

Stranger 271

Chapter 271: No One Has It Worse Than Me

After blotting out the iridescent light, Song Xilai looked at the five Purity Sword disciples and said, "It's getting dark. There's a temple not far away in that direction. I want you to take your junior brothers and sisters and take shelter there, Chengyun."

"Remember. Never head out when it's nighttime."

"As you command, elder," said the Spirit Purifier with a salute. "We will take our leave now. Take care, elder."

"I will be fine. Just keep your junior brothers and sisters safe," Song Xilai replied indifferently.

"I will," Xie Chengyun promised before taking off in the direction Song Xilai had pointed him to immediately.

"Phew... We should leave as well." Yi Pin urged as he crawled out of the hole, "Song Xilai is strong, but even he cannot slay the Lady of Iridescence in short order. We need to be away from here while he's still blocking the iridescent light with his sword qi."

"Besides, you heard what Song Xilai said earlier. We now know for certain that the nights of Demon's Tomb are dangerous. We've already been delayed by Demon of Unliving, we can't afford to dilly-dally any longer."

"Yeah," Ye Qing agreed before looking at the five Purity Sword disciples. "We're going to follow them."

Song Xilai mentioned a temple just now. Since the swordsman was confident enough to instruct his disciples to hide inside the temple, that must mean that it was a safe place. At the very least, it would allow them to survive the night.

"Great idea, brother! It will save us a lot of trouble!" Yi Pin let out a vulgar chuckle before trailing behind the group of five.

Meanwhile, one of the male disciples glanced back at Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang with a frown on his face. "Senior brother, those three are following us."

"Hmph! They must be planning to follow us to the temple," another disciple said. "Should we chase them away, senior brother?"

Xie Chengyun replied coldly, "The sky's about to turn dark. Don't cause trouble."

"But senior brother, they were going to leave us for dead just now. Instead of being ashamed of what they did, they're going to enter our safe place uninvited! How is this acceptable?"

Xie Chengyun shot her a cold look. "And why should they help us? It is our own weakness that led to our situation, isn't it?"

"As warriors, we practice martial arts and cultivate the heart. We ourselves should be enough to handle anything the world throws at us. If we were strong enough to defend ourselves against Demon of Undying, then their help would've been unnecessary. And if we were so weak then we were slain by the enemy, then it is the result of our own weakness, is it not? How do others factor in the equation?"

"Rather than bemoaning others, you should ruminate on what you could've done better and train harder."

"Thank you for your guidance, senior brother." The four disciples were disgruntled, but they didn't show their true emotions on their faces in the slightest. It was because they feared Xie Chengyun deeply.

Meanwhile, a smiling Yi Pin moved closer to Ye Qing and said, "I think they noticed us."

Ye Qing chuckled. "Heh. So what if they did? It's not like they're the ones who built this road or that temple. This is the Demon's Tomb after all. They are in for a big surprise if they think they can oust us."

They were following the group openly, so of course the five Purity Sword disciples noticed them. The reason they hadn't tried to conceal themselves was because they didn't want the group to misunderstand that they were plotting something.

An incense stick later, they arrived at a small, ancient-looking Taoist temple that was painted black and white. It was built atop a small hill and surrounded by a bunch of pine trees. Whoever chose this place to build the temple had chosen well because it looked rather impressive despite its current state and size.

Around ten to twenty people were gathered at the foot of the hill. They were separated into several groups, and they were all watching one another warily.

"Huh. There's a surprising number of smart people around here," Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise.

Yi Pin disagreed. "Not necessarily. I bet some of them simply came because they thought that the temple might contain a treasure or two."

Ye Qing scratched his nose as the corner of his lips curled into a smirk. "To be fair, what is a Taoist temple doing inside the Demon's Tomb?"

Yi Pin shrugged before voicing his puzzlement, "Why aren't they entering the temple? They can't be here to welcome us, can they?"

"Let's find out."

A number of gazes landed on Ye Qing's group for a moment, but they quickly moved onto the five Purity Sword disciples. Compared to three nobodies, the five Purity Sword disciples obviously deserved more attention.

“They’re Purity Sword disciples...”

“Their leader... that’s Xie Chengyun the ‘Cloud Sword’...”

“Fuck! What is that fiend doing here? I’m starting to regret coming to this place...”

“Heh. You can leave if you want to!”

“And why aren’t you? There’s a high chance this temple is the resting place of a former champion. Like hell I’m going to give up on their inheritance or possessions!”

“You’re the one who said you regret coming to this place!”

Everyone was murmuring to one another while watching Xie Chengyun’s group warily. The swordsman himself paid them no heed and went over to a small path at the foot of the hill.

Xie Chengyun’s group didn’t understand why the band of warriors were lingering at the foot of the hill, but one male disciple thought that they were just cowards. He let out a disdainful chuckle before stepping onto the path.

“Wow. This guy’s an idiot, isn’t he?”

“This will be entertaining.”

Crackle!

The band of warriors cracked enigmatic, expectant grins on their faces, and what happened next did not betray their expectations. As soon as the disciple set his foot on the first step, he abruptly froze like a mountain had suddenly appeared on his back. The next moment, a bolt of lightning struck him squarely in the chest and threw him backward.

“Are you okay, Zhong Ming?” Xie Chengyun hurriedly caught the disciple and asked concernedly.

“I’m... fine... just... a... little... numb...” Zhong Ming stuttered as lightning rippled across his body. “In... fact... it feels... kinda comfortable[1]?”

Xie Chengyun: “...”

The swordsman trained his gaze on the nearby warriors—he had noticed their looks of schadenfreude, of course—and asked in a stern voice, “What’s going on here?”

“Ahem...” The unfortunate man who caught his gaze shivered and explained in a hurry, “It’s very simple, Brother Xie. This temple can only be entered during the night. Look.”

The man pointed at a broken stone slab with a few lines of blurry text etched on it. It stated:

“Enter during the night,

Or suffer a lightning bolt.

Offer a prayer before entering,

Or protection you shall not receive.”

The reason the group hadn’t noticed it before was because it was almost completely covered in grass.

“Hmph! If you knew this was here, then why didn’t you tell us sooner?” A Purity Sword disciple asked angrily while glaring at the warriors.

A man snorted loudly. “Heh! Did you ask us? No? Then why should we tell you anything? Even if we did, would you have believed us, you snob?”

“You—!”

“Enough!” Xie Chengyun stepped in and rebuked the disciple, “We are not here to stir up trouble.”

The swordsman’s reprimand sounded harsh, but it was nothing compared to the steely gaze he showered upon the outsiders. “We are here to rest for the night. Nothing more, nothing less. I hope we can co-exist in peace until tomorrow comes.”

“One more thing. The Demon’s Tomb is exceptionally dangerous during the night. I would advise you to stay the night inside the temple if you wish to live.”

His advice got varying responses from the group. Some people looked solemn, some looked suspicious, and some didn’t take his advice to heart at all. Xie Chengyun didn’t care about their reactions though. He was just doing what he thought was right. He returned to his group after saying that.

Some distance away, Yi Pin bumped Ye Qing on the shoulder and said in a soft voice, “Who would’ve thought that Xie Chengyun is a softie on the inside? Not that it’s a bad thing, of course.”

He is an elite disciple of a famous sect. It makes sense that he has a bigger heart than most,” Ye Qing replied just as softly. “This is good for us though. With Xie Chengyun keeping the peace, the night would be quieter than it could’ve been.”

“I sure hope so!” Yi Pin crossed his arms and chuckled.

Suddenly, someone looked up at the sky and muttered, “Hmm? It’s raining.”

“It rains inside the Demon’s Tomb?”

“Why not? This is the Demon’s Tomb we’re talking about. It could rain blades, and I wouldn’t be surprised in the slightest.”

“True. This is the resting place of Rahu, the Progenitor Demon. Sigh. I wonder when we’re going to become an almighty power like him?”

“Are you stupid? We’re average warriors with only a modicum of talent and no background to speak of. We’ll never reach the heights he reached, man.”

“Yeah, it’s impossible. Just impossible.”

“Sigh... why wasn’t I born in a famous martial clan? Why wasn’t my mother or father a powerful warrior? Just why?”

“Sigh, it’s all because we’re too useless.”

“Sigh... I can’t believe how useless and miserable we are! Just unbelievable!”

As they chatted, a mood of melancholy and self-hatred slowly spread throughout the crowd like a disease. Slowly but surely, everyone started feeling sad and depressed.

“Sigh, I’m an old man already, but I’m still just a Vessel Augmentor. I wasn’t able to make a name for myself in the jianghu, nor was I able to revitalize my sect. I’m so useless, so useless! A dog could’ve lived my life better than I had! Ahhhhh, I’m so ashamed!” Yi Pin couldn’t hold back his tears any longer and started weeping openly.

“My life is terrible! I’m over fifty years old, and I still haven’t achieved anything! Why do I even live? I should die. I should die!”

A man was sobbing uncontrollably to himself when his sorrow and despair finally reached the limit. He abruptly hit himself in the head and killed himself.

“My life is worse! I was an orphan, and I never found a friend or a family to rely on. As if that isn’t bad enough, I have no fame or wealth to speak of. Heck, I didn’t even have a woman to warm my bed! Uuuu...”

The man abruptly slammed his head against a nearby rock and splattered his brain matter all over its surface after saying that.

“Uwaaaah! You thought your life was more miserable than mine? I was born a bringer of all things ill and disastrous. I indirectly killed my dad when I was three, my mother when I was five, and my older brother and his wife when I was seven. I had married thirteen wives and sowed twenty sons my whole life, but they all left me eventually. What a miserable life it was!”

Pssh!

The man cut open his neck and committed suicide as well.

“You think you have it worse than me? No one has it worse than me! When I was three, my brother and I peeked at my neighbor in her bath only to get discovered. My older brother managed to escape because he had longer legs, but I was caught and beaten up real bad.”

“When I was ten, my older sister and I played with fire and accidentally burned up our house. When I was fifteen, I joined the Mind Altar Sect and served them faithfully as a servant for a decade, but they threw me out in the end because my talent is trash. I risked my life trying to survive the jianghu and finally obtained a martial arts manual, but my best friend stole it and ditched me the next day. I married fifteen

wives and had thirty children my whole life, but none of them is my seed.
Uwaaaaaaah! No one has it worse than me!”

“We’re so miserable, so useless. Our mere existence is a waste of this realm’s resources. Every grain we eat is a waste; every breath of air we draw is a waste. We should just... die.”

“Yes, death is the refuge we deserve. It’s just too hard to keep living.”

Pssh! Squelch! Thud!

For a time, countless people lamented how miserable their lives were, and countless people committed suicide as a result of it.

Chapter 272: The Rain of Misery

Ye Qing too was filled with sorrow. When he recalled his birth, he thought about how humble and lonely he was. When he recalled the recent fiasco at Luo Shui, he thought about how he saved Luo Shui from disaster and saved the people from danger, but all he earned for his efforts was hatred, jealousy, and enmity. He was the man with the Annon Sutra, but there was barely a day where he wasn’t fighting to protect his status and his life. Surely he was the worst performing protagonist of all the web novels out there?

The more he thought about his past, the more he became infused with thoughts of melancholy and despair. He... He wanted to die.

“Sigh. Why even live when I’m so miserable and useless?”

Without hesitation, Ye Qing headbutted a rock behind his back. There was a loud bang, and the rock shattered. His head remained perfectly intact, however. There wasn’t even a scratch on his forehead.

Unwilling to give up, Ye Qing went up to a tree and headbutted it. Once again, it was the tree that snapped in half, not him.

“Sigh, I’m so miserable I can’t even commit suicide. What a terrible life this is!”

Tears streamed down his cheeks as Ye Qing stared blankly at the broken tree in front of him. He was just about to grab his saber and cut off his neck when suddenly, the Annon Sutra glowed and basked his entire body in a chilly sensation. Finally, he jolted back to reality.

“Huh? What was I doing?”

Ye Qing rubbed his forehead as he recalled what he just did. “What the fuck? Did I just try to commit suicide?”

“There is no fucking way that was me. I must have been influenced by a Stranger of something!”

“Senior uncle! Thank heavens you’re awake! Please help me! I can’t keep master from killing himself much longer!”

Ye Qing was still rubbing his forehead when he heard Li Longxiang crying for help. He turned and saw the young man clutching Yi Pin's waist with a death grip while the old Taoist struggled with all his might. He looked like he was planning to headbutt the stele at the foot of the hill.

"Let go of me! I'm so miserable and useless! I deserve to die!"

Ye Qing pushed off the ground and appeared in front of Yi Pin in the blink of an eye. While pinning the old Taoist down with his right hand, he raised his left hand and gave him a powerful slap across the face.

Slap!

The slap was hard enough to leave a palm print on Yi Pin's face and stupefy him for a couple of seconds. However, he soon broke into a louder sob while saying, "Oh, how miserable I am! I can't even kill myself without someone slapping me in the face! I want to die! Don't stop me, please!"

"It's no use, senior uncle. Maybe try hitting him harder?" Li Longxiang suggested. He was still holding onto Yi Pin just in case.

Ye Qing coughed awkwardly. "Ahem... I don't think that's the issue here."

He had slapped Yi Pin hard enough to wake even a coma patient, so pain wasn't the answer here. Now that he thought about it, he had headbutted a rock and a tree earlier and still couldn't break free from the spell. Those were easily more painful than a slap to the face.

If it's not a disease of the body, then it's most likely something that affects the mind and spirit, Ye Qing thought. The only reason he regained his consciousness was because the Annon Sutra had jolted his mind with its chilly energy.

Ye Qing pressed his fingers to his forehead and visualized the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method". Then, he roared with power and spirit, "WAKE UP!"

His voice was so loud that the rain cloud in the sky literally scattered into nothing. The weaker warriors were disoriented and bleeding from all orifices.

"What the..."

"What happened?"

"Why are those people dead?"

The warriors started waking up one after another. At first, they were too disoriented to remember what had happened. When they did, shock and terror immediately overtook them.

"What the fuck was influencing us?"

"I... I don't like this place. We should leave as soon as possible."

"Brother... Brother Xie, you're a well-read, well-traveled man, right? Do you know what just happened to us?"

"Yeah, Brother Xie. What should we do in this situation?"

Everyone subconsciously looked to Xie Chengyun—the warrior with the highest cultivation level in their group—for directions.

“My apologies, but I don’t know what just influenced us either.” Xie Chengyun shook his head. “Honestly, I myself was seconds away from killing myself.”

“What... What should we do then? We broke out of its spell once, but... but...”

Panic and fear started spreading among the group. Thankfully, a voice spoke up before the warriors could crumble into full-blown panic, “The Rain of Misery. If I’m not mistaken, we were affected by the Rain of Misery.”

Xie Chengyun and the others looked. An old Taoist wearing disheveled robes and carrying a bright red, swollen cheek was the one who spoke up. He was also activating a talisman and covering himself in a sheen of golden light that prevented a single raindrop from hitting him. He was, of course, Yi Pin.

Yi Pin puffed up his chest and clasped his hand behind his back when he noticed that everyone was staring at him. He would’ve looked pretty cool if it wasn’t for his swollen cheek and the bright red palm print on his face.

“If I may ask, Reverend, what is the Rain of Misery?” Xie Chengyun saluted him.

Yi Pin didn’t keep them in suspense. “The Rain of Misery is a rare Stranger that is left unclassified because no one can agree on whether it’s a Phenomenon-class Stranger or a Disaster-class Stranger. The Rain of Misery looks no different from a normal rain, but unlike a normal rain, it does not sink into the ground or merge with other waters. Instead, it converges at low-lying areas and forms a Lake of Misery.”

Yi Pin motioned at their feet as he said this. As he said, the rainwater floated just above the ground as if it was insulated by some sort of invisible barrier. Moreover, the rainwater was flowing toward low-lying areas.

“The Rain of Misery could afflict anyone who makes contact with it with melancholy and sorrow. If you don’t shield yourself against it, you would recall all kinds of sorrowful and miserable memories until you grow despondent enough to commit suicide. Moreover, the Rain of Misery is particularly effective against people with an active, complex mind.”

“No wonder!” Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. He was wondering why Li Longxiang, the weakest of all of them, wasn’t affected by the Rain of Misery. It was because he was pure and simple-minded.

Yi Pin continued, “Few people noticed the Rain of Misery’s effects until it was too late because of its similarity to ordinary rain. Throughout history, there have been plenty of incidents where a settlement and even an entire territory was caught by the Rain of Misery and perished as a result. If the Rain of Misery rained long enough to form a massive flood, well... I don’t need to tell you what a disaster that would be.”

“This is also why some people argued that it should be classified as a Disaster-class Stranger.”

“Oh, heavens... a Disaster-class Stranger? Doesn't that mean we're dead?”

“I don't want to die, I...”

Please save me, Reverend! Please!”

“Hehe. Worry not, everyone.” Yi Pin beamed as everyone begged him for a solution. He seemed to be enjoying the attention a lot. “It's actually quite simple to shield yourself from its effects.”

“What do we do, Reverend? Please, tell us!”

“Please, Reverend! I can feel it changing me again!”

“We will forever remember your kindness if you save our lives, Reverend!”

“Heh, there is no need to beg me, everyone. We are all part of the *jianghu*. It's only natural to watch each other's backs, no?”

Yi Pin stroked his beard as he revealed the answer, “As I said earlier, the Rain of Misery only affects those who make contact with it. In other words, you simply need to dry your clothes with astral qi and shield yourself from the rain, and you will be fine. Alternatively, you can also find a shelter. You will be fine as long as you don't make contact with the rain.”

“Got it, got it...”

“Thank you so much for the advice, Reverend!”

“Thank you so much for saving our lives, Reverend!”

The warriors immediately launched into action as they thanked Yi Pin. Some people protected themselves with astral qi as Yi Pin advised, and some brought out their Strange Artifacts to shield themselves from the rain. There was even one guy who grew a massive tree to block the whole area from the rain.

After Yi Pin was done speaking, Ye Qing walked up to the old Taoist and praised, “You're pretty good at social manipulation, brother!”

It wasn't quite the carrot and the stick, but the logic was the same. Yi Pin had given them a scare by describing how horrifying the Rain of Misery was before revealing the solution. It was a much more effective method at earning the warriors' goodwill than just telling the answer from the get go.

“It's nothing, and it's not like I'm doing this out of altruistic reasons. I'm hoping that these people will remember what I did for them when they decide to stir up trouble inside the temple later,” Yi Pin explained.

Yi Pin noticed that Ye Qing had already protected himself from the Rain of Misery's influence. He couldn't sense any fluctuation in his astral qi, but the Rain of Misery automatically evaporated into

air as soon as it got close to the young man. The air surrounding him felt incredibly hot and dry as well.

“Were you the one who woke us up, brother?” Yi Pin asked.

Ye Qing didn’t deny it.

“You love doing good deeds anonymously, don’t you? If you told them what happened, they would probably be kissing your feet in worship right now!” Yi Pin chuckled.

“And why on earth would I want anyone to kiss my feet? Anyway, I prefer to keep a low profile.” Ye Qing shrugged.

“It’s your choice!” Yi Pin shrugged back before recalling something. “Oh right, did you know what happened to my face, brother? Why do I feel like someone slapped me real hard in the cheek?”

“Don’t ask me, I don’t know, it wasn’t me!” Ye Qing instinctively executed his triple-denial protocol. When he noticed the dubious look on Yi Pin’s eyes, he let out an awkward cough and added, “I mean, it has to be yourself, wasn’t it? You were trying to commit suicide via face-slapping.”

“Really? But I don’t remember being strong enough to—ooh, that really stings.” Yi Pin turned to his disciple next and asked, “Was it you, Longxiang?”

Li Longxiang hurriedly shook his head. Feeling Ye Qing’s hot, passionate gaze burning a hole in his face, the young man forced himself to lie, “Senior uncle is telling the truth. You were going so hard at it I literally couldn’t stop you.”

Sorry, master. I think senior uncle would kill me if I told you the truth.

“Is that so?” Yi Pin frowned and glanced back and forth between the duo. He was out of his mind, so he supposed he could have hit himself harder than he intended. But why did he still feel like something was off?

“Let’s not dwell on the past, shall we brother?”

Afraid that Yi Pin would find out the truth if they dwelled on this any longer, Ye Qing hurriedly changed the subject. “The sky’s dark already. We should be able to enter the temple now, right? This darkness is giving the creeps.”

“Me too.” Yi Pin nodded and checked out the sky. “I *think* we should be able to enter now, but... do you want to give it a try?”

“Absolutely not. Do I look like I love getting struck by lightning?” Ye Qing shook his head without hesitation.

So, Yi Pin looked at Li Longxiang and ordered, “Longxiang, you try.”

Li Longxiang: "...” *Can I not? I don’t like getting struck by lightning either.*

“There’s no need to be afraid. We know it’s non-lethal, and didn’t that guy from Purity Sword say that it was actually quite comfortable?” Yi Pin urged when he noted Li Longxiang’s hesitation. “Relax. Best case scenario, nothing happens. Worst case scenario, you enjoy a shock massage. It’s a win-win either way, isn’t it?”

Li Longxiang: “.....” *Oh yeah? Then why don’t you try it?*

Unfortunately, his master wouldn’t be denied, and he was feeling a bit of guilt after lying to his master. So, Li Longxiang ultimately forced himself to walk up to the stairs.

Upon reaching his destination, Li Longxiang sucked in a couple deep breaths before extending his right foot. He braced himself when he planted his foot on the step, but... nothing happened.

Li Longxiang wanted to gather himself some more before moving his left foot, but Yi Pin had already lost his patience. “Quit dilly-dallying and get it over with already!” the old Taoist said before kicking Li Longxiang right in the butt. Caught off guard, the young man staggered forward until he caught himself. Before he knew it, he was standing on the fourth and fifth step of the stairs already.

Ye Qing: “...”

Everyone else: “...”

There’s no doubt about it. They’re one hundred percent master and disciple.

Seeing that Li Longxiang was neither stopped nor sent flying by a bolt of lightning, Yi Pin beckoned Ye Qing over with a straight face. “Looks like we’re clear to enter the temple. Let’s go, brother.”

“Yeah.”

And so the duo walked up the stairs, and everyone else was right behind them.

Chapter 273: Anomalous

“Do you feel like a pressure has suddenly lifted from your shoulders?”

“In fact, I did. It felt kinda suffocating earlier, but it’s much better now.”

“Same.”

As soon as the people set foot on the stairs, they suddenly felt a little lighter than before. It was as if some sort of invisible object had left their bodies.

Most of them could only feel the sensation, but Ye Qing could “see” it clearly. Through his spirit, he saw countless wisps of strange demonic qi leaving their bodies and dissipating into the air as soon as they set foot on the small path.

Yi Pin and Xie Chengyun—both of them extraordinary warriors in their own right—noticed the same thing as well.

“I knew something wasn’t right with this temple,” Yi Pin muttered under his breath.

“It doesn’t matter so long as the effect is positive,” Ye Qing replied smilingly, though in reality he was feeling quite worried on the inside. Even with his spirit, he hadn’t sensed the demonic qi clinging to his body until now, much less the others. He didn’t even know if he had come into contact with the demonic qi during the day or the night.

He had no intention of dying without even knowing what killed him. He would have to be even more careful in the future.

“Hmm? Where’s Brother Wu?”

“He’s probably still loitering at the bottom. I’ll call him. Brother Wu! What the hell are you doing down there?”

“Hehe, no need to wait for me. We’re all fishes in the same *jianghu*, so my bleeding heart can’t bear to see my fellow warriors left in the open, you see. I’ll come up as soon as I bury all the bodies.”

Bastard! He talks a good game, but he’s really just looting the bodies! I can’t believe I didn’t think about it myself!

Brother Wu wasn’t the only one who was looting the bodies. There were a couple others who were doing the same thing. Unwilling to let go of the opportunity, a couple of warriors immediately raced down the hill to join them.

“Stop.”

However, Xie Chengyun stopped the warriors before they could take more than a couple of steps.

“Brother Xie, we just want to—”

They tried to explain that they weren’t heading down because of their greed, but the swordsman interrupted them before they could finish. “Look behind their backs.”

“What?”

His remark drew everyone’s attention. When they looked, a couple of people fell to the ground from sheer shock and horror. “What... What the hell is that?”

How had they not noticed it sooner? There were currently four people looting the bodies at the foot of the hill, and every single one of them was carrying a “person” behind their backs. The entities had long hair that covered up their faces and swayed lightly behind the warriors’ necks. They gave off a strange and evil feeling to say the least.

Strangely, the warriors didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary. They were still going through the bodies with clear excitement.

“Are those... humans?” Li Longxiang stuttered in fear.

“Of course not!” Yi Pin rolled his eyes at his disciple.

“B-Brother Wu! Come back quickly!” One of the Purity Sword disciples finally regained his senses and shouted at his friend.

“It’s not going to take long, man. Stop pushing!” Brother Wu brushed off this advice.

“You fucking idiot! There’s a Stranger behind your back! Get up the hill before it’s too late!” The disciple lost his patience and shouted.

“Stranger? What Stranger?”

The four on the ground couldn’t help but stop whatever they were doing and look behind their backs. But instead of being horrified, the warriors merely looked confused. They couldn’t seem to see anything.

What happened next was almost too terrifying to describe. The warriors’ flesh started falling off their bodies chunk by chunk like fully ripe persimmons. Even scarier was the fact that the four Strangers they were carrying slowly raised their heads and stared at the group on the hill. When their faces were fully revealed, it turned out that they looked exactly the same as their victims. Then, their lips curled into a horrifying grin.

Countless people gasped as a terrible chill shot up from their feet and straight into their skull, but that wasn’t the end of the horror. They suddenly heard a great number of footsteps—it sounded like countless people were stepping on rainwater—and soon, a large group of *jianghu* warriors emerged from the darkness. They were rotten and decayed just like the four, and they were all carrying a Stranger behind their backs, one who shared the same face as them.

The Strangers then looked up at the group and shot them a toothy white grin as well.

“Ma... Master... tho... those Strangers aren’t going to come after us... are they?” Li Longxiang stuttered while trembling with fear.

Ye Qing[1] said while rubbing his nose, “I doubt it. If they were going to attack us, they would’ve done it already. It’s probably because this temple is special somehow.”

If he wasn’t mistaken, the demonic qi that left their bodies after they entered the temple had something to do with these Strangers. Had they dilly-dallied like the poor fucks on the ground, they would’ve suffered the same fate.

“What the hell are these things, brother?” Yi Pin gulped in fear. He had never seen or heard such a Stranger in his life.

“I don’t know, man. I’m not omniscient.” Ye Qing was also licking his lips nervously. “I can tell you one thing though. The nights of the Demon’s Tomb aren’t just dangerous. They’re anomalous as fuck.”

“At least they aren’t attacking us. Thank the heavens we chose to follow Purity Sword to this temple.” Yi Pin sighed in relief.

“There’s no saving those people, so let’s focus on saving ourselves. C’mon!” Ye Qing turned around and resumed his stride toward the temple. He never looked back. This

place was way too dangerous, and the temple was the only place that looked a little safer.

Yi Pin hurriedly caught up to him while calling out to his disciple, "What are you waiting for, Longxiang? Let's go!"

"Right, right!" Li Longxiang hurriedly responded and ran up to the duo.

"What should we do, senior brother?" A Purity Sword disciple looked to Xie Chengyun for instructions.

"We go up," Xie Chengyun replied simply before glancing at the dazed crowd around him. "This place isn't safe. If you would listen to my advice, head up the hill as soon as possible."

Xie Chengyun didn't wait for a response. He turned around and hiked up the hill with his junior brothers and sisters.

"R-Right! Thank you for the advice, Brother Xie."

"Thank you, Brother Xie."

"What should we do now?"

"Are you deaf? We follow them and get the fuck out of here! You guys can stay here if you want to."

"Hehe. Same."

"Wait for me, dammit! Don't think I don't know that you're just trying to get first dibs on whatever is inside the temple!"

.....

As everyone was racing up the hill, no one noticed that the Strangers on the ground were grinning wider and wider. They didn't stop until their cheeks were split wide open, and the soil beneath them were drenched in blood.

For whatever reason, every Stranger on the ground was grinning from ear to ear. It was a wanton, arrogant, taunting, and evil grin. The blood-drenched ghouls laughed at them all.

.....

"Dao births one, one births two, two births three, and three births everything."

"One incense stick, two incense sticks, three incense sticks for the divine."

Outside the temple, Yi Pin was admiring a couplet set above the entrance curiously. "What an interesting couplet this is. The first line reveals the truth and essence of Taoism, and the second line exposes the desire of all celestials and gods. Yes, yes, I like this a lot."

"The horizontal scroll is even better: Sincerity begets all."

Ye Qing rubbed his nose smilingly. "Sincerity is a must when seeking freedom and Dao. It is the same when praying to celestials and gods."

"Hahaha! Well said, brother!" Yi Pin guffawed as he stepped into the temple.

The first thing they saw was a courtyard. The floor was smooth limestone with not a speck of unwanted weed or branch anywhere. There was a small temple hall in the middle of the courtyard where a mud statue was enshrined. It was also the only place in the temple where one could take shelter from the rain.

The mud statue was a tall, thin Taoist with blurry facial features. He was carrying a horsetail whisk over the crook of his arm and wielding a spell sword[2]. He was also standing on a patch of clouds.

The group quickly split into three groups after they entered the temple hall. Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang were together as a matter of course, and Xie Chengyun with his junior brothers and sisters. The last group was made up of six *jianghu* warriors.

That's right. There were over twenty *jianghu* warriors at the beginning, but now only six of them were left. That was why they were huddling together even though they didn't necessarily see eye to eye with each other.

"Hmm? The fruits on this incense burner table are... fresh?"

There was only one piece of furniture inside the temple hall, and it was the incense burner table set in front of the mud statue. The incense burner was nothing to write home about, but the offerings—the fruits to be exact—were still fresh.

"Wait a second... These aren't your normal fruits! These are spirit fruits! The Langgan Golden Flower Fruits to be exact!" A man suddenly exclaimed in surprise.

"What? Are you sure, Brother Xiao?"

"I could never mistake it! Just look! You can almost see the pattern of a golden flower on its surface. It's obviously the Langgan Golden Flower Fruits!"

"You're right! Hahaha!"

It was at this moment Xie Chengyun spoke up, "I'd advise you not to touch those spirit fruits. Think about it. We are the first group of people to enter this temple. So who could have placed those fruits there?"

His words poured over the *jianghu* warriors' heads like a bucket of cold ice. It cooled them down so much that cold sweat was breaking out of their foreheads.

"Do you mean we're not alone in the temple? That's... that's not possible, right?" A man stuttered.

"Impossible. This temple is quite small, and there is no place to hide at all."

"Where did this Langgan Golden Flower Fruits come from then?"

"Why are you asking me? I'm just as clueless as you are!"

“Maybe they’re the belongings of the deceased? You know, the master of this temple?”

“That... makes sense, actually!”

Despite Xie Chengyun’s warning, their greed gradually overcame their fear. The six *jianghu* warriors began eying the Langgan Golden Flower Fruits with greed once more.

“What are you doing? My senior brother told you to keep your hands off the fruits!”

A Purity Sword disciple said angrily when he saw this, “If you want to commit suicide, at least do it somewhere else! Your actions could very well doom us all!”

“Hmph! You keep saying that it’s dangerous to take the fruits, but in my opinion, you just want to keep them for yourselves!” A vicious-looking man with a muscular figure and arms so long that it reached past the knees scoffed.

Chapter 274: the Spirit Ape Pays His Respect

The man’s name was Kou Xiong, and he was a Half-Step Spirit Purifier and the strongest of the six.

“Relax, we won’t take it all for ourselves. There are fourteen of us here, and it so happens that there are exactly fourteen Langgan Golden Flower Fruits on the table. There is enough to share.”

“I don’t want the Langgan Golden Flower Fruits! I just want to survive the night! What’s so difficult to understand about that?” The Purity Sword disciple exploded. As if sensing its master’s anger, his sword began stirring and ringing.

He wasn’t alone in this. The other three Purity Sword disciples had grabbed their swords as well. Xie Chengyun was the only one who remained seated.

The six *jianghu* warriors subconsciously grabbed their weapons and watched the Purity Sword group warily. Xie Chengyun raised an arm to stop any conflict from breaking out before asking in a cool voice, “As you say, there are fourteen of us, and it so happens that there are fourteen Langgan Golden Flower Fruits on the table. Don’t you find that strange at all?”

“And what’s so strange about it? The master of this temple must have been a warrior like no other. It would be far stranger if we encountered nothing strange in his temple,” Kou Xiong argued. “Brother Xie, we’re not privileged like you. We’re not disciples of a major sect where we have a master to guide us and resources to squander as we please. We simply cannot allow a free opportunity like this to slip through our grasp!”

“In that case, there’s nothing to say.” Xie Chengyun narrowed his eyes and grabbed his sword. Killing intent immediately filled the hall.

Suddenly, a ridiculing voice interrupted the tension. “Heh. There’s no need to fight. There’s actually a very easy solution to your conundrum, you know?”

Xie Chengyun and Kou Xiong subconsciously glanced at the direction of the voice, and they found a young man leaning against the wall and sipping his wine at leisure.

“What do you propose?” Xie Chengyun asked. Although the young man was only a late-stage Astral Refiner, Xie Chengyun had a feeling that he was the greatest threat out of everyone present.

Ye Qing smirked. “Brother Kou wants to partake in these Langgan Golden Flower Fruits, whereas Brother Xie just wants to survive the night safely. In that case, why don’t you both make a compromise? Brother Kou, can you wait until the night is over before you take the fruits? This way, we can ensure that nothing will happen during the night.”

“Brother Xie, can you promise not to harass Brother Kou and his acquaintances when tomorrow comes? After all, you just want to get through the night safely, right? You should have no qualms with them taking the fruits after the night is over.”

Kou Xiong replied immediately, “That’s... That’s a good idea. I will give you face, brother. What says you, Brother Xie?”

Although Kou Xiong wanted to take the fruit as quickly as possible—after all, the longer this dragged out, the higher the chance something might happen and cost him the opportunity—he didn’t want to offend Xie Chengyun even more. If the swordsman really made up his mind to attack them, they would be lucky to escape this place alive, much less obtain the Langgan Golden Flower Fruits.

On the other hand, Ye Qing’s suggestion offered the best of both worlds, and assuming that the Purity Sword group really didn’t want the Langgan Golden Flower Fruits, he would be able to nab a couple more fruits. All things considered, why not?

“That sounds agreeable. Very well,” Xie Chengyun replied, though he wasn’t looking at Kou Xiong. He stared at Ye Qing for a moment before asking, “May I know your name, brother?”

Ye Qing lied, “My name is Ye Shi[1]. I’m just a nobody.”

In fact, Ye Qing didn’t even look like himself. As a powerful body tempering warrior, he could manipulate his bones and muscles as he pleased. Therefore, it was all too easy for him to alter his appearance.

He was famous throughout Luo Shui and even Tian Yong right now. The last thing he wanted was to be chased by his bounty hunters while he was still in danger. Just because he wasn’t afraid of trouble didn’t mean he actively wanted to get into one.

“Well met, Brother Ye. I am Xie Chengyun,” replied Xie Chengyun with a nod. He had a feeling that Ye Qing had given him a fake name, but it was fine. He wasn’t willing to press the young man for it.

“Well met, Brother Xie,” Ye Qing returned. Another nod later, Xie Chengyun closed his eyes and returned to his meditation once more.

He's a proud one, Ye Qing thought to himself. He thought the swordsman would at least make some small talk before excusing himself, but that wasn't the case.

Ye Qing was okay with this though. After taking another sip of wine, he slowly rose to his feet and walked up to the incense burner table. Then, he stared at the mud statue.

A short while later, Ye Qing produced a bright yellow incense stick and snapped his finger. He then lit the incense stick with an invisible flame. A fragrant scent immediately permeated the hall.

"What are you doing, brother?" Yi Pin asked curiously.

"I'm offering my respects. What else?" Ye Qing replied simply before straightening his posture and bowing his head deeply three times. Finally, he placed the incense stick inside the incense burner.

"In a temple, it is only natural to offer a prayer. Brother, Longxiang, you should pay your respects as well."

"I suppose that's true, especially since I'm a Taoist myself."

Yi Pin stepped in front of the table after a moment's thought and clasped his hands in a prayer. He bowed respectfully to the statue and said, "Disciple Yi Pin pays his respect to his better. This disciple may not have an incense stick to offer, but his truth is as heavy as a thousand mountains. This disciple humbly requests you to provide him your protection and shield him from all evils."

Yi Pin was a true Taoist, so his gestures, tone, and even expression were far more convincing than Ye Qing's.

Li Longxiang emulated his master's behavior, but went even further and kowtowed to the statue a few times.

After Ye Qing went back to his seat, he suddenly looked at Xie Chengyun and asked, "Would you like to offer your respects as well, Brother Xie?"

Xie Chengyun opened his eyes and answered, "I appreciate your advice, Brother Ye, but we swordsmen only believe in ourselves and our sword."

"I know right? Why would anyone practice martial arts if praying to the gods is enough to give us a good life?" A *jianghu* warrior sitting next to Kou Xiong chimed in ridiculingly.

"Seriously, Brother Ye. Everyone but ordinary people knows that a mud statue is just that, mud. Why are you taking this so seriously?" Kou Xiong himself guffawed in agreement. He could not help but find Ye Qing and Yi Pin's solemn prayer absolutely ridiculous.

"Yeah! It's just a mud statue. I can literally shatter it in one punch. If you're going to pray to such a thing, then you might as well pray to me!"

"Hahahaha!"

It wasn't intentional, but the atmosphere was considerably lighter after Ye Qing's actions. Sure, the laughter were mocking and unkind, but it was still better than the razor sharp tension that existed a moment ago.

Ye Qing didn't take offense despite the provocation. He simply gave them a small smile and said, "Well, there are true deities in this world, even if they aren't quite what we expect. Better safe than sorry, right?"

After that, he slowly leaned against the wall and half-closed his eyes as if he was catching a break.

"By the way, brother, the incense stick you used isn't normal, is it?" Yi Pin asked curiously after taking a seat beside Ye Qing.

He couldn't say for the others, but as a Taoist who often paid his respects to all kinds of deities, he knew more about prayer items than most. It was how he noticed that the incense stick Ye Qing used wasn't just of superior quality, its smoke had a firm shape, and its scent was thick but not irritating. More importantly, he could feel an indescribable air within the smoke. It was anything but ordinary.

"It's called the Incense of Worship, a toy I developed during my free time. It's nothing to write home about," Ye Qing said casually.

"You're a funny one, brother. That incense stick is anything but a toy."

Yi Pin didn't press Ye Qing since it was obvious the young man wasn't willing to spill. Instead, he moved onto the topic he really wanted to talk about. "Say, you found something, didn't you?"

Ye Qing took a sip of wine and admitted readily, "I'm not really sure, but I'd rather be safe than sorry. Remember the stele at the foot of the mountain and the couplet we saw at the entrance?"

"Sure. What about them?" Yi Pin asked.

"The stele said, 'Offer a prayer before entering, or protection you shall not receive,' and the couplet said, 'One incense stick, two incense sticks, three incense sticks for the divine.' Both items state that he who visits this temple must pay their respects and prayers to a deity. I don't believe that it's a coincidence."

"I'm a cowardly man who treasures my life a lot, you see. That is why I decided to offer up an incense stick. I won't deny that I could be overthinking this, of course."

Yi Pin grew solemn as he stroked his beard. "No, no you're not overthinking this. This is the Demon's Tomb we're talking about. There is no such thing as too much caution. If anything, I'm the one who was careless."

"Anyway, I'm feeling a little sleepy. Can you take the first watch, brother? I'll replace you when it's past midnight."

Yi Pin didn't give Ye Qing the chance to say yes. He plopped down on the floor and fell asleep just like that.

Nearly everyone in the temple was still engaging each other in friendly conversation, but as time passed, they started feeling tired and began engaging in other activities. Some people fell into

meditation, some people lay down on the floor and slept just like Yi Pin, and some people cultivated. For a time, it was pure silence inside the temple.

As time passed, the sky grew darker and darker. There wasn't a single ray of light outside the temple besides the bloody moon. As for sound, there was only the sound of the rain dripping against the roof tiles and the limestone floor. As unsettling as its origins might be, it at least chased away some of the oppressive darkness and silence hanging above the temple.

Plop.

Suddenly, a soft noise came from the courtyard. It sounded like an object hitting the floor or someone stepping on the floor and kicking up a small splash of water.

Plop plop plop.

The noise came closer and closer at a rapid pace. It sounded like something was approaching the temple hall at high speed.

The noise disappeared a moment before it would enter the temple hall. For a few breaths, there was only eerie silence until—

Creak...

The wooden door slowly swung inward. It looked like someone had grabbed the handle and gently pushed open the door, but strangely, no one was outside the door. Even stranger was the fact that the noise—as soft as it was—sounded unbelievably loud considering how quiet it was. It should've jolted everyone in the temple hall awake, and yet no one did.

Plop.

Plop.

The footsteps resumed and got closer to the incense burner table. One could vaguely see the outline of something paying their respects to the statue. Then, the transparent figure slowly revealed its existence.

It was a spirit ape wearing a Taoist robe. It was about as tall as the average human being, and its hair was tied up in a Taoist hair bun. Its arms were spread flat across the floor as it kowtowed deeply and reverently toward the statue. Its gestures were ancient, natural, and almost spiritual.

It was at this moment clear, dreamy light rippled out of the statue. When the spirit ape had assumed a meditative position—its palms, soles, and the top of its head all pointed toward the top—it inhaled and sucked the dreamy light into its mouth. It was almost like it was cultivating.

A few breaths later, the dreamy light disappeared. The spirit ape's hair flashed with divine luster from time to time.

After the spirit ape was done cultivating, it rose to its feet and observed the people in the temple hall for a bit. As it closed its eyes, the skin on its forehead slowly split open to reveal a single eye that looked pure, clear, and transparent, yet seemingly contained an infinite amount of spirituality and essence of Dao.

As the third eye slowly swept its gaze across the room, everyone suddenly started glowing subtly. Some people's lights were bright and clear, while some were dark and murky.

Chapter 275: The Spirit Ape of Dao

To be specific, Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang's light were bright and pure.

The Purity Sword disciples' lights were weaker but untainted.

And finally, Kou Xiong and the five *jianghu* warriors' light were dim and tainted.

When the spirit ape looked at the trio with his third eye, a smile crossed his lips as if it was happy and approving of them.

When it looked at Xie Chengyun and his junior brothers and sisters, its face smoothed into a look of indifference.

And when it looked at Kou Xiong and the five *jianghu* warriors, its face warped into a look of anger and disgust. Wisps of spiritual light shone out of its pupil and hit the six men, and semi-transparent silhouettes floated out of their bodies. It was none other than the six men's souls.

At first, the six souls were dazed and confused. They had no idea what just happened to them. When they saw the spirit ape, their souls began quaking with shock and terror. They tried to struggle, resist, or escape, but because they were just souls, they couldn't produce so much as a squeak, much less break free from their confines.

The spirit ape opened its real eyes and grinned provocatively at the terrified men. Then—

Slurp!

It inhaled them all into its mouth. Pops and cracks resounded from its cheeks as it crunched down on the souls. They sounded surprisingly chewy considering that they were intangible blobs.

After the spirit ape had devoured the six men's souls, it walked up to Ye Qing, Yi Pin and Li Longxiang and examined them for a moment. Then, it turned its palm upward and produced a pair of peaches.

The peaches were surrounded by a faint purple mist that sparkled like it contained a nebula or stars. If the trio were awake, they would've recognized the fruits as the famous Nebula Peach.

The Nebula Peach was created from the apotheosis of the power of the stars. An extremely rare purify one's mind and improve one's spirit, it was far more valuable than the Langgan Golden Flower Fruits on the incense burner table.

The spirit ape placed the fruits beside Yi Pin and Li Longxiang. When it moved over to Ye Qing, its third eye shone a clear, warm light as if it was trying to see through his very soul.

A while later, the spirit ape carried Ye Qing beneath its arm pit and leaped out of the temple hall. After returning to the courtyard, it pushed off the floor with both legs and leaped all the way to the path outside the temple.

“Huhu...”

The spirit ape shot Ye Qing a mysterious grin after landing on the ground. It was almost as if it knew that Ye Qing was pretending to be asleep.

That's right, Ye Qing had been awake for a while, though not from the beginning. Specifically, he awoke while the spirit ape was devouring Kou Xiong and the five *jianghu* warriors' souls.

He didn't know when or how he fell asleep. In fact, he had never planned on sleeping considering that he was in an unfamiliar and dangerous environment. His original plan was to meditate and keep his spirit expanded so he would be able to detect any unusual activity at a moment's notice, but before he knew it, he was asleep. It was a deep, dreamless slumber as well. It was almost as if the temple possessed some sort of magical power that could relax one's nerves no matter how taut and put them to sleep.

He had been jolted awake by a series of strange crunching noises. When he cracked a slit and saw the spirit ape devouring the six *jianghu* warriors' souls, he immediately closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep.

Some people might wonder why he hadn't put up a fight. It was because he recognized the spirit ape. Forget him, everyone in the temple hall combined would still be no match for the spirit ape.

The spirit ape was a Disaster-class Stranger called the Spirit Ape of Dao. Born with a body that was both yin and yang, it could switch between tangible and intangible forms and create life on its own. Naturally close to Dao and born to pursue the Dao, it loved nothing more than visiting Taoist temples, praying to Taoist icons, and worshiping the sun and moon. As its third eye contained the essence of Dao, it could observe the flow of energies of the world, see through the darkness of the Nine Nethers, and distinguish one's true nature. It was also why it was known as the Three-Eyed Spirit Ape.

The Spirit Ape of Dao adored good and loathed evil. It especially loathed people who blasphemed a deity. It would capture the souls of blasphemers with its third eye and consume them.

It wasn't that Ye Qing was a coward. The enemy was just so strong that he couldn't muster even the slightest bit of desire to engage in some good ol' heroism.

Ye Qing wasn't particularly worried that the spirit ape would do him harm, however. The reason the Spirit Ape of Dao had consumed the six *jianghu* warriors' souls was obvious: they had blasphemed against the deity of this temple and were disrespectful toward deities in general. It was only natural that the Spirit Ape of Dao would be furious with them.

Ye Qing wasn't too worried about himself though. He had paid the deity of this temple its due respect and even offered it an Incense of Worship. Therefore, he was pretty sure he would be fine.

At first, the script went more or less as he expected. Not only did the Spirit Ape of Dao not harm Yi Pin or Li Longxiang, it had even given them a Nebula Peach each. In a sense, they were being rewarded for doing nothing.

Yi Pin and Li Longxiang were just tagalongs, but they were given the Nebula Peach. Ye Qing couldn't help but anticipate what he, the guy who presented the Incense of Worship, was going to get.

The next thing he knew, he was tucked under the spirit ape's armpit and taken away to heavens-know-where.

He wondered what went wrong. Seriously, why the fuck was this happening? Why was he, the guy who did all the hard work, being carried away to an unknown fate while Yi Pin and Li Longxiang got freebies while they were sleeping?

Is it going to steam me in broth, simmer fry me, or turn me into preserved meat? Eeeeeeeek!

He couldn't struggle though, at least not now. The spirit ape was a Disaster-class Stranger. There was zero chance he would survive if he tried to put up a fight. If he waited, an opportunity might present itself. So, he kept his eyes closed and continued to pretend that he was asleep.

The Spirit Ape of Dao knew that Ye Qing was pretending to be asleep but paid him no heed. It turned back toward the front and jumped down the hill.

Rustling noises assaulted their ears as soon as they landed. It was caused by the Strangers Ye Qing and the others had witnessed earlier. Still lying on top of the dead men's backs, they all stared at Ye Qing with greedy eyes.

Disgust entered the Spirit Ape of Dao's eyes. When it snorted, two streams of air exited its nostrils and swept across the area like a pair of swords. The Strangers' heads shattered into pieces, and not a single one of them could take even a single hit. The Strangers then transformed into a pile of bones.

The Spirit Ape of Dao paid no attention to their plight. Perhaps their existence was no different from ants to the Strangers. It broke into a run and ventured into the darkness.

As mentioned before, the Spirit Ape of Dao possessed a yin and yang body that could turn tangible or intangible. This included the objects it was carrying such as Ye Qing. What this meant was that it didn't need to slow down for anything. It could pass through mountains, rivers, and more like it was nothing. Naturally, its speed was nothing to scoff at. The Spirit Ape of Dao had covered over a hundred kilometers of distance in just ten or so breaths.

The Spirit Ape of Dao eventually came to a stop before a strange mountain. First, it was suspended about thirty meters above the ground. Second, it was broad at the top and narrow at the bottom as if it was upside down.

After they arrived at the mountain, the spirit ape leaped tens of meters into the air before catching a hanging rock with one hand. It swung about half a circle in the air to generate momentum before throwing himself further up the mountain. It would repeat this a number of times until it finally reached the top.

The top of the mountain was as flat as it was broad. If Ye Qing didn't know better, he would think that he was still on the ground. That wasn't what caught his attention, however. It was the fact that the whole place was littered with tombstones.

The Spirit Ape of Dao dropped Ye Qing on the ground, and at this point, Ye Qing couldn't be bothered to keep up his act. He just stared at the scene before him in utter shock.

Why... Why are there so many tombstones at this place? Could it be...? Realization struck him. Is this the graveyard of all those super champions who came here in search for a resting place?

The reason the Demon's Tomb was called the Demon's Tomb was twofold. One, it was the resting place of the Progenitor Demon, Rahu. Second, it was also the resting place of countless titans of the Dark Ways.

Unless he was mistaken, this graveyard could very well be *the* graveyard of those titans.

As for who made the gravestones, the answer was simple. It was the champions themselves. Even on death's bed, they were still some of the most powerful warriors or Strangers in the world. It was all too easy for them to make themselves a grave.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, Ye Qing's heart skipped a beat. When he looked up, he saw a white deer carrying an old man walking toward him.

The old man had a big forehead and pure white hair. He had a kind, benign-looking face and carried a bronze mirror in his hand. He looked just like a celestial who had descended from the heavens.

The white deer he was riding was perfectly clean and white. There wasn't so much as a speck of black or any other color on its body. It had a pair of massive, rainbow-colored horns that stretched out like a pair of plum trees, and a boy and a girl were sitting on each side of the horns.

The two children were really paper dolls, and they looked no different from the legendary Golden Boy and Jade Maiden people usually burned when conducting a sacrificial ritual. Their cheeks were painted red, and they both wore an eerie smile on their faces.

The children carried a white lantern with a lit white candle each. they cast an eerie light upon their surroundings. When Ye Qing narrowed his eyes, he could vaguely see the ghosts of several children running around, playing and laughing with each other.

Before the old man could reach Ye Qing though, a person abruptly leaped out of the clouds and landed on the peak. At the same time, they burst out laughing, "Hahaha! I finally found it! I finally found the graveyard where all the demons are buried! Hahahaha!"

Suddenly, they noticed the old man and the white deer.

"Who the hell are you?" The person scoffed in disdain before waving their hand. Thunder cracked, and a cascade of lightning fell down from the sky. It was like they were the god of thunder bring down their wrath upon the old man.

The person looked arrogant, but they used their ultimate move from the get go.

The old man was unmoved, however. His only response was to raise his bronze mirror.

There was a flash of black-and-white light, and the skyful of lightning abruptly disappeared into nothing. The person was frozen in place for a moment before slowly, they started growing transparent. Eventually, they too disappeared completely from view.

Ye Qing could hardly begin to describe just how shocked and afraid he was. It was because the person hadn't turned invisible or executed some sort of technique to escape. It was the old man literally wiping their existence from the world somehow. He knew because his senses told him that the person's life force and energies had completely vanished from the world. This was true annihilation in every sense of the word.

Chapter 276: Lu You

"Lu You..."

Ye Qing felt like his blood had turned into ice as he stared at the old man.

The Lu You was an unclassified Stranger. Appearance wise, he looked like an old man with white hair and a white beard. He wielded a Soul Mirror and rode a white deer whose horns carried a pair of children carrying white lanterns.

Nothing was known about the Lu You's origin, only that he was often sighted at the graves of champions. He lived in a small hut of his own making and acted as a gravekeeper. He didn't harm innocents, and he didn't involve himself with the secular world. If he ran into malicious people or Strangers, he would shine his Soul Mirror on them and annihilate them in both body and soul.

The Lu You only guarded graves of champions, and there was more than one Lu You in the world. Generally speaking, the stronger the deceased, the greater the Lu You who would be guarding that grave. The deceased must be a Grandmaster or above to attract a Lu You's attention, and the Stranger was at least as strong as the deceased. This meant that even the weakest Lu You in the world was still a Disaster-class Stranger.

The fact that a Lu You was guarding this place proved that this was definitely the fabled burial ground of champions. Not only that, Ye Qing counted hundreds of gravestones at first glance, meaning that at least hundreds of champions were buried in this place.

With that in mind, just how strong was this Lu You?

That warrior from before was at least a Spirit Master, but they had died so easily you would think that the Lu You was just squishing an ant. He never even managed to react, much less resist.

The Lu You paid no attention to the warrior he just killed. He simply resumed his stride toward Ye Qing.

Ye Qing stiffened and subconsciously took a step backward. Then, he took two steps to the left and hid behind the Spirit Ape of Dao.

You're the one who brought me here, so it's your responsibility to keep me safe, right?

The Spirit Ape of Dao turned around and placed a furry hand on Ye Qing's shoulder. Then, it cracked a grin at him.

Ye Qing blinked in confusion and puzzlement. *What is this bad feeling I'm getting?*

His fear was proven true just a second later. The Spirit Ape of Dao dropped to its knees and gave the Lu You a solemn bow. Then, it leaped over the edge and disappeared into the sea of clouds below, leaving a sad, sad boy behind.

"You're leaving me!? At least take me with you!"

Ye Qing wanted to cry, really. Instead, he dashed toward the edge and attempted to jump down the mountain as well.

You're not the only one who can run, bastard! I'm way too young to be talking about the meaning of life with the Lu You!

Like a phantom, Ye Qing reached the edge in just a breath. He had never been so thankful that he had learned the Astral Refinement stage movement art, Illusionist's Grace. Just one more step, and he'd be able to leave the peak and return to safety. Hopefully. Surely the Lu You had no interest in a weakling who had zero interest in the graveyard, right?

But right before he would take that final step, a furry fist abruptly entered his view. Caught off guard, Ye Qing split into multiple images in an attempt to dodge the attack. But no matter how fast he moved, he just couldn't get away from the fist no matter what. In his eyes, it kept growing bigger and closer.

As Ye Qing despaired about the hopelessness of his situation, the fist abruptly extended a middle finger and flicked him on his forehead.

“You motherf—”

The world spun round and round as a massive force sent him flying all the way back to where he started. An instant before that, he caught the glimpse of a furry face staring at him with a shit eating grin.

Ye Qing was so pissed he couldn't speak. *Did I steal your food or rob your ancestor's grave or something? Why are you doing this to me?!*

Bang!

The second Ye Qing's back hit the ground, he immediately pushed himself off and took off in a different direction.

I'm going in a different direction. Surely that fucking ape isn't going to stop me a second time, right?

Unfortunately, he was too late. The Lu You abruptly raised his Soul Mirror and fired a beam of light at him.

“FUCK!”

The beam of light moved faster than he expected, so fast that it felt like it had teleported in front of him. As if that wasn't enough, Ye Qing felt that the light would've hit him even if that fucking ape hadn't bonked him back to where he started. It was absolutely undodgeable.

Knowing that it was do or die, Ye Qing arrested his momentum and gathered his strength. A solemn-looking Buddha that was wrapped in chains immediately appeared in front of him.

Clatter clatter clatter...

The Moko Boundless Chains fell off, and what felt like an infinite amount of demonic qi gushed out of the Buddha's body. The cloud of energy literally blotted out the sky itself.

The Buddha wore a merciful smile on his face. He was holding a swastika mudra with his left hand, and an exorcism mudra on his right. However, the energy surrounding him was a mixture of the Buddha's light and demonic qi. While a million Buddhas were praying to the sky and chanting Buddhist mantras in the light, a sea of flesh, blood and bones were peeking through the demonic qi. It was like a glimpse of the Kingdom of Buddha and hell itself. At the same time, a grandiose and formless voice filled the air,

“Kekeke! You finally let me out for fresh air, boy! By the way, didn't you promise me that you would treat me to delicious meals and run to the brothel three times per day? Instead, I've been cooped up since the day you received me, you liar!”

An evil voice came from within the demonic qi. It sounded so loud and obnoxious it was almost like it was trying to overwhelm its wielder, Ye Qing himself. But before it could do anything, a wisp of clear light began disintegrating the sea of demonic qi rapidly.

“What is—the Lu You!? What the fuck did you do? Why did you provoke the Lu You!?”

All the jolly in the voice transformed into fear and anger as the Buddha lowered his palm. The swastika mudra in his hand inverted, and the light of the Buddha and the demonic qi joined into one.

As soon as the swastika mudra was inverted, the Kingdom of Buddha transformed into the Kingdom of Mara. All of the Buddhas turned into demons, and they served the Mara now. That wasn't the end though. The palm continued to descend as if it would transform all of humanity into the Kingdom of Mara as well.

Ye Qing let out a small sigh of relief when he sensed the godly power contained with that palm. The Buddha floating in the air was of course the Boundless Mara Buddha, and the voice was the Fog Demon.

The Fog Demon was now the Boundless Mara Buddha's Artifact Spirit or Anima, and this allowed the Stranger to use the Boundless Mara Buddha on Ye Qing's behalf. This insulated Ye Qing from its side effects and allowed him to unleash the Boundless Mara Buddha's maximum power without repercussions. To put it in simpler words, Ye Qing no longer had to worry for his life every time he used the Strange Artifact.

However, the Fog Demon wasn't the Boundless Mara Buddha's natural Artifact Spirit. He was Nine Nethers Demon who was absolutely going to exploit every loophole available to screw Ye Qing over if given the opportunity. Unwilling to watch his back all the time, Ye Qing went with the obvious solution and signed a Oath of Burden with the Fog Demon.

That's right, it was the same master-servant contract he had signed with Faceless, but with some added details considering the elusive nature of a Nine Nethers Demon. With this arrangement, the Fog Demon could be the most cunning Stranger in the world, and there was still no way it would be able to squirm its way out of this. Since then, it had become Ye Qing's faithful servant.

If Ye Qing wanted the Fog Demon dead, a single thought was all he needed to kill it no matter where he was. Unwilling to die, the Fog Demon could only allow Ye Qing to use him as he pleased.

Having witnessed the power of the Soul Mirror just now, Ye Qing harbored no illusions that he would be able to block the attack without going all out. That was why he commanded the Fog Demon to unleash the Boundless Mara Buddha's full power from the get go. Not only that, he himself sucked in a deep breath and circulated his energies until they were exactly where he wanted to be. When his presence had become as thick and solid as a mountain, he punched the ground diagonally like he would sever a river.

“Divide”

The fist force transformed into a wall—well, more like a tidal wave really—as soon as it struck the floor. Divide was a powerful technique that could operate both offensively and defensively. The intercepted “river” could both be used to attack the enemy or defend oneself.

Ye Qing waited after that. He had erected the greatest defense he could put up with his current abilities. If this still wasn't enough to block the incoming light, then... he supposed he was going to die.

The Boundless Mara Buddha's palm strike was as strong as a late-stage Spirit Purifier's full-powered attack, but like snow basking under a blazing sun, it melted into nothing almost all too quickly. It showed just how powerful the beam of light was.

That said, the palm strike wasn't useless. Ye Qing could clearly sense the light's power weakening as it ate through the Boundless Mara Buddha's palm.

By the time it finally disintegrated the entire palm and reached Ye Qing's Divide, it had already dimmed down considerably.

Unfortunately, Ye Qing's Divide was nowhere as strong as the Boundless Mara Buddha's palm. The beam of light chewed through his fist force almost as easily as before.

Realizing that he was at a pivotal moment, Ye Qing stepped forward instead of retreating and threw a one-inch punch. The dense wall of fist force abruptly broke like a dam and crashed down on the beam of light.

BOOOOOOOM!

The earth shook, and the howling wind seemed like it would never end. In the end, Ye Qing was able to dispel the Soul Mirror's light a third of a meter before it would hit his fist.

Ye Qing was only gripped by even greater fear and despair, however. It had taken him everything he got to block just a single beam of light. If the Lu You were to attack him again...

But to his pleasant surprise, the Lu You didn't follow up the attack after the beam of light disappeared. Instead, he put away the Soul Mirror and shot him a warm smile. A kind and benevolent voice rang inside his mind, "You may enter."

The voice clearly belonged to the Lu You, and Ye Qing wasn't surprised to hear it. It would be Stranger if such a powerful Stranger couldn't master something as simple as human language.

What did he mean by "enter" though?

Is he talking about the graveyard?!

That was most likely the truth. As far as he could tell, the graveyard was the only notable site on the mountain peak, and the Lu You was only concerned with the graveyard.

If he wasn't mistaken, the Spirit Ape of Dao's reward for him was most likely the right to enter the graveyard. It would certainly explain its strange actions. As for the Lu You's earlier attack, that was most likely a test. Only those who overcame his test were allowed to enter the graveyard.

Those who failed would just die, of course.

"Should I go in? Or should I not?"

Ye Qing was feeling very conflicted right now. It was obvious that the graveyard contained all sorts of opportunities and valuables. After all, this was the graveyard of many titans of the Dark Ways after all. Possessions and inheritances were just the start. He imagined that even a *finger nail* would be enough to make him happy for a long time to come.

However, risk and reward were two sides of the same coin. He had no doubt that grave dangers and monsters resided within this graveyard as well. He simply needed to look at Lu “Da Boss” You to know that.

Even if there were, for whatever reason, no Strangers in the graveyard, he mustn’t forget that the people buried here were monsters or greater monsters. He couldn’t claim that every single one of them was an inhuman scum who deserved the worst punishments hell could offer to them, but they had to be ruthless, wanton motherfuckers who acted as they lived at the very least. Would someone like that prepare a death trap for their would-be grave robbers? Most likely. One small mistake, and his life would go poof just like that. It was scary to even think about.

But I’m already here, and this feels like the opportunity of a lifetime. Am I really going to give up without even trying?

Ye Qing wouldn’t be able to arrive at a decision until a voice interrupted him, “What are you waiting for, boy? Let’s leave already! This place is too dangerous!”

A mist suddenly appeared around Ye Qing, and it said, “That Lu You is way too powerful for us to handle, and something about this place gives me the creeps. It’s terrifying.”

The speaker was the Fog Demon, of course.

Ye Qing retrieved the Boundless Mara Buddha and wrapped it in the Moko Boundless Chains once more, returning it to its usual appearance. He taunted the Fog Demon, “You’re scared? I thought there’s nothing in the world you’re afraid of?”

“Tsk! There *is* nothing in the world that I’m afraid of. But if you die, then I die as well! Do you know how weak you are, you weakling?” The Fog Demon scoffed disdainfully.

Ye Qing ignored its provocations and asked, “By the way, when you said that something about this place gives me the creeps, were you talking about the graveyard?”

“Of course I’m talking about the graveyard!” The Fog Demon rolled its eyes. “Everyone buried in that graveyard is a powerful warrior. They were at least as powerful as I was in my prime. If you wanna survive, then listen to me and get the fuck out of this place already!”

Ye Qing rolled his eyes right back. *As powerful as I was in my prime, my butt!*

He agreed with the Fog Demon’s assessment though. This place really was exceedingly dangerous.

Chapter 277: The Graveyard of Demons

“There’s nowhere to run, you old bald donkey!”

Ye Qing never arrived at a decision before a booming voice brought him back to reality. The loud, resounding roar of a dragon caused him to look over to the edge, and he saw a golden dragon breaking through the clouds and chasing after a ray of golden light. Both were headed straight toward the peak.

A laughter broke out from the ray of golden light. “Amitabha, there is no need to press me like this, Benefactor Hong!”

A boorish voice replied, “I don’t think so. You’re a bald donkey, so what could the Dragon Holds Stone possibly do for you? None of your martial arts have anything to do with a true dragon, and you have no need to study the essence of a true dragon! Just give it to me already!”

“Amitabha! I got the Dragon Holds Stone via my own power! Why should I give it to you?” The golden light—or rather, the monk riding the golden light argued, “Plus, who said that the Maitreya Sect doesn’t have martial arts relating to a true dragon? Our ‘Mahayana Twelve Wyverns Sutra’ is exactly that, and it requires studying the essence of a true dragon to attain true mastery. So please give up your obsession, benefactor!”

“Your ‘Mahayana Twelve Wyverns Sutra’ is literal garbage. You’re not missing anything even if you do not achieve mastery in it. Rather than wasting the Dragon Holds Stone on such garbage, you should give it to me!”

“I’m the one who decides whether or not it’s a waste, and the fact that this treasure is in my hands proves that I am destined for it, not you. Just give it up, benefactor!”

“Oh, I don’t know about that. If I managed to take it from you, that means that I’m the one who’s truly destined for it, don’t you agree?”

The golden dragon roared and took a swipe at the golden light.

“Amitabha! Things that you take by force are resentment, not destiny!”

The monk lifted his hand lightly like he was picking up a flower. He gave the incoming claw a gentle tap, and the entire dragon shattered into pieces.

A boorish-looking man with thick eyebrows and large eyes emerged from the shattered dragon. He thrust both of his hands forward and shattered the golden light surrounding the monk in return, exposing him for all to see.

The monk had a big head and fat ears. He was wearing a red monk’s robe with the front parts loosely draped over his round belly. He also wore a wide smile on his face.

Surprisingly, the monk wasn’t alone. A young, graceful-looking monk was sitting in a meditative position next to him.

“Fine, fine, I yield. You may observe this Dragon Holds Stone three times,” The older monk finally conceded with an exasperated shake of his head.

“Haha! You should have just said so from the beginning, Laughing Buddha[1]!” The boorish-looking man laughed. “My time is precious, man! Don’t waste it!”

“You’re just as shameless as ever, Hong Jianglong.” Laughing Buddha shook his head again.

“Says the bald donkey with the fattest face of us all! Have some shame, you!” Hong Jianglong retorted.

Laughing Buddha's grin widened as he rubbed his tummy. "I might change my mind if you keep attacking me, benefactor!"

"Nooo, I was wrong! Please don't change your mind, Venerable Bhante!" Hong Jianglong instantly pulled a one-eighty.

"Haha! Anyway, we're finally at the Graveyard of Demons, so let's cut the childish act already, hmm? You don't want our senior and juniors to think less of us, do you?"

The monk and his plus one disappeared and reappeared on the mountain peak, and Hong Jianglong was right behind them.

"Senior."

"Senior."

Both Laughing Buddha and Hong Jianglong saluted the Lu You as soon as they landed on the mountain peak.

The Lu You nodded in acknowledgement but didn't say anything.

"Wait, what? Someone actually reached this place before us?" It was at this moment Hong Jianglong found Ye Qing and examined him curiously. "Wow, you're young and just a late-stage Astral Refiner. How are you not dead, boy?"

Ye Qing grimaced. *You couldn't ask that in a more polite fashion?*

He didn't hesitate to salute the two men, however. "My name is Ye Shi. Pleased to meet you both, seniors."

Unless he was gravely mistaken, these two men were at least as strong as Song Xilai, if not stronger. He wasn't going to offend someone like that.

"Ye Shi (Honest)? You couldn't have come up with a less dishonest name, boy!" Hong Jianglong joked.

"Haha, please don't make fun of me, senior," replied Ye Qing with a stiff laugh. For some reason, he felt like Hong Jianglong had seen through him completely.

"Hey kid, I think he noticed me," the Fog Demon spoke inside Ye Qing's head.

Ye Qing hadn't withdrawn the Fog Demon. Right now, it was swimming around him like a layer of mist. Barring a warrior with an exceptionally powerful spirit, it was basically impossible to detect the Stranger. However, Hong Jianglong had noticed its existence at first glance.

"Have more confidence and take out 'I think' from your sentence," Ye Qing replied expressionlessly.

Thankfully, Hong Jianglong paid him no heed after that. Instead, he waved his sleeves and produced three men and women out of nowhere.

"Lord Hong, is this... the fabled Graveyard of Demons?"

“That’s correct.” Hong Jianglong nodded before launching into an explanation, “As you might have inferred, the Graveyard of Demons is where all followers of the Dark Ways are buried.”

“According to the legend, when Rahu, the Progenitor Demon finally met his end, his eyes transformed into the sun and moon, his blood transformed into rivers, his muscles and bones transformed into hills and mountains, his hair transformed into plants, and his essence transformed into this floating, upside-down mountain. That is why this mountain is also known as the Rahu Mountain or the Mountain of Demons. To a follower of the Dark Ways, this mountain is known as the Holy Mountain.”

“Lord Hong, we already know about this,” a young man voiced his puzzlement.

“I know that you already know about this. I just want to repeat the legend. Is that a crime?”

Hong Jianglong rolled his eyes at the youngster before continuing, “Anyway, the followers of the Dark Ways believe that their souls would go to Rahu if they bury themselves in the Mountain of Demons, and they all view it as an unparalleled honor. But of course, only those who are truly strong are qualified to bury their bones here. Over time, this place was known as the Graveyard of Demons.”

“Do you know why I’ve brought you here?” Hong Jianglong asked after finishing his explanation.

“Yes chief!” The group of five responded affirmatively.

“Good. I am now going to repeat myself.”

The group of five: “...”

“The reason I brought you here is because everyone buried here is a champion of some sort, and most of them engraved their martial intent to their gravestones while creating their graves. These are greatly beneficial to your cultivation as a matter of course.”

“There were even people who left behind entire inheritances because they were unwilling to let their legacy end with them. If you manage to obtain them, then your future will be brighter than ever before.”

The five warriors’ eyes lit up. This was the main reason they had entered the Demon’s Tomb. It was to enter the Graveyard of Demons and obtain a suitable inheritance. The martial intent was nice, but it was a low priority at best.

I see! Ye Qing thought in realization. If he wasn’t tempted before—which he was—now he was *sorely* tempted to enter the place.

He wouldn’t have been moved if the treasures inside the graveyard were just natural resources or the sort. With the Annon Sutra, there was probably no natural resource he couldn’t get so long as he

was strong enough to survive the journey. But a martial inheritance? That was a temptation he found difficult to resist. And to be fair, what kind of warrior wouldn't be interested in a martial inheritance?

If he could obtain a martial inheritance, then he would reach the heavens in a single bound. At the very least, he wouldn't need to worry about finding good martial arts for a long time to come.

"I don't remember you being a long-winded man, Benefactor Hong." Laughing Buddha shot Hong Jianglong a strange look before urging, "If your hopefuls aren't going to go first, then mine will. You don't want to keep senior waiting, do you?"

"Haha! Sorry, I sometimes forget myself when I roleplay a teacher. Do as you please," said Hong Jianglong with a guffaw. "Watch the test carefully, kids. I know you're qualified, but you don't want to screw up because you were arrogant, do you?"

"Yes chief."

Meanwhile, the young monk Laughing Buddha brought had walked up to the Lu You and gave him a solemn bow.

Hong Jianglong walked over to Laughing Buddha and joked, "Is your Holy Son a mute or something, Laughing Buddha? Why isn't he speaking at all?"

To his surprise, the monk said, "That's because he's cultivating the Vow of Silence I taught him."

"The Vow of Silence? That is one of the hardest ultimate arts your Maitreya Sect possesses, isn't it? Those who cultivate it must not say a single word for ten years, or you would have to start all over again. It is said to be the art that only a person of great willpower and courage could cultivate. Is your Holy Son stupid or retarded?"

Hong Jianglong jeered before asking, "How long has he been practicing the Vow of Silence?"

Laughing Buddha didn't get angry despite Hong Jianglong's provocation. He simply said, "Amitabha, I'm not telling you!"

Hong Jianglong: "... *When did you become so naughty, monk?*

While the duo were conversing, the Luo You had already raised his Soul Mirror and fired a beam of light at the young monk. The Holy Son of Maitreya didn't attempt to dodge out of the way, however. In fact, it was like he couldn't see the beam of light at all. A moment before the bright, translucent light would hit him, he whispered, "Disperse all evils."

As soon as he said this, a strange energy rippled out like an edict of heaven. The beam of light grew weaker and weaker under its effects until it was completely gone.

"Amitabha..."

The Holy Son of Maitreya chanted before walking back to Laughing Buddha.

That's insane! Ye Qing's pupil contracted in disbelief. The young monk was only a Spirit Purifier, but he felt stronger than the unfortunate bastard who was annihilated by the Lu You earlier.

"He... he... he already completed the Vow of Silence?!"

Hong Jianglong stared at the Holy Son of Maitreya in disbelief before looking back at Laughing Buddha. “Tell me I’m dreaming, bald donkey. This can’t be true, is it?”

Laughing Buddha ignored the rude nickname and replied amiably, “You’re not that old that your eyes and ears would deceive you. Yes, our Holy Son has completed the Vow of Silence.”

“Born with a Buddhist’s heart, our Holy Son is a devotee of great willpower and courage. He had begun practicing the Vow of Silence since twelve, and today is the day his ten-year silence comes to an end.”

A long time later, Hong Jianglong finally voiced his wholehearted admiration. “Incredible. Truly incredible! A Buddhist’s heart, great willpower and courage. If the practitioner is lacking in any one of these qualities, then they would not succeed. But all who succeeded could verbally command power and repel all opposition. What were the heavens thinking? What did your sect do to deserve a genius?”

Laughing Buddha glanced at a stern-faced young man with cloth wrapped around his hand and carrying a long saber behind his back. “You speak as if your Pacification Bureau doesn’t have its own fair share of geniuses. That young man over there is the famous “Tyrant Blade” Luo Zhan, am I right? To have attained such power and skill at his age, he has a bright future ahead of him.”

Luo Zhan nodded in acknowledgement, but that was all. He remained unmoved despite the praise.

Hong Jianglong smiled. “He’s just okay. Speaking of which, you may take your turn now, Luo Zhan.”

“Yes chief,” Luo Zhan responded before walking toward the Lu You. When he walked past the young monk though, he shot him a taunting look.

Chapter 278: In Death, They Would Never Be Forgotten

Luo Zhan walked up to the Lu You and saluted him respectfully. “Please enlighten me, senior!”

The Lu You smiled and raised his Soul Mirror. He then fired a beam of light just like before.

Luo Zhan wasn’t a defensive warrior like the Holy Son of Maitreya. As soon as the light left the mirror, he gripped his saber and seemingly underwent a drastic change in personality. When before he was cold and indifferent, now he looked like he was a tyrant ready to strike down heaven and earth.

“Begone!”

His saber escaped his sheath, and a terrifying, seemingly all-encompassing saber intent enveloped everyone. If the sky stood in his path, then he would cut a path through the sky. If the ground blocked his way, then he would sunder the earth itself. Such was his power that the beam of light was completely overwhelmed by the saber force.

“Thank you for your guidance!”

Luo Zhan sheathed his saber and returned to Hong Jianglong’s side after the deed was done. The ground where the saber force had passed through looked like it had been dug up by a bulldozer.

No wonder he's called the Tyrant Blade, Ye Qing thought with a gulp. Was Luo Zhan's technique particularly exquisite or refined? Not even close. However, his overwhelming power and unstoppable will were more than enough to make it for it.

"Amitabha! It looks like Young Benefactor Luo has mastered a third of the essence of the Tyrant Blade. His future too is limitless," Laughing Buddha praised from the bottom of his heart.

"Hahaha! He's okay! Just okay!" Hong Jianglong's words were humble, but his expression was anything but. "It's your turn now, Qing Feng."

"Yes chief," A woman responded and stepped out of the group. She wore a purple, form-fitting outfit and tied her hair into a bun like a man. Her features weren't masculine, but they were sharp, strong, and full of spirit. She might not be a man, but her spirit was greater than many men.

Qing Feng walked up to the Lu You and saluted him just like Luo Zhan. Once she was ready, the Lu You pointed his Soul Mirror and fired a beam of light at her.

Boom!

Qing Feng raised her eyebrows when she sensed its power. When she took a step forward, her eyes abruptly turned purple, and a silhouette wearing an emperor's robe and a crown of sun and moon manifested in the world. A terrific presence immediately enveloped the world.

As soon as the silhouette appeared, a feeling and oppression and fear immediately engulfed everyone. They felt like ants facing the wrath of heavens, and they were unable to muster even the slightest will to resist.

"The 'Son of Heaven Qi Observing Art'? Could she be...?" For the first time, a hint of surprise was mixed into Laughing Buddha's ever present smile.

"Ahem! No need to point it out, bald donkey! It's a secret!" Hong Jianglong hurriedly interrupted Laughing Buddha.

Boom!

Back to the battle, the silhouette of the Son of Heaven threw a punch at the same time Qing Feng threw hers. The Lu You's eyes flickered with a hint of surprise. Not only did the fist force shatter the beam of light, it managed to keep its form and continue sailing toward him.

The Lu You raised his wooden staff and tapped the ground once. The Golden Boy sitting on the deer's horn immediately grinned and summoned a pale white flame from his white lantern. Clawing and writhing about like a beast, the restless flame let out a ghastly cackle and wrapped around the fist force.

The first force immediately melted like ice, but that wasn't all. It traveled along the fist force all the way to the silhouette and engulfed his whole body. The blink of an eye later, the silhouette crumbled into nothing, leaving behind only a stream of white flames.

“Thank you for your mercy, senior!” Qing Feng hurriedly thanked the Lu You. She hadn’t expected the Stranger to be this powerful.

The Lu You smiled and tapped the ground once more. The white flame abruptly condensed into a white lantern with a small flame before flying into Qing Feng’s hand.

“Er...” Qing Feng stared at the lantern with confusion.

Hong Jianglong said smilingly, “You should thank Senior Lu You, Qing Feng? The white lantern contains a wisp of his Soul Illuminating Flame, and it acts as a protective charm that will shield you from some Strangers and ghosts. You will be a lot safer thanks to it.”

“Thank you, senior!” Having realized the function of the white lantern, Qing Feng gave Lu You a deep bow before returning to Hong Jianglong’s side.

You can get extra benefits for surpassing expectations? Figures. Geniuses get extra privileges no matter where they go,

Ye Qing thought enviously. He wasn’t the only one. Both the Holy Son of Maitreya and Luo Zhan were shooting the young woman envious looks as well.

The test continued as normal after that. The two men were called Gao Ning and Ge Xin, and the other young woman was called Sui Yan. They weren’t weak, but they were clearly incomparable to the likes of Qing Feng, Luo Zhan and the Holy Son of Maitreya. They just barely overcame their test.

“Alright, you can all go in now.”

After everyone had passed through the test, Hong Jianglong advised, “Remember, there are three taboos one must abide by after entering the Graveyard of Demons. One, you mustn’t damage anything in the graveyard. Two, if an opportunity is yours, then it is yours. If not, never force the issue. And three, you must exit the graveyard before daybreak. Otherwise, you’ll never leave.”

“Also, there exists all kinds of Strangers and Anomalies in the graveyard. Always be careful.”

“Yes chief!” The group of five nodded affirmatively.

“Finally—”

“Ahem... Benefactor Hong? You do remember that the Graveyard of Demons disappears during the day, right? At this rate, they might as well not enter the graveyard,” Laughing Buddha interrupted when it looked like Hong Jianglong was going to rant on and on without end. *He wasn’t this long-winded before. Did he change his sex or something?*

“Hahaha! You know how dangerous the graveyard is. Only with proper guidance could they navigate it safely,” Hong Jianglong said dismissively.

“But chief... you already told us about this before,” Luo Zhan spoke up.

"I'm saying all this for your own good, and this is what I get?" Hong Jianglong shot Luo Zhan a glare before waving him away impatiently. "Get lost then! It's not like I want to repeat myself either!"

Luo Zhan: "... *You were though?*"

"Chief, Venerable Bhante, we're leaving now."

The group of five saluted Hong Jianglong and Laughing Buddha before walking into the graveyard. The Holy Son of Maitreya too paid his respects to the duo before leaving.

After the six warriors were gone, Ye Qing finally saluted Hong Jianglong from afar to express his thanks.

By now, Ye Qing had figured out that Hong Jianglong's words were really meant for him. Earlier, Laughing Buddha had mentioned that Hong Jianglong was a member of the Pacification Bureau. Adding that to his strange behavior, it was very likely that Hong Jianglong had guessed his identity. That was why he purposely recited what he knew about the Graveyard of Demons even though his men already knew them. It was so that Ye Qing wouldn't lose his life.

Of course, there was also the possibility that Hong Jianglong really was a nagging mom on the inside, but whatever the truth might be, there was no doubt that he was a great help to Ye Qing. A simple thank you was the least he could do to repay the man. It was only then he entered the graveyard.

"Hong Jianglong, you were really speaking to that young man, weren't you?"

Laughing Buddha asked after Ye Qing was out of earshot.

Hong Jianglong feigned ignorance. "Was I? Well, it doesn't matter!"

Laughing Buddha smiled but didn't expose Hong Jianglong's shoddy acting.

"Hmm! Someone's coming." Hong Jianglong suddenly looked over the edge of the peak. "Scratch that, a *lot* of people are coming this way."

"This is the Graveyard of Demons; the center of the Demon's Tomb's opportunities. I can only hope that the bloodshed will be kept to a minimum!" Laughing Buddha sighed.

"Eh. Those who fear for their lives shouldn't come here." Hong Jianglong shrugged before letting out a sinister chuckle. "Say, do you wanna get rich, bald donkey?"

Laughing Buddha shot Hong Jianglong a puzzled look. "What do you mean?"

Hong Jianglong explained, "It's very simple. I'm sure there are self-styled fishermen who'd be lying in ambush for my men and your disciple when they exit the graveyard. My suggestion is that we hide ourselves and show them how you really play the fisherman. What do you say?"

Once again, Laughing Buddha's expression turned strange. *Seriously, when did you become so smart? So dirty?*

"Amitabha, that's not very benevolent, is it?"

“What do you mean, this isn’t benevolent? These people are bandits who wanted all the spoils with none of the effort. It’s not like these people are kind-hearted souls either. You and I both know that at least eighty percent of the people who enter the Demon’s Tomb are irredeemable monsters who deserve to be eradicated. We’re doing the world a favor by eradicating these vermins, understand?”

Laughing Buddha asked suspiciously, “You are Hong Jianglong, right? Since when did you become so... cunning?” It was an eye-opening experience to hear such shameless words from such an honest face.

You’ve changed, Hong Jianglong! You’re not the simpleton you used to be anymore!

“Fuck you! People can improve for the better, okay? I learned this tactic from a very interesting junior.” Hong Jianglong scoffed at Laughing Buddha. “Also, you can quit the good monk act now. An outsider might fall for the act, but I know exactly what kind of scum you are. Let’s go already!”

“Amitabha, that is slander.”

“Yes, yes, I’m slandering your good name, you black-hearted monk. Now come on!”

.....

A cold, oppressive sensation pressed down on Ye Qing as soon as he stepped inside the graveyard. He felt like the rows and rows of gravestones were alive, and they were all gazing at him coldly. It was an unsettling feeling to say the least.

“Revered Crimson Sun”

“Old Yellow Sand”

“Skydevourer Ghoul”

“‘Sky Spanning Sword Qi’ Zhao Wuji”

“‘Moon and Cloud Catcher’ Chu Tachun”

“‘Granny Blackheart’ Wu Chunhua—Kekeke, I have devoured countless human hearts my whole life, so I can declare with absolute certainty that all human hearts are delicious, kekeke...”

“‘Seven Killing Gentleman’ Qisha Wuqing—I started practicing martial arts when I was five, graduated at ten, challenged countless elites at fifteen and met no match. When I was twenty, I stepped into the jianghu and trained a hundred fists, practiced a thousand martial arts, and met a million people. Eventually, I invented the ‘Seven Killing Fists’.”

“When I was thirty, I challenged the greatest champions and again met no match. It is quite lonely at the top, isn’t it? When I was forty, I founded the Seven Killing Sect, wiped out all opposition, and claimed an entire territory for myself. For a time, there was no one

who didn't know the Seven Killing Sect. When I was fifty, I discovered that my martial attainment had hit a wall, but money, soft power and sex all felt meaningless to me, so I exiled myself from my sect and journeyed the jianghu just like when I was younger. Thanks to this decision, my fists attained perfection, and my cultivation improved like never before..."

"At a hundred years old, I sought out the Demon's Tomb and buried myself here. My life was an exciting and satisfying one, and my death will be one without regrets or complaints as well!"

.....

Some of these gravestones were completely blank, some only had a name on it, and some was filled to the brim with their life's journey. Regardless, each and every gravestone emanated an enormous presence and power that wouldn't be denied.

Some gravestones reminded Ye Qing of the bright sun,

Some reminded him of a cold moon,

Some possessed a sword qi so sharp that it pierced through the nine heavens,

Some possessed a saber glow that spread everywhere freely and without a care,

Some brimmed with demonic qi that cast hallucinations of blood and death into his mind,

Some brimmed with such evil that it seemed to touch the living even after it was long gone...

.....

Through these gravestones, Ye Qing could almost see those warriors who were once proud, arrogant, free, unchained and more. Once upon a time, these were people who had turned the *jianghu* upside down and left their marks in the world.

In life, they had cemented their legends in the *jianghu*. In death, their existence would still be remembered for eternity!

Chapter 279: Void Fly

Every one of the gravestones was imbued with the deceased's extraordinary martial spirit and intent. Curious, Ye Qing decided to probe a blank, seemingly ordinary gravestone with his spirit.

What happened next was decidedly *not* ordinary. A pitch black saber force suddenly appeared inside his mental space, and everything it touched turned black and deathly as well. It was going to disintegrate his mind and spirit!

Shocked, Ye Qing hurriedly visualized the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method". It wasn't until the last moment that he barely blocked the surprise attack.

"That was too close, too close..."

After the ominous saber force was gone, a pale-faced Ye Qing staggered away from the blank gravestone and wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead.

If he hadn't received all those boons in the past, if his spirit wasn't so strong that it rivaled some late-stage Spirit Purifiers, that one attack could've annihilated his mind just like that. This was after he examined the gravestones carefully and selected the most ordinary-looking one of them all. What kind of stupid place is this?

Oh right, it's the graveyard of demons and champions. Fuck my life.

No wonder Hong Jianglong told him not to "strong-arm" an opportunity into his lap. It would just be suicide.

Gao Ningang—one of the five people Hong Jianglong had brought with him—noticed his situation and advised him kindly, "Friend, try to avoid probing anything in the graveyard with your spirit. Otherwise, there's a chance you might trigger its martial intent. Weak and eroded by time they may be, they were left behind by powers we can scarcely imagine. Best case scenario, you might get away with some minor injuries. Worst case scenario, your mental space and mind might be shattered into pieces."

"Thanks for the advice, Brother Gao," Ye Qing said before taking the opportunity to ask, "If I can't probe anything with my spirit, then how might I locate my so-called opportunity?"

Gao Ningang was obviously a chatty person as he answered Ye Qing's question without any hint of impatience, "If you sense something, then it's probably your opportunity. If not, that is fine too. Your opportunity may lie elsewhere."

"So, you're saying it's all up to luck?" Ye Qing chuckled amiably.

"That is exactly correct, my friend! If you think about it, all opportunities have some element of luck in it, isn't it?" Gao Ningang laughed.

It was at this moment Ge Xin interrupted with a displeased look, "Stop wasting time, Ningang. We only have one night."

"We're all fishes in the same pond. There's no need to be so heartless, is there?" Gao Ningang said uncaringly, "Plus, it doesn't matter if I hurry or not. Opportunities are luck-based. If I'm destined for one, then it'll come to me eventually. If not, I could search the whole world for it and end up with nothing, no?"

"Hmph! Do as you please." Ge Xin shook his head.

The deeper they went, the heavier and darker the air became. Even with their eyesight, they were unable to see anything farther than six to ten meters clearly.

"Gao Ningang, what are you—"

Ge Xin was walking past the gravestones when suddenly, he felt someone patting him on the shoulder. He was about to rebuke his compatriot for making unnecessary contact in such a place when suddenly, he recalled that they had split up a while ago.

The graveyard was ridiculously big, and the graves were put down haphazardly. There were hundreds and hundreds of small paths that could all be leading somewhere, which made it nigh

impossible to explore the graveyard in an orderly fashion. That was why the group had eventually decided to split up and go their own ways.

But of course, they weren't that stupid as to split up completely. They all agreed to maintain a certain distance with each other so they could come to each other's aid should the need arise.

"What's wrong?" Gao Ning'an called out from nearby when he heard Ge Xin's voice.

"No, it's nothing." Ge Xin shook his head thinking that he was hallucinating because of the ominous environment. Not even warriors were immune to self-doubts and delusions after all. He resumed his stride.

Tap.

It wasn't a hallucination, however. He had only taken a few steps when he felt someone tapping him on the shoulder a second time. This time, he could feel it as clear as day.

"Who is it?!" Ge Xin spun around and yelled, but he couldn't find anyone. Forget a person, he couldn't even spot a ghost.

Ge Xin's expression turned ugly and worried. He was absolutely certain that someone had tapped him on the shoulder just now, and yet he couldn't see anything. *It's not an actual ghost, is it?*

Ge Xin frowned. Despite finding nothing at all, he instinctively knew that he might be in trouble. He channeled his energies and concentrated fully on his surroundings.

That said, he wasn't planning on giving up just because something was off. It hadn't been easy making it to the Demon's Tomb and the Graveyard of Demons even with Hong Jianglong's protection, and he still hadn't found anything. He couldn't possibly leave empty-handed, could he?

Ge Xin spread out his spirit and kept a close eye on his surroundings. Then, he continued forward once more.

Tap.

A short while later, he felt something tapping him on the shoulder once more, but this time the "hand" didn't move away. Instead, it clung to his shoulder like it would squeeze it into ribbons, and a deep, penetrating chill seeped all the way to his core.

A terrible chill gripped Ge Xin then. Every hair on his body stood on end, and large beads of cold sweat formed on his forehead. Even scarier was the fact that he had lost control over his true qi. He had no idea when it happened, only that he was almost fully paralyzed from the neck down.

Teeth chattering, Ge Xin slowly and painfully turned his head around. When he finally saw the thing that was pinning him down, his eyes bulged, his face turned as white as a sheet, and his mouth opened to let out a terrified scream.

"Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!"

.....

Buzz buzz...

On the other side of the Demon's Tomb, Ye Qing was wearing a deep frown on his face. He couldn't see anything, but he could clearly hear an incessant buzzing in his ears. It was like a swarm of flies were flying round and round his ears.

When the buzzing grew closer and closer, his heart skipped a bit, and his sixth sense warned him of danger. He immediately let loose a burst of invisible flames that temporarily dispelled the buzzing noise.

It was only temporary though. His spirit was telling him that the invisible flames conjured by the Burning Wind dealt no real damage to whatever the hell was causing that buzzing.

As expected, the buzzing noise began once more, and it was definitely louder than before. His head pounded, and he was gripped by a kind of frustration and anger that he couldn't fully dispel even with the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method". He felt like grabbing someone and battling them to the death.

The buzzing noise had appeared not long after he split up with the group, and at first, he paid it no attention. But over time, it kept growing closer and louder until he grew certain that he was in danger.

The problem was that everything he tried to stop the buzzing—or more accurately, the Strangers that were causing the noise—such as sealing his hearing, using a Strange Artifact and more didn't work. He was certain that the noise was caused by a Stranger, he just couldn't see them for some reason.

"This is beyond annoying!"

As the buzzing noise continued to come closer, Ye Qing opened his mouth and spat out Lightning Bolt. Pure white lightning lit up the gloomy graveyard for a moment, and the buzzing noise disappeared like it never was. But as soon as he withdrew his Strange Artifact, the noise resumed once more.

"What the hell is this thing?" Ye Qing growled as he struggled increasingly hard to restrain his irritation and desire to inflict violence upon someone.

It was at this moment the mist surrounding him wobbled a little, and the Fog Demon spoke up, "Quit wasting your energy, boy. You're being harassed by the Void Flies, and as far as I'm aware, there is nothing you have that can kill them!"

"Void Flies? That's it!" Ye Qing exclaimed in realization.

"You know about the Void Flies?" The Fog Demon sounded surprised.

"Are you looking down on me?" Ye Qing recalled what he knew about the Void Fly and recited, "The Void Fly is a void born Stranger that normally exists in a state of nothingness. Despite being formless, intangible and invisible, it makes a buzzing noise when it flies."

"As the Void Fly is a creature of the void, it can pass through any tangible or intangible objects. Impervious to the elements and conventional weapons, it enjoys infesting a flesh-and-blood creature's head and feeding on their brains."

“You’re surprisingly knowledgeable, aren’t you?” The Fog Demon voiced its amazement.

“I’m a scholar,” Ye Qing said smugly.

The Fog Demon let out a demonic cackle. “What are you going to do then, scholar?”

As Ye Qing had said himself, the Void Flies were creatures of the void. Trying to attack them with weapons or elements was like trying to attack air. Forget killing them, he couldn’t even deal any damage to them. That was why the Void Flies were extremely dangerous.

“It’s simple.”

Ye Qing smiled confidently and examined his surroundings for a bit. Then, he bent down before a small shoot of grass.

The grass was light blue in color and had two leaves, two flowers, and two fruits. The two leaves were elongated like a human’s arm, and the fruits were hanging below them like a pair of mini lanterns.

Ye Qing gently pushed the grass with a finger. The fruits immediately lit up and illuminated the surroundings with dark blue light.

At first, the Void Flies were circling around him like bees who had caught the scent of honey. But when the blue light shone, they suddenly left his side and flew toward the grass. Ye Qing clearly saw five—no, six flies the size of a fingernail slowly manifesting into existence. They were none other than the Void Flies.

A Void Fly shared more or less the same shape and size as a normal fly. It just looked semi-transparent as if it didn’t exist.

“Got you.”

Ye Qing smirked cruelly and snapped his finger. Everything within ten meters of him suddenly turned as hot as a volcano. The Void Flies caught on fire and disintegrated into ash in just the blink of an eye. In fact, even the ash disintegrated into nothing before it could hit the ground.

The grass remained untouched though. He wasn’t going to hurt the plant that just saved his life.

“And that’s a wrap.”

Ye Qing pushed the grass again, and the two fruits dimmed immediately almost as if he had flipped their off button.

“Hmph. I suppose I underestimated you,” The Fog Demon remarked.

“Heh, no need to sing my praises. A man’s gotta be humble and all that,” said Ye Qing with a smirk.

All things in life were born with an antithesis, and the seemingly ordinary grass was the bane of the Void Flies.

A kind of grass called the Darklight Grass normally grew where the Void Flies could be found. In the morning, it was as ordinary as any other grass. But at night, touching them would cause its two

fruits to emit a dark blue light that was fatally attractive to the void Flies because it accelerated their growth. However, they were unable to maintain their intangible form until the light was gone.

When a Void Fly was tangible, it was as fragile as an ordinary fly. Naturally, killing it only took a single thought.

“Say, how did *you* know about the Void Flies?” Ye Qing asked the Fog Demon curiously.

The stranger answered, “Oh, I know a lot of things. All kinds of Strangers are born in the Nine Nethers, and the Void Fly is one of its most common Strangers. In fact, I’ve witnessed many, many more Strangers than all of you humans combined.”

“Really?” Ye Qing didn’t believe it.

The Fog Demon didn’t care that Ye Qing didn’t believe it. “You can pretend I haven’t said anything if you think I’m lying.”

“Heh. My apologies. I’ll be counting on you to enrich my knowledge from now on,” Ye Qing said with a smirk.

The Fog Demon harrumphed. “Sorry, but I don’t go on dates with people I’m not familiar with.”

Ye Qing was going to harass the Stranger some more when suddenly, a bloodcurdling scream pierced through the darkness.

“That’s Ge Xin’s voice. Did something happen?” Ye Qing looked up and gazed to the distance. “I better go check it out.”

He didn’t want to get involved when he had just escaped his own predicament, but Ge Xin’s voice wasn’t far away from his location. In the end, he couldn’t suppress his curiosity and broke off into a run. Hopefully, he wasn’t too late.

Chapter 280: Bloody Handprint

Ye Qing slunk through the dark, lifeless tomb of death, swift and silent as a ghost. It wasn’t long before he arrived at the spot where Ge Xin had screamed.

From afar, Ye Qing saw a person standing frozen like a statue, unmoving. He was none other than Ge Xin.

“He’s dead?!” Ye Qing narrowed his eyes. He could tell that Ge Xin was dead because he couldn’t sense even a hint of life from his body.

Ye Qing didn’t rush forward recklessly. Instead, he examined his surroundings carefully for dangers or abnormalities until he was certain it looked safe. Only then did he step forward to examine the body.

Ge Xin was frozen with his head turned to the back as if he was looking at something behind him. His eyes were bulging, his pupils were dilated, and his mouth were agape with unbridled terror. It looked like something had scared him to death.

“That... might actually be what happened.”

Ye Qing circled around Ge Xin twice but couldn't find any injury or signs of struggle on or around him. There was no denying that he had a fatal scare though.

What on earth could scare an early-stage Spirit Purifier to death?

Buzz...

Suddenly, Ye Qing's skin prickled all over. He didn't hesitate to split into several afterimages that looked exactly like him. Not a moment too soon, starlight fell from the sky and pierced a handful of them.

The starlight didn't fade, however. Instead, it kept growing in length until they resembled a belt of stars, glittering. Then, a milky white finger poked the belt gently and caused all the stars to fall earnestly.

The world shook. It felt like there was nowhere he could run or hide from the starfall. He had no choice but to reveal himself and unleash a one-inch punch.

"Break Through"

If a lone cavalry could punch through a formation, it could put a hole in the sky as well.

Break Through blasted the falling stars into bits and slammed against the finger. Space trembled, and the belt of stars crumbled into nothing. It wasn't without a cost though. Ye Qing stifled a groan as he staggered backward. Every time he took a step, the ground would rock like a mini earthquake.

The owner of the finger also floated away from Ye Qing like the wind. When she landed, they kicked up a powerful gale that persisted for a time.

When Ye Qing finally saw the attacker's face, he sucked in a deep breath, suppressed the instability in his vigor, and explained himself in a hurry, "It's a misunderstanding, Miss Qingge! I'm not the one who killed him."

"I believe you," Qingge replied indifferently. "You're definitely a late-stage Astral Refiner, and even though you possessed the strength to kill Ge Xin, there is no way you could've killed him instantly and without a struggle."

"You're a discerning woman, Miss Qingge."

That was what he said, but he was rolling his eyes at her method. *She attacked me just to test if I could kill Ge Xin without a trace? She's quite violent despite her appearance, isn't she?*

That said, Qingge was an extremely powerful warrior. That one attack had made him feel like his life was in grave danger.

Qingge ignored Ye Qing's sarcastic tone and answered calmly, "You came before me. Did you see who or what killed Ge Xin?"

Ye Qing shook his head. "No. He was dead by the time I reached him. I didn't find any injuries on his body or signs of struggles in the surroundings either. In my opinion, I think he felt something, looked behind his back, and was literally scared to death."

"Scared to death, you say?" Qingge examined Ge Xin for a moment. Then, she stepped forward and ripped off his shirt.

“You’re a bold one, aren’tcha?” Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise. “Did you find anything, Miss Qingge?”

“I did. Look at his shoulder!” Qingge pointed.

Ye Qing stepped forward and saw a bloody handprint on Ge Xin’s shoulder. It was very small like it belonged to a child, but it was drenched in blood and giving off an evil, vicious and resentful feeling.

“What could possibly have caused this?” Ye Qing rubbed his nose in thought.

“I’m not sure, but it’s clearly dangerous,” Qingge replied coolly.

“What do we do now?” Ye Qing frowned.

“We burn the body.”

As soon as Qingge said this, she tossed out a talisman that consumed Ge Xin’s body in a burst of flame. The man turned into ashes in just the blink of an eye.

Ye Qing thought he understood Qingge’s reasoning. Rather than leaving Ge Xin’s body behind and potentially attracting unwanted trouble, burning it was the safest course of action.

“We shouldn’t stay here. See you later, Miss Qingge,” said Ye Qing with a salute. Qingge’s decision resonated with him, and he wasn’t planning on staying for even a second longer. The bloody handprint on his shoulder also gave him an ominous feeling.

“Mm.” Qingge nodded and walked the other way just like that.

She’s a decisive one, Ye Qing thought as he walked in the opposite direction.

Neither Ye Qing nor Qingge managed to go far. He had only walked a few steps when suddenly, his spirit picked up a terrifying blast of aura. When he looked back, he saw Qingge surrounding herself in purple qi and looking at her surroundings warily.

“What’s wrong, Miss Qingge?” Ye Qing asked, though he didn’t get close to her. He too was watching his surroundings warily.

After scanning her surroundings and finding nothing, Qingge replied with a frown, “I felt like someone just tapped me on the shoulder.”

“Are you sure?” Ye Qing was frowning as well. He hadn’t seen or sensed anything either. Right now, even Qingge herself wondered if she was just paranoid.

“Boy, you need to leave now! This place isn’t safe!” It was at this moment the Fog Demon spoke up inside his head.

“It’s not safe? Do you sense a Stranger? What is it?” Ye Qing asked mentally.

"I don't know, but I know that that girl has caught its attention. If you leave now, you can still get away unharmed. If not, then you won't be able to escape even if you tried!"

The Fog Demon kept urging, but Ye Qing didn't move a muscle. Thinking he knew what Ye Qing was thinking, the Fog Demon scoffed, "Hells below, you haven't fallen for that girl, have you? Are you thinking of saving the damsel? Just give it up, boy. Your cultivation level is weaker than that girl's, and even she couldn't identify the Stranger that's haunting her. What can you possibly do if you stay behind? You're not a necrophilic, are you?"

Ye Qing: "... *What the fuck do you think I am?*

"Get going already! You can daydream some other day!" The Fog Demon urged again when it noticed Ye Qing still wasn't doing anything. *You might be suicidal, but I still have much to live for!*

Ye Qing continued to ignore the Fog Demon's words and called out to Qingge, "Miss Qingge, can you inspect your shoulder?"

Qingge immediately pulled down her shirt and revealed her smooth, milky shoulder. This was the ancient times, so Ye Qing thought she would move to a more secluded location to perform the inspection or tell him to turn around. She really was a bold one.

Unlike him, Qingge showed no signs of embarrassment or awkwardness whatsoever. She mused, "That's the right call. There's a handprint on my shoulder, although it's much lighter than the one on Ge Xin's shoulder. It's not bloody either."

She pulled her shirt back into position and said calmly, "It looks like the thing that killed Ge Xin has set its sights on me."

"My shirt is a Hatred-class Strange Artifact, and it possesses the ability to repel most evils and Strangers. However, this Stranger managed to ignore its defenses and leave a handprint on my shoulder. With that in mind, it should be quite easy for it to kill me. So why didn't it? Strange!"

Ye Qing replied thoughtfully, "Maybe it's because you haven't satisfied the conditions necessary for it to kill you?"

"Do you know what it is then?" Qingge scrunched up her eyebrows.

"I'm not sure." Ye Qing shook his head.

Qingge didn't fall into disappointment or dejection despite Ye Qing's words. She replied calmly, "In that case, you should leave."

"Hmm?" Ye Qing wasn't expecting this. According to his experience, she should have asked for his help. Even if it might be pointless, it was better to drag someone to the grave with her than not. That was how the *jianghu* warriors he knew would have acted.

As if she could hear his thoughts, Qingge explained, “You and I aren’t even acquaintances. You have no obligation whatsoever to help me, much less sacrifice your life for my sake.”

“Also, if I can’t deal with whatever’s haunting me, then what’s the point of keeping you around?”

Ye Qing rolled his eyes. *In the end, she’s looking down on me.*

“But of course, it’s also because I’m confident that I will survive this!” The corners of Qingge’s lips suddenly curled up, and it was such a bright, beautiful smile that Ye Qing lost himself in it for a moment. Since the moment he encountered Qingge, the woman had maintained a cold, indifferent straight line on her face. It was like she was apathetic toward anything and everything. But now, her smile was as bright as the sun and moon themselves. It was brilliant, confident, and so bright he almost couldn’t stand to see it directly.

It lasted only for a breath before Qingge withdrew it. It made him feel like it was a mirage or a dream.

“What’s wrong? Are you really going to stay?”

Seeing that Ye Qing wasn’t moving, Qingge urged again, “Really, there’s nothing you can do even if you stay behind. If you really want to do something for me, I would ask you to take my body with you so it can be put to rest properly. It would be even better if you could offer me some wine at my gravestone.”

Ye Qing didn’t say anything for a time. Then, he looked Qingge straight in the eye with bright, clear eyes. “Do you trust me, Miss Qingge?”

Qingge was taken aback for a bit. They had known each other for minutes at best, and she didn’t even know his name, his origin, his personality or his nature. So how could she possibly answer that question?

But when she saw his clear eyes and warm smile on his face, she couldn’t help but answer, “I do.”

Ye Qing smiled wider and said, “Okay. I want you to pretend that everything’s fine and take a couple more steps forward. Let’s see if that thing is going to tap you on the shoulder again.”

“Got it.” Qingge didn’t hesitate. She withdrew her energy completely and strode down a certain direction.

As expected, she came to a stop just a few steps later and said, “That thing just tapped me on the shoulder again.”

This time, Ye Qing didn’t hesitate to walk all the way up to Qingge and asked, “Can you show me your shoulder again?”

Once again, Qingge didn’t hesitate to reveal her bare shoulder. This time, Ye Qing felt perfectly calm since he was prepared for it. He watched the handprint on Qingge’s shoulder closely.

The handprint was clearer and redder now. It almost looked like blood could seep out of the handprint at any moment. It was brimming with inauspiciousness, viciousness and resentment.

