

Stranger 281

Chapter 281: Tiny Shoulder Ghost

“Did you see anything?” Qingge asked.

Ye Qing shook his head. He simply stared at the handprint thoughtfully.

“I haven’t sensed anything either.” Qingge frowned a little. “Tell me your thoughts.”

Ye Qing was about to pull her shirt back again when Ye Qing stopped her. “Wait! I want you to tap me on my shoulder.”

Qingge frowned in puzzlement, but she still did as he said.

The next moment, she was treated to a stunning sight. As soon as she tapped Ye Qing on the shoulder, the handprint began disappearing at a visible rate.

“What just happened?” Qingge exclaimed in disbelief.

Ye Qing’s lips curled into a knowing smile. “I thought this might happen. I think I know what this Stranger is now.”

“Hmm?” Qingge looked at him inquiringly.

“Not yet. Allow me to perform one more experiment,” Ye Qing implored. First, he pulled apart his own shirt and checked his shoulder. As expected, there was now a handprint on it. It was exactly the same as the one on Qingge’s shoulder, and it was as faint as when it appeared on her shoulder for the first time.

Ye Qing tapped Qingge on the shoulder next. They watched as the handprint on his shoulder slowly disappeared.

“Heh. Now I know for certain what we’re dealing with!” Ye Qing grinned and clapped his hands triumphantly.

Qingge looked at again with her beautiful eyes, and this time he didn’t keep her waiting. “I’m pretty sure that the Stranger that tapped our shoulders is a type of Tiny Shoulder People.”

“Tiny Shoulder People?” Qingge frowned. “You mean the one that taps people’s shoulder for fun? I’m pretty sure they don’t harm humans though, and they definitely didn’t possess such a potent and bizarre power.”

The Tiny Shoulder People Qingge spoke of was a Malice-class Stranger. It was shaped like an infant with two wings, and it loved nothing more than to tap someone’s shoulder from behind. When the victim turned around, they would make a scary face and attempt to scare them. If the victim was scared, they would fly away with pride and satisfaction. If not, they would roll their eyes at the victim and leave huffing and puffing.

The Little Shoulder People were pranksters, but their pranks were completely harmless. They would never harm a human intentionally.

Ye Qing shook his head. “You’re right, but you’re also wrong.” He waited a moment thinking that Qingge would prod him like a proper audience would, but she just stared at him and waited patiently for him to reveal the answer.

How disappointing. I bet most conversations with her end in awkward silence.

Disappointed he might be, Ye Qing had no choice but to resume his explanation, “It is true that the average Little Shoulder People is only a Malice-class Stranger, but there is another kind of Little Shoulder People who can only be found in places of extreme yin and coldness such as this graveyard. Born from yin energy and resentment, their nature differs drastically from the average Little Shoulder People. Not only that, they are Phenomenon-class Strangers.”

“In fact, I personally think they should be differentiated from the average Little Shoulder People and named Little Shoulder Ghost, especially since they couldn’t be seen during the night. According to the legends, only those who could see through yin and yang—someone with the Dark Seeing Spell Eyes for example—could see the Little Shoulder Ghost at night.”

“The Little Shoulder Ghost loves to prank people as well, but they play their games differently from the average Little Shoulder People. If a person is tapped on the shoulder by the Little Shoulder Ghost, they must seek out another person and tap them on the shoulder as soon as possible. This would convince the Little Shoulder Ghost to shift their focus to the other person.”

“If they don’t do so, then the Little Shoulder Ghost would haunt them and tap their shoulders for eternity.”

Ye Qing took a break and gave Qingge another chance to say something like, “Interesting” or “go on”, but she remained as silent and indifferent as ever. Left with no choice, he continued, “But of course, when I say ‘eternity’, I really mean three chances. Because the Little Shoulder Ghost is born from yin energy and resentment, they are quite the resentful creatures. If they tapped a victim three times, and the victim still couldn’t find another person to transfer the ‘curse’ so to speak, they would think that the victim wasn’t willing to play with them and get angry. They would lean across the victim’s shoulder, pin them down and immobilize them.”

“When the victim turns around to look, the Little Shoulder Ghost would transform into their worst nightmare and scare them to death.”

“Ah. That would explain how Ge Xin died,” Qingge exclaimed in realization. “This is the first time I heard such a Stranger. How did you learn this?”

“Haha, I love reading all things related to Strangers, Anomalies and more, and I happened to come across a folktale regarding the Little Shoulder Ghost in a journal titled ‘Acquiring The Strange’. The title of the chapter is, ‘When You Get Tapped On The Shoulder’.”

Ye Qing chuckled. “It’s a good thing you discovered the handprint and told me all those clues, or I wouldn’t have figured out the truth either.”

The praise bounced off Qingge’s skin like water off a duck’s back. “So, the Little Shoulder Ghost is a Phenomenon-class Stranger, and it is invisible during the night. The only way to deal with it is to have the Dark-Seeing Spell Eyes, wait until daytime arrives, or... pass its curse to another person.”

Ye Qing nodded. “Well, there’s technically a fourth way. The Little Shoulder Ghost can only take the shape of a victim’s worst nightmare. Theoretically, if you’re a purehearted or fearless person, then there is nothing it can conjure that might scare you to death.”

Qingge fell silent for a moment. “I personally believe that my martial heart is tough, and my will is strong, but the Little Shoulder Ghost is a Phenomenon-class Stranger. I cannot proclaim with certainty that I will definitely be able to withstand the nightmare it conjures.”

“What a coincidence! I think so too.” Ye Qing shrugged. “But luckily for us, we don’t need to take the risk. We just need to stick together and juggle the curse between us, and the Little Shoulder Ghost wouldn’t be able to harm us. Besides that, an opportunity to remove the curse permanently may reveal itself in the future. Even if that doesn’t happen, the Little Shoulder Ghost is a Phenomenon-class Stranger. Its presence would shield us from much danger and trouble.”

“Very well. We shall go with your plan,” Qingge agreed after careful consideration.

She knew what Ye Qing meant by “opportunity”, of course. It was simply transferring the curse to someone else that wasn’t them.

She wasn’t a good-natured woman though, so she had no qualms damning someone else to safeguard her own life.

On that note, there was a chance Ye Qing might betray her to save himself, but she wasn’t worried that might happen. For one, she thought she had a good enough handle on Ye Qing’s personality, and she was fairly certain that he wouldn’t do so.

And two, she was stronger than him. The only one who would suffer should he change his mind was misery.

Ye Qing knew Qingge wouldn’t turn him down. He took the opportunity to introduce himself, “Oh right, my name is Ye... Shi. I’m a member of Luo Shui.”

He was still using his fake name not because he didn’t believe Qingge—she was one of Hong Jianglong’s, which meant she was probably a member of the Pacification Bureau. However, that didn’t mean he shouldn’t drop his guard completely. For example, what if she was related to one of the *jianghu* warriors he killed? He would be digging his own grave. Sure, it was extremely unlikely that might happen, but better safe than sorry, right?

“It’s a fake name, but I don’t mind.” Qingge replied indifferently, “My name is Qingge. Chu Qingge.”

“Ahem... you jest, Miss Chu.” Ye Qing rubbed his nose awkwardly and changed the subject. “Let’s continue on our journey, shall we? I would like to remove this curse as soon as possible, but it would be a waste to go back now.”

Chu Qingge nodded in agreement. “Agreed. The Graveyard of Demons is the location where the Demon’s Tomb’s biggest opportunities are located. We shouldn’t miss it if possible.”

She then tapped Ye Qing on the shoulder and took the lead.

Ye Qing didn’t find her gesture strange. The Little Shoulder Ghost must’ve tapped her on the shoulder again. He followed closely behind Chu Qingge toward the deeper areas.

“Oh right, didn’t Senior Lu You give you a paper lantern earlier? Where did it go?” Ye Qing recalled suddenly.

“It extinguished,” Chu Qingge replied succinctly. “After we separated, I was walking past a grave when a gust of wind blew past me. Its flame went out after that.”

“I guess Senior Lu You isn’t as dependable as he looks!” Ye Qing curled his lips in disdain. He thought Chu Qingge would be able to explore the graveyard to her heart’s content after receiving a powerful boon from the Lu You, but if a simple gust of wind could dispel it just like that... like what the fuck, bro?

The barest hint of a smile crossed Chu Qingge’s lips when she heard this. “I’m not finished. It was the Weak Wind.”

“What? The Weak Wind?!” *You should’ve mentioned that first!*

According to the “Journal of All Things Strange”, there existed a water to the north of Kunlun that was weaker than a speck of dust, and could not keep even a feather afloat. Hence, it was named the Weak Water. The Weak Wind was basically the wind version of the Weak Water.

If the Weak Wind blew against dust, then the dust would sink to the bottom. If it blew against a leaf, then the leaf would fall to the ground. If it blew against a cloud, then the cloud would drop like a rock. And if it blew against a human, then the human would crumble into a pool of blood and gore. Naturally, it was incredibly dangerous.

Logically speaking, no white lantern in the world could possibly block the Weak Wind. And yet, the Lu You’s did and saved Chu Qingge’s life. What an item!

The Lu You can’t hear me from outside, right? I’m so sorry, daddy Lu You. I shouldn’t have doubted you.

Unwilling to subject himself to the shame of being wrong any longer, Ye Qing hurriedly changed the subject, “Ahem. So, are we heading deeper into the graveyard?”

“Mm.” Chu Qingge nodded.

“Why though? Isn’t it safer near the periphery?”

There were fewer and fewer graves the deeper they ventured into the graveyard, but Ye Qing also noticed that those few graves that were present possessed extremely powerful and inexplicable presences. He was feeling suffocated to say the least.

Chu Qingge explained, "The Graveyard of Demons begins at the center of the Mountain of Demons and spreads outward. According to the legends, the Mountain of Demons was made of the body, organs and soul of the Progenitor Demon, Rahu, and the center of the graveyard is where his heart and soul lay. You can also find his air of Dao there."

"This is why the followers of the Dark Ways believe it to be an honor to be buried in the Mountain of Demons. It was also said that the center of the Mountain of Demons is overflowing with demonic qi and demonic thoughts. Only the strong may venture into it."

"That is why the closer we got to the center of the mountain, the number of graves we encountered kept decreasing, but the 'quality' of the graves kept increasing so to speak."

"Although everyone who is buried in the Graveyard of Demons is strong, even the strong can be categorized from the weakest to the strongest. In other words, the ones buried at the center of the mountain are the strongest of the strong."

"I see!" Ye Qing exclaimed in realization before shooting another question, "So, you're aiming for the center of the Mountain of Demons?"

"Mm."

"You seem to be very familiar with the center of the Mountain of Demons. Would you happen to know who is buried in that place?" Ye Qing asked curiously.

"And where did you get that from? This is my first time ever in the Graveyard of Demons." Chu Qingge retorted. "I know what I know from a senior. He once entered the Graveyard of Demons and explored the center."

"Unfortunately, he wasn't able to obtain anything from his exploration. In fact, he only survived because he used his ultimate trump card."

"If you don't mind, can you go into some details?" Ye Qing asked.

"He told me that he saw only one grave at the center of the Mountain of Demons, and it was none other than the grave of the Progenitor Demon himself. However, as soon as he read the name on the gravestone, his eyes exploded, and he began bleeding from every orifice. His companions' minds were snuffed out instantly. The only reason he hadn't suffered their fate was because he used a secret magic art that barely protected his mind," Chu Qingge explained.

Chu Qingge made it sound like nothing, but Ye Qing felt cold sweat dripping down his forehead. If Chu Qingge's senior knew a secret magic art, that must mean that he was a Spirit Master at least. However, he still nearly lost his life after taking one look at the Progenitor Demon's gravestone. He could only imagine that they would do worse.

"Er, Miss Chu. Why don't we go anywhere *but* the center of the mountain?"

Chu Qingge's lips curled into a smirk. "What, you scared?"

"A little," Ye Qing answered honestly. *How could I not? First there was One Punch Man, now there was One Look Die! This world is terrifying!*

"Relax. You'll be fine with me by your side," Chu Qingge consoled him while patting his shoulder. It was impossible to say if she really meant the gesture, or if she was just transferring the Little Shoulder Ghost's curse to him.

Ye Qing grumbled inside his head, *I don't feel reassured in the slightest, girl!*

"Hmm? I can hear someone talking ahead of us. No wait, they're not human. Careful!" Chu Qingge said suddenly.

Chapter 282: Word Sprite

Ye Qing released his spirit, and as Chu Qingge said, there were chatterings coming from ahead of them. In fact, the voices sounded quite childish. It was a bunch of children seemingly arguing with each other about something.

"It's all your fault, Thought! It's all your fault! It's your fault he got scared and ran away!"

"Yeah, yeah! We haven't had enough fun yet!"

"Why are you blaming me only when Sword scared that human as well?"

"Yeah, yeah! It wasn't just Sword either. Saber, Fist and Stick were all part of the scare as well!"

"Ghost also turned into a ghost as well."

"Snow didn't just scare that human, he even spoke to him directly!"

"Hmph! That human's just too timid."

"Yeah, he's a scaredy-cat. He's even more chicken than I am!"

"Yeah, he's such a chicken. He's even more chicken than Small."

"I'm not chicken! My name is Small, but my courage is big! Coward is the one real chicken in our group!"

"Who are you calling a chicken? At the very least, I'm not so chicken that I would piss my pants because I got scared!"

“Yeah, yeah! That human is seriously chicken. He lost a shoe when he was running away!”

“And he pissed his pants!”

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At first, it sounded like the voices were pinning the blame on each other. However, they got distracted later on and started discussing who was the biggest chicken of them all. Then, they got hanged up about the guy they scared off with their antics.

Strangely, Ye Qing couldn't see anyone no matter where he looked. He was still looking when Chu Qingge pointed at a nearby gravestone, “Look! That gravestone!”

It was a gravestone that was made white jade, and it was engraved with countless fly-sized ancient scripts. Although the text was small, Ye Qing could tell that they looked strong, elegant, and full of intent. Whoever engraved them must be a master calligrapher.

At first, Ye Qing couldn't spot anything amiss. But over time, he realized that the childish conversation came from the ancient scripts themselves.

“That's the ‘Timely Clearing After Snowfall[1]!’”

“Sorry, what?” Ye Qing asked.

Chu Qingge explained, “The gravestone is engraved with a calligraphy art titled ‘Timely Clearing After Snowfall’. It was crafted by the master calligrapher, the ‘Sage of Calligraphy’ Wang Donghe, and it was heralded by countless calligraphers and artists as the best calligraphy art of all times.”

“The one engraved on the gravestone obviously isn't the original, but it is strong, firm, elegant, and imbued with the author's unique intent. Not only was the author as skilled as Wang Donghe, I believe that his version of ‘Timely Clearing After Snowfall’ has exceeded the original.”

“Hahaha! She praised me! You heard that, people? She praised me!”

“She's not praising you, she's praising us.”

“She's not praising us, she's praising our master.”

“That's the same as praising us, you doofus.”

“Well, she is as beautiful as she is discerning, unlike that dumb-looking sucker standing next to her. It's clear he's not a very bright person.”

“Yeah, he wouldn't be haunted otherwise. He deserves what he got.”

Ye “I Look Dumb” Qing was miffed. *You could've praised her without slandering me!*

He abruptly realized that the ancient scripts could sense the Little Shoulder Ghost's presence after that.

“Enough! She's coming over. Try not to scare her, okay?”

“Yes, yes.”

“If there is someone we must scare, it would have to be the sucker next to her.”

“Yes, we’re going to scare him until he pisses his pants just like that fool from earlier.”

“Yes, we will, hehehe...”

Ye Qing: “...” *The fuck did I do to you? Did I eat your food or something? Is it a sin to be stupid? Ah ptooeey, I’m not stupid! I’m the most intelligent and handsome man in the world!*

“Miss Chu, why are you approaching that gravestone?” Ye Qing asked his companion via sound transmission.

She replied, “I sense a sword art within that calligraphy art.”

“A sword art?” Ye Qing sounded puzzled because he couldn’t sense anything.

I’m not actually stupid, am I? The young man couldn’t help but fall into a pit of self-doubt.

Meanwhile, Chu Qingge had reached the gravestone and bent down to inspect the ancient scripts. In Ye Qing’s spirit, he sensed the ancient scripts somehow floating away from the gravestone, stood on top of it, and began demonstrating a set of sword techniques with the blurry image of a snowfall as the backdrop.

When Ye Qing attempted to get a closer look, everything suddenly disappeared from view. He could barely see or sense Chu Qingge herself.

Ye Qing rubbed his nose in irritation. *So, they don’t want to show me the sword art. Who would’ve thought that I would be discriminated against by a bunch of words one day?!*

About half a teatime later, Chu Qingge abruptly exploded with sword intent. It gave off a melancholic feeling like that of a person stranded in the middle of a snowfall.

“Wow, you’re really smart! I can’t believe how quickly you grasped master’s sword art and intent!”

“Yes, she’s practically as smart as master himself.”

“Don’t be stupid. No one is as smart as master. He’s the smartest human in the whole world!”

“Sorry, sorry. I’m saying that she’s smarter than that sucker.”

“But of course!”

“Why are you stating the obvious?”

Ye Qing: “...” *They just cannot stop shooting me in the knee, can they?*

“How is it?” Ye Qing walked over to Chu Qingge and asked after she opened her eyes.

Chu Qingge replied honestly, "It's a sword art called the 'Sword of Timely Clearing After Snowfall'. It was a sword art created based on the original calligraphy by Gongsun Yang, a master calligrapher and a swordmaster. It was also his signature martial art."

Chu Qingge then turned back to the gravestone and performed a disciple's salute. "Thank you so much for imparting to me your techniques, senior. This junior is eternally grateful for this boon."

"Would you like to give it a try, Brother Ye?"

"Why not?" Ye Qing was tempted after seeing Chu Qingge obtaining a sword art inheritance with barely any effort.

Unfortunately, his dreams were shattered before he could even get close to the gravestone.

"Outta my way! I will be the one to make him piss his pants!"

"You get out of my way! You already scared that human from earlier! It's my turn now!"

"Bullshit! It was Sword, Fist and Stick who scared the human earlier. I haven't scared anyone yet!"

"Liar! I'm the one who hasn't scared anyone yet!"

"Shut up, you stupid words. We won't even get to play if you scare him off. Now listen to me. Mouth, Talk and Dialogue, shut your mouths. Dream, Thought and Wish, drag him into a dream on my mark. When that happens, we'll be able to scare him to our hearts' content."

"Haha, that's a great plan, Heart! We'll do that. I'm going to turn into a ghost and scare the shit out of him!"

"I'm going to turn into a sword and cut him into ribbons!"

"And I'm going to beat him up until shits his pants!"

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Ye Qing's mouth twitched uncontrollably. Chu Qingge was smirking a little as well. The young woman had called them a masterpiece of calligraphy art, but in his opinion, they were just naughty children who deserved a long, hard spanking!

Ye Qing's eyes glinted with cunning as he walked up to the gravestone. Right before the ancient scripts could pull their stunt, Ye Qing abruptly walked away while saying, "I'm sorry, Miss Chu, but these words remind me of lying dogs. They're so ugly I can barely stand to look at them, so I'm not going to."

Chu Qingge looked surprised for a second. Then, she broke into a wry grin.

"What did he just say? Was he insulting us?"

"Of course he's insulting us, you doofus! He's calling us ugly!"

“Ah... that sucker dares to call us ugly? You’re the ugly one, you bastard!”

“We are cool, strong, and beautiful! You must be blind to think us ugly!”

“Ayaya, don’t stop me! I’m going to cut his dog head off with my sword!”

“Waaaaaaah! Come back if you dare, you sucker! What, you’re bold enough to call us ugly, but not bold enough to face us! Come back, and we promise to blow your top!”

As soon as the ancient scripts realized what happened, they immediately erupted into a cacophony of insults and threats. However, it looked like they were unable to leave the gravestone probably because their existence was bound to it, and their vocabulary of expletives was sorely lacking probably because they were child-minded.

“Oh ho? You can’t leave your gravestone, can you? That’s good to know.”

Almost ten meters away, Ye Qing relaxed after confirming that the ancient scripts couldn’t leave the gravestone. He was going to take off like a ghost if the ancient scripts could leave the gravestone or attack him, but for once, luck was on his side.

So, what was he going to do now? He was going to insult the ancient scripts to his heart’s content, of course. He would be a real sucker if he didn’t serve his revenge hot.

“Sigh, I’ve never seen such ugly words in my life. They’re so ugly I wonder if I was dreaming. I was this close from throwing up yesterday’s dinner.”

Ye Qing crossed his arms and said disdainfully, “Even a three-year-old’s shitty handwriting looks better than this. What a sad, sad gravestone this is.”

The ancient scripts fumed—literally, white smoke was rising from their top—with white hot anger when they heard this.

“He... He dares! Get over here, brat! 1v1 us if you dare! We promise to attack you as a group!”

“You’re the one who’s so ugly that I could throw up!”

“Yeah, yeah! In fact, we’re gonna throw up right now! Everyone, on the count of three, one, two—blaaaaaargh!”

“Blaaaaaaaargh!”

“Blaargh!”

“Are you words stupid? He can’t hear what we’re saying! We’re just wasting our breaths!”

“Oh right! Come, come, let’s make a word!”

“Yeah, yeah! Move it!”

The ancient scripts started shifting around the gravestone until they formed a single word, “Ugly”.

“Oh? The words are alive?” Ye Qing feigned ignorance and exclaimed with fake surprise, “Do you see that, Miss Chu? The words themselves knew that they were ugly. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have formed the word ‘Ugly’.”

“If you know you’re ugly, you shouldn’t show your face around any longer. My advice to you all is to kill yourselves and save us all the embarrassment.”

Ye Qing then sighed and started walking away. “Let us leave, Miss Chu. I can’t bear to stay here for a moment longer. I have a feeling that my eyes are going to turn blind if I stare at them any longer.”

“Ahhhhhhhh! I’m angry! I’m so angry!”

“Something is wrong with this guy’s head! The word is obviously meant for him, not us!”

“Come back, you sucker! Come back and fight us for three hundred rounds!”

“Yeah, yeah! You’re a chicken if you back down from our challenge!”

“Don’t go, you sucker! Come back! Come back!”

Ye Qing could hear their desperate, rage-filled screams even after he was far, far away from the tombstone. His lips automatically spread into a delighted, relaxed grin.

“That was a little childish, don’t you think? Those Word Sprites have a child’s mind, and I can tell they don’t harbor any real malice. Had you praised them instead, they might have taught the Sword of Timely Clearing After Snowfall,” Chu Qingge said after they were out of earshot.

“Oh, I know they’re children. They’re naughty children who need to be punished.” Ye Qing shrugged uncaringly. “Besides, I can tell that those ancient scripts have zero intentions of teaching me the sword art, so just as well.”

Did he have an actual basis to his assumption? Not at all. But sometimes, you just know that you weren’t destined for something. In that case, he would rather teach those naughty children a lesson and get his revenge.

“It’s your choice!” Chu Qingge shook her head.

“Oh right, are you still going to venture deeper into the Mountain of Demons now that you’ve obtained Wang Donghe’s inheritance, Miss Chu?” Ye Qing asked.

Chu Qingge nodded firmly. “But of course. If I was just aiming to obtain a martial art at this level, then I wouldn’t have come to the Demon’s Tomb at all.”

Ye Qing rolled his eyes. If he wasn’t sure before, now he knew they didn’t live in the same world.

Chapter 283: Blood Demon

“Wait, Miss Chu.”

After teaching the naughty children a lesson, the duo resumed their journey toward the center of the Mountain of Demons. The deeper they went, the emptier the place became, and the darker and more oppressive the atmosphere became.

While they were walking past a gravestone, Ye Qing's blood abruptly boiled as if attracted by something. At the same time, the inscription on the gravestone started bleeding bright red blood.

Ye Qing wheeled around immediately. The gravestone was black in color like most of the gravestones in this graveyard, and the inscriptions were just two short lines. The center of the gravestone was inscribed with the moniker, "Blood Demon", and the bottom right hand corner of the gravestone was inscribed with the name "Shangguan Wuwo".

The inscription was short, but Ye Qing could feel a terrible, oppressive power from it. It continued to bleed as if a river of blood ran beneath the gravestone, endless and eternal.

"Blood Demon? Shangguan Wuwo?"

Chu Qingge's face bloomed with surprise and disgust when she saw the inscription on the gravestone.

Ye Qing noticed her odd reaction and asked curiously, "Do you know who this Shangguan Wuwo is, Miss Chu?"

The young woman answered, "Shangguan Wuwo the 'Blood Demon' is one of the titans of the Dark Ways six hundred years ago. Shangguan Wuwo was a member of the Blood God Sect of the Nine Demonic Ways, but he couldn't stand their rules and ultimately left his sect. Shangguan Wuwo's cultivation art is the 'Blood Demon Sutra', something he invented by combining the Blood God Sect's 'Blood God Sutra' and the Demon Palace of Kunlun's 'Demons of Mountains and Rivers'."

"The 'Blood Demon Sutra' is an incredibly powerful cultivation art that enables the practitioner to absorb and control other people's blood to their heart's content, pollute one's mind, and slay enemies without a trace. One could also create the 'Children of Blood Demon' and use them like an army. So long as the Children of Blood Demon are alive, the Blood Demon is unkillable."

"At his prime, Shangguan Wuwo created eighty one Children of Blood Demon and annihilated the Unliving Sect, one of the thirty six unorthodox sects singlehandedly. He also survived being surrounded and hunted by dozens of Grandmasters. He was incredibly powerful."

"That sounds amazing!" Ye Qing's eyes lit up with excitement and interest. If he wasn't mistaken, the reason he was drawn to the Blood Demon's grave was because of his special blood.

Chu Qingge shot him a look and said, "Shangguan Wuwo was a man of dual nature. He acts and kills as he pleases. When he's in a good mood, he could form brotherhoods with weaklings and enjoy long drinks with beggars. When he's in a bad mood, he could annihilate entire clans for the slightest offense. Not even their pets and livestock are spared from his wrath. That was why he came to be known as the Blood Demon."

“If you wish to accept his inheritance, my advice for you is to be very, very careful.”

Ye Qing’s smile was replaced by a deep frown. “Are you saying that Shangguan Wuwo might have prepared a trap for his ‘successor’?”

Chu Qingge replied, “I can’t possibly say, but I do know that Shangguan Wuwo was infamously cunning and ruthless. You would be wise to stay on your guard.”

“Besides that, ‘Blood Demon Sutra’ is a demonic art through and through. Fresh blood is needed for its cultivation, and the longer you cultivate it, the more it will warp your temperament. You may become tyrannical, bloodthirsty, and heartless.”

“If you ask me, my advice for you is to give up on it.”

“I see.” Ye Qing hesitated a little, but in the end he chose to disregard the advice.

“There are no good or evil martial arts, only good or evil men. So long as I stay true to myself, what can it do to me?”

“Besides, there’s no telling if the ‘Blood Demon Sutra’ is what the Blood Demon left behind. It could be some other martial arts, right?”

“As for the risks, is there anything in the world that doesn’t come with risks and consequences? Don’t worry. I will be careful.”

“It’s your choice. I’m just offering you my advice,” Chu Qingge replied indifferently.

“Thank you.” Ye Qing smiled.

He looked relaxed and fearless on the outside, but on the inside he engraved Chu Qingge’s warning into his heart.

Ye Qing produced an incense stick from his Nature’s Shell, lit it up, and prayed to Shangguan Wuwo’s grave. He muttered under his breath, “Bless me, Brother Incense. Grant me your protection, heavens. Be merciful, senior.”

Finally, he planted the incense stick on the ground.

“What are you doing?” Chu Qingge asked with obvious confusion.

“Nothing. I’m just praying to senior and asking for his blessing is all,” Ye Qing gave her a random excuse.

“Don’t you normally use three incense sticks instead of one?” Chu Qingge asked suspiciously.

“I only have one, and I’m sure senior wouldn’t mind as long as my prayer is sincere,” Ye Qing said smilingly.

He hadn’t lit a normal incense stick, of course. It was none other than the Incense of Fortune.

“Protect me, Fog Demon,” Ye Qing thought to the Fog Demon. Although he didn’t think that anyone could harm him while Chu Qingge was around, and his impression of Chu Qingge so far was quite favorable, it was always better to be safe than sorry.

“Boy, the girl’s right. I can feel a great evil buried in this grave. You might be better off giving up on this opportunity,” The Fog Demon advised.

Only the Fog Demon itself knew if it was handing out the advice out of good will or not, but in any case, Ye Qing’s mind was set. “I know what I’m doing. Just keep me safe.”

With that, he sat crosslegged on the ground and made contact with the gravestone with his spirit.

Boom!

Ye Qing’s mind shook violently as soon as his spiritual power made contact with the gravestone. A sea of blood abruptly appeared in front of him, and standing above it was an evil, handsome man with an ostentatious and violent aura. He had red hair and wore red clothes.

Shangguan Wuwo looked down on Ye Qing and guffawed. “Hahaha! I am Shangguan Wuwo! And who might you be?”

The sea of blood stirred violently as he laughed.

Ye Qing hurriedly replied, “This junior is Ye Qing. It is an honor to meet you, senior.”

“You possess a bloodline that is quite compatible with my ‘Blood Demon Sutra’. Are you willing to become my disciple?” Shangguan Wuwo asked amiably.

I knew it! It really is because of my blood! Ye Qing thought excitedly as he responded, “I am willing, senior. Thank you.”

Only a fool would reject such an opportunity.

“Hahaha, good. Now open your mind to me and do not resist,” Shangguan Wuwo extended a finger to Ye Qing as he said this. The sea of blood immediately surged toward Ye Qing.

Back in the real world, the Annon Sutra slowly lit up as blood red text appeared on its surface:

“Ye Qing discovered Shangguan Wuwo’s grave and was prepared to receive his inheritance, but he didn’t realize that the Blood Demon had an ulterior motive. Instead of passing down his inheritance to Ye Qing, he was planning to extinguish his mind, take over his body, and be reborn.”

“But right before Shangguan Wuwo would succeed, a sense of grave danger suddenly enveloped Ye Qing.”

Three silver dragon-serpent runes winked out of existence after the last word appeared.

Meanwhile, Ye Qing was ready to lower his mental guard and accept Shangguan Wuwo’s inheritance when suddenly, he was beset by a terrible sense of unease. It was like standing at the

edge of a bottomless chasm, or dueling a powerful warrior who was a moment away from killing him. Such was his unease that even his mind was quaking in fear.

Not good!

Ye Qing abruptly recognized the danger and visualized the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method”.

Right before the blood sea would overwhelm him, the dharma of Emperor Fuxi appeared above the blood sea and cast his golden rays like the sun. The bloody waves evaporated in just the blink of an eye.

As Shangguan Wuwo was standing at the forefront, he suffered the full brunt of the mental attack and let out a bloodcurdling scream. His expression was savage with anger as he retreated together with the waves, “What... What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Ye Qing’s lips curled into a smile that didn’t reach the eyes. “I’m the one who should be asking you that.”

“What are you talking about? I just want to pass on my inheritance to you is all. Now lower your defenses and let me in already!” Shangguan Wuwo said urgently.

Ye Qing sneered. “Come now, senior Shangguan. It’s a bit too late for the theatrics, don’t you think? I know you’re plotting to take over my body.”

There was a chance he was just being paranoid, but Ye Qing grew certain that that wasn’t the case after seeing Shangguan Wuwo’s reaction. The guy was just too desperate.

A few breaths later, Shangguan Wuwo laughed loudly. “You’re smarter than those idiots who came before you, it seems. As soon as they heard that I was planning to pass them everything I know, they immediately became blinded by greed and were taken over by me without trouble.”

“Unfortunately, their bodies were too mediocre and untalented. My future would’ve been limited if I took over them permanently.”

“You are a different story though. Your body is so perfect it’s practically a creation of the heavens. Your vigor is rich, your physique is strong, your aptitude is flawless, and you bear the blood of the Blood God in you. You are the most perfect specimen I’ve ever encountered in my life.”

“If I could take over your body, I would return to my former glory—no, I would surpass it! I would become a Sage^[1] and live forever and ever...”

“When the time comes, I will track down those who participated in that hunt back then and annihilate them to the nine generations! Ahahahaha...”

Shangguan Wuwo laughed like a madman as he narrated his dream. He could practically envision that future already.

Heh. That’s another bastard who’s lusting after my body, Ye Qing sneered inside his head. It was true that his body was unbelievably OP after it was baptized by the Burning Wind and the Water of Life, but that was not an excuse for these old fuckers to covet it like disgusting perverts!

Seriously, who the fuck do you think I am? The last person who coveted my body got refined into my Artifact Spirit, you know that?

“Surrender and give me your body, boy. If you do, I promise to preserve a sliver of your consciousness.”

Shangguan Wuwo attempted to tempt Ye Qing, “When I have attained Sagehood, I promise to reforge your body and take you as my disciple.”

“You really think I’m stupid, don’t you?” Ye Qing sneered. Only a total retard would believe such a promise, not to mention that his tone and words were almost the same as the Fog Demon’s. Was this some sort of disease that afflicted all champions regardless of their race?

“Remember, you’re the one who rejected me. You don’t actually think you can resist me, do you?” Shangguan Wuwo scoffed disdainfully, “This is my world. It takes but a sliver of effort for me to kill you.”

As soon as Shangguan Wuwo said this, countless Blood Shadows poured out of the sea of blood, wailing.

“The Children of Blood Demon...”

The next moment, the Children of Blood Demon rushed toward Ye Qing in unison.

“Heh. You can certainly try!” Ye Qing sneered as he visualized the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method” once more. The dharma abruptly shone much brighter until it looked like the sun itself. Like an inferno, its piercing golden rays burned all of the Children of Blood Demon into dust before they could even get close.

The next moment, the dharma itself cut a brilliant arc through the air and vanished abruptly. Before Shangguan Wuwo could find out where it went, he was crushed into bits by its fiery chariot.

After the dharma was gone, the sea of blood shuddered and split in half to reveal a bottomless chasm. It was like Moses parting the Red Sea, but with a splash of gore.

“Phew...”

Ye Qing’s spirit was far stronger than what it used to be. Although he hadn’t unlocked his Xuanguan point yet, his spirit was as strong as a Spirit Purifier’s. In fact, it was better than some late-stage Spirit Purifiers.

Of course, his spirit was incomparable to that of a Grandmaster’s, and Shangguan Wuwo was a Grandmaster. However, the Blood Demon only possessed a wisp of soul and consciousness right now, so Ye Qing didn’t believe that he could threaten him overly much.

Chapter 284: Coincidence?

That said, there was no need to take risks just because he wasn’t afraid. Ye Qing immediately acted to sever his spiritual connection with the gravestone as soon as he shattered Shangguan Wuwo’s soul. That was the surefire way to ensure his safety.

Unfortunately, his hopes were quickly dashed. He discovered that he was unable to sever his connection with the gravestone for some reason. Somehow, he was trapped in this place.

“Hahaha! Give it up. You cannot break free, and don’t count on your companion to save you. No one will find out about your predicament.”

As if on cue, Shangguan Wuwo’s soul reappeared atop the sea of blood with a ridiculing expression.

Ye Qing put a hand to his forehead and visualized the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method”. The emperor’s dharma reappeared, and Shangguan Wuwo’s soul melted into a puddle once more. However, he reappeared as soon as the golden light was gone.

“I am immortal here, boy, but you will eventually run out of spiritual power no matter how strong you are. When the time comes, your body will still be mine.”

“So stop resisting already.”

“Stop resisting already.”

Shangguan Wuwo opened his arms wide like he was hugging the world. The sea of blood rose higher and higher behind him until it formed an all-encompassing tidal wave. Then, it crashed down on Ye Qing.

It was like the sky itself had collapsed.

Knowing that he could no longer afford to preserve his strength, Ye Qing used all of his spirit to visualize the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method”. The dharma grew almost solid, and it protected his mind from the relentless assault of the tidal wave of blood.

“Stubborn fool! Let’s see how long you can last!” Shangguan Wuwo roared in anger. He mustered his sea of blood to batter Ye Qing’s defenses again and again, while Ye Qing weathered it all like a boulder splitting the waves. They were locked in a stalemate.

However, the stalemate was only temporary, and Ye Qing knew that the situation was very much not in his favor. He must have crushed Shangguan Wuwo’s soul a hundred times with Emperor Fuxi’s dharma, but they showed no signs of weakness whatsoever. It was the same for the sea of blood.

On the other hand, he was losing spiritual power by the second due to the constant battering. Worse, the guy’s Children of Blood Demon could pollute the mind, which greatly hastened the rate he was depleting his spiritual power.

Worst of all, there was absolutely nothing he could do to help himself.

Well, that wasn’t entirely true. He could try to slay the enemy using the “Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art”. However, it was a last resort. The saber art consumed a lot of spirit, and he could only execute it once or twice considering how much spirit he had already expended. If that wasn’t enough, then Shangguan Wuwo would win just like that.

That was why he didn’t want to take the risk, at least not yet. He wasn’t at the point where it was do-or-die yet, and more importantly, he wasn’t alone. He still had Chu Qingge, the Incense of

Fortune, and the Annon Sutra. Despite Shangguan Wuwo's claims, it was possible one of them might notice his predicament and act to save him.

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Outside, Chu Qingge shot Ye Qing a glance after sensing a brief flare of spiritual power. She instinctively felt a little uneasy, but she soon calmed down when she noted that Ye Qing's expression remained peaceful and at ease.

"Hmm? Why is the incense stick burning so quickly?"

It was at this moment she noticed something strange. The incense stick in front of the grave suddenly started burning at an accelerated rate. In fact, over half of it was gone in just a matter of seconds. Then, a thick, pungent puff of smoke started floating toward somewhere.

Strangely, the smoke didn't dissipate like a normal smoke would. The fact that it was moving even though there was no wind was odd as well.

"Strange." Chu Qingge frowned as her wariness stirred awake once more.

A while later, she suddenly heard a series of coughs from afar. It was accompanied by some angry yells,

"Cough! Cough! What the fuck! Why is there smoke here? Is someone burning some offerings or something?"

"Don't be stupid. Just how stupid would you have to be to do that[1]?"

"Cough! Cough! Who knows? Stupidity is everywhere. Heavens, this smoke is terrible!"

"The smoke's coming from this direction. Cough! Let's go check it out."

"Yeah. If I find out that this smoke is really caused by some idiot, I'm absolutely going to snap their necks!"

Chu Qingge squinted slightly as she listened to the conversation, but she didn't move a muscle. A dozen or so breaths later, a group of men and women wearing blood red robes entered her view.

The men carried themselves with a cold, unfeeling air, whereas the women looked soft and seductive. They quickly spotted Ye Qing, Chu Qingge, and the incense stick that was almost burned out at this point.

"Were you and your companion the one who made that horrible smoke?" One man asked Chu Qingge in an unfriendly tone. He looked like the leader of the group.

She answered indifferently, "No. We are busy right now. Please leave."

"Heh! You couldn't come up with a better lie? It's obvious that the smoke had come from the incense stick!"

The guy was about to say something more when suddenly, his companion cried out in shock and delight, "Senior brother, look, it's the Blood Demon!"

“What Blood Demon?” The man looked very displeased at the interruption.

“It’s our founder, senior brother! Shangguan Wuwo!” The other guy explained.

“Our founder?” The man looked and saw that he was right. “It really is the founder’s grave! Hahahaha! Sometimes, good fortune really does fall into your lap for free! Praise be!”

“Senior brother, I think that boy over there is receiving our founder’s inheritance. What do we do?”

“What else? Shangguan Wuwo is *our* founder. How can we allow his inheritance to go to an outsider?”

“Yeah. We need to kill him now! The founder’s inheritance can only belong to us, the Blood Demon Sect!”

The group immediately acted to rush Ye Qing, but Chu Qingge blocked their way after they had just taken a few steps. She stared at the group with cold eyes as she asked, “Are you the remnants of the Blood Demon Sect?”

“Who are you calling a remnant?” The leader of the group said coldly, “Shangguan Wuwo is the founder of the Blood Demon Sect. His inheritance can only go to us. Now get out of our way, or we’ll kill you.”

“I don’t know, senior brother. It seems like a waste to just kill her. Why don’t you leave her to me? It so happens that I’m looking for an incubator.”

“What a coincidence! Me too!”

Everyone—even the women—started chuckling sinisterly. They were all looking at Chu Qingge with malicious eyes.

Chu Qingge didn’t seem to care about their implied threat, however. Acting as indifferent as she was facing a group of ants, she said, “Thank you for confirming my suspicions. The world has no need for the Blood Demon Sect, so die.”

As soon as she finished, Chu Qingge threw a punch that filled everyone’s ears with a draconic roar. A tyrannical fist force blew past the leader of the group and crushed two late-stage Astral Refiners into bits.

“How dare you kill our people! Die!” The leader uttered viciously as his right hand turned as red as blood and curled into a claw. He charged forward and took a swipe at Chu Qingge.

He wasn’t afraid of Chu Qingge because he was a Spirit Purifier just like her. Bloody energy ripped through the air and let out a dissonant cry that disrupted the mind.

“Divine Claw of Weeping Blood”

Chu Qingge didn't dodge, however. She simply clenched her right hand and threw another punch. A golden dragon circled around her arm as the tyrannical fist force shattered the crimson claw and hit the guy's palm, breaking his bones with insulting ease.

The man let out a muffled groan as the blood drained away from his face. He exclaimed in shock and anger, "The Stunning Dragon Fist? Who are you?"

Chu Qingge remained silent as she shifted to a finger technique. Stars suddenly fell out of the sky and skewered several people through the forehead before they could even react.

"Starfall Finger"

Not done yet, Chu Qingge shifted to a palm technique and unleashed a palm strike that caved in space itself. The Blood Demon Sect disciples who were caught in its range died having their hearts crushed.

"Heart Crushing Palm"

The battle had just begun, and the Blood Demon Sect group had already lost over half of their members. Only a handful of them were still alive.

"Run!"

Realizing that they were no match for her, the leader yelled for everyone to escape and took off to the distance.

The surviving members of the group also scattered in every direction.

Chu Qingge didn't agree with the leader's plan, however. Like a colorful phoenix, she swooped over to several disciples and fired several beams of sword qi from her fingers. They were skewered and killed in just the blink of an eye.

Then, Chu Qingge took another step—a phoenix's cry broke out of her body as she did so—and blocked the leader's way before he could go anywhere. She then threw out a mighty punch.

"Xue Feng wanted to escape, but Chu Qingge had no intentions of allowing him to go free. With the Rainbow Phoenix Step, she cut in front of the disciple and threw a mighty punch."

"However, her foot slipped a little as she was throwing the punch. She was aiming for Xue Feng's left chest, but the slip caused her to hit his right chest instead."

"The attack caused Xue Feng to fly toward Shangguan Wuwo's gravestone, and The Fog Demon did nothing to stop him for selfish reasons. As a result, Shangguan Wuwo's gravestone was snapped in half."

In Ye Qing's shirt, lines and lines of blood red text were appearing on the Annon Sutra's surface. When the words "snapped in half" were written, five silver dragon-serpent runes abruptly shattered, and an invisible power permeated the air.

On the other side, Chu Qingge accidentally stepped on a slippery stone as she was throwing a punch and hit the leader of the group on the right chest instead. The powerful fist force sent him flying straight toward Ye Qing's location.

By the time Chu Qingge realized her mistake, it was already too late. She could only watch as the man crashed into Shangguan Wuwo's gravestone and snapped it in half.

"Kekeke... the boy told me to protect him but not the gravestone, so he only has himself to blame!"

The Fog Demon could've easily intercepted the body if it wanted to, but it didn't. After all, the stronger Ye Qing became, the lower the chance it might be able to break free from its shackles. If Chu Qingge wasn't around, it would be clapping its hands in applause already!

For the first time, Chu Qingge's expression turned embarrassed and confused. She was aiming for the guy's heart, so how did she miss so badly and even send him flying over to Shangguan Wuwo's gravestone?

Chu Qingge was so puzzled that she didn't even bother to hunt down the remaining Blood Demon Sect disciples.

Back in Ye Qing's headspace, Shangguan Wuwo laughed like a madman as he slowly but surely pushed back Ye Qing's defenses. "I told you you wouldn't be able to hold for long. Today is the day you die!"

Unfortunately, he didn't even get to finish his laugh when his infinite sea of blood suddenly began to shrink rapidly as if its source was cut off. His own soul was weakening at a rapid rate.

"What the hell? What happened?"

Shangguan Wuwo was stunned and terrified by this sudden turn of events.

"This is my chance!"

Ye Qing didn't know what was happening outside, but he knew that this was his chance to break out of his fatal predicament. He immediately focused his spirit into a saber and slashed at Shangguan Wuwo.

Demonic red lotuses began manifesting inside his headspace. As they rained from above, crimson flames that were shaped like lotuses started bursting from Shangguan Wuwo's body as well.

At first, the flames were weak and dim. Then, they grew in both size and strength as if fueled by something.

Shangguan Wuwo wasn't the only one who had caught on fire. The sea of blood had turned into a sea of inferno as well.

Chapter 285: Shake It Together

"Aaaargh! The hellfire? Of all the things, hellfire? Gaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Shangguan Wuwo screamed in pain and terror, but no matter how hard he struggled, he just couldn't extinguish the hellfire on his person.

The hellfire would never fade so long as the sinner still had sins and karmic hindrance. That was how the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art kills its enemies.

“Mercy, mercy! I can teach you the ‘Blood Demon Sutra’! All I ask is that you let me live! Ahhhhh...”

Shangguan Wuwo’s soul continued to weaken under the all-consuming heat of the hellfire, but Ye Qing was completely unmoved. He was never merciful toward those who tried to kill him, and even if he was, he didn’t possess the ability to extinguish the hellfire. Although Jin Hui had bestowed him his true martial arts inheritance, it hadn’t been long since he grasped the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art, so he hadn’t yet reached the level where he could control the hellfire he had inflicted upon his victim.

“Ahhhhhh! I was so close! I was so close!”

In the end, Shangguan Wuwo let out one last roar before disintegrating into nothing under the hellfire.

The sea of blood was completely burned as well.

After Shangguan Wuwo’s soul and the sea of blood were purified, a refined energy began flowing into Ye Qing’s mind and nurturing his weakened spirit. At the same time, he felt a mysterious energy scattering inside his headspace. It felt tattered and disorganized for some reason.

“It’s... the ‘Blood Demon Sutra’!” Ye Qing exclaimed in pleasant surprise when he perceived it and discovered that it was Shangguan Wuwo’s memories and martial truth regarding the “Blood Demon Sutra”. However, it was in a broken state as if someone had grabbed a perfectly fine piece of paper and ripped it to shreds. It must have happened when the hellfire had violently annihilated Shangguan Wuwo’s soul.

Ye Qing didn’t hesitate. He immediately started studying the memories and martial truth. If he waited, they would eventually disintegrate into nothing, and he would truly have risked his life for nothing.

A moment later, Ye Qing opened his eyes and let out a long sigh in the real world. His lips were curled into a smile.

It was then he noticed the broken gravestone in front of him. He blurted, “What happened?”

“Ahem. You’re awake, Brother Ye?” Chu Qingge coughed twice while wearing a rare look of embarrassment on her face. “It’s like this...”

After Chu Qingge finished explaining everything that had happened while he was distracted, she apologized deeply, “It wasn’t on purpose, Brother Ye. Please accept my sincerest apologies.”

“I see!” Ye Qing exclaimed in realization and shot the fully burned Incense of Fortune on the ground. Now he had the full picture.

He had wondered why Shangguan Wuwo’s soul had suddenly withered for apparently no reason. Now he knew it was because his gravestone had snapped in half.

If he wasn’t mistaken, Shangguan Wuwo must have set up a restriction or something else on his gravestone. So long as the gravestone was intact, he could fuel his soul with some sort of energy and become effectively immortal.

Since the gravestone was destroyed, his connection with this mysterious source of power was cut off. He became mortal once he could no longer sustain his weak, broken soul with an infinite well of power.

Thank goodness I had the Incense of Fortune and the Annon Sutra. I would probably be dead if it wasn't for them.

Ye Qing was seriously glad that he had done his homework before communicating with Shangguan Wuwo's gravestone. The Incense of Fortune had attracted the Blood Demon Sect disciples over, and the Annon Sutra had used the Orbit of Fate to influence Chu Qingge into breaking the gravestone by accident.

"Sorry, Brother Ye," Chu Qingge apologized again when she noticed that Ye Qing wasn't saying anything.

Ye Qing jolted out of his thoughts and waved off her apology. "Oh no, you have nothing to apologize for. If anything, I should be thanking you for saving my life."

He proceeded to tell her everything that had happened in his headspace and said, "If it wasn't for you, I might have been taken over by Shangguan Wuwo already, so thank you."

"That happened?" Chu Qingge wasn't expecting this. "Shangguan Wuwo actually tried to possess you?"

"Yep."

"I don't understand. Wouldn't it be easier for him to take over a body in the real world? Why did he do it in the Demon's Tomb of all places?"

"Oh, I've actually gleaned this from his memory fragments." Ye Qing explained, "Shangguan Wuwo was being hunted by his enemies. Although he managed to escape his pursuers after entering the Demon's Tomb, he was grievously injured with no hope of recovery. That was why he set up this trap in hopes of returning to life one day."

"That would explain it." Chu Qingge nodded. "It also explains how an Astral Refiner like you managed to survive his devious trap. Shangguan Wuwo was grievously injured, and his mind was fragile. If he was at his prime, there was no way you could've held him back long enough for me to break his gravestone by accident."

"Yeah. It was all fated," Ye Qing sighed.

As Chu Qingge said, Shangguan Wuwo would have overwhelmed him in a matter of seconds if his mind wasn't frail from the injuries he had sustained when he was still alive. And if he didn't have the Incense of Fortune or the Annon Sutra, then he would still be dead.

Truly, it was all fated!

"Oh right, did you obtain Shangguan Wuwo's 'Blood Demon Sutra'?" Chu Qingge asked.

"I did, but it's incomplete." Ye Qing shook his head reluctantly. "I only managed to glean a portion of the 'Blood Demon Sutra' from Shangguan Wuwo's memory fragments. To be exact, I only learned how to control, absorb, and refine another person's blood. I wasn't able to learn how to refine the Children of Blood Demon."

"That's a shame. The Children of Blood Demon is easily the best part of the 'Blood Demon Sutra'. In fact, it is the core of the cultivation art." Chu Qingge consoled him, "But maybe this is for the better. The method to create the Children of Blood Demon is abhorring, heartless, and horrifying. The warriors of the Orthodox Way would have attacked you if they knew that you practiced the Children of Blood Demon, and the Blood Demon Sect would personally come after you as well."

"The Blood Demon Sect?" Ye Qing looked at the corpses littered across the ground and asked, "What is the Blood Demon Sect? Is it a sect that Shangguan Wuwo founded?"

Chu Qingge replied, "No, but he was the main reason the sect was founded."

"A long time ago, Shangguan Wuwo recruited a disciple called Xue Yue and taught him everything about the 'Blood Demon Sutra'. After Xue Yue mastered the cultivation art, he used his newfound powers to wreak havoc in the *jianghu* and founded the Blood Demon Sect. He later claimed that Shangguan Wuwo was the founder of the sect, but Shangguan Wuwo himself had never accepted the title."

"Later, Xue Yue murdered a lot of innocents to create the Children of Blood Demon, which earned him the fury ire of the Orthodox warriors. The sects came together under One Righteous Way, Dragon Tiger Mountain and True Martial Sect and attacked the Blood Demon Sect with the goal of annihilating them once and for all."

"Unfortunately, not only did the movement fail to eliminate the sect completely, it was showing signs of life as of late. These people claimed that they are disciples of the Blood Demon Sect, and their martial arts prove that that is the case."

"I see!" Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. No wonder Chu Qingge had killed them without mercy.

It was at this moment Chu Qingge patted Ye Qing on the shoulder. Caught off guard, Ye Qing asked her, "Why haven't you removed the Little Shoulder Ghost?"

Chu Qingge's hand froze for half a breath before she replied in an emotionless voice, "I forgot."

Ye Qing: "... *Well, we all forget things sometimes.*

"How many people did you let go, how long were they gone, and which direction have they disappeared to?" Ye Qing asked suddenly.

"Five, they weren't gone for long, and they were headed toward the center." Chu Qingge asked tentatively, "Are you planning to..."

"It's exactly what you think." Ye Qing smirked. "The disciples of the Blood Demon Sect are hopeless criminals anyway, and this is our opportunity to break free from the Little Shoulder Ghost permanently."

Besides that, these people knew he accepted Shangguan Wuwo's inheritance. If they lived long enough to spread the news, he would've gained yet another new enemy.

Sure, there was a high chance they wouldn't recognize him since he had altered his appearance, but he would rather be safe than sorry.

"Come on." Ye Qing dashed down the direction Chu Qingge had pointed him to.

"It's an acceptable plan." Chu Qingge smirked and followed behind him.

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"Dammit! Who the fuck is that bitch? She's unbelievably strong!"

"Yeah. Thank goodness we managed to escape, or she would've killed us all."

"Fuck! Fuck! If it wasn't for her, we would have obtained the founder's inheritance. Fuck!"

"What do we do now? The entire reason we came here is to obtain the founder's inheritance, but now, it was stolen by a thief. How are we going to explain this to the head?"

"Don't worry, I've memorized that bastard's appearance. The head would forgive us so long as we carry the information back to him."

"That's true."

It was at this moment someone asked, "By the way, does anyone know where we are right now?"

"The inner area of the Demon's Tomb. What's wrong?" Someone answered. The guy blanched. "Oh shit! We need to leave immediately! I heard that the inner area of the Demon's Tomb is beyond dangerous! The slightest misstep could cost us our lives!"

"Don't be a chicken. Nothing has happened to us yet, has it?" Another disciple replied mockingly.

As soon as he said this, a strange song suddenly entered their ears:

"White hat, black hat, everyone's a small hat!"

"Red hat, green hat, everyone's a flower hat!"

"Cyan hat, blue hat, everyone's a round hat!"

“Lalala...”

“Ah ah ah...”

“Ya ya ya...”

“Little hat, flower hat, round hat...”

“Everyone’s a beautiful, good hat!”

“Hehehe...”

“Hehehe...”

“Hehehe...”

As the strange song continued, multiple hats flew toward the group from somewhere.

There were colorful hats that were black, white, blue, green and more; and shapely hats that were big or small, square or round. But regardless of their color, shape and size, every hat was glowing slightly like lanterns and singing with a child’s voice.

As the childish singing continued, the hats started bobbing up and down, left and right. They were swaying along with the melody.

Before they knew it, the five Blood Demon Sect disciples started bobbing up and down, left and right together with the tune as well.

Come, let’s shake it together!

This continued for a time until their bodies started flickering between colors all of a sudden. Sometimes they were black, and sometimes they were white. Sometimes they were red, and sometimes they were green.

Then, their body started shrinking—no, compressed by some sort of magical, inexplicable power. Eventually, they transformed into various hats and joined the troupe of hats, singing and dancing as one.

Chapter 286: Ghost Song

“Gulp...”

Ye Qing and Chu Qingge arrived just in time to see the five Blood Demon Sect disciples turning into hats.

There was no gore, no screams, no struggle. They just... transformed into hats as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

From an observer’s perspective though, well. Ye Qing felt a chill shooting from the bottom of his feet all the way to the top of his skull.

It wasn’t like those five Blood Demon Sect disciples were weaklings. They were all late-stage Astral Refiners. However, the Stranger—or was it an Anomaly?—still turned them into hats with almost no effort at all.

Even worse was the fact that at least twenty hats were floating in the sky. How many of them were humans before?

“Uwah!”

Suddenly, Ye Qing heard a baby’s cry behind him. At the same time, a baby with red eyes and a pair of wings manifested into existence. It was approaching Ye Qing when it saw the hats in the sky and abruptly burst into tears. Terrified beyond belief, it slipped into the void and disappeared just like that.

“Was that... the Little Shoulder Ghost? The hats scared off the Little Shoulder Ghost?!”

Clearly, the Little Shoulder Ghost was planning to give him a tap on the shoulder just now. However, the sight of the hats had scared it away.

Just how scary were the hats?

“We need to go.”

Next to Ye Qing, Chu Qingge suddenly blanched as if she recalled something. “We need to go now. To the center!”

She took off in a burst of speed, and Ye Qing was right behind her. Ye Qing had zero intentions of being anywhere close to the hats, though unlike Chu Qingge, he was planning to escape to the outskirts instead of the center. Since the Little Shoulder Ghost, there was no longer any reason for them to stick together.

Ye Qing ultimately changed his mind, however. Judging from Chu Qingge’s bloodless face, she probably knew what those hats were. In that case, he must take her words seriously.

The duo had just made a move when the hats started dancing toward them. They looked slow, but in reality they had covered a long distance in just the blink of an eye. The childish song was growing louder and louder as well.

Ye Qing’s consciousness immediately blurred when the song grew louder. He started feeling the inexplicable desire to dance according to the tune.

“Don’t listen to the song! Seal your hearing and keep a clear head!”

Chu Qingge immediately noticed Ye Qing’s unusual reaction and shouted on top of her lungs. It was enough to jolt Ye Qing back to reality.

“Thank you.” Ye Qing mouthed and sealed his hearing immediately. It was only then he felt much better.

The hats were still gaining on them, however, so he pushed “Illusionist’s Grace” to its limit and dashed to the center of the Mountain of Demons at top speed.

As it turned out, they weren’t the only ones who were being pursued. Ye Qing and Chu Qingge quickly realized that a number of people were also running toward the center of the Mountain of Demons like beaten dogs, and they were all being chased by a certain number of hats.

Worse, the hats’ power seemed to increase after they met up with each other. Sealing their hearing had worked for a time, but over, their countermeasure became useless. It was because the childish

song appeared directly inside their heads as if it had forged some sort of telepathic connection with them.

Those with weaker spirits were unable to withstand the song's corruption for long. One moment they were running, and the next they were swaying left and right. Ye Qing noticed that the time it took for them to transform into all kinds of colorful hats had shortened as well. The weaklings were quickly subsumed into the singing army of hats.

As if that wasn't bad enough, their numbers just kept growing and growing. It was like this whole graveyard was full of hats. Ye Qing could almost believe that the graveyard was really a theater where countless people and hats were dancing to a catchy tune.

He felt neither the joy nor the relaxation he normally felt in a theater, however. In fact, he was a little out of breath.

No one was fighting each other right now. They were all running to the center like their lives depended on it.

Orthodox warriors and unorthodox warriors only glared daggers at each other,

Sworn enemies only scoffed at one another before running off in different directions,

And friends exchanged bitter chuckles as if saying: Yo! You're on the run too?

Right here and now, there was no such thing as orthodoxy or unorthodoxy; grudge or friendship. There was only fast or slow, life or death.

Those with a fast pair of legs would live, and those without would die!

About half an incense stick later, the hats finally stopped singing and came to a stop.

Naturally, everyone else came to a stop as well.

The hats hadn't suddenly found their conscience, of course. No, they had just entered a place where even the hat Strangers were wary of.

Ye Qing scanned his surroundings quickly and quickly discovered that their location didn't have a single gravestone. There was only a massive tree.

It would've been better if he hadn't looked. His and everyone else's face turned deathly white in an instant.

The tree was extremely tall and massive. There were vines stretching down from its branches, and hanging at the end of these vines were bodies. Lots and lots of bodies.

The good news was that the vines weren't wrapped around the bodies. The bad news was that they were piercing right through the skull. Even worse news was the bodies slowly turning around to face the group as if they were watching them as well. It was a spine-chilling moment to put it mildly.

Thankfully, the bodies didn't do anything besides staring at them. Over time, everyone began to relax.

Most *Jianghu* warriors possessed great adaptability.

“Huh? There’s a stele over here!” Someone suddenly shouted. That’s right. A stele, not a gravestone. Ye Qing looked and saw what the man was referring to amidst a bunch of tall, dead grass.

Two lines were engraved to the stele: “Sanctuary of the Mountain of Demons. Keep away.”

Ye Qing rubbed his nose as he began to ponder the words’ meaning.

The sanctuary of the Mountain of Demons probably refers to the center and heart of the Graveyard of Demons. Pretty straightforward.

The second line is even more straightforward. Keep away. Nothing else needs to be said besides that.

Ye Qing rubbed his nose again as he glanced back and forth between the stele and the sea of hats outside. Now this was what they called stuck between a rock and a hard place.

A lot of people shared his sentiment and wore nervous expressions as well.

It was at this moment a young Taoist wearing an Eight Trigram Daoist robe with a yellow dragon sewn to the sleeves spoke up, “Worry not, everyone. Those hats are the Ghost Song, and they will leave once their patience wears thin. We’ll be able to leave when that happens.”

“Ghost Song? What’s a Ghost Song?” Someone asked.

“You don’t even know what a Ghost Song is, and you came to the Demon’s Tomb? You must have a death wish!”

A man with a stern face and carrying a ghost-faced saber scoffed in disdain as soon as the question was asked. The eyes of the skull that made up the saber’s crossguard also lit up and smashed its teeth together to create a strange laugh.

The inquirer looked like he wanted to mouth a retort, but as soon as he caught sight of the man who insulted him, he immediately fell silent. He seemed to be deathly afraid of the man.

It was at this moment a cold voice spoke up, “Ghost Song is a Phenomenon-class Stranger with no fixed shape or form. It loves singing, but anyone who hears its song would become a part of it.”

When Ye Qing looked, he discovered that the speaker was none other than Luo Zhan, one of the Pacification Bureau members Hong Jianglong had brought with him.

The man carrying the ghost-faced saber seemed displeased, but he ultimately didn’t say anything.

Luo Zhan ignored him and continued, “The hats you’re seeing are all a part of the Ghost Song.”

The group broke out in cries of shock, fear, or both. Even Ye Qing couldn’t help but gasp in surprise. He had thought that each hat was an individual Stranger, but Luo Zhan had corrected his misunderstanding.

“The Ghost Song may only be a Phenomenon-class Stranger, but it is extremely difficult to kill it or shake it off. The Ghost Song also possesses multiple forms, and the hats we’re seeing are but one of its many forms. This particular form possesses the power to curse all those who listen to its song into a hat.”

“Some forms of Ghost Song could transform humans into all kinds of livestock, some could afflict them with terrible diseases, some could kill without a trace and more.”

“What... What should we do then?” A terrified warrior asked when he heard this.

“We wait!” Luo Zhan declared. “The Ghost Song can only exist for a certain amount of time. When their time is up, they would automatically disappear into nothing. We only need to wait until then to be safe.”

“Really?” Someone asked suspiciously.

“Hmph! Why are you wasting your breath on these people, Luo Zhan?” The man carrying the ghost-faced saber sneered. “You did them a favor, and they don’t even believe you!”

Luo Zhan replied indifferently, “I speak because I chose to speak. Just the same, it is their choice whether to believe me or not. Not that I care even if they didn’t.”

“...” If you don’t care, then why say anything at all?

The man carrying the ghost-faced saber was Zhong Ji, the “Ghost Saber”. He cultivated a cultivation art called the “Ghost King Sutra”, which warped him into a gloomy, ruthless, and somewhat twisted person. Zhong Ji himself thought that his personality was pretty twisted, but Luo Zhan had proven to be an even stranger man than he was.

As Luo Zhan said, the Ghost Song started fading about half a teatime later. It didn’t fly away or disappear with a poof as Ye qing thought it would, however. Instead, the hats dissolved into colorful fog that converged into a massive, sky-blotting silhouette.

Judging from its curvy figure, it was probably a woman.

The woman started singing a sad, ancient song then. Full of longing and sorrow, it sounded like a tune one might play during a funeral. Despite themselves, tears started sliding down everyone’s cheeks uncontrollably.

Thankfully, the song didn’t seem harmful like the one before. The silhouette and the mournful song eventually disappeared completely.

“Alright. The Ghost Song is gone. If you wish to leave, now is the best time to do so,” The Taoist from before spoke up. “Also, the Strangers and anomalies within the graveyard would be temporarily inactive before and after its appearance. You shouldn’t encounter any danger along the way.”

Chapter 287: Fungus Tree

“You’re not going to leave, Brother Huang Yu?”

Everyone let out a sigh of relief when the Ghost Song was gone, but now that threat was over, they were starting to get funny ideas again.

The young Taoist named Huang Yu smiled but did not respond to their question.

“You’re going to head deeper, aren’t you? Can you tell us what’s inside the center, Brother Huang?” No one here was stupid. They figured out Huang Yu’s plan immediately.

“Brother Huang, this is the Graveyard of Demons. The opportunities in this place are not yours alone to take. Since you hail from a distinguished sect, surely you’re not planning to claim all the profits for yourself, right?”

“He wouldn’t! Brother Huang is the disciple of Trueman Yellow Dragon. He wouldn’t sully his own reputation!”

“Indeed! Brother Huang is a kind, big-hearted man. He would never do such a thing!”

“Hahaha, you’re right.”

It sounded like everyone was praising Huang Yu, but in reality they were forcing him to reveal what he knew about the center of the Graveyard of Demons. If he refused to divulge his secret, then he would surely be attacked by everyone.

“May the heavens’ blessing be with you,” Huang Yu chanted while performing a salute. Despite knowing that the *jianghu* warriors were threatening him, he replied amiably, “I’m not keeping it a secret on purpose. I just don’t want you all to lose your lives.”

“Hahaha! Are you suggesting that the secret is so terrifying that even listening to it might cost us our lives?” A brawny, ferocious-looking man laughed. “Don’t worry! I, Cheng Pu, don’t believe in superstition!”

“Yeah. I’m no one special, but I’m a bold guy. Why don’t you tell me the secret and see if it can actually scare me to death?”

“Yeah, Brother Huang. Just tell us already!”

“Hehe. You mean well, but it looks like everyone think you’re just trying to be selfish, Huang Yu!” A woman wearing a half-transparent veil giggled.

The woman had a comely face and a shapely figure. The fact that her robes were thin and revealing did nothing to stop the flare of lust that everyone felt when they looked at her.

“If you won’t say it, then I’ll say it for you.”

“Past this tree is the true center of the Mountain of Demons, the Guixu. Everyone buried there is a champion of champions who once shaped the world with their might. For example, the ‘Sword Demon’ Gudu Wuxing, the ‘Joy King’ Luo Qianqiu, the ‘Demonic Sovereign of Six Desires’ Yu Wuxin, the ‘Heretical One’ Ying Ruoxu and more.”

Every time she mentioned a name, she would drag it out on purpose as if drawing out the *jianghu* warriors' desires. And it worked. Their breathing grew heavier, and complexion grew redder as they clung onto every word. It was because the names she mentioned were so famous that everyone and their mothers knew about them. They might not be invincible under the heavens, but they were still one of a kind.

For example, the "Sword Demon" Gudu Wuxing was a famous swordsman who was never defeated for as long as he lived. One iron sword was all he needed to triumph over the *jianghu*.

The "Joy King" Luo Qianqiu was a free man who traveled all over the world and got himself involved with all kinds of worldly affairs for fun. He might be no noble, but everyone who knew him thought him as a king of his own right.

The "Heretical One" Ying Ruoxu was a man who did whatever he wanted. There were countless people who hated and resented him to this day, but there were also many who respected and feared him.

Deeply satisfied with the crowd's reactions, the woman continued with a giggle, "The Guixu is the true Graveyard of Demons. The graves we encountered outside came after the Guixu."

"Is she lying or telling the truth?" Ye Qing asked Chu Qingge with a whisper.

"She's lying," Chu Qingge replied without hesitation. "I've never heard of anyone from Yin Mountain Palace entering the Guixu, not to mention that they simply don't possess the strength to do so."

"Just because you haven't heard of it doesn't necessarily mean that it isn't true, does it?" Ye Qing asked suspiciously.

Chu Qingge explained, "The 'Sword Demon' Gudu Wuxing is a member of the Gudu Clan, and he had died in his clan's Swordgrave. Therefore, there is no chance he would be buried in the Guixu."

"The 'Joy King' Luo Qianqiu is really the royal descendant of the previous dynasty, and he once colluded with imperial officials and *jianghu* warriors in hopes of starting a rebellion. He was later captured and imprisoned in the Frozen Pond of Sky Prison for life. He was cremated after he died, and his ashes were scattered across the mountains and rivers. Naturally, Luo Qianqiu didn't have a grave or a cenotaph, so how could he have a grave in the Demon's Tomb?"

Ye Qing watched Chu Qingge closely as if trying to discern if she was lying. *If what you said is true, then why is everyone believing her?*

Once again, it was like Chu Qingge could read his mind. "None of this information were publicized, so it's perfectly normal for these ignorant people to know nothing about it. I don't know if the Demon Sovereign of Six Desires and the Heretical One are buried here though."

At this point, Ye Qing was almost certain that Chu Qingge was telling him the truth, which meant that that seductive woman was lying out of her ass to fan the flames. What a terrible person!

“And why are you telling them about all this, Yu Feifei? It’s not like anyone can enter the Guixu, much less these useless pieces of garbage,” Zhong Ji sneered.

Yu Feifei pulled a strand of hair behind her ear and giggled. “Because they want to hear about it. It’s that simple. As for whether they possess the courage and strength to head in, that’s not my problem, is it?”

“You have too much time on your hands!” Zhong Ji scoffed. He then strode right past the stele and into the Guixu, disappearing into the darkness in just the blink of an eye.

“Hmph! And here I thought it would actually be dangerous. Where’s the danger?”

“Yeah. Why would anyone be afraid to enter the Guixu if there’s no danger?”

“Hehe, you guys keep chatting. I’m heading in first.”

“Don’t even think about it, bud!”

“Here I come, seniors!”

It was like someone had unclogged the rock sitting atop their fountain of greed and desire when Zhong Ji had entered the center of the Mountain of Demons safely, not to mention that they could never resist the names “Sword Demon”, “Joy King”, “Demon Sovereign of Six Desires” and more.

If they could obtain their inheritance or even just a speck of their possessions, they would be set for life.

They weren’t stupid, of course. They knew that there was likely no chance they would actually obtain what they wished for. Even so, they would rather shoot for the moon than not at all. After all, you miss one hundred percent of the shots you don’t take.

And who could say they would never succeed? One had to get stupidly lucky at least a couple of times in life, right?

For the sake of their future, for the sake of that what if, they were willing to gamble with their lives.

“Fools!” Chu Qingge commented.

“Greed is a powerful motivator!” Ye Qing shrugged. He completely understood the *jianghu* warriors’ sentiment if nothing else.

Chu Qingge replied with indifferent eyes, “In this case, it’s going to cost them their lives.”

“What do you mean?” Ye Qing asked, but he got his answer before Chu Qingge could say anything. A group of *jianghu* warriors had just reached the tree when suddenly, they scattered about in panic. It was because the bodies hanging on the vines suddenly opened their arms and caught the nearest warriors in a deadly embrace.

No one here was a weakling—those who were already dead—but those who were caught couldn’t break free no matter how hard they struggled. Even scarier was the fact that the corpses

grew countless long, branching, filamentous fungal threads that crawled into their body through the pores, mouth, eyes, ears and more.

It wasn't long before fungus of all kinds burst out of their bodies. There were white mushrooms, red mushrooms, tree fungus, lion's mane, and even lingzhi. It was like they had transformed into a mushroom incubator.

The *jianghu* warriors still weren't dead, however. They were still struggling to break free. But the fiercer their struggle, the faster and more colorful the fungus grew.

When all of the fungus had reached full maturity, they swelled bigger and bigger until they abruptly exploded into clouds of blood red spores. As the spores touched the surviving *jianghu* warriors' skin or entered their body through their mouth and nostrils, fungus began growing on their bodies as well.

In just a dozen breaths or so, almost everyone was completely covered in fungus. It looked just like a mushroom farm.

"Gulp..."

To say that Ye Qing was horrified by this turn of events would be an understatement. The one silver lining was that the red spores wasn't spreading in their direction. More accurately, it looked like some sort of strange power was keeping it from spreading. If that wasn't the case, he would've run off a long time ago.

It was at this moment Chu Qingge said, "It's not over yet."

As if on cue, countless vines dropped down from the tree branch and pierced through the *jianghu* warriors' skull. Then, it pulled them into the air. Their struggles eventually ceased, and the mushrooms and fungus on their body stopped growing as well. The way they glowed slightly in the dark was both eerie and beautiful.

"That explains why the previous corpses were covered in mushrooms." Ye Qing exclaimed in realization as he recalled the withered fungus he saw on the dead bodies.

"This tree is most likely the Fungus Tree, a rare Stranger," said Chu Qingge after looking away from the body and examining the tree for a bit.

"This is the Fungus Tree? I've read about it, but this is the first time I saw it in person," Ye Qing exclaimed in realization.

The Fungus Tree was a Stranger that indiscriminately transformed all living creatures within its range be it flora or fauna into its host.

It was said that the fungus growing on the Fungus Tree was actually edible. In fact, it was the natural food for those people who lived in places where food sources were scarce.

However, those Fungus Trees were usually as big as a shrub only. A Fungus Tree that was over fifty meters tall and had a massive tree trunk was practically unheard of.

“These mushrooms should be pretty delicious!” Ye Qing said suddenly while rubbing his nose.

Chu Qingge replied matter-of-factly, “They’re both delicious and nutritious.”

“The stronger the host, the better the fungus it grows. In fact, these mushrooms are as effective as certain medicines and food, if not more so. It’s why Tai An and some dignitaries privately raised Fungus Trees to farm their mushrooms.”

Ye Qing looked tempted. “Now I’m hungry.”

Luo Zhan: “...”

Huang Yu: “...”

Everyone else: “...”

Are you guys serious?

If you are, are you guys alright in the head?

“As you can see, not everyone can enter this place.” Luo Zhan glanced at those who lagged behind the initial group and so was lucky enough not to get caught in the death trap before adding, “Do as you see fit.”

With that, Luo Zhan strode into the Guixu as well. He didn’t forget to give Chu Qingge an imperceptible nod when he was walking past her.

Chapter 288: The Giant Carries A Mountain

“Is he suicidal?” The survivors were shocked by Luo Zhan’s action, but they were even more shocked by what happened next. It was because the Fungus Tree hadn’t attacked him after he entered its range. In fact, the vines actually moved the corpses away and opened up a path for him.

“What’s going on?” Everyone looked stunned when Luo Zhan finally stepped out of sight.

“Hehe, I’m heading in as well! Have fun!” Yu Feifei, the woman who had masterminded the slaughter, bade everyone goodbye before entering the Guixu as well. Just like Luo Zhan, she wasn’t attacked by the Fungus Tree.

“What’s going on? Why aren’t they attacked by the Fungus Tree?” The group subconsciously looked to Huang Yu for answers.

As expected, Huang Yu performed a salute and answered their question, “Guixu is the place where many seniors and able people are resting in peace. Naturally, not everyone is allowed to enter the place.”

“The stele says to keep away, but it only refers to those who lack the necessary karma and destiny.”

“Karma and destiny?” Ye Qing rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

Huang Yu explained, “Buddhists speak of karma, Taoists speak of destiny, and even the common people speak of bonds both loose and tight. If you wish to enter the Guixu, then you must possess the necessary karma or destiny with a senior who’s resting inside the place. In simpler terms, you must be related to them.”

“For example, someone who possesses a senior’s relic can enter this place. If you are a senior’s descendant or have received some sort of inheritance from them in the past, then you may enter the place as well.”

“Since those people weren’t tied to the Guixu in karma or destiny, they were killed. It’s as simple as that.”

“To demand something that isn’t destined for you is to invite tragedy.”

The crowd was silent for a moment. Then, someone yelled at Huang Yu accusingly, “Why didn’t you tell us this sooner? Those people wouldn’t have died if you had!”

Huang Yu’s smile didn’t falter in the slightest. “Would you believe me had I told you about it?”

Some people opened their mouths, but no sound came out. It was because no one could refute his point. Not only would they disbelieve him, they would even think that Huang Yu was lying to claim all the spoils for himself.

Such was human nature. Loyal advice jarred on the ears, and humans wouldn’t truly believe anything until they had experienced something with their own body.

“Also, I had warned you all beforehand. You just didn’t believe me,” Huang Yu put the final nail in the coffin. “So you have no grounds to resent or hate me.”

“May the heavens’ blessing be with you.”

With that, Huang Yu turned around and stepped into the Gui Xu as well.

After Huang Yu was gone, Chu Qingge looked at Ye Qing and said, “Come. It’s our turn now.”

“Er...” Ye Qing blinked. “I think I’ll stay here. I don’t have a death wish, you see?”

Ye Qing was pretty sure that neither he, the interdimensional interloper, nor the original Ye Qing had anything to do with the seniors in this place whatsoever.

“Don’t worry. I am here.”

Chu Qingge explained, “Just stay close to me and don’t go further than one-third of a meter, and the Fungus Tree wouldn’t attack you.”

“Huh? Are you sure?” Ye Qing was surprised to hear that.

Chu Qingge confirmed. “Yes. So long as you stay within one-third of a meter of me, the Fungus Tree would treat you like an extension of myself and refrain from attacking you.”

“But of course, I won’t press you if you truly have no desire to enter the center.”

Ye Qing considered this for a moment before nodding. “In that case, thank you.”

Of course he didn’t want to miss the opportunity. Even if he got nothing out of this venture, he would rather have lived through the experience than otherwise.

“Let’s go then.”

After Chu Qingge took the lead, Ye Qing fell in behind her. One third of a meter wasn’t a long distance at all, so Ye Qing was forced to walk almost directly behind her. They were so close he could smell her elegant, quiet[1] scent clearly.

Right before they would enter the Fungus Tree’s range, three *jianghu* warriors abruptly raced forward to attack them.

Heh. I knew they would do this.

As if they had predicted this would happen, Ye Qing turned left to face the man who was targeting him, and Chu Qingge turned right to fight the two warriors targeting her.

Ye Qing’s opponent was a short but muscular early-stage Spirit Purifier. A hint of disdain flickered in his eyes when Ye Qing was reaching out to grab him.

His name was Lei Meng, and he was born with supernatural strength. An elder of the Mountain Mover Sect took him in as a direct disciple and taught him their ultimate art, the ‘Moving Mountains’.

“Moving Mountains” was a torturous body-tempering cultivation art that, at the adept level, could imbue the practitioner with the power to move mountains and seas. It was a cultivation art with massive potential.

Of course, Lei Meng was far from reaching the adept level, but he was still far stronger than any one of his peers. He was an outstanding warrior in the *jianghu* of Tian Yong, and he was a body-tempering warrior with one dragon elephant strength. He was nicknamed the “King of Moving Mountains” because of this.

This was why Lei Meng was skeptical. Instead of blasting him with astral qi or something, Ye Qing was clearly planning to challenge him to a bout of strength. It was like lighting a lantern in a toilet—committing suicide. Not that he minded, of course.

Lei Meng hadn’t heard Ye Qing and Chu Qingge’s conversation, but since the young man dared to enter the Guixu, he must possess “something” that would allow him to enter the Guixu. If not, he could still use his body to achieve the same outcome. If he succeeded, then the opportunities, inheritances, treasures and more were all his.

“Hahaha! You only have your own stupidity to blame, boy!” He taunted.

From his perspective, Ye Qing was just a late-stage Astral Refiner, while most of them were Spirit Purifiers. If he was Ye Qing, he would’ve waited until everyone was gone or distracted before slipping into the Guixu. Instead, this guy was waltzing right in like he owned the place. Just how audacious was he?

Do you think you’re Luo Zhan or Huang Yu?

You should’ve known this would happen!

The other two warriors were most likely plotting the same thing even though their target was the young woman. She too was a Spirit Purifier, but she didn't really look very strong.

Right before their hands would touch one another, Lei Meng abruptly changed his move and grabbed Ye Qing's wrist instead.

"Get over here!" He roared and pulled Ye Qing to his side—or at least, he tried to. Not only did Ye Qing remain exactly where he was, he was the one who staggered a little.

"Hmph. So you're strong. But are you stronger than me?!"

Lei Meng grunted and unleashed his full strength. The ground beneath him shattered as he pulled Ye Qing with all his might.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice.

Lei Meng's face turned bright red with exertion, and his legs sank all the way to his knees. That was how much strength he was exerting. However, Ye Qing still didn't budge an inch. To Lei Meng's senses, Ye Qing was like a massive mountain that he couldn't move no matter what he tried, which was ironic considering his learned martial art.

"Is that it? Did you forget to eat dinner before entering the Graveyard of Demons? Who do you think you're robbing with such pathetic strength? A baby?"

By now, Lei Meng noticed that he had gravely misjudged his opponent. He immediately let go of Ye Qing's wrist and tried to retreat, but of course Ye Qing wasn't going to let him. As soon as Lei Meng let go, Ye Qing grabbed his wrist and did a little tug, saying, "Don't be sad! Here, I'll treat you to some mushrooms. They're very tasty and completely free."

An unstoppable strength like nothing Lei Meng had ever felt uprooted him from the ground. The next thing he knew, he was flying through the air and sprouting all kinds of mushrooms and fungus on his body.

It smells delicious.

That was Lei Meng's final thought before his consciousness vanished, and he fell into eternal darkness.

Meanwhile, Chu Qingge had dealt with her opponents as well. If Ye Qing's method of dealing with Lei Meng was coarse and brutish, then hers was elegant and comely. She unleashed her Stunning Dragon Fist, Qilin Palm, Rainbow Phoenix Step and more and successfully murdered the two warriors without breaking a sweat. One warrior had his heart shattered, and the other had a hole in his head. They were completely and utterly dead.

"Let's go."

After taking out the two enemies, Chu Qingge dusted her clothes with a finger and resumed her stride. Neither the anger of being ambushed nor the arrogance of killing her ambushers could be spotted from her face. It was like she had just squashed a pair of ants.

More accurately, everyone present was an ant to Chu Qingge.

Ye Qing shot the crowd one last look. They still looked tempted, but no one dared to do a thing after the ruthless display of power. He shrugged and followed Chu Qingge into the Guixu.

This was the *jianghu*; the strong feeding on the weak!

And so Ye Qing followed Chu Qingge past the stele and the Fungus Tree. As soon as he passed through the darkness, he felt a chill and a sudden mental shudder.

As it turned out, the air in the Guixu was filled with thick, refined demonic qi. In fact, they were thick enough to transform into all sorts of mirages such as mountains, seas, clouds, palaces and more gorgeous sceneries.

Strangely, the demonic qi didn't feel evil or tainted at all. In fact, Ye Qing could sense a sliver of profoundness and Dao from them.

One might say that the demonic qi outside was but a drop in the true ocean that resided in the Guixu.

"This place is practically paradise to a follower of the Dark Ways!" Ye Qing sighed. Seriously, he was certain that a demonic warrior could save years of hard work just cultivating here and doing nothing. It was a shame he wasn't one.

"Keep a clear head and don't let your guard down. The demonic qi here is too rich and pure. It might seem harmless, but it can influence your mind and soul without you noticing. If you're not careful, you would become possessed by demonic thoughts and fall into the Dark Ways."

Chu Qingge manifested a circle of light that pushed the demonic qi away before continuing, "In fact, there were many people who were corrupted by demonic qi and possessed by demonic thoughts after entering the Demon's Tomb. They might not realize it at first, but once they return to the real world, the demonic thoughts would feed on their desires and experiences and eventually coerce them off the right path."

"I understand. Thank you for the warning," replied Ye Qing. In fact, he had visualized the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method" and protected his mind the second he entered the Guixu. His relaxed expression was just a ruse.

He didn't do anything to protect his body though. Right now, his body was like a natural furnace with the sun at its core. Any demonic qi that invaded his body would be refined and uprooted instantly.

Chu Qingge nodded and resumed her stride. Ye Qing followed closely behind her while scanning his surroundings carefully.

For a time, they didn't encounter any grave or gravestone. They didn't run into Luo Zhan, Huang Yu and everyone else who had entered before them either. The place was deathly silent save for the ever-changing mirages. In just a dozen steps or so, Ye Qing had witnessed the collapse of mountains, the drying of rivers and seas, all manners of clouds, the sunrise, the moonfall, and timelapses that stretched across centuries, millennia, and maybe even eons.

Besides that, he also saw all kinds of unlikely yet magnificent sceneries such as floating forests, reverse-flowing rivers, flying mountains and more.

Rumble rumble rumble...

Suddenly, a series of loud rumbles interrupted the short moment of peace. The mirages shuddered unnaturally, and the clouds scattered into nothing. When the duo looked, they saw an unbelievably tall giant carrying two mountains on his shoulders and running to heavens-know-where.

Chapter 289: Hill In Lake, The Holy Son Climbs A Hill

The giant was baring its upper body and wearing animal skin underneath his waist. Easily over fifty meters tall and extremely muscular, he was the definition of animalistic beauty and strength.

The giant was carrying two steep and tall mountains on its shoulders, but the way he was moving about with ease, Ye Qing would've been convinced if someone told him that he was carrying a pair of bricks. They might as well weigh nothing to him.

The giant was running swiftly. He crossed over two hundred meters of distance every time he took a step. The ground shook, and any hill or river unfortunate enough to stand in his way were crushed into bits. Demonic qi spilled all over the place.

At some point, the giant sucked in a deep breath, and the demonic qi flowed into his chest like a river. Speaking of chest, it sounded like a thunderclap—no, a series of thunderclaps every time his heart thudded. It was an experience unlike any other.

Throughout this time, the giant never stopped in his tracks. He kept running with the two mountains on his shoulders, stepping over hills and rivers.

Then, the giant was gone just like that. The only proof of his existence was the thunderous rumbles of his heart and the demonic qi he scattered.

“What just happened, Miss Chu?” Ye Qing asked a little nervously while licking his lips.

Chu Qingge looked at the spot where the giant had disappeared and answered seriously, “That is a wisp of martial consciousness the champion left behind while he was still alive. Or more accurately, it is a physical manifestation of their martial truth.”

“A manifestation of their martial truth?” Ye Qing repeated. Martial truths were supposed to be an intangible thing, but the giant had been perfectly real if only for a moment. Just how strong was the giant when he was still alive?

“Assuming I wasn't mistaken, that giant was probably the one they called the Mountain Bearer!”

Chu Qingge slowly delved into the Mountain Bearer's history, “Six hundred years ago, a man named Dan Yue had come across the ancient Pangus'[1] ‘Pan Emperor Mountain Bearing Sutra’ by accident, a cultivation art that specifically honed the body. As a result, he was able to hone his body almost to its ultimate limit. He could become as small as a mosquito that could slip through the smallest cracks, or he could become a giant that could bear mountains on its shoulder. Hence, he was nicknamed the Mountain Bearer.”

“The Mountain Bearer was immeasurably powerful when he was still alive. Although he was a free spirit who did whatever he wanted and so was denounced by the orthodoxy and labeled as a heretic, he wasn’t actually an evil or vicious person. He once moved the two mountains, Kunchi and Yusui away to make way for the people, dropped a mountain on a river to alter its path and prevent a great flood that would’ve flooded many settlements, and more.”

“Mountain Bearer?” Ye Qing’s eyes lit up. He too was a body-tempering warrior, so he knew better than most just how much strength was needed to lift an entire mountain. He might possess the strength of five dragon elephants right now, but compared to the Mountain Bearer? Let’s just say that the giant could still squish him like an ant.

“You seem pretty strong. Would you like to try obtaining his inheritance?” Chu Qingge suggested after looking Ye Qing up and down.

Ye Qing looked tempted, but he ultimately shook his head and said, “Nah. The risk is too high.”

There was a non-zero chance that the guy might accidentally crush him underfoot, not to mention that he literally couldn’t catch up to the giant even if he moved at top speed.

“It was just a suggestion,” Chu Qingge replied indifferently. It was Ye Qing’s choice whether to heed her suggestion or not.

“Anyway, this is where we say goodbye, Brother Ye. I’ll see you later.”

Ye Qing: “...” *Nani the fuck? Did she just... dump me?*

Chu Qingge explained as if she could read Ye Qing’s mind, “I’m carrying a token that would lead me to a certain senior. The reason I came to the Demon’s Tomb is to obtain his inheritance. If you follow me, this might turn out to be a fruitless journey for you. Besides, it would be inconvenient for us both.”

“Everyone has their own destiny, so it’d be best for everyone if we split up here.”

Ye Qing smiled. It was unbelievable how forthright she was, but he didn’t dislike her personality. On the contrary, it was quite refreshing and welcoming.

“Oh right. This is for you.” Chu Qingge produced a palm-sized, luopan-like object[2].

“This is a Star Compass. It is a must-have for you to navigate this place safely.”

“What about you?” Ye Qing asked. He didn’t really need the Star Compass because he had the Annon Sutra.

“I have a Star Compass of my own, of course.”

Chu Qingge handed the Star Compass to Ye Qing and instructed, “One more thing. The Graveyard of Demons appears during the night and disappears during the day. If you don’t leave while it’s still nighttime, then you will be stuck here for eternity. Never forget the time no matter what you do.”

“Understood. Thank you for everything,” said Ye Qing with a salute. He didn’t think Chu Qingge was heartless or anything for leaving him behind. Strictly speaking, they were barely acquaintances who knew each other for an hour or two at most. If she owed him anything, she had already repaid it all by bringing him to the Guixu, and she didn’t. He would be abusing her good will if he insisted that they stayed together, not to mention that he already knew that this was going to happen eventually.

“May you get what you wish for, Miss Chu,” Ye Qing said smilingly.

“Thank you. Goodbye.” Chu Qingge gave him a wave and went away just like that. She truly was a free and decisive soul.

“Did you allow your lower head to take over you, boy? I can’t believe you would come to such a place! We need to leave immediately!”

As soon as Chu Qingge was gone, the Fog Demon ranted, “Come on! It’s not too late yet!”

Ye Qing shrugged. “It will be fine. Also, don’t you think it’s a shame to leave without having explored at least some parts of this place?”

“You...” The Fog Demon was so furious it couldn’t speak for a time. “Are you actually suicidal?”

Ye Qing smirked. “Relax. If it looks like I’m going to die, I promise I’ll take you to the grave with me.”

“Hmph.” As irritated as the Fog Demon might be, it could only obey Ye Qing’s whims.

With a thought, Ye Qing dissipated the mist surrounding him. The Boundless Mara Buddha flashed, and the Fog Demon was abruptly sealed inside the Strange Artifact.

This was a restriction he had specifically requested while the Fog Demon was being added to the Boundless Mara Buddha. It prevented the Stranger from perceiving the outside world and more importantly, his secrets.

Although he had signed an Oath of Burden with the Fog Demon and could kill the Stranger with a single thought if he wanted to, there was no such thing as too much caution.

This was especially true regarding the Annon Sutra. This was a secret he must never reveal to anyone.

After sealing the Fog Demon, Ye Qing took out the Annon Sutra to ask if there was any opportunity for him in the Guixiu. If the answer was yes, he didn’t mind giving it a go. If not, then he would leave immediately. There was no need to risk his life unnecessarily.

Normally, he kept the Annon Sutra tucked inside his shirt. He was just about to unfurl it when suddenly, he was struck by a deep sense of unease. It was almost as if something bad might happen if he continued with the action. He might die, he might lose something that was incredibly precious to him, or he might suffer some sort of tragic fate. In any case, nothing good would come from unfurling the Annon Sutra now.

Ye Qing immediately tucked the Annon Sutra back under his shirt. It was only then the deep sense of unease disappeared.

Clearly, the strange unease was a warning from the Annon Sutra.

The Annon Sutra's origin was a mystery just like the Guixu, and there were countless martial consciousness, fragments of truth, and even soul fragments in this place. Now that he thought about it, it was possible that using the Annon Sutra might attract a strange, powerful, unstoppable existence to him.

"Foo..."

Ye Qing exhaled deeply before releasing the Fog Demon from its restriction. As soon as the Stranger appeared, it let out a cackle. "Were you doing something sneaky, boy?"

"No? It was a punishment because you didn't know when to shut up!" Ye Qing changed the subject, "Anyway, cut the bullshit and keep an eye out for any danger."

Hmph. Mark my words, I will consume your soul and uncover all of your secrets one day!

The Fog Demon hmphed inside his head knowing that Ye Qing was lying to his face. But of course, he didn't even dare to say it to the young man's face or force him to reveal his secret. After all, his life was literally in Ye Qing's hand.

Ye Qing couldn't read the Fog Demon's mind, but even if he could, he wouldn't have paid its foolish thoughts any heed. He randomly picked a direction and strode toward the unknown.

Since he couldn't use the Annon Sutra, he decided to explore the periphery of the Guixu. If he got something out of this, then all was well. If not, then he would book it immediately. It was a good plan.

He had just taken a few steps when the Fog Demon suddenly cried, "What a huge lake! Wait, no, it's just a mirage made of demonic qi."

Its warning was unnecessary because Ye Qing's eyes were no less worse than its. The thick demonic qi had come together to form a huge lake that was calm on the surface—it looked as flat and still as a river—but churning at the bottom.

There was also a spiral-shaped, upside down hill inside the lake. The bottom of the hill was sticking to the surface, and the top of the hill was pointed toward the lake bottom.

Strangely, the hill was wrapped in thick, large chains that glowed darkly in the water. It seemed to be some sort of shackle.

There was also a temple at the peak of the hill. He could vaguely see an emaciated monk sitting crosslegged inside the temple.

The Fog Demon spoke up again, "Boy, I think someone is attempting to climb that hill."

It was true. In fact, when Ye Qing saw the climber's face, he couldn't help but exclaim in surprise, "That's the Holy Son of Maitreya!"

There was a row of stairs leading toward the temple, and considering the Holy Son's strength, he should have zero problems making his way there. In reality, he was moving at a snail's pace as if he was carrying a mountain or pushing through some sort of invisible barrier.

Every time he climbed a step, the demonic qi in the lake would churn, and the chains surrounding the hills would shake violently.

Is that temple where his opportunity lies? Ye Qing guessed.

Although his footsteps were slow, the Holy Son of Maitreya was slowly but surely approaching the peak. The closer he got, the harder the demonic qi stirred, and the more violent the chains shook.

“Wait... that’s not a hill! That’s—”

When the “hill” started shaking, Ye Qing abruptly realized that it was a hill at all. It was... a giant snail that was shaped like a hill!

The spiraling hill he saw was really the shell, and the snail’s head was hidden within it. That was why he and the Fog Demon thought it was a hill at the beginning.

The Holy Son’s action seemed to anger the snail because its head abruptly reached out of its shell and attempted to smash the temple built atop of its shell. It was like a second hill had grown out of the original “hill”.

Unfortunately the chains were preventing it from reaching the temple. No matter how hard the snail struggled, it just couldn’t break free no matter what.

The temple and the emaciated monk inside the temple were keeping it suppressed.

Chapter 290: The Incense of Fortune Can’t Be Lit!?

Ooooooooooooo...

A long and futile struggle later, the snail finally switched up its tactic. A strange energy spread across the lake bottom as the snail began secreting some sort of thick, slimy fluid.

The slimy fluid transformed into countless tentacles and reached out for both the temple and the Holy Son of Maitreya. But as soon as its tentacles made contact with the temple, a ripple of golden light immediately melted it all into pitch black goo. The snail wailed in pain as the goo rained from above.

Angry and in pain, the snail kept secreting more slime and creating more tentacles. The form of the tentacles was growing increasingly eldritch as well. They surged toward the temple and the Holy Son of Maitreya from every direction.

“Amitabha”

It was at this moment the old, emaciated monk inside the temple joined his hands in prayer. A Buddha appeared above him and shone as brilliantly as the sun itself.

The Buddha was none other than Vairocana of the Five Tathāgatas. His brilliant light dissolved the sea of tentacles and even evaporated the lake of demonic qi in one go. For a time, not a trace of impurity or darkness could be found in that area. There was only light and pure air. It was like a mini Kingdom of Buddha.

The snail writhed in pain as its tentacles, slime and body rotted under the power of the all-encompassing light. A frustrated roar later, the snail ultimately retreated back into its shell.

After the snail was gone, the turmoil underneath the lake finally subsided. The light faded, and demonic qi filled up the lake once more.

The “hill” was the same, the temple was the same, and the old monk was the same as well.

There was one small but notable difference though. A young monk was now standing in front of the old monk and saluting him respectfully.

Ye Qing wasn’t done watching, but the old monk suddenly turned his head and stared straight into his eyes. The next thing he knew, he felt like he was staring into the sun itself. He flinched in pain as tears poured out of his tear ducts profusely.

By the time the pain disappeared, and Ye Qing could open his eyes again, he discovered that both the “hill” and the temple were nowhere to be found.

“I just want to watch, man! What a petty old monk!”

Obviously, the old monk was the one who blinded him and made the snail and the temple go poof somehow. He wondered if the old monk was still alive, or if it was just a remnant of his consciousness. He also wondered why a monk would reside in the Guixu. This was the *Demon’s Tomb* after all. Surely there were better places for him to bury his weary bones? In any case, it wasn’t important.

“Hmm? Why do I feel so itchy all of a sudden?”

Ye Qing was just about to take his leave when suddenly, he was struck by an itchy sensation. When he attempted to scratch the itch, he realized in shock that there was a large bulge in his neck. He had no idea when or how it got there. Even stranger was the fact that it kept growing and shrinking in intervals. It was also wiggling back and forth as if something was trying to push out of his skin.

“What the fuck is this!?”

Ye Qing had a very, very bad feeling about this. He immediately clenched his neck muscles in an attempt to crush whatever the hell it was into bits.

It was futile though. Either the strange object was tougher than he thought, or some sort of strange energy was preventing him from exerting his strength on it.

Right now, he was so strong that he frightened even himself sometimes, but now he was balked by a simple bulge. It was how he knew he was in deep shit.

Next, Ye Qing awakened his internal energies and attempted to refine the bulge with his body. Unfortunately, it didn’t work either.

Not only that, he could feel the bulge growing bigger and bigger. It was to the point where he felt a hint of weight behind his neck.

Ye Qing hesitated for a moment but knew drastic measures had to be taken. His eyes grew flinty as he grabbed the bulge with his right hand and ripped it right off his neck.

“Gah!”

Ye Qing gasped as an entire chunk of his neck was ripped off as well, but there was no time to waste. He immediately squeezed the object in his hand with all his might.

The outcome was as expected as it was disappointing. Despite his prodigious strength, he was unable to put even a dent on it, much less crush it.

Since it was impossible to crush, Ye Qing decided to change his tactic. He attempted to burn it with the Burning Wind.

As his own flesh and blood turned into ash, he finally saw the object he was holding for what it was. It was a snail that looked exactly the same as the giant snail in the lake down to its very pattern. It was just a million times smaller than before.

The Burning Wind could supposedly burn anything and everything, but the snail looked perfectly fine. Not only that, it was stretching a little as if it was enjoying a sauna bath. At the same time, it stared at Ye Qing with its pitch black eyes as if mocking him for his impotence.

Ye Qing: "... *The fuck you looking at? Look at me some more, and I'm gonna...*

Despite his irritation, there was nothing he could do against the snail. He could neither crush it, boil it, or burn it to death. Moreover, it looked exactly the same as the giant snail in the lake bottom. He was one hundred percent certain that this mini snail was either its offspring or its body double.

There was only one thing he could do then. Without hesitation, Ye Qing moved his hand back and tossed the snail back to whence it came; the lake.

"And don't come back!"

That wasn't all. Ye Qing immediately turned in the opposite direction of the lake and dashed off using Illusionist's Grace at full speed. *I might not be able to harm it, but surely I can get the fuck away from it?*

He was gone in the blink of an eye.

Dozens of breaths later, a palm-sized snail slowly climbed onto the lakeshore and looked in the direction where Ye Qing had run off to, eyes flashing with enigmatic emotion and intent. Then, it slowly chased after Ye Qing. Seriously, it was so slow that it was only a little faster than a regular snail.

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"Hmm? Why is there a snail here?"

It was at this moment a man appeared next to the lake and noticed the snail. He sneered, "How slow you are."

In response, the snail glanced at the guy with clear disdain.

"Huh! It's a snail with a personality!" The man exclaimed with a raised eyebrow. Then, he stomped down on the snail and even turned his foot back and forth as if to make sure that the snail would be crushed completely.

A few seconds later, the man finally withdrew his foot and walked away. He never even bothered to check if the snail was still alive.

As he was walking, he suddenly felt an itchy sensation behind his neck. He felt a big bulge but thought that it was just a particularly huge mosquito bite or something. He continued on his way after scratching the itch.

But over time, his neck felt heavier and heavier, and the bulge grew bigger and bigger as well. He tried everything he knew but was unable to crush the bulge.

Eventually, the bulge grew so heavy that his head was drooping, and his back was bent. The bulge itself had become bigger than a human's head. It was as if the man had grown a second head.

The man kept trekking forward despite his condition. His eyes grew dimmer and dimmer until finally, he died.

His body was still moving, however. While carrying a big bulge behind his neck, he slowly but surely chased after Ye Qing...

.....

"Phew... I should be safe now, right?" Ye Qing exhaled heavily after coming to a stop. He had been running at top speed for a good few minutes.

It shouldn't be able to catch up to me. It's not its true body, and it's just a snail.

"I think so. As far as I can tell, there's nothing behind us," The Fog Demon replied.

It was only then Ye Qing let out a sigh of relief. "Do you know what the hell is that thing?"

The Fog Demon replied in a severe tone, "No. Not only have I never seen such a Stranger before, I don't even know when or how it made its way into your body. How strange!"

"In other words, you're useless," Ye Qing complained.

The Fog Demon rolled its eyes. *Says the guy who ran away like a beaten dog?* "The snail's most likely related to that giant snail that's suppressed under that lake. I would urge you to be careful and keep your eyes to yourself."

"You don't fucking say?" Ye Qing retorted and rolled his eyes right back at the Fog Demon. Can't a man watch a show anymore?

The Fog Demon egged Ye Qing again, "Also, and I do wish you'll listen to my advice this time, but this is no place for little ol' you or me. The sooner you get out of this place, the better it is for all of us!"

If Ye Qing died, then it died. It was afraid for its life to say the least.

"Eh. Just a little longer!" Ye Qing shrugged. The snail was eerie, but it wasn't so dangerous that he must evacuate the place as soon as possible. At the very least, escaping it was more than doable.

Ye Qing tossed the matter regarding the snail behind his head and began searching the area for his opportunity once more. That said, the earlier encounter warned him that the Guixu was even stranger and more dangerous than the graveyard outside. One mistake, and he might not live to see another day. That was why he was on full alert even though he didn't look like it.

Hmm, it seems very inefficient to roam aimlessly and pray that I would stumble onto something... oh right. I can light another Incense of Fortune.

Ye Qing's heart ached—he only had six Incense of Fortunes, and he had already used three—but he ultimately produced an Incense of Fortune from his Nature's Shell and lit it up.

He was planning to make more as soon as he got home. After all, the Incense of Fortune was exceedingly useful in certain cases. In fact, it saved his worthless life not long ago.

“Brother Incense, it's all up to you now.” Ye Qing raised the Incense of Fortune and prayed in all four directions. “Please grant me your blessing!”

As soon as he said this, the Incense of Fortune... went out.

Ye Qing: “...” *This place can't be that cursed, can it? It won't even let me use the Incense of Fortune?*

Ye Qing frowned and tried lighting it again. However, the flame went out practically the next second.

This time though, Ye Qing found breaking out in cold sweat. The Incense of Fortune wasn't working not because there was some sort of restriction in the Guixu, but because it was snuffed out. It was like someone standing right behind him and blew it out in a single breath!

A terrible fear shot up his spine and spread to every corner of his body as soon as he thought this. Gulping, he abruptly unleashed his Burning Wind in every direction and threw an elbow strike behind him like a revolving hammer.

Whoosh!

Ye Qing's expression only turned uglier, however. It was because he hadn't hit anyone. It was almost as if there had never been anyone behind him.

“I'm not paranoid... right?” Ye Qing muttered.

As if on cue, a low, raspy voice stuttered behind him, “Kekeke... have we got everyone we need?”