

## Stranger 521

### Chapter 521: Don't Go Out When It's Bright

"Heh, it looks like you know your manners, so I'll be the bigger man this time and forgive you." The boy laughed boisterously before waving his hand. "My name is Mu Qing. You may call me Old Mu. This is my wife Qin Fang, my son Mu Lin, and my daughter-in-law Ding Rui."

*What a coincidence. My name has a Qing in it as well.* Ye Qing chuckled and replied, "My name is Joyless Ye. Nice to meet you all, Old Mu, Mrs. Mu, uncle, auntie."

Oh man, that sounds both weird and embarrassing for some reason.

"Nice to meet you too." They returned the greeting with a nod before Mu Qing asked, "So, why have you come to Longevity Village, boy? Are you here to extend your lifespan as well?"

Ye Qing shook his head. "No, I'm here to find someone."

"Find someone? Who?" Mu Qing asked, puzzled.

Ye Qing replied, "A group of people should've entered Longevity Village about two or three days ago. I'm looking for them."

Yi Pin and his unwanted companions had departed for Longevity Village about three days ago, but he didn't know when they entered the village exactly. He could only give Mu Qing a vague answer.

"Two or three days ago?" Mu Qing looked confused. He glanced at his wife, son and daughter-in-law and asked, "Did our village welcome a group of visitors in the past couple days?"

They all shook their heads in unison. "Not at all. In fact, we haven't received any visitors for a very long time."

Mu Qing looked back at Ye Qing and asked, "Are you sure you got the right place, boy?"

Ye Qing frowned. He knew there could be no mistake because the Annon Sutra was the one who told him that Yi Pin was at Longevity Village. Either Mu Qing and his family were lying to him, or something else was going on here.

He didn't think that they were lying to him. Besides their unnatural longevity, Mu Qing and his family felt perfectly ordinary to him. He had also been examining their expression and emotion using his demonic thought while he shot them questions. As far as he could tell, no one was lying to him.

A skilled liar might be able to control their expression perfectly on the outside, but they had to experience some level of turmoil on the inside. Even if he presumed that some of them possessed the exceptional skill to conceal their expression and their emotions perfectly from scrutiny, it was unlikely that all five of them could pull off the same feat. That was why he did not think that Mu Qing and his family were lying to him.

That said, reality cared nothing for his opinions, so just in case Ye Qing continued his line of questioning, “I’m sure they’ve arrived at Longevity Village. Are you sure you haven’t missed them? Perhaps you have a faulty memory or something?”

“Screw you! I’m nowhere old enough to have blurry eyes or declining memory! There is no way I would miss it if an outsider really has come to our village, much less a whole group!” Mu Qing huffed.

“Ahem... that’s not what I meant, Old Mu.” *Bro, you’re almost seventy years old. If you’re not an old man, then who is?*

Then, Ye Qing noticed Mu Qing’s youthful appearance and changed his mind. *On second thought, he has a very good reason to say he’s not old.*

“Hmph! I can tell you don’t believe me. Come! I’ll take you to the others. Maybe one of them has seen your mysterious group, or maybe I’m right! We’ll know in a moment!” Mu Qing grunted.

“Apologies for the trouble, Old Mu.” Ye Qing saluted him. He was planning to explore the village anyway, and Mu Qing as a guide would make things much simpler.

“Can you prepare an extra meal for this boy while I take him around the village, woman? I promise we won’t take too long!” Mu Qing instructed.

Ye Qing tried to decline their invitation. “It’s fine. I’m not hungry.”

Mu Qing’s wife, Qin Fang merely waved him off and said in a warm tone, “Spare me the courtesy, will you? You must have traveled long and far to come here. No way I’m going to let you starve! Come back soon, you two!”

“I already said we won’t take too long,” Mu Qing mumbled before beckoning for Ye Qing to follow him. “Come on!”

And so Mu Qing began leading Ye Qing around the village and introducing him to various villagers. To Ye Qing’s surprise, not only was Mu Qing not the oldest man in the village, he was among the younger generation. Nearly everyone they met was his senior, and it was awkward to hear him addressing them as big bro, big sis, uncle, auntie and more. *If Mu Qing is “Old Mu” to me, then what about the others? Should I address them as great uncle A or great auntie B? Maybe even grand uncle C?*

Just like Mu Qing, his uncle and auntie all looked ridiculously young. If you judged them by their appearance alone, you would think that they were only several years apart from each other.

One thing he noticed while touring the village was that they were exceptionally friendly. Although he was an outsider, they never failed to enquire solicitously about his wellbeing and invited him to take a seat at their houses.

The village wasn’t big, but it wasn’t too small either. It took him over two hours before he finally met with everyone in the village. Ye Qing’s impression after the tour had come to an end was that one word: paradise.

Longevity Village felt like a paradise that should only exist in one's dreams. Everyone here was freed from pain, anxiety and depression, and everyone was kind, happy and peaceful. If there was such a place as a utopia, then this was it.

Despite this, there were oddities that Ye Qing couldn't help but notice. For example, not even the oldest people in this village looked particularly old. Two, everyone was walking about and doing things even though it was past midnight. And three, he was the only outsider they had met since a very, very long time.

One person could concoct a perfect lie. Two people could concoct a perfect lie. It was possible for five or even ten people to concoct a perfect lie. But the entire village?

Not only that, Ye Qing had been scanning the village non-stop while he and Mu Qing traveled from house to house. He was unable to find a trace of Yi Pin anywhere no matter how hard he searched. It was almost as if Yi Pin wasn't at Longevity Village, except it couldn't be. The Annon Sutra had spoken, and its word was law. He just couldn't find the old Taoist for some reason.

Ye Qing was dazed and feeling he had a small headache by the time Mu Qing finally took him back to his house. Not long after, he joined them at the dining table and enjoyed a delicious meal.

Yi Pin was still nowhere to be found, and he was worried that the food might be drugged or something. He honestly didn't feel like eating anything. However, he couldn't bring himself to spurn the family's invitation for the tenth time, so he ultimately gave in and... ate so much food that he nearly burst his belly.

Normally, he was a cautious, highly disciplined professional who would not succumb to temptation. When he did, it was because the temptation was too much. The food itself was nothing special, and there wasn't even a plate of meat on the table. It was just some all-natural honey, fungus, wild vegetables and more. But for some reason, they were some of the most delicious-smelling and tasting food he had ever eaten in his life. Literally, it was better than even the strange food he had eaten at Food Is Heaven some time ago.

So, yes, he couldn't hold back—but he made sure to check that the food was safe, of course. He wasn't *that* far gone that he would risk his life over some food.

After a fulfilling dinner—or was it supper?—he spent the rest of the night chatting with Mu Qing and his family. Before he knew it, weak beams of sunlight were shining into the living room. Dawn was coming.

“Oh my, it's almost morning?”

When Mu Qing noticed this, he suddenly yawned and said tiredly, “It's been a long time since we welcomed a visitor, so I couldn't help but speak a little more than I meant to. I hope you won't mind.”

“Of course not, Old Mu. I'm happy to make your acquaintance,” Ye Qing replied.

“Hahaha! I'm glad you don't find me long-winded,” Mu Qing chirped happily. “Alright, it's getting late. You should go to bed soon.”

*It's getting late? Shouldn't it be the other way around?* Ye Qing blinked in confusion as he glanced at the growing light.

“Old Mu, do you guys... sleep in the morning?” Ye Qing asked after deciding that there was no point holding back his question.

“What else?” replied Mu Qing while he was halfway to his room. He then added, “Seriously, boy, go catch some sleep.”

“Remember, you must never, ever leave the house when it’s daytime.”

Chapter 522: There’s Someone On Your Shoulder

“Hmm?” Ye Qing frowned. *They go to bed in the morning? I’ve never heard of such a culture before.*

Now he understood why everyone in Longevity Village was up and about during midnight. It was because they slept during the day!

But what did he mean by not leaving the house during daytime? Usually, people were advised to stay indoors during nighttime. Why was this flipped around again?

It was strange. Too strange.

“But why can’t we go out during the day, Old Mu?” Ye Qing voiced his doubt.

“Because... that is the law of Longevity Village!” Ye Qing wondered if it was his imagination, but the old man’s voice sounded a little odder and eerie than normal. “In any case, never go out during the day!”

Having said that, Mu Qing turned around and walked straight toward his room. Ye Qing had more questions to ask, but the old man ignored his cries almost as if he couldn’t hear them. He was gone in just a moment.

Ye Qing hesitated, but he ultimately did not try to stop Mu Qing. After all, he couldn’t predict what kind of consequences such an action might bring, not to mention that the Mu Family had never shown an ounce of malice toward him. He didn’t want to endanger them unless absolutely necessary.

It was almost daytime anyway. Whatever oddity that was afflicting this village would soon reveal itself. There was no need to start something unnecessary.

Having made up his mind, Ye Qing sat cross-legged on the bed and entered a meditative state. At the same time, he spread out his demonic thought like a web and paid close attention to his surroundings.

By now, his spiritual power was strong enough to spread his demonic thought across one-fifth of Longevity Village, and his senses were telling him that the whole village had fallen silent. If it was as noisy and lively as a market before, now it was as silent as death itself. If it wasn’t for the villagers’ slow breathing—and even then, their breathing was so quiet that he could mistake them for the dead—he would have thought that the village was dead.

That wasn’t all. As time passed, and the darkness slowly gave way to light, Longevity Village slowly began to transform. As if it was in a time-lapse video, the village began falling apart in real time. The buildings started looking old and dilapidated, chunks of the walls began falling off its

main body, the roof tiles began cracking or powdering into dust, and dead grass was everywhere. It looked both desolate and bleak.

The room Mu Qing had prepared for him was undergoing a transformation as well. Dust bunnies began to spawn like crazy, cobwebs appeared all over the place, the table, the chairs and his bed were covered in mold, and the air smelled of something rotten. The wisps of light shining through the lattice windows only made the decay clearer.

“Strange!”

Ye Qing was wondering what was going on when suddenly, his eyebrows shot into his hair. The next moment, he disappeared and reappeared in front of Mu Qing’s room.

He didn’t step inside because he knew that the husband and wife were already gone. In fact, every villager in Longevity Village had disappeared as if they never were. He knew this because they had all vanished from his demonic thought without warning, though he had no idea how they disappeared or where they went. One moment they were there, and the next, poof.

“What is going on here?”

He could not fathom Longevity Village’s transformation at all, the villagers’ sudden disappearance even more so.

“Let’s head out.”

Ye Qing made up his mind to leave after thinking for a moment. Although Longevity Village’s transformation was strange to say the least, and Mu Qing’s warning implied that he would be in danger if he left the place, his intuition also told him that this was probably his best chance of finding Yi Pin.

More importantly, he was confident that he was strong enough to handle any danger.

As soon as he stepped out of the building, he was blasted in the face by a strange gust of air. The sky was bright, but for some reason, it didn’t feel warm or inviting like the morning sunlight should. Instead, it felt cold, biting, and discomforting.

“Hmm? There’s someone here!”

Suddenly, Ye Qing sensed an unfamiliar man entering his sensory range. Ye Qing immediately took off in his direction and appeared in front of him a few breaths later.

The man was caught off guard by Ye Qing’s sudden appearance as a matter of course. Seemingly embarrassed by his own reaction, he yelled, “Who are you?”

Ye Qing paid him no attention, however. Standing about six meters away from him, Ye Qing stared at the man with a severe look on his face. Specifically, he was staring at the space above his head.

A few seconds of tense silence later, when the man realized that Ye Qing wasn’t going to answer his question, he raised his voice even further, “What are you looking at?”

This was not the time for a classic, “I’m looking at you. Whatcha gonna do about it?” So Ye Qing ignored the question and asked a question of his own, “Can’t you see it?”

“See what?” The man blurted uncertainly and anxiously. In fact, he noticed that Ye Qing was shooting him a strange look from the very beginning.

“I guess you can’t,” Ye Qing muttered to himself.

The man swallowed visibly but forced himself to yell again, “What on *earth* are you talking about, boy? Stop acting enigmatic and give it to me straight already! I’m not scared!”

“If you’re not scared, then why are you shaking?” Ye Qing smirked a little before turning serious. “Would you believe me if I tell you that a creature is crouching on top of your head?”

He wasn’t joking. The reason he was staring at the man so intently wasn’t because he was strong and definitely not because he was handsome. It was because a humanoid Stranger was crouching on top of him.

The Stranger possessed the shape and size of a human child, though it looked anything but cute and innocent. Its skin was bluish black in color, its face looked ancient and wrinkly, its hair was patchy white, its beard was longer than the length of its head, and its bloodshot eyes were filled with greed, madness and anomaly.

Right now, the child was hugging the man’s neck with both arms, and its long beard was stuck inside his brain like tentacles. However, the man couldn’t seem to feel it at all.

While Ye Qing watched the child-like Stranger, the Stranger too was staring at him. If there was any doubt that the emotions brimming in its bloodshot eyes were greed and hunger, the saliva trickling down the corners of its mouth was the decisive evidence. Ye Qing could barely control his disgust when the saliva trickled down its beard and into the man’s brain.

The man blanched when he heard Ye Qing’s words. He subconsciously waved his hands over his shoulders, but of course he couldn’t feel anything. From Ye Qing’s perspective, he saw the man’s hands passing through the child Stranger’s body almost as if it was just an illusion.

Knowing that one’s senses weren’t always reliable, the man produced a stone mirror from his Nature’s Shell and pointed it toward himself.

The stone mirror was a Strange Artifact named the Stone Mirror. Despite its bland name, it was a bonafide Hatred-class Strange Artifact. It could illuminate Strangers and traces that were usually invisible to the human senses.

The Stone Mirror revealed nothing, however. Thinking that Ye Qing was lying to him, the man let out a sigh of relief and raged, “Why did you trick me?”

“I’m not tricking you. I’m telling you the truth,” Ye Qing replied while examining the child-like Stranger curiously. When the man produced the Stone Mirror just now, he clearly saw a flash of disdain on its face. This reaction seemed to suggest that the child-like Stranger was an intelligent Stranger. “Make no mistake, you’re the blind one between the two of us.”

Unable to hold back his anger any longer, the man yelled, “You are courting death!” And leaped into the air. Then, he kicked up his legs repeatedly while aiming at Ye Qing’s heart.

“*Serial Heart Piercing Kick*” [1]

Ye Qing watched the incoming attack with calm and indifference. Right before the flurry of kicks would hit him, he waved his hand like he was brushing aside the clouds. At that moment, the flurry of kicks suddenly vanished into nothing, and the man hit the ground in an unceremonious fashion. His eyes were filled with shock and disbelief.

“You... you...”

In his senses, Ye Qing’s vigor was weak, and his energies barely perceptible. It was why he thought that Ye Qing was just a novice who had accidentally stumbled upon Longevity Village. From the start he never thought that Ye Qing amounted to anything.

Then, the young man dispelled his astral qi and force with a simple flick of the hand. A boy? How could he ever have made such an obvious mistake? He was obviously an old monster!

Cold sweat appeared on the man’s forehead as Ye Qing declared, “I told you that you’re as blind as a bat. Do you believe me now?”

He took one step forward and loosened his control a little. A torrent of energy immediately flooded out of his body and washed over the man, crumbling his energies and suffocating him where he sat. Pale as a sheet, the man hurriedly begged, “Yes, yes! This junior’s the blind one! Please have mercy and forgive me this once, senior!”

The torrent of energy didn’t stop. The man shook like a leaf as his face grew paler and paler. Just when he thought he was dead, the pressure pinning him to the floor abruptly disappeared, and Ye Qing said, “Taking action against a pitiful Astral Refiner like you would only sully my reputation. Rise.”

Chapter 523: Life, Death, and Human Nature

“Thank you! Thank you for not killing me!” The man thanked Ye Qing profusely as he climbed back to his feet.

“Hmm? I never said I wasn’t going to kill you.” Ye Qing suddenly changed his tone and stared at the man with a smile that didn’t reach the eye. The poor guy had just regained a hint of color when the blood drained away from his face once more.

“Relax. It’s just a joke,” Ye Qing said indifferently.

“Phew...”

The despairing man let out a huge sigh of relief when he heard this. Right after some color had returned to his face, and he was about to say something, Ye Qing said again, “I can always kill you after you disobey me.”

The man’s heart hadn’t even lowered back into his ribcage before it leaped to his throat once more. For a time, he could only stare at Ye Qing incredulously. *If this guy isn’t a bloodthirsty murderer, I’ll wash my hair while doing a headstand!*

"I... I wouldn't dare, senior. Just give me the order, and I will fulfill it no matter what it is," replied the man in a hurry while bowing deeply to Ye Qing. He was worried that Ye Qing would grow impatient and kill him if he took too long to answer.

"Good." Ye Qing nodded and asked, "What is your name?"

The man answered carefully, "My name is Zuo Ming, senior. It's an honor to meet you."

"Zuo Ming (Bright)? What a waste of a good word." Ye Qing shot him a disdainful look.

Zuo Ming laughed dryly. "P-Please don't make fun of me, senior."

"Tell me, is this Longevity Village?" Ye Qing finally stopped intimidating the guy and asked.

Zuo Ming answered obediently, "I'm not sure, senior."

"You're not sure?" Ye Qing narrowed his eyes a little as the temperature in his voice dropped. "I'll give you one more chance to ruminate on your answer. There is no one I hate more than liars."

"I wouldn't dare, senior!" Cold sweat trickled down his nose like bullets as Zuo Ming explained himself as quickly as he could, "We are here in search for Longevity Village, but this place is nothing like what we imagine. That is why I can't in good conscience say that we're in the right place."

"We? You're not alone then," Ye Qing stated matter-of-factly.

Zuo Ming replied obediently, "That is correct, senior. There are seven of us in total."

"Seven? That's quite the big group you have!" Ye Qing chuckled and caused goosebumps to break out on Zuo Ming's skin. "And how did you find this place?"

Zuo Ming didn't dare to conceal anything. "An... An old Taoist's the one who led us here."

*Old Taoist? Is it Yi Pin?* Ye Qing thought with delight, though he didn't reveal his emotions on his face in the slightest. He continued in an indifferent tone, "Heh. And you're sure the old Taoist didn't lie or mislead you?"

Zuo Ming scoffed, "He wouldn't dare. That old Taoist is a small fry who knows nothing but some divination skills."

A weakling who only knows some divination skills? It has to be him!

"Fool. Even a rat will bite when cornered—but it is not my responsibility to correct your foolishness. Take me to him," Ye Qing declared in a tone that wouldn't accept no as an answer.

"As you command!" Zuo Ming neither had the courage nor the strength to resist.

"This way please, senior."



Two steps later, Ye Qing continued his questioning, “Has this village always looked like this?”

“Yes, senior.” Zuo Ming nodded. “The village looked like it had been abandoned for decades since the moment we set foot in this place, and as far as I’m aware, nothing has changed during our time here. Not only could we find no one, we couldn’t even spot a single Stranger. It’s quite unusual.”

“Not a single Stranger, you say?” commented Ye Qing while side-eyeing the child-like Stranger crouching on top of Zuo Ming at this very moment.

“I-Is there a problem, senior?” Zuo Ming shuddered involuntarily under Ye Qing’s stare.

“If you think there’s no problem, then sure,” Ye Qing replied ambiguously. He didn’t know what the child-like Stranger haunting Zuo Ming was and so didn’t want to act rashly.

It wasn’t because he was afraid of the Stranger, of course. He just didn’t want to lose his one and only guide at this point of time.

Zuo Ming grew even more anxious after hearing Ye Qing’s answer, but Ye Qing couldn’t care less about his feelings. He asked another question, “Why are you looking for Longevity Village?”

Zuo Ming snapped out of his worries and answered, “My master is nearing the end of his lifespan, but he doesn’t want to die just yet. That is why he came here in search for a way to extend his lifespan.”

“Your master?” Ye Qing purposely dragged out the word “master”.

Zuo Ming understood his meaning and launched into an explanation, “My master is the patriarch of the Xue Clan of Mu Yang, Xue Hanshan. We usually address him as Lord Xue.”

“The Xue Clan of Mu Yang?” Ye Qing knew that Mu Yang was the county to the south of Bei You, but he had never heard of a Xue Clan.

A short silence later, Ye Qing said in a ridiculing voice, “It is true that entering the Longevity Village would increase one’s lifespan, but doesn’t Xue Hanshan know that his boon comes at the cost of his own friends and family?”

Zuo Ming let out an awkward chuckle. “He is aware, but...”

Zuo Ming didn’t finish his sentence, but his meaning was clear enough. There were some people in this world who would sacrifice themselves to save a million lives, but there were also people who would sacrifice millions to save themselves.

It was just human nature.

“My oh my... and everyone in the family is fine with this... exchange?” Ye Qing asked curiously.

Zuo Ming chuckled a lot more naturally. “Lord Xue kept them in the dark, of course.”

“Interesting.” A meaningful smile flitted across Ye Qing’s face. “You’re one of Xue Hanshan’s aides, aren’t you? Are you sure he won’t blame you for your indiscretion?”

Zuo Ming hurriedly clarified his standpoint. “I’m sure Lord Xue will forgive me since it’s a question from you, senior.”

“Heh... I guess you’re not too stupid.” Ye Qing chuckled as if satisfied with Zuo Ming’s response. Zuo Ming too let out a sigh of relief.

The duo continued to chat as they walked. Of course, Ye Qing was the one who did most of the questioning, and it wasn’t because he was bored. He needed to know as much about his enemies as possible so that he could come up with a surefire plan to rescue Yi Pin.

Very soon, Zuo Ming led Ye Qing to his companion’s meeting spot. Ye Qing immediately recognized it as one of the residences he and Mu Qing had visited last night. In his memory, the residence was an elegantly-designed house attached to a beautiful garden filled with gorgeous flowers. However, the house currently in front of him was dilapidated and overgrown with weeds. He would never have linked the two houses together if they weren’t at the exact same spot.

They were dozens of meters away from the house when Qing’s demonic thought picked up an ancient voice, “Reverend Yi Pin, are you sure we’re at Longevity Village?”

The speaker was a pale, haggard old man who looked like he had one foot in the grave. He was most likely Xue Hanshan.

There were three other people in the courtyard. One of them was muscular, ugly, and carrying a jagged mace on his shoulder. The second person was wearing a ghost mask and a black outfit. Inconspicuous and unnoticeable, he was carrying a sword in his lap and standing behind Xue Hanshan like a shadow.

These two were probably Xue Hanshan’s left and right arm and his most trusted aides, the Tiger and the Hawk. Tiger was the muscular, ferocious-looking man, and Hawk was the one standing in Xue Hanshan’s shadow.

The third and last person was of course, Yi Pin.

The good news was that the old Taoist looked unharmed despite the fact that he was a hostage. In fact, Ye Qing would even say that he looked fit and healthy.

Xue Hanshan was asking Yi Pin a question, and the old Taoist answered in a hurry, “I’m sure. This has to be Longevity Village.”

Tiger grabbed Yi Pin by the collar and snarled into his face, “Bullshit! We haven’t found a single soul since we set foot in this place! I bet you’re trying to trick us!”

Yi Pin defended himself, “I wouldn’t dare! As far as my divination is concerned, this place really is Longevity Village. It’s not like I came here before, so how would I know it looks like this?”

“Let him go, Tiger. Reverend Yi Pin is a smart man, and a smart man wouldn’t do stupid things,” Xue Hanshan said slowly.

“But of course!” Yi Pin forced out a chuckle.

“Hmph.” Tiger grunted with displeasure before threatening, “Don’t forget that your disciple is in our hands, old man. If you dare lie to us, then I will rip you and your disciple into pieces.”

“Of course, of course.” Yi Pin’s head bobbed up and down like a doll.

Suddenly, Xue Hanshan looked outside the courtyard as if he had sensed something. He then called out, “You’re back, Zuo Ming. Did you find something?”

Chapter 524: To Punch A Mountain

“Not yet, my lord.”

Zuo Ming pushed open the gates and stepped inside.

“Then why are you back?” Xue Hanshan frowned with clear displeasure when he heard this. “Didn’t I say—”

It was at that moment the old man saw the young man behind Zuo Ming. He never heard his footsteps or felt his presence at all. In fact, he still couldn’t perceive the young man in any way except sight despite the fact that he was right in front of him.

For obvious reasons, Xue Hanshan’s hair immediately stood on end. “Who are you?”

Instead of replying, Ye Qing slowly swept his gaze across the group. Just like Zuo Ming, everyone was carrying a child-like Stranger on their shoulders, and they seemed completely clueless about it.

Am I the only one who can see it?

Ye Qing frowned deeply. It was one thing if the others didn’t notice, but Yi Pin was someone who once reached the peak of the martial way. Could he not see the Stranger as well?

The other possibility was that Yi Pin could see the Stranger, but he was keeping calm about it because he was plotting something. He wouldn’t know until he interacted further with the group.

Ye Qing was thinking about the child-like Strangers, but in Xue Hanshan, Tiger and Hawk’s opinion, he was either putting on airs or ignoring them.

“Are you deaf, boy? My master is asking you a question!” Tiger yelled. When Ye Qing still remained quiet, he flew into a rage, “Do you seek death? Very well then!”

Tiger pushed off the ground and pounced toward Ye Qing like a man-eating tiger.

“Tiger! Stop!” Eyes widening, Zuo Ming blurted and tried to stop Tiger. It wasn’t because he wanted to save the man’s life—although they were all on the same side, Tiger was hot-tempered, irritable, and bloodthirsty by nature. As a result, almost no one was on good terms with the warrior, and Zuo Ming was no exception—it was because he was afraid that Tiger would provoke Ye Qing into a rage and land him in trouble as a result.

He was just about to step forward when he felt a hand grabbing his right shoulder. His energies dissipated into nothing in an instant, and he felt like a mountain was holding in place. Forget taking a step, he couldn't even move a muscle.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Zuo Ming saw a fist flying in Tiger's direction. It was just a straight punch with no overt flashes of energy or complexity whatsoever, and yet it was Tiger who let out a bloodcurdling scream when their fists met at the center. The clothes around his right arm exploded inch by inch, and his muscles were twisted round and round like a braid. So much of his flesh was blown away that one could peer into the bone within. He was sent flying through the air like a rag doll.

Seeing this, Hawk appeared behind Tiger in an attempt to arrest his momentum. His hands had just made contact with Tiger's back when a terrific force was transmitted into his body, and Hawk realized that his arm bones were strained to breaking point, and his throat was wet with the taste of iron. It took him seven or eight steps before he finally managed to catch himself.

Hawk stared at Ye Qing in shock and horror. He could tell that the young man hadn't used his full power. Both he and Tiger were late-stage Spirit Purifiers, and Tiger in particular possessed a strong body even though he wasn't a body-tempering warrior. However, the young man was able to break his arm in one punch, and it had taken him everything he had just to neutralize the remnants of his force.

What would happen if the young man went all out?

The mere thought of it sent chills up his spine.

"I apologize for my subordinates' insolence, good sire. I hope you will forgive their transgression." Xue Hanshan flinched at the display of power and hurriedly wore an apologetic smile on his face. "If I may ask, what is your name?"

"You don't need to know who I am," Ye Qing replied indifferently. "You simply need to know that I have business with the old Taoist behind you."

Ye Qing's casual dismissal of his question was impolite to say the least, but Xue Hanshan didn't rise to the provocation. "You're right. Your business is your own. Are you here for the Longevity Village as well, sire?"

"What does it matter to you?" Ye Qing asked.

"To be honest, I am here for the Longevity Village as well. If it doesn't bother you too much, would you like to cooperate with us and discover the true secrets of the Longevity Village?" Xue Hanshan suggested.

"No thank you. I'm used to working alone." Ye Qing turned him down mercilessly. "I only have a few questions for the old Taoist. I will leave as soon as I'm finished with him."

"If that is your wish, then so it shall be." Xue Hanshan spoke as kindly as your friendly neighborhood grandpa and stepped aside. "Go on."

Ye Qing didn't say anything or even nod his head. He simply walked straight toward Yi Pin.

While he was passing by Xue Hanshan, what felt like a volcano of energy abruptly erupted from the old man's core. Then, he raised both his hands toward the sky.

The wind blew away from Xue Hanshan, and origin qi gathered above his head until it took the form of a mountain. When Xue Hanshan sucked in a deep breath, he abruptly swelled to the size of a giant, grabbed the mountain with both hands, and swung it straight at Ye Qing's skull.

He wasn't able to peer through the veil and grasp Ye Qing's true strength, but that didn't stop him from pressing the kill button. The reason was simple. He was nearing the end of his lifespan, and he was willing to pay any price to keep the final end at bay. He was currently at the most critical moment of his life, and he wouldn't allow anything to ruin it.

Besides, he was confident he could kill the young man. He was named Xue Hanshan (Mountainshaker) not just because he could shake mountains, but also because he could lift them into the air and smash his enemies into paste!

As if he knew that Xue Hanshan would do this, Ye Qing channeled his vigor and relaxed his muscles. Then, he responded to the attack with a backhand.

Xue Hanshan's act couldn't fool him in the slightest because he had already learned of his personality and history while chatting with Zuo Ming. Xue Hanshan might be the patriarch of the Xue Clan of Mu Yang today, but when he was younger, he was known by a far more notorious title, the Mountain Bearing Raider.

The Mountain Bearing Raider was a raider and a rapist rolled into one. A monster who had raided countless villages and raped even more women, he was one of the most hated villains of the Northern Xinjiang and ranked seventy-four on the Black List. It wasn't until he accidentally killed a disciple of the Sword King Palace, and he feared that the sect would come for his life that his life as a notorious criminal finally came to an end. He faked his death, traveled to Mu Yang, and transformed himself into a rich man.

There was a saying that went something like this: "It's easier to move a mountain than it is to change one's nature." Xue Hanshan was a heartless man who would sacrifice his own friends and family to extend his own life. Why on earth would he allow a stranger to get the better of him?

That was why Ye Qing was ready when the old man turned on him. In fact, he was plotting to wipe Xue Hanshan off the face of the earth altogether. There was absolutely no need to leave someone like him alive, which was why his backhand also contained his full power.

Rumble!

His nine dragon elephants' worth of strength allowed Ye Qing to cleave through the mountain as easily as a hot knife through butter. Not done yet, his fist continued to travel straight toward Xue Hanshan.

"A late-stage Spirit Master?!"

The blood drained away from Xue Hanshan's face when he saw Ye Qing shattering his mountain into bits like nothing. Judging from the sheer force pricking against his skin, the young man was one hundred percent a late-stage Spirit Master.

Although Xue Hanshan himself was a late-stage Spirit Master, and his martial art was one of forcefulness and strength, he was at the twilight of his life. He was far weaker than he used to be. Besides that, his instincts warned him that taking the punch head on would most likely kill him, if not cripple him permanently.

Without hesitation, Xue Hanshan stomped the ground and caused it to ripple like the surface of a body of water. Then, he slipped into the earth and disappeared from view.

Ye Qing altered the trajectory of his fist and punched the ground with everything he got.

Boom!

The ground within twenty meters of the young man caved inward before shattering into a million pieces. Naturally, the dilapidated house next to him collapsed into rubble as well.

After the attack, Ye Qing spread his demonic thought in every direction and quickly locked onto Xue Hanshan, who was currently hiding under the ground. As he stepped toward the old man, the ground vibrated like a drum, and the surrounding houses scattered into dust.

Nine steps later, Ye Qing's arms swelled like a balloon, sharp, iron hard fur grew out of his pores, and his muscles rippled with a kind of violent beauty. When the transformation was done, he raised his apish arms and slammed the ground again.

*“Chaos Demon Ape Body”*

He was close to entering the adept level of the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra”. Naturally, his Chaos Demon Ape Body was also a lot stronger than before. Now, he could control his transformation as easily as breathing. He could perform a full-body transformation, or he could transform just parts of his body into the Chaos Demon Ape's.

Chapter 525: Purple Sun Suppresses Evil

Rumble rumble rumble!

As he punched the ground like a drum, the earth rippled again and again like the sea waves until finally, Xue Hanshan was spat out like a gum into the air.

The second he appeared, Ye Qing bent his knees slightly—the earth crumbling beneath his feet as he did this—and appeared in front of Xue Hanshan suddenly. Then, he launched a palm strike straight at his head.

It looked like the old man was dead when suddenly, every hair on Ye Qing's body suddenly stood on end. *Danger!*

As if on cue, the child-like Stranger on top of Xue Hanshan suddenly raised its head and glared at him. Its beard extracted itself from the old man's head and flew straight toward him.

It looked just like an ordinary beard, but all of Ye Qing's senses were screaming danger. He didn't hesitate to jump away from the hair and summoned a cascade of multilayered force in front of him with a diagonal punch.

*“Divide”*

He flinched when he landed on the ground, however. He looked down and saw two strands of facial hair wrapped around his wrist. Not only that, he felt them slowly absorbing some sort of profound and mysterious power from his body.

“Is it... absorbing my lifespan?!” Ye Qing frowned as he discerned the power he was losing.

Unwilling to treat this lightly as a matter of course, Ye Qing clenched his fist and attempted to snap the two strands of facial hair with sheer strength. However, they only wobbled in place and showed no signs of breaking whatsoever.

Frown deepening, he ignited the Netherflame next and attempted to burn the hair into ash. Unfortunately, the flames went right through the hair almost as if they didn’t exist.

“It’s no use!”

Ye Qing’s expression grew even more severe. In just a matter of breaths, the facial hair had consumed yet another glob of lifespan. However, two of his greatest strengths were unable to make contact with the hair almost as if they didn’t exist in reality.

Meanwhile, Tiger and Hawk had finally recovered from the shockwaves of Ye Qing and Xue Hanshan’s battle and saw Ye Qing making strange and pointless gestures like he was a mental patient. Although they couldn’t figure out what the guy was doing, they figured that attacking Ye Qing while he was distracted was their best chance of landing a hit on him. So, they charged at the same time.

Tiger crouched on all fours and transformed into a ferocious tiger.

Hawk jumped to the highest point in the sky, pointed his sword at Ye Qing and descended on top of him like a meteor.

It was futile. Without even bothering to look at them, Ye Qing bent a finger and made a knocking gesture.

*“Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”*

Tiger immediately froze in place, and Hawk lost momentum and fell from the sky. Both men’s eyes were glazed over as if their minds were millions of kilometers away.

Ye Qing could have killed them, but he didn’t. It was because he was afraid that the act would trigger a reaction from the child-like Strangers crouching on their shoulders just like Xue Hanshan.

One was already trouble. Three would be an absolute riot where he was the one being stampeded on.

Meanwhile, more strands of facial hair were flying toward him from Xue Hanshan. Knowing that he couldn’t afford to hold back, Ye Qing lifted an eyebrow and spat purple fire from his mouth.

The second the purple flames appeared, space distorted, and the surrounding temperature shot up like crazy. In less than a second, the area had suddenly transformed into a molten hell.

*“Purple Sun Trueflame”*

It worked. When the illusory facial hair in the sky made contact with the Purple Sun Trueflame, they suddenly burst into flames and writhed wildly like they were alive.

*“Ahhhhhhhhh!!!”*

The child-like Stranger's face became distorted with pain as it let out a bloodcurdling scream. At the same time, Xue Hanshan started aging at a visible rate. His body grew increasingly thin, the age spots on his face grew increasingly dense, and his nonenal odor became so strong it was almost putrid. If before Xue Hanshan still gave the impression that he was alive despite his age, now he felt no different from the dead.

Ye Qing's expression didn't relax, however. Although the Purple Sun Trueflame was effective against the child-like Stranger, it had also pissed it off. Ye Qing could feel its aura getting deeper and terrible as countless white hair slithered in and out of its body. The way they stretched all the way to the sky and flailed like an alien god from a certain horror fiction from his old world was beyond scary as well.

A Disaster-class Stranger?!

Ye Qing was astonished to say the least. The aura the child-like Stranger was giving off was on par with the Old Man of the Mountain he encountered some days ago. The child-like Stranger attached to Xue Hanshan was the only one who was attacking him. Neither Tiger nor Hawk's was interfering with the battle. This seemed to suggest that the child-like Stranger wouldn't attack him so long as he didn't try to attack their host with the intention to kill.

Maybe it was because the child-like Stranger was wary of the Purple Sun Trueflame's power, but it didn't launch a counterattack immediately. After pondering for a moment, Ye Qing inhaled the Purple Sun Trueflame back into his abdomen and appeared next to Yi Pin. He grabbed the old Taoist's shoulder and dashed off into the distance.

Although the child-like Stranger on top of Xue Hanshan was glaring at Ye Qing's back hatefully, it didn't give chase. A few breaths later, the swarm of white hair retracted back into its body, and it laid lazily on top of Xue Hanshan's shoulders as if it was tired. Its beard wriggled and slithered back into the old man's head once more.

*“What happened?”*

Xue Hanshan stared at Tiger and Hawk in confusion. The last thing he remembered was being spat out of the earth by a terrific force and seeing that terrifying young man charging toward him. After that... he couldn't remember anything.

The young man had the chance to kill him. Why did he let him go in the end?

Besides that, his body was obviously older than it was a moment ago. What the hell happened to him?

Was he crazy, or was the whole world crazy?

He didn't know.

Tiger and Hawk snapped out of their daze and exchanged a glance with each other. Then, they shook their heads at the same time and said, “We don't know either, my lord.”



“Useless!” Xue Hanshan rebuked them. Compared to the mysterious young man, he was far more concerned and afraid of his sudden aging.

Suddenly, Xue Hanshan noticed something. “Where is Yi Pin?”

The old Taoist was nowhere to be found.

“That man probably took him,” Hawk replied gravely.

“Should we give chase, my lord?” Tiger asked tentatively when Xue Hanshan didn’t say anything for a few seconds.

“Are you stupid or suicidal?” Xue Hanshan shot Tiger a disgusted look. The brawny man smiled awkwardly and zipped his own mouth.

“What do we do now, my lord?” Hawk asked.

Xue Hanshan considered his options for a moment before answering, “Unearthing the secrets of Longevity Village is more important than confronting those two.”

“As you command!”

Both Tiger and Hawk hid a sigh of relief when they heard this. Had Xue Hanshan ordered them to give chase, their only realistic options were to try and change his mind or start a mutiny...

.....

“You’re finally here, brother! I miss you so much!”

Outside Mu Qing’s house, as soon as Ye Qing dropped Yi Pin on the ground, the old Taoist immediately jumped to his feet and tried to give Ye Qing a loving embrace.

Ye Qing took a step away from the old Taoist and grimaced at Yi Pin’s patently false smile. “At least try and squeeze out a few drops of tears before you say that. I can’t even pretend that you’re being sincere right now.”

“Pay no attention to such trivial details, brother!” Yi Pin quipped without a shred of shame whatsoever. “Oh right, you were going to kill Xue Hanshan just now, right? Why did you change your mind at the last second? Is something wrong?”

He did not think for a second that Ye Qing had changed his mind because he was feeling merciful. His strange gestures, his use of the Purple Sun Trueflame, and his sudden decision to grab him and escape like hell all indicated that something was very wrong about the situation.

Ye Qing glanced at the child-like Stranger on top of Yi Pin and asked, “Would you believe me if I say that a Stranger is crouching on your shoulders right now, brother?”

“D-Don’t scare me, brother! You know I’m too old for this shit!” Yi Pin exclaimed with worry while waving his hands back and forth across his shoulders. Of course, he couldn’t feel anything at all.

Ye Qing said seriously, “You’ve known me for a while, brother. Have I ever lied to you?”

Yi Pin nodded just as seriously. "You have, and more than once."

Ye Qing: "... *Talk about unnecessary truth.*"

Chapter 526: Life Leech

"Ahem... let's not get bogged down with the details, shall we?" Ye Qing coughed awkwardly before saying, "I'm telling you the truth this time. There really is a Stranger on top of you. It's about the size of a child, but it has bluish black skin, old face and hair, and a long white beard that's currently stuck inside your brain like tentacles."

"It's not just you. Xue Hanshan, Tiger, Hawk and Zuo Ming all had one on their shoulders as well."

"Hmm? The Stranger has a child-like appearance, old face and hair, and a long white beard?!" Yi Pin's expression suddenly turned ugly as if he just realized something.

"Do you know what it is, brother?" Ye Qing asked curiously.

"Now I get it!" Yi Pin mumbled to himself as if he couldn't hear Ye Qing.

"What did you get, brother?" Ye Qing urged. "Come on, man. Don't keep me in suspense!"

Yi Pin snapped back to reality and said seriously, "I've figured out the truth behind Longevity Village's longevity."

"Is it because of these Strangers?" Ye Qing asked.

"That's right." Yi Pin nodded. "They are a type of Phenomenon-class Stranger called the Life Leech. A life-leeching Stranger, it consumes the lifespan of anyone who interacts with the host to grow stronger and shares a portion of that lifespan with its host. That is why its host lives exponentially longer than a normal human being, whereas those related to them die several times quicker than usual."

"Anyone who interacts with the host? I thought it only affected the friends and family of the host?" Ye Qing voiced his puzzlement.

"That is just a rumor based on a collection of poor and incomprehensive observations." Yi Pin scoffed in disdain. "Do you know why the Life Leech shares a portion of its consumed lifespan with its host? It certainly wasn't out of the goodness of its heart. There is no human in the world who can avoid interacting with other humans while they're still alive, and everyone who interacts with the host would inevitably become the Life Leech's prey."

"That is why the Life Leech keeps its host alive. It allowed it to extend its reach to much, much more prey than otherwise."

“As for why the general public misunderstood that the Life Leech only consumes the lifespan of one’s friends and family, that’s because those who share a deep bond with the host naturally interact with them a lot more frequently than, say, a random stranger they encountered only once or twice in a lifetime. It takes time for the Life Leech to increase its influence after all. That is why it seems like the Life Leech only targets the family and friends of the host.”

“I see!” Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. As it turned out, the secret behind Longevity Village’s longevity was neither a curse nor a natural treasure of some sort. It was a Stranger.

The young man suddenly glanced at the Life Leech again and asked, “Brother, I noticed that the Life Leech possesses a certain level of intelligence. Are you sure it’s okay to talk about them in their face?”

“Don’t worry,” Yi Pin assured him, “the Life Leech does possess some semblance of intelligence, but it’s only as smart as a five or six years old child. Not only that, they exist in the illusory world and thus can only see our actions but not hear our words.”

“Wait a second.” Yi Pin suddenly realized something. “The Life Leech has a form but no substance as it exists in the illusory world. It is undetectable by the eye or the mind, and it cannot be hurt by ordinary means. In a sense, it’s a more annoying foe than even a Disaster-class Stranger, so how on earth did you discover it?”

“Would you believe me if I tell you that I’m seeing it with my own eyes?” Ye Qing asked.

“You *saw* it? How’s that possible?” Yi Pin sounded dubious. “Did you recently gain something like, say, the Delusion Piercing Godeye, the All-Seeing Eye, or the Sky Patrolling Pupils?”

He just couldn’t believe that someone could see the Life Leech with their naked eye otherwise.

The Life Leech was one of the most mysterious and anomalous Strangers of the world. Having no substance and existing in the illusory world, it was normally imperceptible and untouchable. Otherwise, the truth behind Longevity Village would’ve been exposed a long time ago.

“No, I have not.” Ye Qing shook his head and guessed, “Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I entered a different Longevity Village earlier?”

“Excuse me?” Yi Pin’s confusion only grew with each word Ye Qing spouted. *Since when there are two Longevity Villages?*

“It’s like this.” Ye Qing began telling Yi Pin his experience when he first entered the Longevity Village, his encounter with Mu Qing and the villagers and so on.

Of course, he didn’t breathe a single word about the Annon Sutra.

“A Longevity Village that only exists at night? Are there really two Longevity Villages?” Yi Pin was stunned when he listened to Ye Qing’s story to the end.

Although the way he and Xue Hanshan’s group had entered the Longevity Village was exactly the same, their experiences were completely different to say the least.

The nighttime Longevity Village Ye Qing visited was a peaceful and quiet place. It was also inhabited by kind, good-hearted villagers with not a shred of malice in their hearts.

However, the daytime Longevity Village he and Xue Hanshan’s group visited was dead and abandoned. Only the Life Leeches inhabited the place.

Not only that, Ye Qing claimed that he had transitioned from the nighttime Longevity Village to the daytime Longevity Village by staying awake until dawn broke, but in his case, the sun never fell during the two days he was here. That’s right. He hadn’t experienced nighttime since the day he entered Longevity Village. Did this mean that one could never return to the nighttime Longevity Village once they entered the daytime Longevity Village?

“A Longevity Village that exists during the day, and another during the night? Why are there two Longevity Villages?” Yi Pin frowned deeply as he moved his fingers rapidly. He seemed to be performing a divination.

A short while later, Yi Pin stopped doing whatever he was doing and turned as white as a sheet. Then, he spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

“Brother! Are you alright?” Ye Qing asked urgently. For some reason, he felt that Yi Pin had grown a tad older than before.

“It’s nothing. Divining the threads of fate cost me a few years of lifespan, that’s all,” Yi Pin replied tiredly, though his eyes were glimmering with smugness. “I figured out why there are two Longevity Villages.”

“That’s what you were doing?” Ye Qing was speechless. *I could’ve asked the Annon Sutra and given you the answer myself, and all it would cost me is a few mouthfuls of blood! What kind of idiot spends their lifespan to satisfy their curiosity? It’s not like you have many years left!*

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Yi Pin noticed Ye Qing’s look and complained.

“I was just admiring your uh, courage. Please continue, brother.” He wasn’t going to voice his thoughts of course. There was no telling if the guy would keel over and die if he pissed him off and shaved a couple more years off his lifespan.

“Yeah, I don’t believe you. You’re as bad as they get.”

Yi Pin did not believe a single word that came out of Ye Qing’s mouth, but he couldn’t be bothered to press him about it. “There is only one Longevity Village. The so-called daytime and nighttime Longevity Village is really its good and evil side.”

“Good and evil side?” Ye Qing asked curiously. “Explain.”

Yi Pin began, “The nighttime Longevity Village you encountered is its good side, whereas the daytime Longevity Village we’re currently in is its evil side.”

“If someone harbors ill intent or greed when they visit the Longevity Village—that is to say, they are here specifically to extend their lifespan—then they would automatically enter the daytime Longevity Village and become infested with the Life Leech. They will obtain their wish, but it comes at the cost of everyone around them.”

“But if someone visits the Longevity Village not to increase their lifespan, and they didn’t harbor evil in their heart, then they would enter the nighttime Longevity Village and encounter its good-hearted villagers. Their lifespan wouldn’t change, but they will receive a different reward.”

“Wow.” Ye Qing blinked in amazement. This reminded him of a saying that went something like this, “Hard work isn’t always rewarded, accidents aren’t always negative.”

On second thought, the saying didn’t really match his situation. Entering the nighttime Longevity Village wouldn’t increase his lifespan, and it also caused him to miss Yi Pin for a time.

“Do you know what that reward is, brother?”

“I can’t say.” Yi Pin shook his head. “It could be a natural treasure, a Strange Artifact, a martial arts manual, anything.”

“But since you didn’t listen to the villagers’ advice and stayed awake until dawn, I’m afraid that...”

Ye Qing caught on his meaning immediately and grimaced. *In other words, I got absolutely nada out of this? Come on!*

“I know this is a stupid question, but is there a chance I can return to the nighttime Longevity Village?”

Yi Pin chuckled with a tinge of schadenfreude. “I’m sorry, but night never falls in the daytime Longevity Village, which means that the process is irreversible.”

“Well, what can I do? Your life is more important than some reward after all.” Ye Qing smirked at Yi Pin. “Isn’t that right, brother?”

Chapter 527: Rest In Peace

“Haha... I knew I made a good friend.” Yi Pin smiled awkwardly. Ye Qing was saying that he was the reason he lost his reward. “Besides, you might have gotten your reward already. For some reason, you’re able to see the Life Leech with the naked eye, nor did you enter the evil side of Longevity village with a Life Leech attached to your body, right?”

“Sure, whatever.” Ye Qing couldn’t be bothered to argue semantics with Yi Pin. Right now, their first priority was to remove the Life Leech attached to the old Taoist’s body and leave this place.

The Life Leech was powerful and anomalous. There was no way he could remove it by force. If things went poorly, then Yi Pin’s life would be in grave danger. Li Hanshan was the perfect example of this. When he had tried to kill the old man earlier, the Life Leech grew so angry that it nearly sucked him dry.

“Don’t worry, it’s actually quite simple to get rid of the Life Leech,” said Yi Pin with an easy chuckle. It was one thing if he had to remove the Stranger without knowing its identity, but now? He knew exactly what he needed to do to get rid of it.

“Simple?” Ye Qing shot Yi Pin a dubious look. As the man who fought the Life Leech firsthand, simple was the last thing he would describe the creature.

Yi Pin explained, “I told you earlier that the reason a Life Leech attaches itself to a human is to devour the lifespan of all those who interact with them, right? Not only that, they purposely kept their host alive so as to maximize the amount of lifespan they could absorb. However, if there was no lifespan for the Life Leech to absorb, then it would automatically leave its host, wouldn’t it?”

“And how do you plan to make that happen, exactly?” Ye Qing asked.

“There are several ways. One, I can seclude myself in a mountain and isolate myself from all people. Once the Life Leech had absorbed the lifespan of everyone who had interacted with me, and I could no longer offer it any lifespan, then it would automatically detach itself from me and leave. But of course, I would age several times faster than normal and perish without the Life Leech to sustain me.”

Yi Pin paused for a second before continuing, “Two, I can kill myself. If I’m dead, then the Life Leech would have no choice but to leave me, wouldn’t it?”

“Neither method sounds viable like, at all.” Ye Qing rolled his eyes. The first plan was inhuman and ultimately futile, whereas the second plan was straight up stupid. Where was Yi Pin going with this? “You’re not planning to go with the first method, are you?”

If Yi Pin said yes, then he was going to bring justice upon him. After all, he had interacted with the old Taoist and so counted among the Life Leech’s prey as well, though he should be fine since he was protected by the Purple Sun Trueflame.

“Hmph! Is that what you think of me, brother? I am no saint, but I would never resort to such a method to increase my lifespan, especially since I would die lonely and become a monster.” Yi Pin glared at him.

“Hahaha... No need to be so serious, brother. I was just joking.” Ye Qing smirked. At the very least, he knew that Yi Pin would never, ever sacrifice Longxiang. “Still, you

gotta admit that neither method sounds appealing one bit. We might as well try and kill the Life Leech."

"Now that's a stupid idea if I ever heard one." Yi Pin scoffed. "The Life Leech exists in the illusory world and so is normally unseeable and untouchable. Besides that, it is incredibly powerful. Even if you're strong enough to kill it, it would take its host to the grave with it."

"Sounds like we don't have a solution then," Ye Qing said.

"You say that only because you're too young and inexperienced." Yi Pin shook his head.

The corners of Ye Qing's lips turned up. "Oh yeah? What's your plan then?"

Yi Pin smirked back. "Death has many facades, brother. A false death is also a kind of death as well."

"Oh! I get it now. Not bad, brother." Ye Qing's eyes lit up in realization. According to Yi Pin, the Life Leech would leave if the host is dead. If Yi Pin could fake his death well enough to convince the Life Leech that he was dead and leave, then the problem would resolve itself.

The Life Leech was only as smart as a five or six years old anyway. How hard could it be for a cunning adult to trick an innocent child?

Pleased with Ye Qing's reaction, Yi Pin stroked his beard and said proudly, "Who do you think I am?"

"So, do you wanna start now, or?" Ye Qing asked.

Yi Pin shook his head. "No, not yet. What if I got rid of the Life Leech, but another Life Leech finds me? We should find the exit first."

Ye Qing nodded in agreement. "So, do you know how we can leave this village?"

"Not yet." Yi Pin's mood took a dip as he shook his head.

"You've been here for a little more than two days. Surely you must have found some sort of clue?" Ye Qing urged.

Yi Pin shook his head again. "Xue Hanshan and I had turned the village upside down since we entered this place, but we weren't able to find anything. The village itself is surrounded by some sort of mysterious power. If you cross through the boundary, then you would reappear on the opposite side of the village. As far as I know, there is no way out"

"I see." Ye Qing frowned deeply. This was definitely a problem.

The duo fell silent for a moment when suddenly, Ye Qing spoke up, "Actually, we don't need to find the exit at all. There are many people who returned from Longevity Village safely, aren't there? This means that there are two possibilities. One, we can only remain in Longevity Village for a

certain amount of time. When our time is up, we would automatically return to the real world. Two, the Life Leeches know the way out but didn't kick us out immediately because they're waiting for some sort of timing. When the time is right, they will take control of their hosts and leave the village."

"In both cases, we don't need to look for the exit ourselves. We simply need to spy on Xue Hanshan and his goons from a safe place."

Yi Pin stroked his beard again and nodded in agreement. "Makes sense."

Ye Qing looked at Yi Pin again. "But before that, you'll have to get rid of your Life Leech. Maybe the exit is a portal that'll appear for only a few minutes. Maybe we'll be teleported out of this place in an instant. If we wait until the last moment to get rid of the Life Leech, then we may not have the time to finish the job."

"On top of that, there is a huge chance we may lose all of our memories regarding the Longevity Village. We may not even remember that the Life Leeches are the ones causing the strange phenomenon. After all, none of the previous victims remembered what happened, and I don't believe that we'll become the exceptions. Worst case scenario, we leave the Longevity Village without our memories, and I can no longer see the Life Leeches because I don't know, the ability only works within Longevity Village or something and so cannot spot anything wrong with you. The consequences would be unimaginable."

Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath. "That is why you should deal with the Life Leech attached to your person now. I'll handle it if we run into another Life Leech in the future."

He should be able to protect Yi Pin from further infestation with the Purple Sun Trueflame.

"Alright. I'll do as you say." Yi Pin produced a bottle from his Nature's Shell and explained, "This medicine is called Together In Life Or Death. When I consume one, I would fall into a state of false death that is no different from true death. I must consume a second pill within an incense stick to break out of this state of false death. Otherwise, I would die for real."

"The name is fitting." Ye Qing nodded. *As usual, this old Taoist owns a ton of good stuff.*

"I'll be trusting you with my life, brother. Please make sure you save me before my time is up," Yi Pin instructed.

Ye Qing gave him a pat on the shoulder and declared, "Just entrust everything to me and rest in peace!"

Yi Pin: "..."

Suddenly, I no longer feel sure about this.

Yi Pin and Ye Qing spent the next period of time discussing how they should put on a convincing act for the Life Leech. The Stranger might possess the intellect of a child, but not even a child would be stupid enough to fall for their ruse if Yi Pin consumed the pill right in front of its face.



## Chapter 528: Moon In The Well

That said, they didn't need to come up with too complicated an act to trick a child. First, Ye Qing grabbed a pill and pretended to leave for some business. In reality, he had hid himself in a safe place. After he was ready, Yi Pin secretly consumed his Together In Life Or Death and immediately started weakening at a rapid pace. Just a few breaths later, he collapsed on the ground and seemingly fell dead.

The Life Leech crouching on Yi Pin's shoulder looked surprised and confused. It circled around Yi Pin as if it couldn't understand how a perfectly healthy human could drop dead all of a sudden.

The Life Leech fed on lifespan to survive and grow its strength. When a person dies, both their lifespan and karmic bonds would disappear completely. Therefore, there was zero reason for the Life Leech to attach itself to a dead body, and it wasn't smart enough to determine if Yi Pin was faking his death or not. After circling around the old Taoist helplessly a few times, the Life Leech finally withdrew its beard and let out a strange cry. Then, it flew away.

Ye Qing didn't appear right away after the Life Leech was gone. He remained in his hiding spot for about a teatime when suddenly, the Life Leech returned and examined Yi Pin for a moment. When it couldn't find anything amiss, it left again.

Still, Ye Qing didn't emerge from his hiding spot. Another half a teatime or so, the Life Leech returned yet again and circled around Yi Pin like before. A couple of strange cries later, it finally disappeared into the distance for real.

"Motherfucker, that was cutting it a little close. Who said that a child is easy to trick again? It pretended to leave and came back twice to check on Yi Pin."

As the observer, Ye Qing saw clearly that the Life Leech was only pretending to leave the first two times. It had been hiding nearby and waiting to see if Yi Pin was faking his death or not. The Life Leech might have fooled him if he couldn't see it, and that almost certainly would have resulted in a dangerous battle.

Time was running out. After he was sure that the Life Leech wouldn't return a third time, Ye Qing hurriedly stepped out of his hiding spot and fed Yi Pin the second Together In Life Or Death. A few breaths later, the dead man's heart began beating, and his blood started flowing again.

When Yi Pin opened his eyes and saw Ye Qing, he asked, "How did it go, brother?"

Ye Qing pulled him to his feet with a smile. "It worked. The Life Leech's gone."

"Thank goodness!" Yi Pin sighed in relief before boasting to Ye Qing, "Do you see how awesome I am now?"

"Yes, yes, I am very impressed," Ye Qing replied with zero sincerity whatsoever before checking the time. "Anyway, there's no time to waste. Let's look for Xue Hanshan and his goons right now."

"Yeah, let's." Yi Pin nodded and fell behind Ye Qing.

Locating Xue Hanshan's group was easy, and spying on them was even easier. Xue Hanshan had taken a serious blow just now, so his spirit wasn't nearly as perceptive as before. With how strong his demonic thought was, he could easily keep an eye on the old man from a far distance.

Despite nearly losing his life just a moment ago, Xue Hanshan remained firm in his determination to find a way to extend his life. He spent nearly the entire day trying to unearth the secrets of Longevity Village, but of course, he turned up with nothing at all.

It was ironic how he had no idea that the objective he searched so desperately for had been clinging to his shoulders this entire time.

"Huh? It's... raining?"

On the third day, a drizzle suddenly fell from the sky. Strangely, the skies of Longevity Village remained as bright and clear as ever. Ye Qing reached out of the window and rubbed the rainwater dripping against his skin a little. It felt cool, wet, and perfectly ordinary.

It was at this moment Yi Pin drew his attention. "Brother, look."

Ye Qing too noticed the oddity and turned to look. Xue Hanshan was getting anxious and irritable since he still wasn't able to unearth the secrets of Longevity Village. He was about to bark an order when suddenly, his arms fell limp, and he just stood there with a glazed look almost as if he was possessed. Then, he slowly began walking toward the exit.

Tiger and Hawk were the same. They too followed Xue Hanshan out of the residence they were staying in.

Ye Qing could see that the Life Leeches attached to their bodies were looking pointedly in a certain direction, eyes betraying a glint of eagerness and urgency.

The trio were walking deeper into the village. Ye Qing gave Yi Pin a look and said, "Let's go." They proceeded to follow behind the trio like ghosts.

A short while later, the trio arrived at the center of the village where the village well was situated. They were bending over the well and looking inside for some reason.

"Did you notice anything when you were inspecting the well earlier, brother?" Ye Qing asked in a hushed voice when he saw this.

Yi Pin shook his head. "No, not at all. It's just an ordinary dead well."

He and Xue Hanshan's group had inspected the well earlier. As far as they could tell, there was nothing special about it whatsoever.

A short while later, another three people emerged from three separate directions. One of them was none other than Zuo Ming.<sup>[1]</sup> They too wore a blank expression and a pair of glazed eyes on their faces. Once they reached the well, they bent over and looked into it as well.

It was impossible to say what the six men were trying to do. They painted an eerie sight to say the least.

Meanwhile, the rain was getting bigger and bigger. What was a drizzle was now a roaring downpour, and all six men were wet all the way down to their breeches. Even so, they continued to stand next to the well like wooden, motionless puppets.

The rain would continue for a little over two hours, and the well slowly became filled with rainwater. When it was filled up completely, the downpour abruptly came to a sudden stop. Seriously, it was like someone had pressed the off button on the weather or something.

After the rain came to a stop, the six men abruptly looked up into the sky.

“What are they looking at?”

Ye Qing and Yi Pin were raising their heads as well. A bright, round moon slowly appeared in the sky, and its silvery light shone straight toward the well. As soon as its reflection appeared on the waters, all six men immediately jumped into the well.

The well was neither big nor deep. Frankly, it wasn’t even big enough to fit two men. However, the six men were able to jump into the well and not cause a single splash almost like they weren’t six adult men, but six specks of dust.

In Ye Qing’s senses, the six men disappeared completely after they leaped into the well. It was almost as if they had been transported into a different world—and that was most likely the truth.

“Come on!” Ye Qing beckoned before dashing out of the house they were sheltering in. A moment later, he stood next to the well and stared at the wavy, beautiful reflection of the moon.

“The well is the exit?!” Yi Pin exclaimed curiously after he caught up to Ye Qing.

“I think so,” Ye Qing replied. He had no idea that the way to leave Longevity Village was identical to the way he entered it in the first place.

“Let’s go.”

But Yi Pin hesitated. “If we head out now, we will surely stumble onto Xue Hanshan and his goons. Even if they couldn’t remember what happened in the village, they would never let me go.”

“That is precisely why we need to head out now.” Ye Qing smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “You know Xue Hanshan. Does he look like the type of person you can hide from? Assuming he’s regained his consciousness, I’m willing to bet a silver that he’s waiting for you to show up.”

“Even if you could hide from him this time, what about the next time, and the next next time? Even if you could hide from him forever, what about Longxiang? Unless you leave Bei You behind you, Xue Hanshan will never let you go.”

Yi Pin frowned deeply not because Ye Qing was wrong, but because he was right.

Ye Qing continued, “Therefore, the best way to handle a scumbag like him isn’t to hide, but to kill him and end the threat once and for all—or that is what I would say if he wasn’t infected by a Life Leech. Since that isn’t an option, I say we scare him and his goons into leaving you alone permanently. We’ll teach them a lesson they aren’t liable to forget for the rest of their lives.”

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll be counting on you, brother.” Yi Pin gave Ye Qing a slap on the shoulder.

“Yeah, yeah.” Ye Qing smirked. “Let’s go.”

Yi Pin nodded and jumped into the well first. Ye Qing followed right behind him.

#### Chapter 529: How Much Is Your Face Worth?

After he leaped into the well, Ye Qing felt his consciousness dissolving into a blur. He was unable to distinguish illusion from reality, nor could he tell where he was right now. At the same time, everything he had experienced in Longevity Village including the way to enter and leave the place began disappearing like bubbles.

It was a bizarre and fearful feeling to feel his memories disappearing bit by bit from his mind. On the other hand, it was like nothing he had ever experienced before, and he couldn’t deny that it was a novel, profound experience. On the other hand, of course he was scared of the fact that his memories were disappearing.

An unknown amount of time later—it could be a breath, or it could be countless breaths—his surroundings slowly began to solidify and stay solidified. A gentle breeze blew past his ears, and humid air brushed gently against his face. He saw a clump of hills, a starry sky and a bright, round moon.

By the time Ye Qing returned to consciousness, he discovered that he was back in Longevity Mountain. He wasn’t at the valley where he entered the Longevity Village, however. He was at a different location.

It was nighttime in Longevity Mountain right now. The hills were but vague silhouettes in the darkness, and a bright, round moon and a sea of stars adorned the sky. The cool air brushing against his skin felt calm and soothing.

Ye Qing was frowning though. It was because he noticed a blank spot in his memories. It was almost as if some invisible force had reached into his mind and stole away some of his memories.

He knew that it was his memories regarding what happened in Longevity Village, and he had anticipated this long before he came to rescue Yi Pin. Even so, he could not help but feel uncomfortable about it.

“Brother? ... Are you the one who saved me?” It was at this moment Yi Pin’s voice rang beside him. Judging from the old Taoist’s expression, he had clearly forgotten about his experience in Longevity Village.

“Maybe?” Ye Qing shrugged. “I couldn’t remember what happened inside the village either.”

Yi Pin was about to reply when an unfriendly voice interrupted their conversation. “Reverend Yi Pin, you’ve finally shown up. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Xue Hanshan, Tiger, Hawk, Zuo Ming and two more people stepped out of the trees and walked toward them. Yi Pin’s face immediately turned ugly.

Xue Hanshan noticed Yi Pin’s expression and asked with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes, “What’s wrong, Reverend Yi Pin? You don’t seem pleased to see me.”

“You must be mistaken,” Yi Pin straightened his expression and replied in a meek voice. Although Ye Qing’s presence gave him strength, Li Longxiang was still in Xue Hanshan’s hands. He had no choice but to act the role of a humble slave.

“Lord Xue, I’ve taken you to Longevity Village as you requested. Can you tell me where my disciple is now?”

Xue Hanshan smiled. The way the crevices on his face squeezed together made him look even older than he already was. “What, are you afraid that we would torture your beloved disciple?”

“Of course not. I trust in your character,” Yi Pin said with a fake smile. “However, my disciple is stupid and cowardly. He needs someone like me to care for him, so I hope you will return him to me as soon as possible.”

“Your fondness for your disciple is touching. In that case, you should join me. You will meet your disciple eventually,” Xue Hanshan said.

It sounded like Xue Hanshan was offering to take Yi Pin to Li Longxiang, but the old Taoist noticed something off with the way he worded the invitation. “Eventually? What exactly do you mean, Lord Xue?”

Xue Hanshan said slowly, “Nothing? I just want to invite you to my place for a short stay. You’ve done me a big favor, Reverend, and it’s only right that I repay the favor. Am I wrong?”

“It’s fine. It is my honor to be able to help you. All I request is that you release my disciple.”

Yi Pin knew exactly what Xue Hanshan was planning, of course. The old bastard wasn’t sure if his lifespan was extended, so he was hoping to imprison him for a time and wait for the results to show itself. If his lifespan was extended, then he would kill Yi Pin and end the potential threat he posed. If not, then he would force Yi Pin to take them into Longevity Village a second time. No matter what, Yi Pin wasn’t getting out of his predicament.

“You won’t give me face, Reverend?” Xue Hanshan’s smile remained unchanged, but his tone grew a tad darker than normal.

A frustrated and furious Yi Pin tried to say something, but Ye Qing finally broke his silence and raised a hand to stop Yi Pin. Then, he looked at Xue Hanshan and said in an indifferent tone, “And how much is your face worth?”

“And who are you, young one?” Xue Hanshan asked. He had noticed Ye Qing from the start, of course. The young man had exited Longevity Village with Yi Pin, so he reckoned that he was the old Taoist’s helper.

His senses told him that the young man wasn’t particularly powerful. His energies were barely perceptible as well. And yet, his instincts were telling him that he was dangerous.

This was why he was wasting his breath on Yi Pin when he could’ve just taken him by force. He was using that time to observe and figure out Ye Qing.

It was useless though. He didn't know this, but he could observe Ye Qing for days and still find nothing at all.

"Who I am doesn't matter. What matters is that your face isn't worth anything."

"You don't get to decide how much my face is worth. Reverend Yi Pin does." Xue Hanshan's smile widened. "So? Do you think my face is worth something, Reverend?"

If he was a couple decades younger, he would have attacked Ye Qing for daring to speak to him like this. But now? The period of peace and idleness had stolen his courage, and time itself had rotten his strength, not to mention that he was injured for some reason. He didn't remember that Ye Qing was the very person who injured him and nearly killed him.

The older the *jianghu*, the more cowardly the fishes that lived within it.

"I..."

Yi Pin wasn't afraid of Xue Hanshan. He had a hundred and one ways to escape him if push came to shove. The problem was that Li Longxiang was currently in Xue Hanshan's hands.

"Calm, brother." Ye Qing consoled Yi Pin. "You're worried about Longxiang, right? Don't worry. I've already rescued him."

"Really?" Yi Pin exclaimed with pleasant surprise.

"But of course," Ye Qing answered.

Next to Xue Hanshan, Tiger scoffed in disdain when he heard this. "Quit lying, boy. Do you even know where that kid is right now?"

"White Sand Fort, right?" Ye Qing watched Tiger curiously. He could feel a familiar aura from the guy's broken arm. If he wasn't mistaken, he was the one who broke the guy's arm in the village.

It wasn't just Tiger. He could feel the same aura from Xue Hanshan and another guy as well. Heck, he might be the one who had injured all of them.

But why didn't he kill them all? It was clear he possessed the strength to crush them despite their numbers, and as far as he could tell he was completely unhurt. Why didn't he end the threat at its roots?

This fucking amnesia.

"You..." Tiger blurted as his expression morphed into speechlessness and shock. Xue Hanshan and the rest of the group were the same.

"Longxiang was at White Sand Fort? You really rescued him from that place?" Yi Pin was stunned as well. He could tell from Xue Hanshan and the others' expressions that Ye Qing was telling the truth.

"Naturally," Ye Qing replied indifferently.

After Tiger recovered from his shock, he thought that Ye Qing *had* to be lying to them and yelled, “Hmph! You have to be lying! There is no way someone like you can rescue his disciple from White Sand Fort!”

The muscle brain just could not believe that Ye Qing possessed the strength to do such a thing.

In response, the corners of Ye Qing’s lips turned up. He lifted one foot and crossed ten meters of distance just like that.

Xue Hanshan had been paying close attention to Ye Qing’s every move, so the second his foot twitched, he immediately focused his energies, melded his mind together with the world, and pushed his palms forward.

Clumps of conjoined mountains immediately manifested in the sky. They looked like they would suppress heaven and earth.

*“Mountain Pusher”*

Ye Qing paid him no attention, however. He floated amidst the mountains for a bit before landing heavily on the ground.

It was like a god had slammed a giant mallet against the ground. First, there was a deafening bang that pierced the eardrums. Then, the ground beneath Ye Qing’s feet began crumbling inch by inch. At the same time, Ye Qing threw out a devastating punch that was do or die.

*“Break Through”*

The mountains Xue Hanshan summoned might as well be rotten wood before his nine-dragon-elephant strength. His fist easily pierced through the mountains and slammed into the old man’s palms.

The ground was undulating like a wave after Ye Qing’s landing. When the two powers clashed, that part of the ground was blasted into smithereens in an instant.

It was only now Tiger, Hawk, Zuo Ming and the rest of Xue Hanshan’s goons reacted, and it was far, far too late. The shockwave flung them into the air and dealt varying degrees of damage to them all.

Xue Hanshan flinched. The next moment, his arms exploded in a shower of blood, bone and gore. The old man let out a muffled grunt of pain and allowed the impact to push him away from Ye Qing.

Chapter 530: Why Don’t You Kill Yourself

Ye Qing wasn’t going to let such an excellent opportunity slip through his grasp, but he had just taken a step when suddenly, his instincts screamed at him about danger. It felt as if something bad would happen if he tried to kill the bastards.

Despite this, Ye Qing didn’t stop in his tracks. Instead, he kept pace with Xue Hanshan from a certain distance.

Although he didn’t know why he suddenly felt this way, the sense of danger was as loud as it was familiar. It was almost as if this wasn’t the first time he had gone through such an experience.

Was this why he had allowed Xue Hanshan's group back at Longevity Village? Although the old man was a late-stage Spirit Master, he was far weaker than he should be due to his old age and declining health. It should've been fairly easy for him to kill the old man, and yet he hadn't. Ye Qing didn't think that it was because he had suddenly found the saint that was inside him all along either. Therefore, it had to be some sort of danger.

While Ye Qing was pondering, the Life Leech was sitting on top of Xue Hanshan's head and flailing its beard about like an oddly-shaped patch of dark cloud. It was also glaring at Ye Qing. It was none other than Ye Qing, of course.

As Ye Qing had predicted, he lost his ability to see the Life Leech as soon as he left Longevity Village. If the Stranger attacked him now, there was a high chance he wouldn't even notice anything amiss. Luckily for Ye Qing, the Life Leech didn't do so despite remembering him as clearly as day. He was the bastard who had nearly killed his host back at Longevity Village after all, and now he was going to pull the same shit a second time. The hell was wrong with this guy?

The main reason the Life Leech didn't attack Ye Qing was because of the Purple Sun Trueflame, of course. Ye Qing might have forgotten about it, but the Life Leech hadn't forgotten about him or the pain he had inflicted upon it during their brief clash. Once bitten, twice shy was true even for Strangers.

Ye Qing reckoned from Xue Hanshan's expression and emotion that he had no idea that something inexplicably dangerous was attached to his body either. Otherwise, he wouldn't strain himself and run away like his life depended on it.

Not wanting to waste his energy on Xue Hanshan, Ye Qing let out a cold chuckle and threatened, "You've already lost your hands, Lord Xue. Surely you don't want to lose your legs as well?"

Xue Hanshan abruptly stopped in his tracks, sighed, and turned back to face Ye Qing. "Fine. You got me. What do you want?"

He could tell that his chance of escaping Ye Qing was exactly zero, and the young man hadn't killed him immediately. Sensing that there was still a chance he might survive this, he decided to stand his ground and see if he could negotiate an out.

Who would willingly choose death if life was an option?

"Excuse me? It's not what I want. It's you. You're the one who chose to shut the doors and windows on yourself, aren't you?" Ye Qing clasped his hands behind his back and countered.

While ignoring the horrific pain eating away at the broken stumps where his limbs once were, Xue Hanshan replied bitterly, "I am in the wrong here. I am willing to offer you and the Reverend my sincerest apologies!"

"Apologies?" Ye Qing chuckled. "If the grudges of this world can be swept clean with a simple 'sorry', then there wouldn't be violence and slaughter in this world, would there? What do you think, Lord Xue?"

"Right," Xue Hanshan replied curtly while a sheen of cold sweat broke out of his forehead. It was impossible to say if the sweat was caused by pain, fear, or both.



“The good news, I don’t like killing people. The bad news, I *loathe* trouble. So what do you think I should do, Lord Xue?” Ye Qing asked while shooting Xue Hanshan a toothy grin.

*How the fuck would I know?* Xue Hanshan thought grumpily in his head but replied carefully and respectfully, “What do you suggest, warrior?”

“You’re leaving it up to me?” Ye Qing pretended to think for a few breaths before clapping his hands. “I got an idea! Why don’t you kill yourself? This way, I won’t need to bloody my hands, and no trouble would befall me! Don’t you agree?”

You don’t like to kill, so you’re going to make your victims kill themselves? What kind of dogshit logic is that?

A shudder coursed through Xue Hanshan and his complexion grew paler. “Please be serious, warrior.”

“Does it look like I’m joking?” Ye Qing cranked up the wattage of his smile, but all Xue Hanshan could feel was cold malice. Xue Hanshan began trembling despite his will, and all sorts of emotions flitted in his eyes: ferocity, anger, helplessness.

In the end though, it all turned into surrender. “I’m willing to do anything so long as you let me live, warrior.”

Thoughts of resisting or bringing Ye Qing to the grave with him had crossed his mind, but his desire to live ground it all into dust.

He had just entered Longevity Village, and unless he was gravely mistaken, he now had a long, long life ahead of him. That was why he didn’t want to die, and the only way for him to survive this situation was to bow his head and beg.

“Will you really do anything I ask you to do, Lord Xue?” Ye Qing asked.

Xue Hanshan nodded obediently despite the bitterness in his heart. He didn’t dare to show even a sliver of his emotions on his face.

“I see... what should I make you do, I wonder?” Ye Qing rubbed his nose as he watched Xue Hanshan with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

Xue Hanshan felt his scalp turning numb, and his hair standing on end out of sheer terror. Such was his fear that even the pain felt duller than before.

“I got it!” Ye Qing snapped his fingers and said, “From now on, you will not trouble the Temple of Divination in any way. What do you think?”

“W-What?” Xue Hanshan looked up in astonishment.

I was ready to become your slave, and

that *is your demand?*

“What, you don’t accept?” Ye Qing raised his eyebrows.

"I accept! I accept!" Xue Hanshan snapped back to reality and replied as quickly as he could. He would have to be insane not to accept such a simple demand.

"Heh..." Ye Qing let out a chuckle but changed his tone suddenly. "Tell me something, Lord Xue. Do you think my request is difficult or easy to fulfill?"

"Er..." Xue Hanshan's heart immediately leaped to his throat again. *What now? What is he planning?*

He hesitated for a moment before answering obediently, "It's easy."

"If you think it's easy, then you wouldn't mind me making another request, right Lord Xue?" Ye Qing asked.

"Not... not at all!" Xue Hanshan felt like going insane. The young man might have a youthful appearance, but his personality and behavior proved to be very flexible and difficult to grasp. It was identical to the disciples of the Dark Ways he interacted with in the past, if not worse.

"Don't worry, my second request is just as simple as the first. All I want—" Ye Qing purposely paused for a few seconds before finally saying, "—is for you to keep today's matter a secret. As you already know, I don't like trouble."

"I swear on my heart demon that no one else will learn about what happened today. If I break my oath, may I die a horrible death," Xue Hanshan immediately swore an oath.

"You're a smart man, Lord Xue. Do you know why I like interacting with smart people, Lord Xue?" Ye Qing asked suddenly.

"N-No? Why's that?" Xue Hanshan didn't know where Ye Qing was going with this.

"Because a smart person wouldn't try to get smart. They wouldn't try to pull something when the person they're watching out for turns their backs on them." Ye Qing's grin widened devilishly. "I hope you're a real smart man, Lord Xue. I hope you won't shut the doors and windows on yourself a second time."

"I won't! I swear I won't break my promises!" Lord Xue replied in a hurry. If it wasn't for the fact that he didn't have arms right now, he would have raised both of them to show how on board he was.

In fact, he had considered placating Ye Qing to survive this predicament and plotting his revenge in the future. But now, he had discarded those thoughts completely.

Even if the young man wasn't the disciple of a major sect of the Dark Ways or the heir of an old monster or something, he had more than proven that he wasn't someone to be trifled with.

That was why he made up his mind to do exactly as the young man commanded and stay as far away from the Temple of Divination—no, from Bei You City as possible. There was no reason to take any risks considering the circumstances.

“Good. I believe in you, Lord Xue. As for your subordinates, you may deal with them as you please, but I expect you to handle this perfectly, understand? If you disappoint me...” Ye qing threatened.

Xue Hanshan swore again, “Don’t worry, warrior. I promise that their mouths would be zipped one way or another.”

“Good.” Ye Qing nodded in satisfaction before waving him away. “It’s getting late, so go home and catch some rest, Lord Xue. You’ve already lost your arms, and I’m sure you wouldn’t want to lose your life as well. I won’t be seeing you off.”

“Of course. Goodbye, warrior.” Xue Hanshan heaved a huge sigh of relief and gave Ye Qing a deep bow. Then, he turned around and walked away without looking back.