

## Stranger 481

### Chapter 481: Deadly Mantra

“Where did that corpse take me to?”

Ye Qing’s eyebrows were locked tight as he scanned his surroundings with his demonic thought. Thankfully, he couldn’t sense any danger within the room.

He was unable to poke his demonic thought beyond the boundaries of the room, however. Whatever this bluestone was, it could insulate his demonic thought and prevent him from sensing beyond.

Besides that, Ye Qing could sense a mysterious power permeating the room. He couldn’t make heads or tails of it, but it was profound in a way that was beneficial toward one’s meditation and cultivation.

Obviously, Ye Qing was in no mood to cultivate right now, and he wouldn’t be until he was sure he was safe. A brief moment of hesitation later, he gingerly reached out and grabbed the door handle.

The second he pulled open the door, every hair on his body suddenly stood on end. His senses were warning him that something terrible would happen if he so much as poked his toes out of the threshold.

He hesitated again, but he ultimately steeled his resolve and walked forward. As soon as he stepped out of the room, a terrible chill gripped his body, and a Buddha abruptly appeared in the distance.

The Buddha had three heads and six arms, and the arms wielded a monk knife, prayer bead, golden alms bowl, monk staff, wooden fish, and seal each. He was radiating a Buddha’s light throughout his body like a sun, and each time his foot left the floor, sweet spring water would gush forth and spill lotuses everywhere.

This would be a most pleasing sight if not for the fact that the Buddha had no face. All three faces of the Buddha were completely blank. Strangely, Ye Qing could tell that the Buddha was wearing a merciful expression even though he didn’t have a face.

Buddhist mantras bounced off the corridor as the Buddha walked toward an unknown destination. Ye Qing could vaguely identify the famous quote, “The sea of bitterness has no bounds, turn your head to see the shore. Lay down the butcher’s knife, become a Buddha on the spot” within the chant.

The Buddhist quote was meant to persuade people to abandon evil and strive for goodness, but the strange Buddha kept changing his pitch and volume. Sometimes it was loud, and sometimes it was soft. Sometimes it was high-pitched, and sometimes it was low. As a result, the peaceful quote sounded strange and disturbing.

When Ye Qing heard the quote, guilt suddenly welled inside his heart. He couldn’t help but regret everything he ever did to the point he wanted to kill himself.

Realizing that something was amiss, Ye Qing hurriedly shielded his mind with his demonic thought. Once his demonic lotus wobbled a little and eliminated the unnatural emotions that were taking root inside his heart, he immediately returned to normal.

It was then Ye Qing saw five or six people stepping out of the darkness. There were men, women, old, young, weak and strong. The strongest warrior he spotted was a Spirit Purifier, whereas the weakest was a Vessel Augmentor.

They all shared one common trait, however. Their expressions were dazed, and they were all walking toward the faceless Buddha. Once they had reached the entity, they abruptly dropped to their knees and began bawling their hearts out. That wasn't all. One person began severing his own veins, another began slamming her head against the floor, a third drew his saber and cut his own neck...

Just seconds later, every single one of these warriors were dead.

The faceless Buddha didn't react toward their deaths whatsoever. He continued to walk in Ye Qing's direction. As the chanting grew louder, guilt and regret began welling inside his heart once more.

What the hell is this thing?

Shocked and wary of the entity's power, Ye Qing was just about to beat a hasty retreat when suddenly, he heard a familiar voice, "It's you, brother! Thank the heavens!"

Ye Qing turned and saw a head poking out of a nearby room. He exclaimed in astonishment, "Yi Pin?!"

The person was none other than the cunning Taoist he had journeyed with at the Demon's Tomb, Yi Pin. Ye Qing wasn't expecting to find a familiar face in this place at all.

"What are you standing there for? Come in already! Before the Faceless Buddha gets us!" Yi Pin urged.

Ye Qing didn't hesitate this time. He immediately dashed toward Yi Pin's room.

Yi Pin slammed the door shut as soon as he entered the room. He looked worried and fearful.

Yi Pin's room was no bigger than his own, so it was fairly cramped all things considered.

"What is this place, brother? And why are you here?" Ye Qing asked.

"Shh!" Yi Pin shushed him with a stern expression. At the same time, the Buddhist mantra began growing louder and louder. Clearly, the faceless Buddha was walking straight toward them.

*"The sea of bitterness has no bounds*

Turn your head to see the shore

Lay down the butcher's knife

Become a Buddha on the spot"

The bizarre mantra kept changing in pitch and volume, and Ye Qing's mind wobbled with it. He began feeling like everything he did since arriving in this world was wrong. His weakness had resulted in the destruction of August Hill Village, his involvement had caused many deaths in Anyang, his presence had caused many Luo Shui citizens to suffer, and his mistake had plunged Tian Yong city into chaos.

Wrong...

Wrong...

Wrong...

It was bad enough that everything he did was wrong, but his hands were covered in blood as well.

His killing of Strangers showed how little he regarded life,

His murder of humans showed how little he cared for his kindred;

The fact that innocents were dragged into his mess proved his lack of ethics,

And the fact that he practiced a heretical art proved his inability to differentiate right from wrong.

Regret...

Regret...

Regret...

As guilt, regret, and all sorts of negative emotions took root inside his heart, the blurry silhouette of a faceless Buddha radiating a Buddha's light appeared before his eyes.

... The Buddha is merciful. Lay down the butcher's knife, and become a Buddha on the spot...

Ye Qing felt the urge to kneel before the Buddha and repent. He felt the urge to cut open his own neck and atone for his sins.

"No. I didn't do anything wrong."

"I do not regret a thing either."

"Why should I atone when I did no wrong, and I regret none of my decisions?"

Suddenly, Ye Qing tapped the space in front of him with his fingers. The image of the faceless Buddha wobbled, but it didn't shatter. The Buddhist mantra grew stronger.

"I don't worship the Buddha, so why are you disturbing me?"

Ye Qing's eyes slowly turned as dark as the night. Inside his headspace, the demonic lotus with only three unfurled petals began bobbing up and down and absorbing all of the negative emotions that had taken root inside his mind. Once they had been converted into refined demonic qi, a blurry silhouette slowly appeared atop the lotus.

The silhouette was his Yin God. It looked blurry, fluid and indistinct because he had just begun to create his Yin God.

"There is no Buddha in me, so how can you bind me?"

"Begone!"

The Yin God floating atop the demonic lotus lowered his fingers, and Ye Qing's demonic thought transformed into a razor sharp blade. It swung down on the faceless Buddha and divided it into two instantly.

The Buddhist mantra that pressed him to kill himself immediately vanished.

“Oooo... I’m useless...”

“Ahhhh... I am guilty. I failed to bring glory to my sect. I do deserve to die...”

It was at this moment Ye Qing heard a sobbing noise coming from beside him. It would seem that Yi Pin was also affected by the Buddhist mantra because he was kneeling on the floor and weeping uncontrollably.

At first, Ye Qing was worried that Yi Pin would rush out of the room and commit suicide in front of the Faceless Buddha just like the warriors he saw earlier. However, he slowly realized that Yi Pin was only crying and screaming to the world how useless and worthless he was. Seeing as he showed no signs of committing suicide, Yi Pin clearly knew a way to shield himself from the mantra’s deadlier effects.

It was at this moment the Buddhist mantra restarted anew. Seeing that Yi Pin was fine, Ye Qing concentrated on himself and fought back against the anomalous mantra. At the same time, he watched the door closely just in case the faceless Buddha decided to barge into the room.

Time passed slowly, and the Buddhist mantra outside his doorsteps only grew stronger. Luckily for him, the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was a profound cultivation art that not only shielded his mind from its mental influence, but also absorbed the negative emotions sprouting inside his heart to fuel its growth. Even so, he slipped bit by bit as time passed, and his concentration began to falter.

As for Yi Pin, his tears had run completely dry. He was dry sobbing and screaming incoherently.

The only silver lining was the fact that the faceless Buddha hadn’t rushed into the room. Otherwise, the consequences would be unimaginable.

An indefinite amount of time later, when Ye Qing felt like he was floating inside a dream, the volume of the Buddhist mantra finally began to weaken. It felt like the faceless Buddha was slowly walking away from their room.

A dozen or so breaths later, the Buddhist mantra disappeared completely, and silence finally returned to the room. Or at least, it would have if Yi Pin wasn’t still dry sobbing at the top of his lungs.

“You can stop screaming now, brother,” said Ye Qing while hitting Yi Pin’s face lightly. *You think this is a funeral or something?*

To be honest, Ye Qing really wanted to dish Yi Pin a hard slap just like that time at the Demon’s Tomb. To say that that slap was one of the most pleasing experiences of his life would be an understatement. Unfortunately, he didn’t have a scapegoat this time, so had no choice but to hold himself back.

“Is the Faceless Buddha gone?” Yi Pin asked as soon as he snapped out of his incoherent state.

“Yep.” Ye Qing asked, “Do you know what that thing is?”

Yi Pin wiped away the snot and tears on his face and exhaled deeply. Then, he sat down on the floor with his legs splayed and said, “That’s the Faceless Buddha and the Deadly Mantra.”

“Faceless Buddha? Deadly Mantra?” Ye Qing asked with a frown.

Yi Pin answered, “The Faceless Buddha is a Phenomenon-class Stranger with the appearance of a Buddha, but the heart of a wretched monster. Born from the dark side of a senior Buddhist monk who passed away, everything the late monk ever learned would transform into a Deadly Mantra that tempts its victims into death. Those who are weak-willed would feel such unbearable guilt and regret that they had no choice but to kill themselves to atone for their sins and partake in the Buddha’s light.”

Ye Qing nodded in understanding.

Chapter 482: The Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin

“By the way, where is this place?” Ye Qing asked.

Yi Pin looked at him with surprise. “You don’t know?”

Ye Qing countered, “Is there a reason I should know about this place?”

Yi Pin slapped his forehead as if he just remembered something. “No, you’re right. I should’ve known from the dumb look on your face that you got roped into this by accident just like me.”

“Quit keeping me in suspense and tell me already. Just where is this place?” *It sounds like you’re patronizing me, but I’ll forgive you temporarily since I’m a magnanimous man.*

Yi Pin answered, “We’re currently trapped in a blessed and cursed place.”

“A blessed and cursed place? What?” Ye Qing frowned harder. *Dude, I just told you not to keep me in suspense!*

Instead of answering, Yi Pin asked Ye Qing a question, “You came here after you saw nine dragons pulling a coffin, am I right?”

“That’s right.” Ye Qing nodded.

Yi Pin replied, “We’re inside that coffin right now.”

“Right. That makes sense.” Ye Qing wasn’t surprised. He suspected it was something like this after recalling what had happened to him. “So, what do you know about this coffin?”

Yi Pin fell silent for a moment before asking, “Have you heard of the Earthly Sovereign, brother?”

“Earthly Sovereign?” Ye Qing blinked. Unfortunately, that wasn’t a name he had heard before.

“Legend says that the Earth Sovereign was an almighty being who was born with the Profound Yellow Mother Qi in him. Immortal since birth, he, the Heavenly Sovereign and the Human Sovereign were known as the Three Sovereigns. In ancient times where the evils seemed infinite, and Strangers were everywhere, the Three Sovereigns were born to save the human race from extinction.”

“The Heavenly Sovereign commanded the heavens, the Earth Sovereign reigned the earth, and the Human Sovereign governed the humans. Together, they killed the Strangers, repelled the evils, and slew the demons to give this barbaric world a heart, establish a life for the weak and powerless, and forge a lasting peace for humanity. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that they are the reason humans still exist—and even thriving—tens of thousands of years later.”

Yi Pin continued, “It shouldn’t need to be said, but humanity and the world itself owes the Three Sovereigns a great deal. As such, they are blessed by the world, worshiped by the people, and respected as indomitable supremes by everyone.”

“When the Earth Sovereign passed away, it was said that heaven and earth wept, and countless races mourned for his death. He was so virtuous that the sons of the ancient dragon volunteered to protect his body and pull his coffin so he might explore the world he fought so hard to protect for eternity. Henceforth, the coffin was named the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin.”

“The Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin?” Ye Qing was astonished. He had no idea this coffin had such an ancient and prestigious origin. “But why are we dragged into this coffin?”

Yi Pin didn’t answer his question, however. He smirked and curled his index finger at him. “My throat’s feeling a little dry. Care to offer your storyteller a jar of wine?”

“And you call yourself a Taoist?” Ye Qing raised an eyebrow but didn’t hesitate to toss Yi Pin a jar of wine.

After Yi Pin caught the wine jar and enjoyed two deep gulps, he defended himself, “My Temple of Divination only cares about the cultivation of the heart, not the mouth. As long as the heart is pure, we don’t restrict our members from doing anything. We can even get married and have kids if we want to, much less something as mild as drinking wine!”

Ye Qing couldn’t be bothered to argue about this. “Sure, whatever. Can you answer my question now?”

Yi Pin took another two gulps before finally answering, “Obviously, the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin is imbued with great power, and as I’ve told you, it is always exploring the world and traveling everywhere. If someone who was adored by the world, protected by great karma, and blessed with incredible luck were to run into the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin, then they have a chance of entering its inner space and obtaining its opportunities.”

“To put it in simpler terms, this is the gift the Earthly Sovereign had left behind for humanity’s future.”

“... A gift? Are you sure?” Ye Qing seriously doubted Yi Pin’s words. *The gift of death, maybe.*

“It hasn’t been that long since we parted, has it? Since when did you become so impatient? If you’re going to interrupt me like this, then I would rather not finish my answer!” Yi Pin complained.

“Fine, fine, I was wrong,” Ye Qing grumbled while motioning Yi Pin to continue.

“It is said that everything in the world is predestined. If you want something, then you must give something in return,” Yi Pin said. “In this case, everyone who wishes to receive the Earthly Sovereign Coffin’s blessing must overcome its trials.”

“So, the Faceless Buddha we encountered earlier is the trial?” Ye Qing asked.

“Correct. To be specific, that Faceless Buddha’s is today’s trial.” Yi Pin explained, “Every twenty four hours, the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin would test its participants with a random trial. It could be a Stranger, an illusion meant to test a certain quality, so on and so forth. Those who overcome its trials—and by that, I mean survive—would receive a reward, and those who don’t... would just die.”

“That is why I called this place a blessed and cursed place.”

Ye Qing looked thoughtful. It was an apt description. Those who survived would see this as a blessed place that keeps giving, and those who died would of course view this place as cursed.

“Oh right. What is the reward you’ll receive for overcoming its trials?” Ye Qing asked curiously.

“The Profound Yellow Qi!” Yi Pin answered.

“What’s a Profound Yellow Qi?” *Sorry, never heard of it.*

Yi Pin explained, “As I told you earlier, the Earthly Sovereign is said to be born with the Profound Yellow Mother Qi in him. The earth is yellow, and the heaven is a profound color that can’t be described. The Profound Yellow Mother Qi is a type of karmic qi that is derived from the creation of heaven and earth. It is the origin of all qis and the mother of all creations, so you can imagine just how strong its karma is, and how profound.”

“It is said that a single wisp of Profound Yellow Mother Qi can transform a mortal with no foundation or cultivation whatsoever into a Sage and grant them eternal life. Their body would become flawless, undying, impervious to the natural elements, and immune to all tribulations. Those who obtained it would be able to reach the dao in a single step.”

“But of course, the Profound Yellow Mother Qi is extremely rare since it is born from heaven and earth. Only those with great karma and destiny may obtain it.”

“Holy shit...” Ye Qing couldn’t help but gasp when he heard this. A kind of qi that could transform an ant into a Sage? Just how overpowered was that? If only he could get his hands on some of that shit...

“What is the relation between the Profound Yellow Qi and the Profound Yellow Mother Qi?”

Yi Pin answered, “The Earthly Sovereign was born with the Profound Yellow Mother Qi in him, so his body remains unchanged even long after he is dead. The qi leaking from his body is the Profound Yellow Qi.”

“Obviously, the Profound Yellow Qi isn’t nearly as potent as the Profound Yellow Mother Qi. It cannot transform you into a Sage in the blink of an eye. Even so, it is nothing to scoff at. As it is derived from the Profound Yellow Mother Qi, it is overflowing with karma and possesses a near infinite amount of uses. You can use it to improve your cultivation, forge Strange Artifacts and more.”

“A strange Artifact created using the Profound Yellow Qi can protect one’s luck, defend the body, and shield them from all tribulations. If you cultivate using the Profound Yellow Qi, you’ll receive twice the results for only half the effort. It is especially useful at nurturing the body.”

“The Profound Yellow Qi can nurture the body?” That got Ye Qing’s attention.

“But of course!” Yi Pin replied, “The Profound Yellow Mother Qi is born from heaven and earth, but it is far more rooted in the earth than the heavens. A wisp of Profound Yellow Mother Qi can turn a mortal into a Sage and grant them eternal life, so of course the Profound Yellow Qi, while far, far weaker in terms of potency, possesses a similar effect.”

“The Profound Yellow Qi can purify one’s marrows, improve one’s foundation, nurture one’s vigor, temper one’s body and more. It is a priceless treasure.”

“Legend says that the descendants of the Earthly Sovereign know of a body-tempering divine art called the ‘Profound Yellow Art of Heaven and Earth’ that specifically uses the Profound Yellow Qi to temper one’s body. At the adept level, the practitioner would gain a body known as the ‘Profound Yellow Body of Heaven and Earth’ that was adored by the world, overflowing with good karma, impervious to evils and immune to tribulations. In other words, they would gain a body that resembled a Sage’s body.”

“So long as their feet remain in contact with the ground, they would enjoy titanic strength and infinite endurance. If they somehow find a way to revert the Profound Yellow Qi into the Profound Yellow Mother Qi, then they could even become a Sage on the spot.”

Ye Qing was overjoyed when he heard this. Assuming that Yi Pin wasn’t exaggerating the effects of the Profound Yellow Qi, then this might just be exactly what he needed to treat his ailments.



“Is that why you’re here, brother? You’ve come to obtain the Profound Yellow Qi?” Ye Qing forced himself to calm down and asked.

To his surprise, Yi Pin grimaced like he had swallowed a piece of shit. “Not at all. In fact, the Profound Yellow Qi is completely useless to me. For almost everyone else, this place is a land of opportunity assuming they are strong enough to survive its trials. But for me? It might as well be the gates of hell itself.”

Chapter 483: Profound Yellow Qi

“What?” Ye Qing blinked in confusion. This wasn’t the reaction he was expecting at all.

“Would you believe me if I told you that I was whisked to this place against my will?” Yi Pin asked in an aggrieved tone, “I was foraging herbs in the mountains that day. After I reached the peak, I decided to catch a break and enjoy the passing clouds in the sky. Oh, it was such a great time.”

“Suddenly, the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin appeared in the sky, and I blacked out. The next thing I know, I was trapped in this heavens-forsaken place!”

If he had a choice, he would never come to this place. After all, who in their right mind would choose death and suffering when they could be enjoying tea in their courtyard, or reading palms or faces for cute girls and sexy housewives?

I was wronged, brother!

Ye Qing felt a sliver of sympathy for the old man. He thought Yi Pin had voluntarily entered this place considering how much he knew, but no, he was “volunteered” into this place just like him!

Yi Pin had it worse than him though. He didn’t know why, but apparently the Profound Yellow Qi was useless to him. This meant the old Taoist was literally suffering for nothing. On the other hand, he desperately needed a miracle to treat his wounds, and the Profound Yellow Qi sounded exactly like what he needed.

“You came here by accident too, didn’t you brother?” Yi Pin asked, hoping that Ye Qing was a fellow comrade who could partake in his sorrow.

“Yeah,” Ye Qing nodded, “but I’m starting to think that this place isn’t too bad.”

Yi Pin: “...” *You’ve changed, brother!*

“Now that I think about it, you are a body-tempering warrior. The Profound Yellow Qi is very beneficial for you.”

It was then Yi Pin noticed something and exclaimed in astonishment, “You’re hurt, brother?”

He hadn’t noticed earlier because of the predicament they were in, but now he realized that Ye Qing’s aura was weak, his vigor was in decline, and his body was covered in various wounds. There were also traces of blood on his clothes and body, blood that reeked of a kind of vicious, tyrannical energy.

“You fought a Grandmaster? Are you crazy, brother?!”

He immediately realized that the foreign energy belonged to a Grandmaster.

Ye Qing: "... *Who taught you how to talk? You're crazy, your whole family's crazy!*

"Ahem... my apologies." Yi Pin noticed the flash of annoyance on Ye Qing's face and asked hurriedly, "So, who's the one who injured you, brother?"

It must be quite the juicy gossip!

Ye Qing shot Yi Pin a glance before replying, "You don't need to know that. All you need to know is that I'm still alive."

"Haha, fair enough. I'm impressed that you managed to survive a Grandmaster." Yi Pin wisely changed the subject. "Your injuries are quite serious. If you don't receive treatment in time, there is a good chance your martial foundation would be damaged. But luckily for you—seriously, your luck is some of the best I've ever seen—the Profound Yellow Qi is exactly what you need to heal your wounds and recover your body."

"Where can I get the Profound Yellow Qi, brother?" Ye Qing asked.

Yi Pin smiled mysteriously. "Don't worry. You'll find out in a moment."

*You've gotten a lot naughtier since the last time we met, haven't you?* Ye Qing rolled his eyes but didn't press for an answer. After all, Yi Pin's reply seemed to suggest that he would find out very soon.

A dozen or so breaths later, Ye Qing suddenly felt that the air inside the room was heavier than usual, but not in an unpleasant manner. His demonic thought told him that two wisps of dark yellow colored energies were swimming round and round inside the room like a dragon-serpent. As they swam, the air turned heavy and dark yellow almost like they were sitting in the middle of a yellow sandstorm.

"This is the Profound Yellow Qi," Yi Pin said. "You should refine them now, brother. I'll guard you."

"There are two wisps of Profound Yellow Qi though. Are you sure you don't want it?" Ye Qing shot Yi Pin a meaningful look. Generosity was *not* a trait the Yi Pin he knew possessed.

"I told you earlier that this is completely useless to me. I would rather have a sip of wine." Yi Pin waved his hand uncaringly. "Anyway, just ignore me and refine the qi already. You're going to regret it if you take too long."

"Hmm? You make it sound like there are other dangers in this place." Ye Qing frowned. Yi Pin mentioned that the trials would happen only once every twenty four hours, so he thought that the place would be safe after the trial was over. It would seem that wasn't the case.

Yi Pin let out a cold chuckle. "But of course! You and I aren't the only ones who are receiving the Earthly Sovereign Coffin's trials, you know."

"There are other humans in this place besides you and me?!" Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise.

"Naturally." Yi Pin explained, "Each time a survivor survives the trial, they would receive a wisp of Profound Yellow Qi. It's a handsome reward, but greed is bottomless. That is why some people decided to rob their fellow humans to enrich themselves. There is no law they wouldn't stoop to, the bastards!"

Yi Pin was gritting his teeth when he said this. He sounded like he had gone through the experience first hand.

"Did someone steal your Profound Yellow Qi?" Ye Qing asked with a poorly suppressed smirk.

"Naw! Never! Who do you think I am?" Yi Pin immediately executed his triple denial protocol. "Who in their right mind would dare steal my stuff?"

His words sounded confident, but they weren't convincing coming from the mouth of a Vessel Augmentor at all.

"Sure. I believe you," Ye Qing declared with faux seriousness. "You said that there is no law they wouldn't stoop to. Can you describe their methods to me? So I can be ready when they come for me?"

Yi Pin: "..."*You think I don't know what you're plotting? You just want to get my story and laugh at my misery, you bastard!*

Yi Pin grunted. "What else? They used threats and promises, of course."

Ye Qing stopped teasing Yi Pin and asked seriously, "Who among these people are worth paying attention to? How strong are they?"

Yi Pin thought for a moment. "I've only been here for two days, so my knowledge may not be comprehensive. There are three people who robbed the others for their Profound Yellow Qi. The first one was a young Spirit Master named Sun Xuanzhen. He hails from a place to the north called Sword King City, and they all call him the Little Sword King. The second person is the current Fire Princess of the Earthfire Palace of Demons. She's also a Spirit Master, and her name is Huo Linglong."

"The last person is just a Half-Step Spirit Master, but that doesn't mean he doesn't deserve our attention. On the contrary, he is a bigger problem than the two Spirit Masters combined."

"Interesting. Who is he? What is his origin?" Ye Qing asked curiously.

"His name is Yue Juejiang, and he is a descendant of the Earthly Sovereign Hall," Yi Pin answered. "As its name might imply, the Earthly Sovereign Hall is a sect composed

of the descendants of the Earthly Sovereign. The ancient blood of the Earthly Sovereign flows in their veins, and most of the power in the sect is held in the ones with the surname Yue. It is said that the Earthly Sovereign Hall has existed since ancient times.”

“The Earthly Sovereign Hall?” Ye Qing muttered under his breath.

“Yep.” Yi Pin continued, “Of course, no one knows if they are actually the descendants of the Earthly Sovereign. Such things can be easily fabricated after all. However, it is true that the sect has existed for a very, very long time.”

“The Earthly Sovereign Hall views the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin as their sacred object, and they would die before they allow an outsider to ‘defile’ it so to speak. To put it in more secular terms, they view the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin as their exclusive property and refuse to share its Profound Yellow Qi with anyone. Since ancient times, the Earthly Sovereign Hall has never stopped trying to assume control over the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin and monopolize the Earthly Sovereign’s body, the Profound Yellow Mother Qi and the Profound Yellow Qi. However, they never succeeded because of the immense power the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin possesses.”

“That doesn’t stop them from viewing the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin as their exclusive property and forbidding everyone from laying their hands on its Profound Yellow Qi though. Earlier, that Half-Step Spirit Master fought Sun Xuanzhen and Huo Linglong precisely for this reason. Surprisingly, he was strong enough to fight two Spirit Masters to a standstill, but of course he wasn’t able to get the upper hand either. Since he couldn’t defeat his opponents, he had no choice but to allow them to claim a share of the Profound Yellow Qi.”

Ye Qing nodded in understanding with a serious expression.

“Don’t worry, brother. Worse comes to worst, we can just give up our Profound Yellow Qi to them.” Yi Pin noticed the serious expression on Ye Qing’s face and consoled him, “The Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin only bestows the Profound Yellow Qi to the living, so if they kill us all, they’ll only obtain one wisp of Profound Yellow Qi per trial. They have a vested interest in our survival.”

“In certain cases, assuming that their lives won’t be in danger, they would even protect the weak so they could obtain even more Profound Yellow Qi.”

Chapter 484: With Great Virtue Comes The Strength To Bear it All

“Right. In short, they’re livestock to be farmed.” Ye Qing nodded in understanding before asking, “But why didn’t they gather everyone in one place? Wouldn’t it make the process easier?”

Humans kept livestock in a pen so it would be easier to protect them from predators and to farm them. The same logic applies here.

“Oh, they would’ve done it if it was possible.” Yi Pin sneered. “You’ve already felt it, but the trials of the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin are beyond dangerous. The rooms are the one place that can shield us from its deadly effects to a certain extent, which is why it is imperative to stay inside a room when a trial is ongoing.”

“However, you can see for yourself how big this room is. At most, you can fit three people in here. Not only that, every additional person in a room doubles the level of threat they face and the chance they might perish. That is why it is much better to have one person per room.”

Ye Qing nodded in understanding before noticing something. The corners of his lips turned up as he said, “You just said that each additional person in a room would double the amount of threat they faced. Does that mean that the trials would be significantly easier to overcome if I return to my room?”

Oh crap! I can’t believe I let slip such an important piece of information! This guy’s a little fox who will exploit anything and everything to his advantage!

Yi Pin tried to deny the allegation, “Did I say that? Nah, I don’t think so. You must have misheard, brother.”

“Har har...” Ye Qing chuckled. *Go on. Let’s see how long you can keep this up.*

“Fine, fine. You’re right.” Yi Pin knew there was no tricking Ye Qing after seeing his expression. “But having an extra person also means getting an extra wisp of Profound Yellow Qi, right? You are seriously injured right now, and the Profound Yellow Qi is exactly what you need to treat your wounds. I’m doing this for your own good, brother!”

The old Taoist even faked a hurtful expression to guilt trip Ye Qing.

Ye Qing sneered mentally while replying, “Har har. Thanks, but no thanks. I prefer to live alone.”

Now he understood why Yi Pin had given him the Profound Yellow Qi without any fanfare. Usually, the guy would have demanded the world for the single wisp of Profound Yellow Qi. The reason he did this was because he wanted Ye Qing to be his bodyguard!

It wasn’t like he couldn’t understand his reason. The Earthly Sovereign Coffin’s trials were definitely dangerous, and Yi Pin was just a Vessel Augmentor. Sure, the old Taoist wasn’t as simple as he looked, but combat was definitely not one of his strengths. Without someone to act as his meatshield, there was a high chance he was going to die in this place. That was why he chose Ye Qing to be that sucker.

Yi Pin exclaimed in horror, “No, brother! Haven’t we been through thick and thin in the Demon’s Tomb? Do we not share a strong, unbreakable bond with each other? I’ve also given you a ton of useful information, so surely you won’t abandon me during my time of need?!”

*Strong, unbreakable bond my butt. Who even wants to share an unbreakable bond with an old man like you?* Ye Qing's lips twitched uncontrollably. He left the guy hanging for a bit to tease him before he finally said, "Fine. I'll help you."

As Yi Pin said, he needed as many Profound Yellow Qi as possible to heal his wounds. It was also true that Yi Pin had proven himself to be a—relatively speaking—reliable companion during the short time they journeyed together at the Demon's Tomb. Plus, Yi Pin was a wise, cunning, and knowledgeable old man with many secrets, so he was sure he would be useful at a critical moment.

"Haha, I know you have a good heart in you, brother!" Yi Pin chirped excitedly.

"Oh right, when can we leave this place?" Ye Qing asked.

"You just need to survive nine days," Yi Pin answered.

Ye Qing looked down. So, he had to survive another eight trials before he could leave.

"What are you thinking about, brother?" Yi Pin asked in confusion since Ye Qing had fallen silent.

"Nothing. Just wondering how I'm gonna survive this place while a good-for-nothing is dragging my ankles," Ye Qing replied uncaringly.

Yi Pin: "... *Excuse you? Even a cat's paw has its pride, okay?*

"So, what are you going to do now?" Yi Pin asked.

"Refine the Profound Yellow Qi," Ye Qing answered without hesitation.

Right now, there was no one he could truly rely on except himself. Therefore, the sooner he regained his strength, the greater his chances of survival would become.

As for surrendering his Profound Yellow Qi for the sake of survival, heh, that was what people called drinking poison to quench your thirst. In this place, the strong would always be strong, and the weak would always be weak. More importantly, the weak would die.

He didn't want to grow weak and die, so he was going to fight to become strong with all his might. That was all there was to it.

Sure, there were going to be consequences for his decision, but he honestly wasn't too afraid. He didn't like trouble, but he didn't fear trouble either. Who knows, he might even come out on top.

Having affirmed his decision, Ye Qing looked at Yi Pin and said, "Please protect me while I refine these two wisps of Profound Yellow Qi."

He also summoned the Fog Demon as extra insurance. The Fog Demon had taken quite the heavy damage to shield his mind from Zhou Hengshan's attack that day, but it was also an artifact spirit. So long as the Strange Artifact wasn't damaged, it was only a matter of time before it recovered in full. It had regained some strength after a few days of rest.

"Haha, sure," Yi Pin's eyelid twitched once as he replied. *Motherfucker! He has another Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact? Just how many good stuff did he have?*

The Fog Demon could've concealed its presence perfectly, but Ye Qing had ordered it to reveal a hint of its aura. It was to intimidate Yi Pin, of course. Although he was counting on the old Taoist to protect him, that didn't mean he could surrender his back to him without reservation. What if Yi Pin was plotting something he didn't know? What if he "accidentally" pulled something while he was cultivating? When all was said and done, he was the one who had to bear all the consequences.

That was why he gave the order. It was a subtle warning to Yi Pin not to attempt any funny business while he was busy.

With that done, Ye Qing sat cross-legged on the floor, mustered his demonic thought, and drew the Profound Yellow Qi still circulating in the air into his body.

The Profound Yellow Qi entered his body like a river that was overflowing with life and possibilities. It was thick, heavy, vast, and absolute. It felt like nature itself was filling him up as it spread throughout his entire body.

The power was thick but not forceful, vast but not aggressive, deep but not unrelenting. It felt like the world was protecting him and nurturing him like a parent would to their children.

The heavens never run out of energy to orbit round and round, so just like them, one should always strive to better themselves.

The earth is vast and all-accepting, so just like it, one should strive to bear all there is to life with virtue.

Like a dryland that welcomed its first rain in a long while, Ye Qing's body greedily absorbed this generous, kind power. The Black Sky Divine Palm force and saber intent inside his body began dissipating bit by bit, and his tattered body also began recovering little by little.

This was the first time since he suffered those injuries that he felt so relaxed and at ease. He felt like a baby nesting in his mother's warm arms, calm and peaceful.

This Profound Yellow Qi is seriously amazing.

Delighted, Ye Qing hurriedly chased away his stray thoughts and cycled the "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra" with all he got. Slowly but surely, he began refining the Profound Yellow Qi he had absorbed into his body.

An incense stick later, Ye Qing abruptly opened his eyes and exhaled a thick, dirty puff of air. It almost looked like it was alive as it writhed back and forth like a serpent. The temperature inside the room began to nosedive, and the air quickly became choked with violence and bloodthirst. Bits of stone were sent flying when the puff of air brushed against the floor and the walls.

"What the hell?"

Startled, Yi Pin hurriedly backed a few steps and surrounded himself in the silhouette of a giant bell. When the puff of air struck the bell, it caused a resonant, metallic clang that wouldn't fade for a long while.

Cowering at a corner, Yi Pin patted his chest and muttered to himself, "Thank goodness I have the Hill Mover Bell, or that puff of air would've been the death of me."

Chapter 485: This Item And I Are Destined For Each Other

“What kind of saber intent is this? Vicious, ruthless, bloodthirsty. Only a saber that had slaughtered thousands, no, tens of thousands of people could produce such an aura. Could it be... the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand? That’s Zhou Hengshan’s Strange Artifact, and Zhou Hengshan happens to be a Grandmaster. Did he take a hit from Zhou Hengshan?”

“Besides that, there’s a cold, yin energy that reminds me of the Black Sky Divine Palm. It’s the signature martial art of the Black Sky Divine Palace, and it can only be learned by a true disciple. If I remember correctly, Zhou Hengshan has a subordinate who’s a member of the Black Sky Divine Palace.”

“If I remember correctly, this guy is the Patrolman of Luo Shui. The Hidden Dragon Meet is being held in Tian Yong right now, and there’s a high chance he was a participant. The Hengshan Army is Tian Yong’s main military force, so that’s a match. Did he really provoke Zhou Hengshan?”

“Hmm, knowing how good this guy is at drawing trouble, it’s definitely not out of the realm of possibility. I wonder what happened to him? Whatever it was, it must be so bad that even my ridiculous encounter with the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin looks paltry in comparison. That makes me feel so much better.”

Yi Pin indulged in schadenfreude for a moment before sighing, “Still, to survive Zhou Hengshan as a late-stage Spirit Purifier... youngsters these days are seriously something.”

Ye Qing had no idea that a certain Taoist had almost figured out the whole truth after he drove out a sliver of Zhou Hengshan’s saber intent and the Black Sky Divine Palm’s palm force from his body. He was too busy healing his broken body after all. After the successful attempt, he opened his mouth and inhaled the second wisp of Profound Yellow Qi into his stomach as well.

The possibilities were endless when the Profound Yellow Qi resided in one’s stomach. As vast, thick energy began circulating inside his body once more, the vicious, gloomy energies writhing inside the room were destroyed, and Ye Qing shone like a yellow sun.

.....

Bang!

About two hours later, the door was suddenly flung open by a brawny, violent-looking man. The first thing he did was to yell at Yi Pin, “Where is your Profound Yellow Qi, Taoist?!”

Then, he noticed that there was a second person inside the room, and he was shining like a mini sun. His eyes bulged with surprise as he questioned, “What the hell’s going on here? Where is the Profound Yellow Qi?”

Cowering at a corner, Yi Pin didn’t hesitate to put Ye Qing in harm’s way immediately. “What else? I got robbed. If you want the Profound Yellow Qi, then go get him. I’ve got nothing for you.”

I don’t have your Profound Yellow Qi~

And I ain’t giving you my life~



If you want the Profound Yellow Qi~  
Then go fuck up the guy who fucked me over~  
Whatever happens next is between you~ and him~  
Sincerely,

Yi Pin

Enraged, the brawny man immediately threw a punch at Ye Qing's head. "Nauseating filth! How dare you steal what belongs to my master! You deserve death!"

The brawny man was a middle-stage Spirit Purifier, and his fist resembled a giant boulder rolling down a steep cliff. It kept growing faster and deadlier like an avalanche.

### *"Rolling Boulder Fist"*

The brawny man's name was Han Meng. He might be huge, but that didn't mean his brain was the size of a peanut. He knew that no one in this place was a small fry because the Earthly Sovereign's Coffin itself had deemed them worthy of receiving its trials. That was why he went all out right from the start.

"Die!"

Excitement and glee well up inside Han Meng's heart as his fist got closer and closer to Ye Qing's head. It was bad enough he was kidnapped to this place and subjected to life-or-death trials, but a stronger warrior had enslaved him into doing his bidding as well. To say he was frustrated would be an understatement.

Frustration must be vent, and killing was the best way to vent one's frustration. He grew so excited imagining Ye Qing's head exploding into a shower of gore that his eyes turned bloodshot.

His fist was exactly an inch away from Ye Qing's head when suddenly, it came to a stop.

He hadn't stopped because he wanted to. It was because someone had caught his fist as easily as a gangster catching the fist of a weak, powerless girl.

Unfortunately for him, he was the weak, powerless girl in that scenario.

Realizing that the person he thought was prey was actually far stronger than he was, he immediately tried to struggle and break free. But no matter what he tried, forget wrenching himself free, he couldn't even move his opponent's arm. It was like his fist was trapped inside a mountain.

"My master is the Earthly Sovereign's—!"

Han Meng immediately tried to bring up his patron in hopes of cowering Ye Qing into leaving him alive. However, Ye Qing opened his eyes before he could finish. His eyes looked as deep as the night, as enigmatic as a god, and as eerie as a demon.

Han Meng's voice abruptly cut short, and his eyes gradually turned empty and lifeless. It wasn't long before he was dead.

"What were you saying just now, brother?" Ye Qing turned toward Yi Pin after killing Han Meng.

The moment Yi Pin saw Ye Qing's eyes, his mind shook like a leaf, and his soul felt like it had fallen into the lowest depths of hell. He hurriedly looked away, slammed the door shut as quick as lightning, and said in an urgent voice, "You screwed up, brother."

"I did?" Ye Qing glanced at the lifeless Han Meng. "Are you sure?"

"I'm not talking about him, I'm talking about his patron!"

Yi Pin explained as quickly as he could, "This guy is a servant of the Earthly Sovereign Hall's descendant I told you before, Yue Juejiang. He's here to collect the Profound Yellow Qi for him."

In Yi Pin's imagination, Ye Qing was supposed to reveal the fact that he was a Half-Step Spirit Master and scare off Han Meng. When Han Meng brought the news back to his master, Yue Juejiang, Sun Xuanzhen and Huo Linglong would have no choice but to accept this because fighting Ye Qing wasn't worth the two wisps of Profound Yellow Qi.

This was also why he didn't stop Ye Qing from refining the Profound Yellow Qi earlier. The stronger Ye Qing was, the safer he would be.

However, Ye Qing went off script and killed Han Meng right from the get go. Now, they had made an enemy of Yue Juejiang.

*This was not the plan, dammit!*

"He's the collector?" Ye Qing's eyes suddenly lit up. "Does that mean he has a lot of Profound Yellow Qi with him right now?"

Yi Pin's heart skipped a beat. *Did I make another mistake?*

Ye Qing looked Han Meng up and down a couple times before setting his gaze on a bright yellow calabash on the man's waist. He grabbed it while asking, "Is this it?"

The bright yellow calabash was barely big enough to fit on a person's palm, but it was surprisingly heavy. Before Yi Pin could say anything, Ye Qing uncorked the calabash and caused a stream of thick yellow qi to gush out of the opening. The entire room was dyed dark yellow in just the blink of an eye.

"Oh my, five wisps of Profound Yellow Qi?!"

Ye Qing's eyes shone even brighter than before.

"What are you planning, brother?" Yi Pin gulped.

"Nothing? I just think that these Profound Yellow Qi and I are destined for each other," Ye Qing replied matter-of-factly.

"Are you seriously going to rob Yue Juejiang?!" Yi Pin exclaimed in shock and horror. *Think thrice before you act, brother! Don't let your greed overcome your good senses!*

"Who are you calling a robber? Like I said, these Profound Yellow Qi and I are destined for each other. If that's not true, then why would they set foot on my doorstep of their own accord?" Ye Qing argued.

Yi Pin: "... *It's bad enough that you killed the guy and looted his stuff, now you're going to call it destiny as well? You really are the most shameless person in the world.*

Chapter 486: You're in A Boat, I'm In A Boat, We're All In The Same Boat

"Er, maybe you didn't hear me clearly earlier, but this guy is the Earthly Sovereign Hall descendant's servant."

"I heard you. So what?" Ye Qing countered.

"So what? First you killed his subordinate, now you're taking his Profound Yellow Qi! Do you really want to fight Yue Juejiang to the death?!"

Yi Pin said urgently, "It's one thing if you're not injured, but just look at the state of you! Fighting him now would be like an old man eating poison to live longer! So please, put down that calabash already. It'll be better for everyone."

You might have a death wish, but I don't!

Ye Qing didn't give him an answer immediately. "Heh. Can I ask you a question, brother? What kind of person is Yue Juejiang?"

"He's arrogant and domineering," Yi Pin replied. "Why do you want to know?"

"Exactly as I imagined him to be then. People like him cannot tolerate even the slightest defiance. Even if his servant is no more than a dog in his eyes, he is still the dog's master. As such, he will never allow this slight to go unpunished," Ye Qing explained. "From the moment we killed him, Yue Juejiang has become our sworn enemy."

"Excuse you? You're the one who did everything! I've got nothing to do with this!" Yi Pin corrected, though he had to admit that Ye Qing's argument held a grain of truth.

"Haha, let's not fuss over the details, shall we? My point is, the situation can't get any worse than it already is, so why not make the best out of it?" Ye Qing smiled.

"Besides, if you move fast enough, then the danger won't be able to catch up to us."

Yi Pin looked completely confused. *The hell are you talking about?*

Ye Qing ignored him and waved his left hand. The Netherflame immediately gushed out and turned Han Meng into a pile of ash.

"What are you doing?" Yi Pin asked.

"I'm eliminating the evidence," Ye Qing answered before waving his hand again and scattering the ashes. Now, not even a trace of Han Meng's existence was left in this world.

"Eliminating the evidence?" Yi Pin repeated numbly like a parrot.

*He must have done this many times in the past, Yi Pin thought. Just look at how casual and practiced his movements are.*

Wait, that's not the point. The point is, this is a useless act.

"Brother, destroying the body isn't going to help anyone. After all, the calabash is still here. It's called the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash, an exclusive Strange Artifact that the Earthly Sovereign Hall had specifically created to store the Profound Yellow Qi. I'm certain Yue Juejian has left a mental imprint on it, so trying to hide it is just delaying the inevitable. The only thing you can do is to destroy it."

"However, the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash is grown from a Innate Spirit Root Profound Yellow Vine. It is impervious to the elements and tough as steel. At our current strength, it's literally impossible to destroy it."

Yi Pin let out a depressed sigh when an idea occurred to him. "Wait a second. I have a plan! We can simply throw it away! That way, Yue Juejiang won't be able to trace it back to us!"

Han Meng was gone in every sense of the word. It should be impossible for Yue Juejiang to identify his murderer, nor was it worth the time and effort. It was highly unlikely that Yue Juejiang would turn the place upside down over the death of a single dog unless the Profound Yellow Qi in the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash was used.

The Profound Yellow Qi was an object of nature. There were only a handful of spiritual objects such as the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash that could contain it, which made it impossible to store and hide the Profound Yellow Qi for future use.

Refining it wasn't an option either since the Profound Yellow Qi wasn't something that could be fully refined on the spot. It took at least one to two incense sticks to refine it to a level where it was almost invisible to another's senses. Five?

It wouldn't take much longer before Yue Juejiang noticed that something was amiss. There was no way Ye Qing could fully refine and absorb five wisps of Profound Yellow Qi before the man acted. If he was found out, things most likely wouldn't end well.

Therefore, killing Yue Juejiang's dog was fine, but stealing his Profound Yellow Qi was absolutely unacceptable.

"Throw it away? Never."

Ye Qing let down Yi Pin with a shake of his head, however. He was going to hold onto this calabash for life.

The Profound Yellow Qi was extremely beneficial to his injuries. Just the two he absorbed earlier had eliminated some of the saber intent and Black Sky Divine Palm force wreaking havoc inside his body. Already, he was feeling much sturdier than before.

It wasn't enough, however. Not even close. He needed a lot more Profound Yellow Qi to heal himself, and five of them had just been delivered to his doorstep. He would die before he let them slip through his grasp.

Besides, his present situation wasn't the only danger he had to contend with. In the future, he would have to clash against the Intelligence Department and the bastard who put him in this situation in the first place. He desperately needed to grow stronger as quickly as possible, damn the risks.

It was his only way to survive the future.

"Why won't you listen, brother?" Yi Pin felt like pulling his hair out.

"Relax. I know a way to stop Yue Juejiang from sensing his Profound Yellow Qi Calabash," Ye Qing replied calmly.

"You do? How?" Yi Pin looked astonished.

"It's a secret." Ye Qing smiled mysteriously. "Anyway, no one was outside when I killed the guy earlier, so make sure you say that he took our Profound Yellow Qi and left, and that we don't know anything, okay? It's not like he'll attack us 'livestocks', so it'll be fine."

As he said this, Ye Qing's body morphed into a completely different appearance. He also suppressed the presence of the Profound Yellow Qi he just refined using his demonic thought and Zhou Hengshan's saber intent. Finally, he altered his cultivation level to appear weaker than he was.

On a related note, the two wisps of Profound Yellow Qi he absorbed had been fully refined and absorbed into his muscles and bones. A small bit of tweaking was all he needed to conceal their presence perfectly.

There were several reasons why he made such a thorough preparation. One, he didn't want to risk others recognizing him as Ye Qing. That was a whole can of worms he wasn't eager to open now or forever. Second, his new appearance would make it easier for Yue Juejiang to believe his story.

And finally, he lowered his cultivation level to avoid drawing attention. Right now, caution and low key was the name of the game.

He wasn't worried that someone might see through his disguise and ruin his whole plan. The "Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra" was a miraculous martial art that could easily alter his presence and conceal his cultivation level. Barring certain exceptions, not even a late-stage Spirit Master or a Half-Step Grandmaster would be able to see through his disguise.

Yi Pin hadn't specified Sun Xuanzhen and Huo Linglong's cultivation level earlier, but he was almost certain that they were early-stage Spirit Masters. As for Yue Tongjiang, the guy was just a Half-Step Spirit Master, so he was even less of an issue.

In conclusion, everything was under his control, and there was nothing to be afraid of.

At the side, Yi Pin watched as Ye Qing physically and mentally transformed himself into an early-stage Spirit Purifier with a dark, psychopathic appearance. His mouth opened and closed as he tried to say something only to discover that he had nothing to say.

One thing Yi Pin noticed was how Ye Qing was able to conceal his true cultivation level and the Profound Yellow Qi he just refined perfectly even from his eyes. He had to admit that it was quite impressive.

So, what should he do with Ye Qing's plan? Should he agree or disagree?

He agreed, of course. He literally had no other option.

If he disagreed, the first person Ye Qing was going to kill was him as he was the one person who knew his whole plan. Plus, he needed Ye Qing to survive this place.

As for pretending to agree to Ye Qing's plan and inform the others about it later, the thought did cross his mind, but that was all. He might suck at martial arts, but he was a good judge of character. Sun Xuanzhen and Huo Linglong were one thing, but Yue Juejiang didn't think of anyone else as human. In his eyes, he was just a tool to collect the Profound Yellow Qi and an ant he could kill any time he wanted to.

Even if his betrayal had gone perfectly, all he would earn for his efforts was nothing. He might as well help Ye Qing out and ensure that his insane plan succeeded.

He was in Ye Qing's boat whether he liked it or not.

There was one more reason he believed that helping Ye Qing was the right option. Inside the Earthly Sovereign's Coffin, the threads of fate were blurry and impossible to divine. However, he was the descendant of the Temple of Divination. He might not be able to divine an exact answer, but his sixth sense still told him that Ye Qing would be fine, just like how he knew that he wouldn't die here.

After all, Ye Qing came not long after he was trapped in this heavens-forsaken place, didn't he?

So, he surrendered to Ye Qing's whims and did whatever he wanted.

.....

"Hmm? Something went wrong?"

Inside a different room, a handsome youngster in his twenties was meditating in silence. He wore a dark yellow robe that oozed with nobility, and his posture bespoke cultivated grace and power.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes. The walls shook like a thunderclap had erupted inside the room.

"An ant dares to covet my Profound Yellow Qi Calabash? They must die!"

The young man was none other than Yue Juejiang, and just now, his connection to the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash suddenly disappeared into thin air.

As Yue Juejiang rose to his feet, it was like a mountain was slowly rising from the ground. The air groaned as if it couldn't withstand the pressure.

After he left his room, he stomped the floor so hard that the surrounding air rippled outward like a tidal wave. Then, he roared, "All of you, show yourself this instant!"

The air was already whipping about in a chaotic and disorderly fashion, but his roar literally tore it asunder.

"Who's the bastard who's shouting like a madman? Do you want to die?"

One man slammed open his door and rushed out into the open, but the blood drained away from his face when he realized his mistake. Yue Juejiang threw a punch, and he slammed into the bluestone wall behind him. His limbs were spread wide, and blood poured out of every orifice.

Those who just left their rooms turned as silent as death when they saw this.

#### Chapter 487: Splitting Mountains

“What’s wrong, dearie? Why are you so angry?”

Suddenly, a gentle, seductive voice rang. Then, a sexy woman wearing a fiery red dress stepped out into the open.

Her long dress looked like fire, and her skin as white as snow. She also had the face of an angel and the body of a siren. Her mere presence naturally ignited a bonfire in everyone’s heart.

Even Yue Juejiang was staring at the woman with naked lust and desire. He didn’t bother concealing it.

“Haha... you’re going to make me embarrassed if you keep staring at me like that, dearie,” the woman in red said with a giggle. The fire grew stronger when they heard her sweet, melodious voice. The weak-willed ones were literally steaming as if they were being roasted on top of a fire. It looked like they might burn into a crisp at any moment.

Shing!

It was at this moment the metallic ringing deafened the ears. It also severed the woman’s influence over the people like a sword. When they calmed down and could think properly again, they all stared at the woman in red with fear and trepidation in their eyes.

If it wasn’t for the sword ringing, they might have burned into a pile of ash for real.

The woman in red was none other than Huo Linglong. She was the current Fire Princess of the Earthfire Palace of Demons, and she practiced a martial art that was exclusive to the Fire Princess of each generation known as the “Flames of Desire”. Every gesture, every smile she performed could draw out the lust submerged in the bottom of one’s heart and turn it into a mind-scorching fire. For the weak-willed, they wouldn’t even realize they were dying until it was too late.

“Stop fooling around, Huo Linglong.”

Another handsome youngster stepped out of his room. He wore a set of white robes and looked cold and lofty.

He wasn’t holding a sword, but his whole body was covered in sword qi. The way it pricked against one’s skin like a needle sent chills up their spine.

“Are you jealous, Brother Sun?” Huo Linglong giggled and moved closer to Sun Xuanzhen.

“They’re still useful,” The white swordsman, Sun Xuanzhen replied indifferently.

Those who felt grateful toward Sun Xuanzhen immediately felt chilled to the bone. Humanity wasn’t worth it, man!

It was their own fault for expecting good things from Sun Xuanzhen though. They all knew that he was a member of the Sword King City, and they were a gray faction that could do good as much as

they did evil. While they weren't as evil as the Earthfire Palace of Demons, they were anything but a virtuous faction.

Sun Xuanzhen paid them no heed. He looked straight at Yue Juejiang and asked, "Why have you called us out, Brother Yue?"

Yue Juejiang swept his gaze across the crowd but couldn't find his servant or sense his Profound Yellow Qi Calabash anywhere. He asked while frowning deeply, "Did you steal my Profound Yellow Qi Calabash, Sun Xuanzhen?"

"Watch what you say, Brother Yue." Sun Xuanzhen's gaze immediately turned steely.

Yue Juejiang's gaze was no less hostile. "Who else could it be besides you and that woman? The two of you are the only ones who would dare to steal my stuff."

"You're sick." Sun Xuanzhen scoffed with disdain.

"What did you say? I dare you to say it again." Yue Juejiang furrowed his brows as the air grew heavy and solid all of a sudden. It pressed down on Sun Xuanzhen like a mountain.

"I said, you're sick."

Sun Xuanzhen wasn't afraid, however. Yue Juejiang was strong, but he wasn't weak either. Besides, the fact that he was talking was already a show of restraint. If he was anyone else, he would have attacked them already.

"You are courting death!" Yue Juejiang erupted. As the descendant of the Earthly Sovereign Hall, he was used to being treated with absolute deference, and he had never encountered anyone who spoke to him like this until now. Enraged, Yue Juejiang threw a punch at Sun Xuanzhen.

The punch was basic and nothing special, but it was as thick and heavy as several mountains.

In response, Sun Xuanzhen took half a step to the right and pressed his index and middle fingers together. Then, he swung them diagonally in front of him.

So what if Yue Juejiang had multiple mountains? He was still going to cut it all with his sword.

His sword qi abruptly swelled like a dragon. The mountains were divided in half just like that.

After the image was destroyed, Sun Xuanzhen's fingers clashed against Yue Juejiang's fist.

Flesh met flesh, but the noise they made sounded like a dull thunderclap more than anything else. The staggering clash caused everyone except Huo Linglong to turn white and stumble backward.

Sun Xuanzhen stepped back from Yue Juejiang after the clash had run its course. His face looked unchanged, but the fingers he hid behind his back were shaking a little.

A bloody wound appeared on Yue Juejiang's fist as well, though it quickly disappeared in the next moment.



“What are you guys doing? If you have a disagreement, then just talk it out. Do you want to draw out the dangers in this coffin and fight them to the death?” Huo Linglong chose this moment to step in between the two men and say, “Give me face and stop fighting, okay? Speaking of which, what happened to you, dearie? We can’t help you if you don’t tell us what happened.”

Yue Juejiang affixed Sun Xuanzhen with a cold glare, but he ultimately wrestled down his murderous desires a few breaths later. For one, Sun Xuanzhen was anything but a weakling. Even if he managed to kill the swordsman, there was no way he would be able to walk away unscathed.

Two, there was Huo Linglong to consider. She might be playing the mediator right now, but if the circumstances were any different, she would be all too happy to play the fisherman and claim the spoils from their cold, dead body. The only reason she didn’t was because the trials weren’t the only dangers in the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin. If they lingered outside their rooms for too long, or if they fought each other with wanton abandon, there was a chance they might trigger some sort of danger that none of them were equipped to handle.

Finally, he hadn’t found the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash or the Profound Yellow Qi yet. It would be unwise to the extreme to fight the man before he even found his items.

Yue Juejiang humphed imperiously before lowering his fists. He then explained, “I instructed Han Meng to collect the Profound Yellow Qi using the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash just now. However, I suddenly lost contact with my Strange Artifact, and Han Meng has gone missing. Someone must have killed him and taken my item.”

“Han Meng is a middle-stage Spirit Purifier, and there are only a handful of people here who have the gall and the strength to kill him.”

Although Yue Juejiang hadn’t stated who he suspected to have stolen his Strange Artifact, his gaze mostly lingered on Sun Xuanzhen and Huo Linglong as he said this. It was clear who he suspected to be the culprit.

“How can you wrong us like that, dearie. You’re going to make me cry.”

Huo Linglong blinked sorrowfully at Yue Juejiang. “Just think about it. Why would we take your Profound Yellow Qi when we couldn’t even finish refining what we currently have? There are a lot of people in this gloomy place, you know.”

“You can search me if you don’t believe me. I promise I won’t move a muscle.”

Everyone’s eyes lit up when they heard this. *I’ll do it! I’ll even pay you to do it!*

Yue Juejiang snorted but said nothing. He stepped past Huo Linglong and Sun Xuanzhen and inspected their rooms carefully. He couldn’t find anything.

“Are you satisfied now?” Sun Xuanzhen harrumphed.

“Show me the contents of your Nature’s Shells,” Yue Juejiang demanded suddenly.

“You’re crossing the line, Yue Juejiang.” Sun Xuanzhen lifted his eyebrow dangerously. It was like he was lifting a sword.

“Show me!” Yue Juejiang repeated in a tone that wouldn’t accept no as an answer.

Sun Xuanzhen was seriously starting to lose his patience. His face darkened as he channeled his sword qi. “Do you really think I’m afraid of you, Yue Juejiang?”

“Show me!” Yue Juejiang repeated a third time, and this time his whole body was surrounded in a sheen of dark yellow energy, one that felt as heavy as suffocating as a mountain.

“If dearie wants to see it, then let him, Brother Sun.” Once again, Huo Linglong played the mediator. “It’s not like you or I are guilty, right? Here, I’ll do it first.”

Huo Linglong unlocked her Nature’s Shell and handed it to Yue Juejiang. After he went through its contents and found nothing, he affixed Sun Xuanzhen with a wordless stare. The swordsman hmped, but he ultimately acquiesced and allowed Yue Juejiang to check his Nature’s Shell as well.

After Yue Juejiang was done with his inspection, Sun Xuanzhen hmped again and left the scene immediately.

Yue Juejiang didn’t say anything. Naturally, he didn’t find his Profound Yellow Qi Calabash in either Nature’s Shell.

The Profound Yellow Qi Calabash was a valuable treasure of the Earthly Sovereign Hall, and it was imprinted with his spirit and his sect’s secret art. Logically speaking, he should be able to sense the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash at such a close range. Since he couldn’t, he automatically assumed that the only ones who knew about the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash’s ability and possessed the strength to conceal its presence were Sun Xuanzhen and Huo Linglong. Besides, they were the only ones who had the balls to take his stuff anyway.

But now, he wasn’t so sure. Did he guess wrong?

“I told you we’re not the culprit, dearie,” Huo Linglong said gently.

“Who else could’ve done it if not you two?” Yue Juejiang asked grimly.

Chapter 488: Where’s My Head

“That’s hard to say. Perhaps a tiger has slipped into our ranks before we know it?”

Smiling, Huo Linglong slowly swept her gaze across the crowd. “If a tiger ate a man, its mouth would surely be covered in bloodstains. Why don’t you check everyone else’s Nature’s Shell as well? Who knows, you might find what you seek.”

Yue Juejiang looked at the crowd and ordered, “Show me your Nature’s Shells.”

Sun Xuanzhen wasn’t around, and Huo Linglong was the one who suggested Yue Juejiang to check their Nature’s Shell in the first place. Left with no choice, everyone opened their Nature’s Shell and allowed Yue Juejiang to inspect its contents.

Yue Juejiang’s expression only grew darker as he scanned each and every Nature’s Shell with his spirit. It was because he couldn’t detect the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash at all.

Not only that, since everyone's door was wide open right now, he could see and feel everything inside the room. He found no traces of his Profound Yellow Qi Calabash, Han Meng's body, or even signs that a fight had taken place. There were no clues for him to pursue at all.

"Who among you have seen Han Meng?" Yue Juejiang asked.

"I did... he left after collecting my Profound Yellow Qi."

"Same here."

"Me too."

"It's the same for the two of us. Han Meng left after collecting our Profound Yellow Qi."

Everyone including Yi Pin and Ye Qing answered.

Suddenly, Yue Juejiang appeared in front of a man and grabbed his throat. He uttered, "You're lying. I can sense the Profound Yellow Qi in you. Did you do it?"

The man he caught slowly turned beet red in the face. He tried to struggle, but he could barely draw breath. It was like a mountain was sitting on top of his chest. "I... I don't understand what you mean!"

"I sensed the Profound Yellow Qi in you. It proves that you had just refined a wisp of Profound Yellow Qi. How is it possible for Han Meng to collect from you if it's already gone?"

Yue Juejiang tightened his grip, and the man's bones creaked ominously. The man's face was starting to turn purple as he squeezed out, "I... did not... kill... Han Meng!"

Yue Juejiang loosened his grip a little, and the man coughed a couple of times to catch his breath. Once he was ready, he explained himself in a hurry, "The Faceless Buddha hurt me very badly today. If I didn't refine the Profound Yellow Qi, I would've died. That is why I did it."

"I didn't kill Han Meng, nor did I steal your Profound Yellow Qi Calabash. I swear it."

"If that's the case, then why did you lie to me?" Yue Juejiang asked coldly.

"I... I just..."

Before the man could finish, Yue Juejiang interrupted, "There is nothing more I hate than liars."

Crack!

There was a disturbing crack, and he ripped off the man's head from his shoulders just like that. The poor man's face slowly spread into an expression of shock and horror before it became frozen for eternity.

Everyone subconsciously took a step backward and stared at Yue Juejiang with fear. The young man slowly swept his gaze across the crowd while still clutching the man's head, saying, "I don't care who among you had stolen my item. Return it to me, and I shall let bygones be bygones. Otherwise, you will end up like this stupid bastard over here."

“...”

“So, you will squander your last chance?”

A few seconds later, when no one stepped forward or said a thing, Yue Juejiang’s aura hit a new low. “Okay then. You can all die.”

Before he even finished talking, Yue Juejiang was already throwing his palm in their direction. A gigantic, dark yellow-colored hand appeared in the air, though the center of its palm was rugged like a mountain and sinuous like a river.

*“Mountain River God Palm”*

Terrible pressure enveloped the group, and everyone turned as white as a sheet. They felt like a literal mountain and river were crashing down on them.

The palm locked the surrounding space and forbade them from escaping to safety. As the palm force washed over them, some people began throwing up copious amounts of blood.

At a critical moment, Huo Linglong suddenly appeared in front of Yue Juejiang and brushed her hand across his wrist like she was playing a string instrument. His hand wobbled, and the giant palm in the air abruptly crumbled into nothing because it was cut off from its energy source.

“You’ve already searched them. Surely you don’t need to kill them as well?” Huo Linglong said gently. “Maybe they really didn’t take your Strange Artifact. The Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin is a dangerous and anomalous place. Perhaps it was one such danger that killed Han Meng and took your treasure? If that’s true, then you would’ve killed them for nothing.”

Yue Juejiang stared at Huo Linglong coldly, but the woman wasn’t afraid in the slightest. “It may be too late to retrieve your Profound Yellow Qi Calabash, but these people can still give us a hefty amount of Profound Yellow Qi. It would be a shame to kill them all, no? Surely you aren’t planning to suffer through the trials for a measly one qi per day?”

“Don’t you agree, dearie?”

Yue Juejiang was still quiet. Judging from his expression, he was either considering Huo Linglong’s words, scorning her reasoning, or both.

“Argh!”

The atmosphere was razor sharp with tension when suddenly, a bloodcurdling scream pierced the air. When they looked, they saw the man Yue Juejiang had just killed a while ago grabbing a woman from behind. Yes, the headless man was somehow moving despite not having a head. Even now, bright red blood was gushing out of the opening and drenching the woman from shoulder to toe.

After the woman had recovered her wits, she let loose a blast of astral qi and shook off the headless man. Surprisingly, the man exploded into a shower of gore like he was a water-filled balloon, not a human.

Caught off guard, some people were splashed by the blood and gore before they could get away. Naturally, the woman caught the worst of it.

“Phew, thank goodness.” The woman sighed in relief, but when she looked up, she noticed that everyone was staring at her in shock. She subconsciously took a step backward and asked, “Wha... what’s wrong?”

Realizing that they were staring at her body, she looked down and saw the blood wriggling like it was alive and taking the form of many tiny faces. The face belonged to the man who just died, of course.

“Where’s my head?”

“Where’s my head?”

“Where’s my head?”

The faces asked very seriously while looking left and right for their head.

The woman screamed and tried to blast the blood away with another surge of astral qi, but...

“Argh! It hurts!”

“It hurts so bad...”

“Ahhhhh...”

The faces were blasted into smithereens, but they reformed almost just as quickly. As they mumbled or groaned in pain, the blood slowly moved upward until it covered the woman’s face completely. Her terrified screams slowly turned more masculine, and her struggles grew weaker and weaker as well.

“Where is my head?”

“Where is my head?”

“Where is my head?”

The woman wasn’t the only one who was afflicted by this strange phenomenon. The blood on the two men who were caught in the blood shower earlier were turning into faces and crying, “Where is my head?” as well.

The next moment, every face suddenly homed in on Yue Juejiang and the head he was holding. Then, they let out a monstrous cry and charged him.

“Hmph. Foolish cur.”

Yue Juejiang remained calm despite the sudden situation. He clenched his fist, and the three victims abruptly exploded into showers of gore.

This time, everyone was ready for it. They backed away from the victims, dodged the scattering bits of flesh and blood, and surrounded their whole bodies in astral qi.

Yue Juejiang scoffed at their reaction, but before he could do anything else, the smatterings of gore on the floor writhed slowly joined together to form a ball of flesh. Many faces were appearing on the surface of the ball, and this time, it wasn’t just the face of the man he killed earlier. There was the poor woman and the two men as well.

Each and every face was crying savagely,

“Where is my head?”

“Why did no one save me?”

“Why did you kill me?”

Their cries weren’t harmless either. They combined to form some sort of chaotic, anomalous sound wave that was magnified many times by the confined space of the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin. Some people clutched their heads and began wailing in pain.

“Get out of my sight!”

A steely glint flickered in Yue Juejiang’s eyes. Realizing that he couldn’t underestimate whatever the hell this thing was, he turned serious and brought down his palm again. The meatball was literally flattened into a meat cake.

Yue Juejiang was frowning, however. It was because his Mountain River God Palm had failed to crush the meatball into a meat paste. In fact, it was wriggling and screaming the entire time,

“It hurts...”

“It hurts so bad...”

“I’m hurting...”

The screams were shrill, terrible, and unholy. It pierced everyone’s mind like knives and caused them to bleed from every orifice.

Pang! Pang! Pang pang!

It was at this moment a new sound entered the fray.

Chapter 489: Soul Collector

The sudden noise sounded like the banging of a night watchman’s rattle—crisp, melodious, and rhythmic. It wasn’t particularly loud or soft, and yet it somehow overcame the shrill, chaotic, and deafening screams currently filling the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin and entered everyone’s ears.

It was because the banging sound had appeared directly inside their head.

Inexplicable terror gripped everyone’s heart. Even the faces had temporarily stopped their screaming.

“He’s here...”

“He’s here!”

The next moment, the faces cried out in abject horror. It was as if who—or whatever was making this sound was the bane of their existence.

Pang! Pang! Pang pang!

The banging sound appeared again, and it was a little louder than before. It was almost as if the thing or creature making the noise... had gotten a little closer to them.

“It’s the Soul Collector! Return to your rooms and stay perfectly quiet and still unless you want to die! Now!” shouted Huo Linglong in a hurry before darting into a nearby room. She was so anxious that she dropped her coy act completely.

As she was talking, Ye Qing grabbed Yi Pin’s shoulder and rolled into the nearest room. Then, he slammed the door shut.

His spirit was probably the strongest out of everyone present, so an indescribable terror struck him the second he heard the sound. Even before Huo Linglong identified the Stranger, he already grabbed Yi Pin’s sleeve and covertly pulled him to the nearest entrance. As a result, they were able to duck into a room at the same time as Huo Linglong, if not faster.

Meanwhile, the crowd finally reacted and dashed toward the nearest rooms as well.

“Out of my way!”

Yue Juejiang didn’t dare to dilly-dally either. He bent his knees and jumped toward a room to his left, bowling over several unfortunate warriors in the process.

Pang! Pang! Pang pang!

The banging sound appeared a third time, and this time, it wasn’t nearly as harmless as before. There were two warriors who were still outside when suddenly, they froze as if someone had cast a spell on them.

The meatball screaming and attempting to roll away to safety abruptly ceased all activities as well. The Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin abruptly turned as silent as death.

An old man with a stooped back emerged from the darkness. He was wearing rags and holding a rattle.

The old man looked incredibly old. His hair was grayish white, and his face was covered in age spots. He was so thin that his cheek bones were sticking out, and his body looked like it was just skin and bones.

The old man looked beyond poor. His clothes were tattered rags woven from the coarsest fabric. He looked like a man whose back was permanently broken by the indomitable concept known as life.

He looked like he was carrying the heaviest burden. It took him ages to take a single step, and every step he took felt like it would shake the ground from the sheer weight of his invisible burden.

The abyss hung behind him like a curtain, and despair stood in front of him like a permanent fixture.

Naturally, there was only incurable numbness and lifelessness in the old man’s eyes.

As the old man came closer, the darkness hanging behind him abruptly spread out in every direction. It looked infinite and immeasurable.

Countless souls were struggling and wailing amidst the darkness, but strangely, there was no sound.

The two unfortunate warriors who failed to duck into a room in time abruptly slumped on the ground. Then, their souls floated out of their bodies and into the darkness.

When the old man walked past the meatball, the soul of the man whose neck was ripped off by Yue Juejiang, the soul of the woman he killed after he underwent a transformation, and two other souls were devoured by the darkness as well.

The old man didn't look like he noticed anything. He continued to step forward while enveloped in infinite darkness.

The one and only thing that could pierce it was the banging sound of his rattle, incessant and rhythmic. Occasionally, a soul would fly out one of the rooms and join the darkness.

The souls kept struggling, but they would never succeed, nor would anyone hear their unearthly wails.

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Inside the room, a white-faced Ye Qing and Yi Pin were clinging to the wall corner like their lives depended on it. Forget moving, they didn't even dare to breathe audibly. They remained as still as puppets.

Although he couldn't see what was happening outside, Ye Qing's heart was thumping with indescribable terror and panic. His limbs felt as stiff as wood, and his mind shook like a leaf.

There were only two Strangers in his life who had inflicted such terror on him. The first one was the terrifying existence who destroyed August Hill Village, and the second was the Nether Lord Evergreen Ivy nearly summoned to destroy Luo Shui.

He was an ant at the time, and those two existences had felt as vast and infinite as the sky itself.

He was now dozens, no, hundreds of times stronger than who he was before, but he still felt completely powerless before such existences. It felt like he would never even come close to narrowing the gap between their powers, much less catch up to them.

An unknown amount of time later, the stifling, soul rattling presence outside the room finally disappeared bit by bit. When it was completely gone, both Ye Qing and Yi Pin slumped on the floor like mud.

A wry smile flickered across their faces when their eyes happened to meet each other. They were both happy and grateful to be alive.

After he recollected himself, Ye Qing asked Yi Pin, "What on earth was that, brother?"

Yi Pin wiped away the sweat on his forehead and answered, "That's the Soul Collector."

"The Soul Collector?" Ye Qing shook his head to indicate that he hadn't heard of it before.

"Have you heard of the Night Watch, brother?" Yi Pin asked.

Ye Qing rolled his eyes at him. That was like asking if he knew what rice was.

"No, I'm not talking about the ordinary night watchmen who patrol the night and remind everyone to be careful with their fire," Yi Pin guessed Ye Qing's thoughts and corrected him smilingly. "I'm talking about the Night Watch of Yan."



“Oh,” Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. Similar to the Night Patrol of Wei, the Demon Suppression Office of Qi, or the Pacification Bureau of Chu, the Night Watch of Yan were the government organization responsible for dealing with Stranger matters in a country.

“It is said that the Night Watch of Yan is a prestigious lineage descended from the ancient Night Watchers,” Yi Pin began slowly. “In ancient times, Strangers were everywhere, and demons and monsters killed and destroyed as they pleased. The Night Watchers were born to patrol the night, eliminate the Strangers, and protect the people from harm.”

“The leader of the Night Watchers was none other than the Earthly Sovereign himself, and the Soul Collector was said to be the vice leader. He was so loyal to the Earthly Sovereign that he willingly buried himself in the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin to protect his resting place.”

“The Soul Collector is the second most terrible existence in the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin besides the Earthly Sovereign himself. Any human or Stranger who dares to disturb his rest shall have their souls taken by the Soul Collector.”

“The reason he showed up is most likely because Yue Juejiang caused too big a commotion, and we stayed outside our rooms longer than usual.”

“Why did he let us live?” Ye Qing asked, puzzled. He refused to believe that this shitty room—or any room for that matter—could keep such a terrible existence at bay.

“The Soul Collector is the protector of the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin. He would not tolerate any act of blasphemy against his lord or his resting place. Anyone who speaks or moves wantonly in his presence shall be treated as a blasphemer and have their souls collected,” Yi Pin explained.

“So, you’re saying that it will be fine if we don’t speak or move when he’s around?” Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. No wonder the first thing Yi Pin told him after they escaped into their room was to stay quiet and stay still. Huo Linglong had mentioned something like this as well.

“You can say that,” Yi Pin confirmed.

“If it’s that easy, then why do we need to hide inside a room?” Ye Qing asked.

“Are you stupid?” Yi Pin shot Ye Qing an incredulous look. “Because it’s safe, of course. The Soul Collector is a champion from ancient times. A single wisp of his aura can damage our minds if you’re lucky, or extinguish it outright if you’re not. These rooms are constructed from special stones that can neutralize the Soul Collector’s

aura and pressure to a certain extent. That is the only reason you and I are still alive right now.”

Ye Qing couldn’t refute Yi Pin. It was a stupid question. He fell silent, and for a time, no one said anything.

Chapter 490: Flower Turtle

“Is the Soul Collector alive or dead?” Ye Qing asked suddenly after a moment of silence.

“Of course he’s—”

Yi Pin wanted to say that the Soul Collector was dead since those days were long, long behind them. But then, he recalled the fact that warriors from those times were on a completely different level, so who was to say that some of them hadn’t transcended death itself?

In the end, Yi Pin shook his head and said, “I’m not sure.”

He could be alive or dead. Only the Soul Collector himself knew for sure.

For the two of them, the appearance of the Soul Collector was just a harmless scare. However, it reminded them that they were just guests of the Earthly Sovereign’s Coffin; ants that the entities of this place could crush like nothing if they really wanted to. So long as they were still in this place, they must never let their guard down.

That said, the appearance of the Soul Collector was a good thing for Ye Qing. It had stopped Yue Juejiang’s search and prevented him from pulling drastic measures to retrieve his Profound Yellow Qi Calabash.

This was proven when Yue Juejiang called everyone out again, but only fired off a few puny threats and collected a few wisps of Profound Yellow Qi. He left them alone after that.

“Phew. So glad that’s finally behind us.” Yi Pin let out a sigh of relief after they returned to their own rooms. He then looked at Ye Qing curiously and asked, “Weren’t you afraid when Yue Juejiang tried to kill us earlier? It would’ve been pretty bad if the Soul Collector hadn’t shown up.”

“Not at all,” Ye Qing replied calmly. “It was just an intimidation tactic, and even if it wasn’t, neither Huo Linglong nor Sun Xuanzhen would allow it.”

The reason the three warriors kept them alive was to use them to acquire more Profound Yellow Qi. Killing them would be like killing the goose for the golden egg. Even if Yue Juejiang managed to retrieve the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash, it would have been a net loss for him, not to mention Huo Linglong and Sun Xuanzhen. Those two would have lost an entire “crop” of Profound Yellow Qi for nothing.

Earlier, Yue Juejiang tried everything but still failed to locate the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash. He acted like his anger had gone to his head, and that he was going to make the thief pay by hook or by crook. In reality, he probably knew better than everyone that killing them wouldn’t help him

retrieve his lost treasure. He was just trying to scare the thief into panicking and exposing themselves.

To be fair, it was a good plan. Most people wouldn't be able to keep their cool in a life-or-death situation. Unfortunately for him, Ye Qing had experienced too much to be intimidated by a mere Half-Step Spirit Master. Besides, he knew exactly what Yue Juejiang was thinking, and he was certain that the young man wouldn't kill them.

"Why are you asking me though? I'm sure you've already figured this out." Ye Qing smirked at Yi Pin. If he could figure this out, then surely the cunning old Taoist would have arrived at the same conclusion as well.

"Hahaha! I have, but as you know, a person only grows more timid with age. Despite my knowledge, I was honestly afraid that that simple-minded mule would say damn the consequences and kill us all. Luckily, everything went as you predicted. I'm fairly sure Yue Juejiang now believe Huo Linglong's claim that the mysterious powers of the Earthly Sovereign's Coffin stole his Profound Yellow Qi Calabash, so you should be in the clear now."

Yi Pin let out a chuckle before asking a question, "I'm really curious though. How on earth did you manage to stop Yue Juejiang from sensing his Strange Artifact? And where on earth did you hide it?"

This was what really confounded him.

"Like I said, it's a secret." Ye Qing smirked and politely refused to answer.

It wasn't anything special, really. All he did was to wrap the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash inside the Annon Sutra. The Annon Sutra was a powerful, enigmatic existence. When it wasn't using its power, not even the strongest, most anomalous existence could detect its presence, much less a mere human.

This wasn't the first time he used the Annon Sutra to cover up an item's presence, so he knew it would work. Of course, he was also lucky that the Profound Yellow Qi Calabash was small enough to be wrapped inside the piece of vellum. After that, he simply deposited the item inside Nine Heavens.

In his imagination, Yue Juejiang's attention would be mostly on powerful warriors such as Huo Linglong and Sun Xuanzhen. He would never look through the Nature's Shell of a "puny early-stage Spirit Purifier" like him too thoroughly no matter how much he wanted to retrieve his treasure. And he was right. The guy hadn't even conducted a thorough inspection. He had simply brushed his spirit across their Nature's Shells.

But of course, he still had to thank the Soul Collector for interrupting the search prematurely. Otherwise, there was no way Yue Juejiang would have let things go so easily.

"Guard me, brother."

Now that it was safe, it was time to convert the Profound Yellow Qi into his strength. In order to prevent Yi Pin from detecting something or someone barging into their room suddenly and finding

something amiss, Ye Qing surrounded himself inside the thick, spirit-isolating fog that was his Child of Blood Demon. But of course, he didn't wrap Yi Pin inside his fog.

With that done, he summoned a wisp of Profound Yellow Qi from his Nine Heavens, swallowed it, and began his cultivation.

"Heh, he's so careful that he doesn't feel like a youngster. Then again, only careful people can live just a little longer in this world."

Yi Pin chuckled and examined the fog permeating the room a little. Then, he leaned against the wall and sipped his wine without a care for the world.

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Darkness and silence, mystery and fear seemed to be the permanent themes of the Earthly Sovereign's Coffin. Darkness produced mystery, and silence elicited fear. Considering how dominant these themes were, it almost felt like light was the biggest taboo of this place.

That misconception was shattered when wisps of light suddenly chased away the eternal darkness that shrouded the coffin. In fact, the light looked colorful and dreamlike.

At the center of the penta-colored light were a bunch of flowers. They were shaped like orchids and had pure white petals. Their pistils were also penta-colored and swaying gently even though there was no wind inside the coffin. The light it emitted was as fanciful as a kaleidoscope.

The colorful, bright orchids slowly came closer to the rooms. At first, it looked like the orchids were floating in the middle of the darkness. But when they got closer, it became clear that they were attached to the back of a turtle[1].

The turtle was pitch black and about as big as a millstone. Its shell was absolutely covered in flowers. It was like a mini garden of sorts.

Every time the turtle took a step forward, the flowers would shake a little and spill more light into the surroundings. The fragrant scent of the flowers was a match for its phantasmal light and colors.

The beautiful, flower-covered turtle seemed to be the antithesis of the coffin's darkness. It brought a sliver of liveliness, happiness, tranquility and auspiciousness into this place of death.

"Yawn..."

"Haap..."

"So sleepy..."

It was as if the tranquil and auspicious light was infectious. A wave of sleepiness washed over everyone before they knew it.

As if responding to their drowsiness, the flowers on the turtle's back grew increasingly colorful and fragrant as well. From time to time, the turtle would turn back and consume the brightest, most colorful and fragrant flower of them all.

Those who were already asleep fell into a deeper slumber.

"Yawn..."

Ye Qing was meditating and yawning inside the room. He was so drowsy he nearly lost control of his energy circulation.

“What the heck? Why am I so sleepy...”

The world spun before his eyes as heavy waves of sleepiness assaulted his mind again and again. He kept nodding off like a chick no matter how much he tried to keep his posture straight, and his eyelids were so heavy that he was unable to open them no matter what.

“Snore... snore...”

Beside him, Yi Pin was already out like a light. His snores were loud, and there were saliva trickling down the corner of his lips. It looked like he was having a great dream.

The old Taoist’s snores only caused Ye Qing’s eyelids to grow heavier. His consciousness was starting to blur as well.

No... something’s not right about this...

Ye Qing shook his head strongly in an attempt to regain his clarity of mind. With his mental fortitude, he could go two weeks straight without sleep and still be more awake than this. Something was definitely wrong about the situation.

His head cleared up for a breath or so, but a new wave of drowsiness threatened to dye his vision black once more.

*“I mustn’t fall asleep!”*

Determination flickered in Ye Qing’s eyes as he bit the tip of his tongue. The sudden outburst of pain immediately pushed away the wave of drowsiness and woke him up completely.

“Brother! Wake up! Brother!”

Ye Qing hurriedly walked up to Yi Pin and shook his shoulder persistently, but it was like someone had turned off the consciousness switch in his mind. No matter how hard he shook the old Taoist and cried out his name, he refused to wake up no matter what.