

The Jade Skin Bone Purifying Pill was used to temper the body both inside and outside. It could make one's skin as flawless as jade and purify their bones. Hence the name.

After handing the pill bottle back to Li Longxiang, Yi Pin picked up the sword next to examine it.

The sword's making was quite old judging from its shape. It had a wooden hilt with a bit of jade mixed in it, and the word "Pine" was etched on its surface.

As soon as Yi Pin unsheathed the sword, a rich amount of vibrant, greenish energy immediately gushed out into the open. As it spread, the plants around them started growing like crazy, and even Yi Pin's arm was sprouting greenish buds as well. Ye Qing immediately stepped forward and slammed the sword back into its scabbard, stemming the flow and causing the energy to slowly fade into nothing.

"Phew... that was close. Thanks, brother."

The unnatural greenness and growth covering Yi Pin's arm also returned to normal after a while.

"Unless I'm gravely mistaken, this sword is at least a Hatred-class Strange Artifact," Yi Pin commented while stroking the sword from the tip all the way to the pommel. "It's around 101 centimeters long, and its whole body is forged from a kind of wood called the Verdant Jade Pine. Speaking of which, the blade is imbued with the power of the Verdant Yi Wood. It definitely deserves its name."

"What's a Verdant Jade Pine, master?" Li Longxiang asked.

Yi Pin responded, "The Yi Wood Jade Pine is a strange tree that can only be found on the peak of the tallest and most perilous mountains. Born from the spiritual qi of Yi Wood, it is shaped like a normal pine but is greenish jade in color. It is impervious to wind, frost, fire and even lightning."

“It takes sixty years to grow a single inch, meaning that it takes thousands and thousands of years to reach full maturity. I shouldn’t need to tell you how valuable this sword is.”

Ye Qing added, “This sword is potent, but its limitations are pretty significant as well. If the wielder is unable to withstand its Verdant Qi, they would be corrupted and assimilated like your master just now.”

“You are absolutely right.” Yi Pin wiped away the beads of cold sweat on his forehead and sighed in relief. “But if you can withstand it, then it will be a sword like none other.”

“What about this martial arts manual, master? I tried reading it earlier, but I don’t recognize the words. They’re shaped like tadpoles for some reason,” said Li Longxiang while handing over the martial arts manual.

The martial arts manual was only a dozen or so pages thick. Its paper wasn’t paper, but some sort of skin that not even Yi Pin with his wealth of knowledge could identify. It remained pristine and free from erosion despite having been here for god knows how many years.

“That’s the tadpole script, an ancient script that is compatible with the Great Way itself. It’s natural that you don’t recognize it.”

Yi Pin was brimming with excitement as he flipped through the pages quickly, “Let’s see... This is the ‘Nine Impetus of Tai Chi’... Those who practice Tai Chi are balanced in both yin and yang. Yin is born where yang is the strongest, and yang is born where yin is the strongest... Yin and Yang is the essence of all things, hence all things contain yin and yang... heaven and earth may switch places, life and death border one another, action and inaction are two sides of the same coin, water and fire may mingle in harmony given the right circumstances... a person’s qi too can be split into yin and yang. Clear qi will rise because it is light, and murky qi will fall because it is dense...”

“Oh heavens, this is incredibly difficult to read...”

Yi Pin was positively sweating after just translating two or three lines of the book. After reciting a couple more lines, he looked no different from when he attempted to look into the rivers of fate earlier; pale and exhausted. “Nope, can’t do it. These tadpole scripts are too hard to read. Not even I recognize all the words.”

“Can I take a look?” Ye Qing was quite curious himself, so he took the manual from Yi Pin and skimmed through the pages. A few seconds later, he nodded and slammed the book shut. Yep, I only recognize a handful of words, and that’s only thanks to my education.

“It’s probably a Taoist martial art. If it can be translated, then it will serve its practitioner well,” Yi Pin said, which was a massive understatement. A martial arts manual written using the ancient tadpole script could not be ordinary.



Ye Qing nodded in agreement before asking, “Longxiang, you said that the senior also gave you a cultivation art, right? What is it?” It wasn’t too much of a stretch to assume that the martial art and the cultivation art were somehow related to one another.

“Right, it’s... it’s...” Li Longxiang was about to answer when he suddenly cut himself off. He looked like he wanted to say something, but an invisible hand was clamped around his mouth. Such was his confusion and frustration that his face turned beet red. Eventually, he blurted, “I can’t say it, senior uncle.”

“What do you mean, you can’t say it?” Ye Qing asked, “Just show us the manual.”

“It’s not a manual.” Li Longxiang shook his head in frustration. “It’s a cultivation art that appeared in my head after the senior tapped me once in the forehead.”

“I can remember every word of the cultivation art, but for some reason, I just can’t say it out loud.”

“What’s happened to me, master, senior uncle? Is it dangerous?”

“You... inherited a true martial arts inheritance from the senior?” Ye Qing and Yi Pin exchanged a glance with each other. Yi Pin in particular looked like he was about to burst with joy. If Ye Qing wasn’t around, he would be guffawing at the top of his lungs already.

The fact that the person in the room had imparted his true martial arts inheritance to Li Longxiang meant that he viewed the young man as his disciple. The cultivation art must be pretty impressive as well seeing as the senior purposely set up a restriction that forbade Li Longxiang from passing it down to anyone verbally. In fact, Ye Qing reckoned that it couldn’t be passed down in any way.

“I’m going to be fine, right master?” Li Longxiang asked worriedly.

Yi Pin barely managed to suppress his silly grin and shook his head. “Of course you’re going to be fine, you silly, lucky boy.”

There was a reason why the saying, “Blind luck follows dumb people” existed.

“You don’t need to force yourself to say it. Just make sure you cultivate hard and live up to that senior’s expectations,” Ye Qing advised. He would be lying if he said he wasn’t envious, but that was how things turned out sometimes.

“I understand, senior uncle.” Li Longxiang shot him a grin.

Yi Pin accepted the loot from Li Longxiang and handed it all to Ye Qing, “As per our agreement earlier, we’ll split the spoils fifty-fifty based on our needs. The cultivation art Longxiang obtained is obviously the most valuable of the lot, so you may have the rest of the loot.”

He was reluctant to give up the items as a matter of course, but they already had the lion’s share of the loot. If he allowed his greed to overcome him, then their partnership would be forever tainted by it. That could be lethal considering where they were right now.

It was important to have ambition, but it was equally important to be satisfied with what you have.

Ye Qing smiled and waved the “Nine Impetus of Tai Chi” he was holding. “Just give me this martial arts manual, and we’re square.”

“Are you... sure about this?” Yi Pin was caught off guard because he wasn’t expecting Ye Qing to turn down the offer. He had explored the jianghu for countless years, and he had seen even father and son turning against one another over something valuable, much less everyone else. This was literally the first time he encountered someone who gave up not one, but multiple valuables that he rightfully deserved.

“It’s fine. I have a feeling that this ‘Nine Impetus of Tai Chi’ is almost as valuable as Longxiang’s cultivation art.”

Yi Pin kept to his word, so Ye Qing wasn’t willing to take advantage of him. Besides that, he could tell that Yi Pin was a true hidden master, and Li Longxiang had a bright future ahead of him thanks to the inheritance he obtained from the senior in the shed. He didn’t mind forging some good karmic bonds in this jianghu.

“Besides, Longxiang is the reason we got anything in the first place. Without him, it’s entirely possible that I would have walked away from this opportunity empty-handed. That’s why I’m grateful with just this.”

“But...” Yi Pin hesitated.

Ye Qing smiled. “Quit it. Are you the but man or what? If you need me to give you some concrete reasons, then sure. First, I don’t use a sword, so Pine is useless to me. I’m also not lacking in Strange Artifacts right now. Second, look at me. Do you seriously think I need the Jade Skin Bone Purifying Pill?”

Yi Pin: “...”

I should be happy that he’s giving up the majority of the spoils to me, but why do I feel like a beggar accepting charity from a rich man?

Then again, Ye Qing really had no use for the items. This was the guy who had screwed over countless jianghu warriors and obtained a mountain of loot as a result, and even had a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. It was no wonder he didn’t value a weapon that he couldn’t use. As for the Jade Skin Bone Purifying Pill, the guy had a body that was as strong as five dragon elephants right now. The Jade Skin Bone Purifying Pill was as useful to him as a glass of water—delicious, but that was it.

What a fucking monster this guy is.

In the end, Yi Pin obeyed his desires and thanked Ye Qing, “In that case, I shall kindly accept your generosity.”

Why play coy with a guy who wasn't lacking in anything?

“Now that we’ve gotten what we needed, let us leave. There’s no need to disturb our senior’s eternal slumber any longer than necessary,” Ye Qing put away the “Nine Impetus of Tai Chi” and said.

“Agreed.” Yi Pin nodded and peered at the sky through the tree leaves. “And this place isn’t safe anyway. The sky’s about to turn dark, and we need to find a suitable resting spot as soon as possible.”

Ye Qing checked out the dimming sky as well and asked curiously, “There’s day and night in the Demon’s Tomb?”

“Yes. And here in the Demon’s Tomb, it’s far more dangerous at night than it is during the day.”

“Danger? What danger?” Ye Qing could tell from Yi Pin’s tone that he was absolutely serious about this.

Yi Pin answered, “I’m not too sure myself; but there was a passage in a book that I read that went something like this: ‘There exists the Red Sun and the Blood Moon, and they are manifestations of Rahu’s eyes, the Progenitor Demon. Its left eye is the Red Sun, and its right eye is the Blood Moon. When the Red Sun falls, and the Blood Moon rises into the sky, the demonic qi in the Demon’s Tomb shall increase drastically. Demonic thoughts shall run free, and all kinds of Anomalies, Strangers, and dangers in general shall appear. A single mistake can damn you for eternity, and fates worse than death lies at every corner.’”

“In short, it is best if we hole up in a good hiding spot when night time arrives. Alternatively, we can seek out places with a lot of people or start a large fire to generate large amounts of yang energy. That should be enough to keep most evils at bay.”

Yi Pin continued after a break, “Of course, I have no idea if what I read in the book is true, but I’d rather rely on superstition than nothing at all. It’s still early, so let’s try and find a suitable resting spot first. We can decide afterward if that plan is a no-go.”

“If it turns out that it is all superstition, and the nights of Demon’s Tomb are as safe as it is during the day, then all is well. If not, then our preparations would be well worth it. What do you say?”

“Sounds like a good plan. Let’s go, brother.” Ye Qing nodded in agreement.

To be honest, the shed would be the perfect place to tuck in for the night. Unfortunately, it was surrounded by Reincarnating Flowers of the Four Seasons, and Li Longxiang was the only one who could enter the shed safely. It was a shame, really.

## Chapter 270: The Sword Blots Out The Iridescent Clouds

After they were out of the forest, Yi Pin performed a divination and obtained a general direction where they might be safe. They immediately headed in that direction.

They didn't go far before the sky slowly turned dim. The red sun suspended high in the middle of the sky slowly sank into the western horizons, its dying rays looking as red as blood. Iridescent light painted both the sky and the ground in rainbow, dreamlike colors.

This was a scene straight out of a painting, but Ye Qing felt uncomfortable and stifled. His spirit revealed to him that what looked like demonic qi was slowly increasing. The clear qi was fading, and the murky air was rising. Then, he saw countless magnificent, divine and bizarre illusions appearing all across the landscape.

He saw Buddhas and celestials making pilgrimages to the Great Way;

He saw gods and demons battling each other until both sky and earth were torn asunder;

He saw auspicious beasts dancing in the sky and what looked like palaces peeking through the clouds;

He saw countless ghosts and demons parading through the night;

.....

Well, this confirms that the Demon's Tomb is most dangerous at night.

Ye Qing continued watching the illusions for a bit until a bloody tear flowed down his cheek, and his mind felt like a discombobulated mess. It wasn't until he looked away that his symptoms improved.

"Are you alright, brother?" Yi Pin also noticed Ye Qing's reaction and advised, "These things are mirages created from demonic qi and one's desires. Just concentrate your mind and clear your heart, and you will be immune to their effects."

"Thanks for the advice, brother," Ye Qing saluted him. "Anyway, the night of the Demon's Tomb is definitely unusual. We need to find a hiding spot as soon as possible."

"Agreed."

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"Kekeke... There is no escape, children. Just give me your possessions, and I might yet consider letting you live."

"We are disciples of Purity Sword, Demon of Unliving. Hurt us, and the consequences will be severe!"

"Yeah! Have you forgotten the lesson Elder Song taught you earlier already? Touch a single hair on our bodies, and Elder Song will chase you to the ends of the earth!"

"Kekeke... it is true that Song Xilai and especially Purity Sword are way, way out of my reach, but your elder isn't here, and we are not at Purity Sword, are we? Who would know that I'm the one who killed you?"

“Speaking of which, Song Xilai humiliated me quite badly back at Luo Shui, and you guys are the perfect fodder to vent my frustrations on. If you must blame someone for your misfortune, blame Song Xilai, kekeke!”

Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang were still searching for a hiding spot when a series of strange cackles suddenly interrupted their search. When they looked, they saw a man wearing black robes and surrounded by demonic qi chasing down five people. They were a group of three men and two women, and they were all dressed in white. The collar of their shirt and their sleeves were embroidered with clouds and flowers. It was a simple yet elegant design.

The group looked miserable, however. Their clothes were in tatters and drenched in blood, and their energies were all over the place. They looked battered and exhausted.

It wasn't like their group was made up of weaklings. The leader of the group was a Spirit Purifier, whereas everyone else was a late-stage Astral Refiner. It was simply because the black-robed man chasing after them was stronger than the five of them combined.

“That's... Demon of Unliving! And he seems to be chasing after the disciples of Purity Sword!” Yi Pin took one look and blanched a little. “We need to leave, brother. And please don't tell me that you're planning to save them.”

“Of course not. I'm not crazy,” said Ye Qing while shaking his head. Demon of Unliving was obviously a bad guy, but his aura was so powerful it quashed any unnecessary thought Ye Qing might have had.

It was never a bad thing to help others in need, but only if it was within one's ability to do so. Otherwise, it would be futile at best or detrimental at worst. In this case, it would be suicide.

Ye Qing was a man of action, so he immediately grabbed his companions and darted toward the distance like the wind. He made no sound when he kicked off the ground, and he was gone in just the blink of an eye.

“They're pretty fast.”

The trio noticed Demon of Unliving, so of course the black-robed man noticed them as well. He was just going to squish the three ants when they abruptly darted out of his range.

“Still, you can't escape. I'll come for you as soon as I'm done with these small fries,” said Demon of Unliving with a cackle.

His voice wasn't loud, but Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang all heard it loud and clear despite the fact that they were almost a hundred meters away from the black-robed man. Not only that, his voice seemed to possess some sort of mind-bending quality that screwed with their heads and made them hallucinate all sorts of things.

“Shit! I was hoping he'd be too busy to bother with us,” Ye Qing cursed. More importantly, the guy managed to affect his mind with a single cackle from a hundred meters away. This was bad. Very bad!

As Ye Qing forced himself to calm down and devoted even more strength into his legs, Yi Pin suddenly said, "You can stop now, brother. The cavalry's here."

"What? Who?" Ye Qing skidded to a stop.

"It's the 'Sword From The West'..." Yi Pin replied indifferently, "Song Xilai."

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"Kekeke... I'm in a hurry, so goodbye!"

On the other side, Demon of Unliving looked back at the five Purity Sword disciples and unleashed a palm strike. The surrounding demonic qi converged into a ghastly face and flew straight toward them. If no help arrived, then the five disciples would surely be devoured by it.

"You dare, Demon of Unliving!"

It was at this moment a furious cry reached them, and dazzling white light lit up the darkening sky. For a time, it almost felt like it was daytime once more.

The light was so bright and sharp that it shattered not just the darkness, but light as well. For a time, no one could see anything.

Shiing!

There was the metallic singing of a sword, and everyone's skin pricked as if they were stabbed by countless needles. When the sound finally faded, and everyone's vision had returned to normal, they discovered that Demon of Unliving was nowhere to be found. There was only a floor of holes and jagged marks, and the sword intent lingering in them were intimidating to say the least.

The five Purity Sword disciples were perfectly unharmed, however. Despite the devastation around them, not a hair on their person was harmed.

"What terrifying power! What exquisite control!" Ye Qing couldn't help but exclaim in shock. Just now, Song Jianlai had unleashed such a terrific amount of sword qi that the entire sky was blotted from view. Despite this, the swordsman was able to control his power such that it would only harm Demon of Unliving and not his disciples. It was incredible to say the least.

"He's called the 'Sword From The West' for a reason," Yi Pin replied with a sigh, his gaze a kaleidoscope of emotions that couldn't be deciphered.

"Cough! Cough! How are you here, Song Xilai? I thought you were—"

The two men were basking in their emotions when an angry, puzzled shout jolted them out of their ruminations. As it turned out, Demon of Unliving was still alive!

"You thought your compatriot managed to lure me away?" Song Xilai interrupted rudely and tossed a head into the air. Its face was frozen in shock, confusion, and terror.

Demon of Unliving exclaimed in shock and disbelief when recognition hit him, “You killed Old Ding? But how!?”

“With my sword, duh. What’s so strange about it?” Song Xilai sneered. “If you’re worried that he’s going to be lonely in the afterlife, don’t. You’ll be joining him very soon.”

Demon of Unliving tried to threaten the swordsman, “Push me, and I swear I’ll do everything in my power to make you regret this, Song Xilai!”

“You can try. Back at Luo Shui, you had tried to murder an entire commandery of people. You only survived my wrath because of Old Ding. Now, you’re trying to murder my disciples. I just cannot see any reason to let you live whatsoever!”

His sword descended, and a pillar of light severed the sky and the demonic qi surrounding Demon of Unliving in half. Knowing that there was no way he could talk his way out of this, the black-robed man let out a frustrated howl and scattered into countless silhouettes.

Despite his earlier threat, he didn’t dare to fight the swordsman at all.

“Really? You think you would succeed when even your compatriot failed to escape me?”

Song Xilai thrust his sword forward and unleashed a torrent of sword qis that shredded most of the silhouettes. However, Demon of Unliving was creating more silhouettes by the second, and he was commanding countless ghosts to attack Song Xilai as well.

“I’ll take you to the grave if it’s the last thing I do, Song Xilai! Graaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!”

Song Xilai’s sword could sever the sky, and his sword qis swam through the sky like rivers of heavens. However, Demon of Unliving’s martial arts were as unpredictable as they were demonic. Although the upper hand was firmly in Song Xilai’s grasp, he was having trouble ending the bastard’s life once and for all.

Such was their clash that the entire sky was dyed in black and white. The earth shook, and the wind howled. It felt like the apocalypse was upon them as the two colors vied for dominance.

“So this is the clash between Grandmasters? I still have a long, long way to go!” Ye Qing sighed with admiration as he watched the battle.

“Song Xilai is okay,” Yi Pin snorted, “but trust me when I say that Demon of Unliving doesn’t live up to his cultivation.”

“Is that so?” Ye Qing chuckled and shot Yi Pin a meaningful look.

Suddenly, Ye Qing caught sight of something and asked, “Hmm? What is that cloud doing over there?”

The clash between the two Grandmasters was such that everything and anything between and around them were annihilated down to the atoms. However, a fiery red cloud had somehow barged into the battlefield before he knew it.

The next moment, the cloud transformed into a woman clothed in iridescent light. When she lifted her hand and waved, the light grew much brighter and slowly spread to the surroundings.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAARGGHHH!”

Demon of Unliving let out a bloodcurdling scream as both his body and his demonic qi slowly transformed into fiery red light. Try as he might, there was nothing he could do to resist. He eventually dissolved into the light completely.

It wasn’t just him either. Everything that was basked by the light—the flora, the fauna, the Strangers, and the landscape itself—all dissolved into fiery red light.

“Is that... the Lady of Iridescence?!” Ye Qing exclaimed in shock and horror.

“I think so...?” Yi Pin replied uncertainly.

“It doesn’t matter. We can’t let the light hit us.” Ye Qing grabbed Li Longxiang and ran all the way to the back of a hill, Yi Pin following closely behind them. Once they were safely tucked in, they peeked out and continued observing the battle.

“What is a Lady of Iridescence?” Li Longxiang asked while Yi Pin gulped beside him.

Ye Qing answered, “The Lady of Iridescence is a Disaster-class Stranger born from the essence of iridescent light. She normally appears when the sun is setting, and disappears after the sky has darkened completely. The equal of a human Grandmaster, everything within her light’s reach—relatively speaking, of course—would be corrupted and assimilated.”

“That’s terrifying!” Li Longxiang exclaimed in shock.

“Of course it’s terrifying! Demon of Unliving, a Half-Step Grandmaster wasn’t able to put up any sort of resistance at all!” Yi Pin slapped Li Longxiang on the back of his head as he said this.

“Do you think Song Xilai would be fine, brother?” Ye Qing asked curiously. It was because he couldn’t find the swordsman anywhere.

Yi Pin nodded his head firmly. “Oh, he’s going to be fine. Unlike Demon of Unliving, he’s a bonafide Grandmaster.”

As if on cue, a dazzling sword beam sliced the curtain of iridescent light in half and crushed the Lady of Iridescence to bits. However, the Stranger was a creature of iridescent light and clouds. So long as the two elements still existed, she would never die.

By now, the iridescent clouds and light had almost spread across the entire sky. It looked like the heavens were on fire.

“Over here!”

Realizing that their hiding spot wouldn’t be safe for long, Ye Qing punched a massive hole in the hillside and slipped in. Li Longxiang and Yi Pin were right behind him.



Outside, Song Xilai scoffed at the display of power. “Hmph! A mere Lady of Iridescence thinks she can slay me?”

Song Xilai flicked his blade, and a metallic ringing resounded throughout the sky. The next moment, an impossible span of sword qi manifested into existence and blotted out the iridescent light like lead gray clouds.