

Stranger 711

Chapter 711: Mortician

“Just look at him... he’s so beautiful, so gorgeous, so perfect...”

The voice continued to speak, passionate yet twisted. It was as if he was watching a flawless piece of art, not a corpse.

“It’s too bad it doesn’t have a head. A shame. It truly is its one and only flaw!”

“Have you seen my head?”

Suddenly, a new voice came from in front of the four women.

It was the headless Sage. No one knew when or how he appeared, only that conflict was inevitable.

As the headless Sage spoke, dark, terrible resentment washed out to the surroundings.

“Looks like he was beheaded while bearing a deep-seated obsession. No wonder his resentment is so great,” The first voice spoke up again.

“Have you seen my head?”

The headless Sage asked a second time as his resentment took on a tangible form and enveloped both heaven and earth. For a moment, the world fell as silent as death.

“Truly, your resentment is something. Corpse Binding Rope, go!”

As soon as the voice said this, the four women’s hair stretched longer and formed four ropes in the air. Then, they flew toward the headless Sage from four different directions.

The four ropes were dark yellow in color and glowing ominously. It almost looked like it was made from human skin.

When the four ropes intersected one another around the headless Sage, they formed the shape of a talisman and caught him in a bind.

If there was an outsider at the scene, they would immediately identify the talisman as a famous Taoist talisman known as the Corpse Suppressing Talisman.

When the ropes wrapped around the headless Sage’s body, they shone bright and somehow suppressed his terrifying resentment.

It only lasted a moment, however. Just a few seconds later, the resentment surrounding the headless Sage thickened once more.

“His resentment is like the mountains, and his obsession the heavens... but so what? All things have limits, much less a beheaded Sage!”

The first voice harrumphed from the shadows. “When Man occupies the Four Spirits, he may borrow the power of the land. When the ropes bind the Eight Directions, they may suppress an evil corpse. Rise!”

As soon as the order was given, the four women immediately scattered and took up a cardinal direction each. At the same time, countless eerie, twisted runes and incantations appeared on their bodies and made them look much more sinister and disturbing than before.

The four ropes shone brightly, and the Corpse Suppressing Talisman at the center of his chest burst into flames. The headless Sage's resentment immediately began to sizzle earnestly, and the headless Sage abruptly sank all the way up to his knees as if he was bearing an unimaginable weight.

However, the headless Sage responded by grabbing the ropes binding his body and pulling them hard. As soon as the ropes snapped, the headless Sage's resentment immediately regained its previous vigor.

"He's strong enough to snap my century-old Corpse Binding Ropes? Kekeke... as expected of a Sage. He's unbelievably strong even when he's long dead. Wonderful! Just wonderful!"

The voice coming from the shadows did not lament the loss of his precious Corpse Binding Ropes, however. If anything, he sounded happier than ever before.

"The sky is clear, the ground is bright. The White Bone Stakes shall suppress even gods and celestials!"

All four women pulled out a bony hairpin the size of a finger from their hair each and threw them at the ground. As they sailed through the air, they rapidly grew into three-meter-tall stakes the size of a tree trunk. Brimming with death qi and covered in reverse hooks, the White Bone Stakes gave off a tremendous amount of energy.

Rumble!

The next moment, the White Bone Stakes sank into the ground and shook the four directions. As if the sky itself was about to tip over, brilliant light illuminated the entire area, and countless runes popped into existence. Like an ordinary mortal who was caught in a quicksand, the headless Sage found himself incapable of moving a muscle.

"Celestial Suppressing Nails, go!"

It looked like they had succeeded, but the person hiding in the shadows wasn't done yet. After he gave another command, the four women opened their mouths and spat out four rusted, square-shaped nails.

As soon as the square nails appeared, unholy screams and yin wind immediately filled the world. Before this, the headless Sage were still putting on a weak struggle despite being caught by the White Bones Stakes. But after the square nails sank into his limbs, he immediately fell still like a corpse.

"Kekeke... it doesn't matter how strong you were when you were still alive. Once you've passed on, all must submit to I, the Mortician."

Eerie laughter filled the air as the coffin lid slid open slightly. Then, a man being supported by countless fair, slender hands slowly sat up.

The man was in his thirties, but unlike most thirty-year-old men, he was tall, slender, and fair-skinned. His face in particular possessed both the rugged handsomeness of a man and the delicate features of a woman. He looked like a living celestial who had descended to the earth, perfect and flawless in every way imaginable.

The Mortician? I've heard of this guy!

Hidden within the shadows, Ye Qing was hugging Giggie tightly and watching the young man in silence. Even as a man, he had to admit that the Mortician was one of the most handsome men he had ever seen. However, he did not put two and two together until the man introduced himself as the Mortician.

Cui Qiuyuan, the "Mortician" was the forty-fourth named warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking. This meant that the beautiful, frail-looking man before his eyes was really a powerful Grandmaster.

Not only that, he was a top fifty Grandmaster on the Earth Champions Ranking. Everyone in the top fifty of the Earth Champions Ranking was either a gifted genius, a famous warrior, a champion strong enough to found a sect or command a corner of the world, or all of the above.

Cui Qiuyuan was one such person, and his background was even more extraordinary. Cui Qingyuan was a direct descendant of one of the Eight Aristocratic Families of Yan, the Clear Spring Cui Clan, and the Clear Spring Cui Clan was a clan of scholars who had been nobility for over a century.

A direct descendant of the Clear Spring Cui Clan, Cui Qiuyuan was naturally gifted in every way. He was proficient in music, poetry, calligraphy, art, literature and etiquette. There was no knowledge he couldn't grasp; no skill he couldn't master. For a time, the Clear Spring Cui Clan held high hopes for him.

Unfortunately, all geniuses seemed to be born with a touch of insanity, and Cui Qiuyuan was not an exception. Despite his incredible gift, Cui Qiuyuan turned out to be a necrophilic who was particularly fond of stitching corpses. It did not matter how genius he was, few people could tolerate a man with such an unusual "hobby" so to speak.

Not only that, Cui Qiuyuan intentionally devalued himself by throwing away his shot at becoming the top scorer in the imperial examination. It was because he wanted to join the Morgue of the Bureau of Punishments as a mortician and gain access to even more corpses.

There were thirteen Offices in the Bureau of Punishments of Yan, and the Morgue was one of them. A mortician was an official position in the Morgue, not a nickname.

A mortician sounded like a fancy post, but in reality, it was one of the lowest class occupations out there. After all, a mortician's scope of work included collecting the dead, applying makeup to the cadaver and more, and it was anything but a glamorous job. Society's opinion of the post was so poor that even some commoners were deathly averse toward it, much less the aristocratic families.

And yet, that was the field of work Cui Qiuyuan had chosen to join despite all opposition. Such was the Clear Water Cui Clan's rage that they expelled him from the family and severed all familial ties with him.

Cui Qiuyuan cared naught for their opinions, however. He took to the work like fish to water. Over time, the people slowly forgot about the handsome scion Cui Qiuyuan, and the Morgue of Yan gained a new mortician no one gave a damn about.

If Cui Qiuyuan's story ended here, then he wouldn't be half as famous—or rather, infamous—as he was now. Not too long after he joined the Morgue, a serial-killing case took the Yan capital, no, the entire country by storm.

The first victim had died a violent death where their limbs were dismembered. Not long after that, a flawless corpse had been found in a famous restaurant in the capital.

At first, the inspectors responsible for investigating the case thought that they were two separate cases. Later, they discovered that it was really one serial-killing case. And how did they know that? It was because the missing limbs of the first victim had been sewn to the second victim's body perfectly.

Chapter 712: Corpse Spirit

The serial-killing case would come to be known as the Stitched Corpse Case.

At first, the murders happened only once every three to five months. As most of the victims were nobodies, the case failed to draw the attention of the higher-ups.

Later, the murders grew more and more frequent. At first, it happened only once every three to five months. Then, it happened once every one to two months. Finally, it happened multiple times per month.

The victims were no longer just nobodies either. Male, female, the old, the young, lowly scum or high nobility, at least one person from every class had fallen victim to the murderer.

As if that wasn't enough, the murderer had openly displayed the corpses he sewed together perfectly in all sorts of ways.

Some bodies were openly displayed in a market.

Some were hung on the city walls.

Some were splayed on the busiest streets.

One body was even left at the center of the throne room of Yan.

The entire world was stunned by the murderer's sheer audacity. It was as if he wanted the entire world to admire his handiwork.

If the murderer's killing was a challenge to Yan's laws and the imperial court's power, then his corpse-stitching was a blasphemy against human nature itself.

That was the point where the Stitched Corpse Case reached its highest point in Yan. Everyone was scared, and the Emperor of Yan was enraged. He personally ordered a nationwide search for the murderer.

However, the murderer of the Stitched Corpse Case proved to be exceptionally cunning. Not only did they leave zero traces behind at the crime scene, there was no pattern behind their killing at all. The officials of the Three Judicial Offices could not find even a single clue despite a long search.

Realizing that the consequences would be catastrophic if the serial-killing case wasn't resolved soon, the enraged Emperor of Yan finally employed his almighty power to perform a divination and pluck out the truth from the rivers of fate itself. He succeeded and determined that the murderer was

none other than the no-name mortician working in the Morgue of the Bureau of Punishments, Cui Qiuyuan.

Unfortunately, by the time the murderer was finally determined, they discovered that Cui Qiuyuan had left the imperial capital behind a long time ago.

Furious beyond imagination, the Emperor of Yan not only ordered a nation-wide bounty for Cui Qiuyuan, but also took out his anger on the Cui Clan. He reprimanded them for improper conduct and demoted several high-ranking officials in the Cui Clan in one sitting. To this day, the Cui Clan still hadn't recovered from their fall from grace.

The story did not end with Cui Qiuyuan's capture, however. No, it was the opposite. Every attempt to detain Cui Qiuyuan, dead or alive, had ended in failure. Some of the elites sent to detain Cui Qiuyuan were Grandmasters too.

The reason was simple. Cui Qiuyuan himself was a powerful Grandmaster, and the corpses he stitched together weren't just flawless and pretty to look at. No, they were incredibly powerful puppets in their own right.

With his corpses and his own strength, Cui Qiuyuan was able to defeat or kill every elite who was sent to arrest him. He easily made it out of Yan, and for a time, there was no one under the heavens who didn't know his name.

Since then, the imperial court lost a mortician, and the *jianghu* gained a new one.

It should not need to be said, but Cui Qiuyuan had only gotten more reckless since he entered the *jianghu*, killing and stitching corpses wherever he went. He eventually came to be known as the Mortician and ranked on the Earth Champions Ranking.

The four beautiful women accompanying him right now were corpses Cui Qiuyuan had personally stitched together. He called them Corpse Spirits.

A corpse was dead, and a spirit was beautiful.

Cui Qiuyuan was a sick man. He believed that all humans in the world were flawed in some way, and his dream was to create a perfect, flawless human. That was why he kept killing and dismembering people and stitching their body parts together. It was to create the most perfect corpse the world had ever seen.

Cui Qiuyuan's horrific crimes aside, there was no denying that the corpses he stitched were perfect and beautiful like an art piece. It was also why people called his corpses "Corpse Spirits" instead of the more generic corpse puppets.

Of course, Cui Qiuyuan's Corpse Spirits wasn't just perfect in terms of appearance. They were quite powerful in their own right as well. It was why Cui Qiuyuan was able to roam the *jianghu* unhindered.

Take the four Corpse Spirits currently accompanying Cui Qiuyuan for example. They had successfully suppressed a Sage without him needing to enter the battlefield himself. Sure, the Sage was long dead, but his will was still present. That wasn't something just anyone could overcome, not Ye Qing at his current strength at least.

After Cui Qiuyuan climbed out of his coffin, he walked up to the headless Sage with unbridled excitement in his eyes. “Perfect. Just perfect. He is dead, but his physical body hasn’t given away to decay, nor has his spiritual qi dissipated in the slightest. He will be one of the best materials I’ve ever had the opportunity to work on!”

“With this body, I will create a better Corpse Spirit—no, no, I will create the most perfect Corpse Spirit in the world!”

“Kekekekeke!”

Cui Qiuyuan laughed boisterously while wearing a sick smile on his face.

“Have you seen my head?”

It was at this moment a cold, quiet voice rang right beside Cui Qiuyuan’s ear like the murmur of death. Every hair on his body stood on end as he cut his own laughter short and appeared ten meters away from his original position.

Not a moment too soon, the White Bone Stakes and Celestial Suppressing Nails used to suppress the headless Sage exploded all at once. At the same time, the heads of four Corpse Spirits turned reverse clockwise twice before jumping into the headless Sage’s hands.

“My Corpse Spirits! You bastard!”

Cui Qiuyuan felt like someone just stabbed him in the heart. It had taken him years of hard work and the body parts of at least a dozen Grandmasters to finally create the four Corpse Spirits. To this end, he had killed even more Grandmasters and offended many powerful factions.

Not only that, Cui Qiuyuan had refined parts of their bodies into Strange Artifacts to further improve his Corpse Spirits’ strength. For example, he had refined their hair into the Corpse Binding Rope, hid a White Bone Stake inside their body, and stored a Celestial Suppressing Nail in their mouths. Thanks to his modifications, every single Corpse Spirit was as strong as a Grandmaster, and they were especially effective against dead spirit-type Strangers. If they worked together, they could even go head to head against a Great Grandmaster, a.k.a Grandmasters who had attained perfection in the Trueman stage.

But now, The headless Sage had twisted their necks and ripped off their heads. Of course his heart ached at the loss.

“This isn’t my head...”

Unfortunately, the headless Sage wasn’t going to give him time to mourn his loss. The headless Sage let out another sigh and asked, “Can you please lend me your head?”

When the headless Sage said, “This isn’t my head,” a powerful wave of resentment washed out of him like a tsunami.

When he said, “Can you please lend me your head?” he appeared behind Cui Qiuyuan faster than the eye could blink and ripped off his head.

As Cui Qiuyuan’s headless body collapsed to the ground, Ye Qing wondered, *Is he dead?*

He quickly shook his head and frowned deeply. *No way. He's the forty-fourth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, the Mortician. There is no way he would die this easily.*

As if on cue, a furious voice came from inside the black coffin, "Good. Very good. You've successfully pissed me off."

A blast of energy threw the coffin lid into the air, and an unbelievable amount of death qi leaked into the surroundings. At the same time, Corpse Spirits climbed out of the coffin one after another.

There were male, female, old, young, tall, short. Corpse Spirits of all shapes and sizes crawled out of the black coffin. However, they all shared one thing in common, and that was they were all flawless and incredibly powerful. They looked like gods or celestials who had walked out of a painting.

Those who hadn't witnessed them climbing out of the coffin with their own eyes would never believe that they were really corpses sewn from multiple body parts.

What happened next felt like something that should only exist in a painting as well.

A Corpse Spirit wielded a sword whose powerful sword qi seemed to encompass the nine provinces.

A Corpse Spirit wielded fists that roared like dragons.

Another Corpse Spirit wielded palms that shook the earth.

A fourth Corpse Spirit muttered incantations that brought forth yin wind and rolling thunder.

A fifth Corpse Spirit drew runes to summon countless ghosts and demons...

Chapter 713: Suppressing A Sage

He's strong...

The thought flashed through Ye Qing's head as the terrifying aura the Corpse Spirits washed over him.

Every Corpse Spirit Cui Qiuyuan unleashed was at least a Grandmaster. While they weren't as strong as the four female Corpse Spirits at the beginning, their numbers were more than enough to make up for the deficit in quality, and they were well-coordinated despite their apparent lack of will.

This was why Cui Qiuyuan, the "Mortician" was feared so. He was a literal one-man-army.

Despite this, the headless Sage was able to handle the Corpse Spirits' coordinated assault with ease. Hardly any of the sword qi, saber force, yin wind and thunder managed to harm him at all. Most of them simply vanish into nothing like they never were. On top of that, the headless Sage was beheading a Corpse Spirit every time he took a step. It was insane to put it mildly.

A dozen Corpse Spirits fell dead beneath the headless Sage's feet in just a matter of moments. That said, the assault wasn't in vain. The headless Sage was dead and lacking a conscious will. He could only act on instinct, and he was much, much weaker than when he was still alive. Slowly but surely, his mountain of resentment was diminishing, and his movements were slowing.

While the headless Sage was battling against a Corpse Spirit, Cui Qiuyuan abruptly appeared behind his back with a willow branch in his hand. He swung it across the headless Sage's back like a whip.

The willow branch looked frail and harmless, but in reality, it cut through the headless Sage's back like a sharp blade through tofu and left behind a deep wound that was several inches deep.

The willow branch in Cui Qiuyuan's hands abruptly burned into a crisp after the attack was performed. However, black blood sprayed out of the headless Sage's back almost as if he had taken a grievous blow.

The Corpse Spirits who were touched by the black blood instantly turned pitch black as if they had fallen into a pool of ink. Then, they began disintegrating into dust like a burning paper.

Caught off guard, the back of Cui Qiuyuan's hand was struck by a drop of black blood as well. The entire arm immediately began to turn pitch black just like the Corpse Spirits, and it was spreading rapidly to the rest of his body.

Having seen what had befallen his Corpse Spirits, Cui Qiuyuan dashed away from the headless Sage while cutting off his entire right arm. Almost as soon as the arm was cut off, it began disintegrating into dust earnestly.

On top of that, the black blood hit the ground loudly like it was some sort of metal or stone. It then spread to the surroundings at an insane rate, chewing through the earth like it was nothing and generating black clouds that were thick enough to blot out even the red moon. A bottomless pit about tens of meters wide appeared around the Sage in just a matter of moments.

Terrifying...

Ye Qing gulped as he stared at the bottomless pit and felt the terrible energy emanating from it.

The black blood that leaked out of the headless Sage's body was overflowing with death qi and desolation. Such was its power that not even the Grandmaster-stage Corpse Spirits and the powerful Cui Qiuyuan could withstand it. As if that wasn't enough, a single drop was enough to annihilate the earth like nothing and form a bottomless pit that was tens of meters wide. If this wasn't terrifying, then nothing was.

The situation wasn't looking good for the headless Sage, however. Although his black blood successfully eliminated all the Corpse Spirits and dealt a good amount of damage to Cui Qiuyuan, Ye Qing could feel that his presence was waning at a visible rate.

It was at this moment Cui Qiuyuan reappeared next to the pit and stared down at the headless Sage from above. Unlike before, he was wearing an ugly expression on his face.

He never imagined that a Sage that had perished for heavens-know-how-many-years could be so powerful. Not only did he kill off all of his Corpse Spirits, he had dealt him a severe wound as well.

The large majority of his strength was concentrated around his Corpse Spirits. Without them, he was far below his peak to say the least. Naturally, this was disadvantageous toward his goal of obtaining the Dark Overlord's inheritance.

Despite this, Cui Qiuyuan could not help but feel a bit of excitement and expectation. Considering how strong the headless Sage was despite being dead for countless years, he must have been exceptionally strong when he was still alive. He could not have been an ordinary Sage.

If he were to stitch a Corpse Spirit with the headless Sage as the core, just how strong would it be?

Would it gain the power of a Great Grandmaster? A Half Sage? Maybe even a Sage?

It did not need to be said, but a Sage-stage Corpse Spirit would massively increase his strength. It was also his life's dream to stitch such a Corpse Spirit.

If he could subdue the headless Sage, then it would be worth all the Corpse Spirits he lost earlier and more.

Unable to suppress his desire any longer, Cui Qiuyuan waved his hand and summoned his black coffin.

Floating at the center of the pit, the coffin turned upside down and poured what looked like innumerable arms down onto the headless Sage. It looked like a massive tree covered in blooming flowers was falling down on the Sage, except that the tree was made of fleshy arms instead of wood.

The arms enveloped the headless Sage from all sides after it reached the bottom. Despite his relentless struggles and continuous decimation of the arms, there were just too many of them. On top of that, the headless Sage was much weaker than before due to the grievous blow he sustained earlier. In the end, the arms managed to pin him down and drag him into the black coffin.

After the headless Sage was dragged inside the black coffin, it landed back on the edge of the pit. Cui Qiuyuan then appeared beside the coffin and slammed the lid on it.

Thump!

The coffin lid sealed off the opening completely.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The black coffin shook violently as something struck against the lid again and again. Countless runes flickered erratically around the coffin, and many weeping faces pushed out of its surface as if trying to break free.

Cui Qiuyuan didn't look so good either. His face kept changing between male, female, old and young, and his aura was extremely unsteady.

Clearly, it cost him a ton of energy to seal the headless Sage inside his black coffin.

“Ooo ooo!!!”

A far distance away, Giggle struggled to break out of Ye Qing's grip as it stared at the black coffin with great worry and anger.

“Calm down. Now isn't the best time...” Ye Qing offered it some words of consolation while staring at the black coffin as well.

By now, Ye Qing had figured out the truth. Unless he was mistaken, the headless Sage was most likely Giggle's first master.

This would explain why Giggle cared so much for the headless Sage, and why the headless Sage heeded Giggle's cries and let him go even though it was entirely within his power to kill him.

Many years ago, the headless Sage left Giggie at the Celestial Spring because he wanted to enter the Death Sea to do something. He was probably planning to retrieve Giggie after he completed his business, but instead, he died.

Since the headless Sage was Giggie's first master, he could not turn a blind eye to his fate.

Although the headless Sage was long dead, he could still stop the outsiders from defiling his corpse.

But of course, just because he had made up his mind to intervene didn't mean that he should jump in recklessly. His opponent was Cui Qiuyuan the "Mortician", the forty-fourth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, and he was just a Half-Step Grandmaster. Under normal circumstances, forget fighting Cui Qiuyuan, he couldn't even earn a sideways glance from the man.

Luckily for him, the circumstances were decidedly not normal. The main reason Cui Qiuyuan was able to rank so high in the Earth Champions Ranking was thanks to his Corpse Spirits. However, not only did the man lose all of his Corpse Spirits, he himself was injured and exhausted. This was his chance to pull off the impossible.

There was no need to hurry, however. Yes, he could technically attack Cui Qiuyuan now as the man was at the lowest point of his power. However, not all opportunities were necessarily good.

Although Cui Qiuyuan possessed only a sliver of his original strength, he was still a Grandmaster. A lean camel was still bigger than a horse. One misstep, and the entire plan would go up in flames. Worst case scenario, they would die here.

That was why he must wait. He must wait for a better opportunity where success was guaranteed, preferably one where he could end Cui Qiuyuan's life in one strike.

Chapter 714: Threatening a Grandmaster

"Now's the time!"

A dozen or so breaths later, the tremors affecting the black coffin began to subside as if the headless Sage had finally been suppressed. It came at a huge cost, however. Cui Qiuyuan's face was as white as a sheet, and he was wobbling on his feet like he might fall over at any moment. Considering that he was a powerful Grandmaster, this was decidedly not normal.

It was at this moment Ye Qing dashed out of his hiding spot. The world turned foggy and illusory, and a giant finger abruptly descended from above to squash Cui Qiuyuan like a bug.

"Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation"

Strangely, Cui Qiuyuan wasn't looking up or trying to defend himself. Instead, he shivered and stared down one corner of the fog with shock and disbelief on his face.

"Mother..."

In Cui Qiuyuan's vision, a woman was slowly walking toward him with a smile on her face. She looked gentle, kind, and graceful. She was exactly the same as Cui Qiuyuan had remembered her... his mother.

However, the woman slowly underwent a transformation. Terrible cracks began spreading across her face and body, and between those cracks were poorly woven stitches. It wasn't long before she looked like a rag doll that had been put together using haphazardly, terrifying and heartbreaking.

“No... no... don’t come closer. Don’t come closer! Ahhh!”

Cui Qiuyuan’s eyes widened with panic and terror as he staggered away from the woman he called mother. Right here and now, Cui Qiuyuan looked less like the terrible Mortician and more like a helpless child.

The scene he was seeing was his biggest secret. It was also his greatest fear and nightmare.

As a direct descendant of the Clear River Cui Clan, one would think that Cui Qiuyuan enjoyed all the power and privileges that was afforded to a noble. In reality, that wasn’t the case.

His father had eight wives and over a dozen children, and unfortunately for him, his mother was the least favored of them all.

A long time ago, his mother left to visit her family but was attacked by a Stranger along the way. The Stranger had killed her and ripped her body to pieces.

Feeling that the clan was disgraced, his father found a random mortician to put her body back together. Then, she was buried as quietly and hastily as possible.

By a stroke of misfortune, Cui Qiuyuan happened to witness his mother’s final moment. The mortician was terrible at his job and made her look like a broken doll that had been stitched together using rags. Unlike her normal self, she looked, ugly, savage, and terrifying.

He caught a terrible fever after that, and throughout the fever, he kept dreaming of his mother smiling or crying over his prone figure. His ugly, nightmare-inducing mother.

After he recovered, an unholy desire was born inside his heart, and he became obsessed with the idea of stitching together a flawless corpse. And so, Cui Qiuyuan the “Mortician” was born.

He never wanted to see a body as ugly as his mother’s again. He would stitch the most flawless corpse in the world.

To this end, he gave up fame and glory and resisted all opposition to become a mortician in the Morgue of the Bureau of Punishments. Over time, the memory of his mother’s ugliest moment slowly faded from his mind as well.

But now, that forgotten memory had been dredged back to the surface of his consciousness once more. He felt as if time had been reversed, and he was a child jolting awake from the nightmare that was his mother’s corpse and cowering at one corner of the bed because he was too afraid to fall asleep again. He felt lonely, helpless, and terrified.

“No... this is fake. It’s all fake!”

For a moment, it felt like the emotions would overwhelm him. However, Cui Qiuyuan was ultimately a powerful, strong-willed Grandmaster. He quickly realized that something was wrong and suppressed his Demon’s Temptation. At the same time, he sensed the giant finger descending toward him.

A terrifying flood of spirit washed out of Cui Qiuyuan, and he made a tearing motion. There was a shredding noise as a giant scar appeared in front of him. As it grew wider and wider, the finger broke, and the strange, foggy world collapsed into nothing.

“Sky Tearing Hand”

With just one move, Cui Qiuyuan had destroyed the giant finger and even ripped the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven into shreds. The first thing he saw upon returning to the real world was a young man less than ten meters away from him.

The young man was Ye Qing, of course.

Ye Qing looked stunned as if he could not believe that Cui Qiuyuan had awakened so easily. Then, he turned around and tried to escape.

“You think you can run?!”

Cui Qiuyuan’s face contorted with fury and murder as the space around Ye Qing abruptly crumpled as if an invisible hand was gripping it. Ye Qing barely got out a scream before the Grandmaster ripped both the space and Ye Qing into pieces.

“A mere ant dares to taunt me?”

Cui Qiuyuan stared at the bloody remains of Ye Qing with dripping disdain. To think that an ant who wasn’t even a Grandmaster thought he could catch him off guard. The ambush had been as futile as an ant trying to tip over a tree.

Yes, he was seriously injured right now. Yes, he didn’t possess even ten percent of his full strength. Even so, he could never be defeated by an ant.

On top of that, the bastard had dared to dredge up his heart demon and nightmare. For this sin alone, he deserved a million deaths!

It was at this moment every hair on Cui Qiuyuan’s body suddenly stood on end. But before he could react, a massive hand abruptly appeared above his head and slammed him into the ground. Web-like cracks spanning over ten meters spread in every direction, and at the center was a dazed and confused Cui Qiuyuan. Right now, the man felt like his body was about to break into pieces.

The pain was just starting, however. While trapping his head in a vice grip, the massive hand lifted his head into the air and slammed it into the ground again, and again, and again. Cui Qiuyuan was powerless to stop it like a rag doll was powerless to stop an abusive owner from tearing it to pieces.

Cui Qiuyuan’s tormenter was Ye Qing, of course. The young man had transformed into a vigorous, ten-meter tall demonic ape before beating the absolute shit out of the Grandmaster. His right hand was grabbing Cui Qiuyuan’s head and slamming it repeatedly into the ground, while his left hand was trapping his body in a death grip to prevent the Grandmaster from breaking free.

Everything he did earlier was for this moment. The “Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation” was a distraction, and the dead Ye Qing was a bait.

Cui Qiuyuan was a Grandmaster, one who managed to survive being hunted by the imperial court of Yan and countless other factions no less. Therefore, he had to be a careful and intelligent man.

Knowing that Cui Qiuyuan was the type who became increasingly dangerous the worse the situation he was in, Ye Qing did not dare to underestimate Cui Qiuyuan in the slightest. After all, the slightest

mistake could end up with his death, and since his cheat wasn't infinite rebirth, he didn't dare to gamble with his life at all.

That was why he sought to create a moment where Cui Qiuyuan's guard was completely lowered. Only then could he execute his ambush without risking nasty surprises.

First, he used the "Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation" to dredge out Cui Qiuyuan's heart demon and destabilize him. While the Grandmaster was shaken, he created an illusion of himself using the "Dream Butterfly True Scripture" for the Grandmaster to kill.

Since Cui Qiuyuan was shaken by the "Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation", and every second counted in a life-or-death battle, the Grandmaster failed to notice that the warrior in front of him was a fake. After he killed the fake Ye Qing, he thought that he had dealt with the little rat who tried to ambush him during his moment of weakness and dropped his guard.

That was when Ye Qing descended upon him like a hawk.

In the end, Ye Qing's plan had worked perfectly. Although Cui Qiuyuan was a Grandmaster, he wasn't a body-tempering warrior. His physical body was obviously stronger compared to a generic Spirit Master's, but a body-tempering one? A body-tempering Half-Step Grandmaster? It wasn't even close. This was before mentioning that Cui Qiuyuan had lost an arm and taken significant injuries from the headless Sage as well.

All things considered, he would be lucky to escape Ye Qing's punishment with his life.

After kissing Cui Qiuyuan's face against the ground a couple more times, Ye Qing let go and raised both fists into the air. Then, he began striking the Grandmaster's body repeatedly like he was playing the drum.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom...

Chapter 715: Undying Phoenix Feather

With each strike, the cracks on the ground spread wider and wider. With each hammering, Cui Qiuyuan's struggles grew weaker and weaker.

Bang!

In the end, Cui Qiuyuan never managed to escape. With one last strike, Cui Qiuyuan's head finally burst into a shower of brain matter and gore. As for his body? It had been pounded into a pile of goo a long time ago.

That wasn't the end of it though. As soon as he shattered Cui Qiuyuan's head, a ball of light shot out of his head as swift as lightning.

Ye Qing was prepared for it, however. Ye Qing tapped the space in front of him, and his demonic thought manifested into existence as an impenetrable web. Like a fish caught in a net, there was nowhere for the ball of light to escape.

The ball of light contained Cui Qiuyuan's yang god, of course. A Spirit Master was a warrior who had created their yin god, but a yin god was afraid of sunlight and could only roam freely at night. A Grandmaster was someone who had purified their yin god with origin qi until it transformed into a yang god. No longer weak to sunlight, it could roam freely both during the day and the night. That was why it was called a yang god.

As long as the yang god still existed, the Grandmaster would never die. Although Ye Qing had destroyed Cui Qiuyuan's body via brute force, he did not quite possess the spiritual power to extinguish the opponent's yang god as well. That was why he was prepared for this outcome.

If you're going to do something, don't do it halfway. From the moment Ye Qing made up his mind to kill Cui Qiuyuan, he was going for total annihilation.

What happened next came as a complete surprise to Ye Qing, however. The ball of light had passed right through his web of demonic thought like it didn't exist.

Ye Qing couldn't believe it. If Cui Qiuyuan's yang god had punched through his web of demonic thought via brute force, he would not be surprised one bit. However, his demonic thought wasn't damaged in the slightest, nor had he felt anything when contact was made. It was almost as if the ball of light existed in a completely different space.

"Kekeke... to think that an ant who isn't even a Grandmaster had destroyed my body and pushed me to this extent. Interesting. How very interesting."

Cui Qiuyuan could've escaped immediately, but instead, he hovered a short distance away from Ye Qing and manifested his yang god's true form.

Cui Qiuyuan's yang god looked exactly the same as Cui Qiuyuan. If anything, it looked even more flawless than the actual person himself. However, a closer inspection would reveal that there were thread lines around Cui Qiuyuan's limbs, necks, and other areas. It was as if his body was sewn together from multiple body parts.

"It is quite interesting. Who would've thought that the forty-fourth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, the so-called 'Mortician' would fall to a mere ant's ambush?"

Ye Qing's laughter seemed to come from every direction as the world abruptly turned illusory once more. Sitting high above the nine heavens, a grand silhouette pointed a finger at Cui Qiuyuan's yang god. Distorted space and howling thunder immediately raced forth to annihilate the Grandmaster.

Ye Qing knew it would be difficult to kill Cui Qiuyuan's yang god. Naturally, he didn't have just one plan to kill him. If the web of demonic thought was the appetizer, then the "Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation" was the main course.

The "Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation" transformed the myriad red dust into the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven, and inside the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven, he was almost as powerful as a real god or demon.

However, the distorted space and howling thunder passed harmlessly through Cui Qiuyuan's yang god just like his web of demonic thought. It failed to leave even a scratch on the man's yang god.

"You know my name?" Cui Qiuyuan did not try to dodge the attack either. He sneered.

Unwilling to give up just yet, Ye Qing controlled his Heavenly Demon Yin God and tried to crush Cui Qiuyuan's yang god with his bare hands. Unfortunately, it still failed to do anything.

It looked like spiritual attacks would not reach Cui Qiuyuan, so he transformed into the Chaos Demon Ape, covered his fists in flames, and tried to punch the Grandmaster. However, the attempt still ended in failure.

“Stop wasting your energy. You cannot kill me.”

Cui Qiuyuan did not even try to dodge. He kept talking while Ye Qing attacked his yang god, “Do you see the feather in my forehead?”

“The Undying Phoenix Feather?!”

It was only now Ye Qing noticed that a rainbow-colored feather was sewn to Cui Qiuyuan’s forehead. It was about the length of a finger, and it was giving off a beautiful rainbow light.

“You’re surprisingly knowledgeable for an ant. That’s right. This is the Undying Phoenix Feather!” Cui Qiuyuan confirmed.

“To think that such a treasure would fall into your hands... I guess there’s no helping it.”

Ye Qing let out a deep sigh before withdrawing his fists and his Heavenly Demon Yin God.

The Undying Phoenix Feather was a Disaster-class Strange Artifact. Ranked seventy-third on the Strange Artifact Register, it was created using the tail feather of the Ancient-class Stranger, the Undying Nether Phoenix as the main ingredient.

The Undying Phoenix Feather was a Strange Artifact of immense power. While it offered zero offensive power or physical protection, it could protect one’s mind from destruction.

No one underneath the Sage stage could wipe out the mind and consciousness of the owner of the Undying Phoenix Feather. No matter how serious their injuries were, their mind would never fade. Worst case scenario, their mind would simply be reborn in flames. That was why it was called the Undying Phoenix Feather.

Nothing short of a Sage could kill someone wielding the Undying Phoenix Feather. Naturally, it was an insanely powerful life-saving Strange Artifact.

It was said that the Undying Phoenix Feather was the legacy Strange Artifact of the Undying Clan of Wei. However, they had lost it for centuries for some unknown reason. Heavens only know how Cui Qiuyuan managed to come by such a treasure.

One thing for certain, there was no way in hell Ye Qing could destroy Cui Qiuyuan’s yang god and end the threat he posed so long as he still owned the Undying Phoenix Feather.

Luckily, Cui Qiuyuan could not do anything to him either. Once the Undying Phoenix Feather was activated, neither the owner nor the attacker could interact with each other in any way. It would be as if they existed in completely different spaces.

This was one of the most defining characteristics of the Strange Artifact.

“Kekeke... you must be feeling so much regret right now, aren’t you?” Cui Qiuyuan sneered.

“I feel unfortunate, sure, but regret? Are you kidding me?” Ye Qing scoffed.

From the start, he was prepared for the possibility of failure. Cui Qiuyuan was a Grandmaster on the Earth Champions Ranking. Even at his weakest, he must possess a good number of table-turning or life-saving trump cards. He never thought he had a one hundred percent chance of killing Cui Qiuyuan in the first place, but he still acted anyway. So, why on earth would he regret his decision?

“Oh? Is that so?” A sick grin slowly spread across Cui Qiuyuan’s face. “You will regret it though.”

“I will turn you into my Corpse Spirit one day. Then, I will make you kill your own parents, brothers, relatives, friends, acquaintances, all of them. You will become the murderer of everyone you ever loved or cared for.”

“Not only that, I will make sure you preserve your consciousness. Only then can you experience the pain and regret of killing your loved ones. I promise you I will extend your misery until eternity. If nothing else, it would be a most pleasant experience for one of us.”

Cui Qiuyuan was laughing, but his eyes were as cold as they were cruel. “An ant is just an ant. An ant should be self-conscious and never try to scheme against a tiger. After all, a tiger would make the ant wish that it never lived.”

“Well said. I can’t deny that that’s the truth.”

Ye Qing slow-clapped. “Unfortunately for you, I am not an ant, and you are not a tiger. After all, there isn’t a tiger in this world who would be bitten blue and black by a mere ant—not unless that tiger is a paper tiger[1]. And since you’re a paper tiger, why on earth would I be afraid of you?”

“Today, I was able to shatter your body and turn you into a helpless dog who’s all bark and no bite. In the future, I will surely be able to extinguish your soul and grant you the true death you deserve.”

“Hahaha! Are you being serious right now?” Cui Qiuyuan burst out laughing like he just heard the funniest joke in the world. “Who do you think you are?”

“I am Chu Wangsun, and my teacher is the Chief Libationist of the Jixia Academy! So tell me, do you still think I cannot crush you one day?” Ye Qing declared.

“Chu Wangsun? You’re Mister Nine?” Cui Qiuyuan’s laughter abruptly cut short.

“Oh? To think that the Mortician had heard of my name. How honored I am!” Ye Qing laughed as he dispelled his Chaos Demon Ape Body and assumed Chu Wangsun’s appearance. Even his aura was exactly the same as Chu Wangsun’s.

It wasn’t like Cui Qiuyuan knew Chu Wangsun in person, much less a nobody named Ye Qing, so he was free to slander the scholar to his heart’s content.

Best case scenario, he would make Chu Wangsun a new enemy. Worst case scenario, he could at least annoy Cui Qiuyuan a little. It was a win-win situation no matter how he looked at it.

Chapter 716: Seen Many Autumn Moons and Spring Wind

“I see. You’re the disciple of the Chief Libationist and the fourth named warrior on the Human Champions Ranking? No wonder you’re so strong.”

As an Earth Champions Ranking Grandmaster, Cui Qiuyuan thought it beneath him to keep an eye on the Human Champions Ranking. However, that did not apply to the top ten geniuses. After all, barring any accidents, everyone in the top ten would eventually enter the Grandmaster stage and subsequently the Earth Champions Ranking. They all possessed outstanding power and backing as well.

Cui Qiuyuan did not suspect that Ye Qing was lying to his face. After all, Ye Qing’s strength and skill were quite extraordinary considering his age. He had to be a top five warrior on the Human Champions Ranking at the minimum, and everyone on the top five were usually too proud to lie about their identity.

Cui Qiuyuan acknowledged Ye Qing’s strength, but he immediately harrumphed afterward and said, “So what if you are the disciple of the Chief Libationist of the Jixia Academy? It’s not like I’ve never killed the disciple of a Sage.”

“I’ll grant you one thing though. I’ve never killed a top five genius of the Human Champions Ranking. I’m sure it would be quite interesting to have a Corpse Spirit like you.”

Ye Qing copied Chu Wangsun’s tone and declared arrogantly, “If you think you can stitch me into a Corpse Spirit, then try. I look forward to your failure.”

“Kekeke... don’t worry, I won’t keep you waiting. I’m a man of my word after all.”

Cui Qiuyuan let out a cackle before disappearing all of a sudden. Then, a voice came from afar, “Do your best to stay alive, Chu Wangsun. I’ll come look for you very soon.”

“I’ll be waiting!” Ye Qing clasped his hands behind his back and announced.

A few seconds later, after he was sure that Cui Qiuyuan was gone, Ye Qing let out a sigh that was infused with both disappointment and pride.

He was disappointed because he had been a hair away from killing Cui Qiuyuan. Seriously, he would’ve killed the Grandmaster if he didn’t have the Undying Phoenix Feather.

He was also proud because he, a “small fry” who wasn’t even a Grandmaster yet had nearly killed the forty-fourth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, the infamous “Mortician”. Sure, it was hardly a fair fight, but that was still a feat worth boasting about. Had he succeeded and spread the word to the jianghu, he would surely become the topic of the week.

Unfortunately, Cui Qiuyuan was still alive, so that was that.

He now had a bullseye on his back, but Ye Qing wasn't really that worried. After all, Chu Wangsun was the one who killed Cui Qiuyuan, and what did that have to do with little ol' Ye Qing?

Besides, he hadn't lied to Cui Qiuyuan about everything. Today, he was already strong enough to send Cui Qiuyuan packing with his tail between his legs. In the future, he was certain he could handle anything the Grandmaster might throw at him fair and square.

"Warrior Ye! Are you alright?!"

It was at this moment Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth finally caught up to him.

"Why have you come?" Ye Qing asked puzzledly and assumed his previous appearance as he turned around to face them.

"You saved my life, but I haven't repaid the favor yet. How can I possibly leave until I've done that?" Shangguan Hongjin replied before repeating, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, thank you," Ye Qing replied while hiding his surprise. He would've thought that Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth were long gone after the near death encounter with the headless Sage, but against all odds, they actually came after him. This was nothing like what he came to expect from jianghu warriors.

"What happened here? We sensed multiple terrible shockwaves of energies earlier, and these bodies... Did a battle take place?" Pedant Earth licked his lips nervously while examining his surroundings closely. The remnant energies lingering in the area alone was enough to send chills up his spine.

"Yeah. A powerful Grandmaster fought against the headless Sage in an attempt to subdue him. What you're seeing is the aftermath of the battle."

Ye Qing did not tell them about the Mortician or the fact that he had ambushed Cui Qiuyuan. Keeping the details as vague as possible, he continued, "Long story short, the battle ended in mutual loss. The headless Sage was suppressed, but the Grandmaster himself was grievously wounded. Perhaps that is why he chose to escape after sensing my presence."

"Is that so? I thought I heard something about Chu Wangsun though. What's that about?" Shangguan Hongjin asked suspiciously.

"Chu Wangsun? Are you talking about Mister Nine? You probably heard wrong," Ye Qing denied the allegation immediately. Chu Wangsun? Whozzat?

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Suddenly, the black coffin Cui Qiuyuan had left behind began shaking violently. When Ye Qing turned to look, he saw Giggles standing on top of the black coffin and whining softly. Over time, the tremors grew more and more violent.

“You guys need to leave. Quickly!”

Ye Qing blanched. Without Cui Qiuyuan to oversee his Strange Artifact, it was clear that the black coffin’s suppression had weakened tremendously. At the very least, it was enough for the headless Sage to start struggling once more.

Unfortunately, his warning came too late. Before he could even finish, cracks spread all across the black coffin like it was made of porcelain. Then, it exploded into smithereens.

A terrifying aura engulfed both heaven and earth. The headless Sage had reappeared once more.

Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth couldn’t move a muscle. Hells, they could hardly breath through the pressure.

Ye Qing was doing much better than the two of them, but he was gripped by tension as well.

Although the headless Sage’s presence wasn’t nearly as bottomless and all-encompassing as it was before, he was still quite terrifying to say the least. Right now, his whole body was covered in black blood, and the ground froze solid with cold, desolate energy when it dripped.

“Ooo ooo...”

It was at this moment Giggle landed on the headless Sage’s shoulder and called out softly to him. It sounded incredibly sad.

“Giggle...”

Ye Qing unconsciously took a step forward. He was worried that the headless Sage would go insane and hurt Giggle.

Although the headless Sage was most likely Giggle’s former master, he was also dead. It was impossible to say what he might do in his current state.

Buzz!

Suddenly, the headless Sage faced toward him. Ye Qing immediately felt the pressure pressing against his body doubling, no, tripling in intensity. The sky itself was clouding from the sheer force he was exuding.

“Ooo oooo!”

Giggle cried urgently from the headless Sage’s shoulder. It was clearly trying to persuade him against harming Ye Qing.

It worked. The headless Sage slowly withdrew its aura until it was no longer suffocating. Then, he turned toward Giggle and slowly, hesitantly, and gently patted its head.

Giggle narrowed its eyes happily. It sat down on the headless Sage’s shoulder with an expression of bliss on its face.

Under any other circumstances, the sight of a little Stranger and a headless Sage should invoke the deepest terror in anyone’s heart. But right here and now? There was only warmth and joy.

A long, long time ago, Giggle must have sat on the headless Sage's shoulder and seen the world with him. They must have walked countless mountains and rivers and seen many autumn moons and spring wind.

After what felt like three to five breaths or many millennia later, the headless Sage gently lifted Giggle off his shoulder and handed him to Giggle.

Caught off guard, Ye Qing hurriedly received Giggle and promised the headless Sage, "Do not worry, senior. I promise I'll take good care of Giggle."

"Not only that, I'll retrieve your head as well."

It was both a promise to the headless Sage and himself.

Giggle was his friend, so of course he would take good care of him.

The headless Sage was Giggle's former master. If only for Giggle's sake, he wished to restore the headless Sage and fulfill the little Stranger's lifelong wish.

The headless Sage petted Giggle a couple more times with clear reluctance. Then, to everyone's surprise, he abruptly reached out to grab Ye Qing's head.

No one saw this coming. Not Shangguan Hongjin, not Pedant Earth, not even Ye Qing.

By the time they came to, the headless Sage had already grabbed Ye Qing's head.

Chapter 717: A Thunderclap Clears The Way To Trueman

"Warrior!"

"Warrior Ye!"

Shangguan Hongjin and Pedant Earth exclaimed in shock and horror. They immediately charged the headless Sage despite their fear.

They quickly came to a stop though. It was because Giggle was blocking their way, stretching its arms wide, and making weird Stranger noises. It seemed to be trying to tell them something.

Pedant Earth was going to step around Giggle and resume his charge when Shangguan Hongjin caught his shoulder. "Calm down!"

"What the hell are you doing?" Pedant Earth said urgently. Saving a life was like trying to put out a fire. Every second mattered.

"Calm down. I think warrior Ye is fine." Shangguan Hongjin shot a glance at the headless Sage and Giggle before looking down on Giggle. "Look closely."

"What?"

Pedant Earth took a moment to steady himself before looking at Ye Qing again. It was only now he noticed that the young man's breathing was steady, and the "attack" hadn't left a scratch on his person.

"What's going on?"

“I can’t say,” Shangguan Hongjin looked just as puzzled, “but I’m fairly sure that the Sage isn’t planning to hurt warrior Ye, so let’s wait and see what happens for now.”

That was what she said, but neither of them actually relaxed their guard. The second they noticed that something was amiss, they were going to jump in and save Ye Qing no matter what.

Right now, Ye Qing’s eyes were wide open in surprise, confusion, and shock. He was surprised because he never expected the headless Sage to attack him. However, his surprise quickly turned to confusion because he realized that the headless Sage wasn’t trying to harm him, much less rip his head off. Finally, his confusion turned into shock when he felt the headless Sage injecting a vast stream of refined power into his body, and wisps of profound martial insight into his headspace.

As power flooded into his body, and understanding into his heart, Ye Qing realized in pleasant surprise that the impenetrable fog that once barred his way to the peak known as Grandmaster was rapidly fading away.

He now had a clear direction as to what he needed to do to get to the top.

The shackles that once barred him from climbing the peak were loosening.

The obstacles that blocked his view and path to the skies were slowly vanishing.

A thunderclap cleared the dark clouds and endless rain that shrouded the image of his true self.

And the life-changing path that would make him a Trueman Grandmaster was now clearly present in front of him.

Long before he entered this place, he was only half a step away from becoming a body-tempering Grandmaster. However, this half step might as well be the gulf between heaven and earth itself. Forget overcoming it, there was a time where he couldn’t even find a path to begin scaling upward.

The reasons why he was stuck were numerous, but to boil it all down, it was a lack of understanding and insight toward what made a Grandmaster, and a fundamental shortage of power.

But now, the headless Sage had pierced the veil of darkness that blinded him from the peak with his martial insight. He could now clearly see the door known as Grandmaster and even the view behind it.

Of course, just being able to witness that door wasn’t enough to make one a Grandmaster. He must also forge the sky stepping stairs that would lead him to that door, push it open, and cross over the threshold. Only then would he truly become a Trueman and a Grandmaster.

All that effort required a tremendous amount of power, and power was the second gift the headless Sage had given to him. It had made him a sky stepping stairs that led him all the way to the door, and a battering ram that rammed it open like nothing.

Creak...

It sounded like the opening creak of a door, the breaking of the shackles that chained him to the earth, or the indescribable sound of heaven and earth. It was crisp, clear, and melodious.

Pedant Earth could hear it. Shangguan Hongjin could hear it.

Everyone within tens of kilometers of Ye Qing could hear it as well[1].

Then, the storm descended.

The rumbling thunder and animalistic roar were really the sound of his muscles and bones stretching.

The rushing river was really the sound of his blood flow.

And the steady yet deafening beat was the sound of his heartbeat.

Just as the sound of the wind, the rain, and the thunder belonged in one group, so was the sound of the muscles, the bones, and the heart.

The sounds were different, loud, and heavy, but they were not discordant. Together, they combined into a beautiful, profound symphony that resounded throughout heaven and earth.

.....

“Someone’s body is resonating with heaven and earth. A body-tempering warrior is breaking through to the Grandmaster stage!”

Inside a dilapidated hall, Yun Qingxiao was gazing toward the horizon and feeling the resonance of Dao in the air. He murmured, “What a strong body it is!”

Suddenly, a brilliant sword beam flashed and cut the hall behind him in half. Inside the hall, a powerful statue of a deity with three heads and six arms also split into two like tofu.

Boom!

Both the Stranger and the hall crumbled, but Yun Qingxiao wasn’t even paying attention to his kill. He put away his sword and continued to gaze toward the horizon with a calm expression.

“Hmm? I can feel a Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation gathering. Who is this person to draw the greatest of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations during his breakthrough?”

He thought for a moment before jumping into the air. Blue lotuses appeared beneath his feet as he dashed toward the distance.

.....

“Oho? Someone’s entering the Grandmaster stage!”

Next to a lake, Zhang Lingyang was chewing on a straw and looking up at the sky with a surprised look on his face. “A body-tempering warrior too? How incredible!”

“Who could it be? Tie Youchun? Lu Zhenwo? Luo Shanhai? Nah, it can’t be them. They might be body-tempering warriors, but they’re half-baked at best. There is no way their Grandmaster breakthrough could cause such a commotion? What about that little bald donkey from Lanke Temple? No, no, it doesn’t feel like him either. I don’t sense his pretentious air of Buddhism anywhere.”

Zhang Lingyang was so absorbed with his own musings that he did not seem to notice that a face was surfacing from the lake behind him. It was such a huge face that it nearly spanned the entire lake, and it was bloated and rotten probably because it had been submerged underneath the lake for heavens-know-how-long.

Despite its size, the gigantic face was surprisingly fast. It reached Zhang Lingyang in just the blink of an eye and opened its mouth to swallow it whole.

It was at this moment Zhang Lingyang threw a backhand. A sun descended from the sky and crashed right on top of the giant face with the force of a meteor.

The giant face in the lake let out a bloodcurdling scream before disintegrating into ash. The lake itself evaporated in an instant and revealed a floor of bones on the lake bed.

Zhang Lingyang did not look behind him from the start until the end. He was still trying to figure out who the ascender was.

“Wait wait wait! Is that the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation? By the Boundless Heavenly Sovereign, who in the fuck could draw such a powerful tribulation for their Grandmaster breakthrough?”

Zhang Lingyang hopped about like a child. “Who could it be? Who could it be?”

“Could it be Beiqiu? She is a body-mind warrior with a once-in-an-eternity level of physique. Yes, yes, it has to be her. Only Beiqiu could possibly draw a Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation during her Grandmaster breakthrough.”

The “Beiqiu” Zhang Lingyang was speaking of was the number two warrior on the Human Champions Ranking, the Saint[2] of Demonic Mountain Mo Beiqiu.

“This is wrong!” Suddenly, Zhang Lingyang cried in frustration. “If Beiqiu’s already a Grandmaster, then I can’t possibly fall behind! A worthy wife deserves a worthy husband!”

That’s right. Mo Beiqiu was, in fact, a woman. There were only two women in the top ten, and Mo Beiqiu was one of them.

“Oh shit. I need to protect Beiqiu! It would be bad if some scumbags try to distract her or something!”

With that said, Zhang Lingyang rushed toward the basin at top speed.

.....

“A body-tempering warrior? The Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation?”

A person covered in black from head to toe flattened a bone-filled valley before gazing into the distance.

“I don’t know such a Spirit Master existed even among the top ten. Interesting.”

The speaker's voice was cold and feminine. She began making her way toward the basin at a leisurely pace.

"I will see who they are."

.....

"Someone's entering the Grandmaster stage?"

Greenlake Bai was carrying a red umbrella and walking barefoot across a scenic hill with beautiful streams passing through it. However, every once in a while, blood and gore would suddenly explode behind her, and dead Strangers with a human's head but a fox's body would slowly manifest into view.

Suddenly, Greenlake Bai felt something and paused in her tracks. "A body-tempering warrior? Who could it be?"

"It can't be my dear husband, can it? It's probably not him. He shouldn't be able to grow this quickly!"

"Well, no harm in taking a look. Who knows, maybe I could even get something good out of it. I would not want to be a wife who is poorer than her husband!"

.....

Chu Wangsun was standing in front of a grave that was split at the center. Poetry, songs and passages were pouring out of the cracks and surrounding him in a cyclone of scholarly recitations. It felt like he was in a classroom or something. The wind, the rain, the sounds of reading.

Standing in front of the grave, Chu Wangsun resembled the center of the world. His great qi surrounded him like a dragon, and his vigor pierced the clouds above. Although the two energies were decidedly different—one qi was calm and peaceful like that of a scholar, and the other was potent and violent like a warrior—they did not repel each other. On the contrary, they seemed to be existing in some sort of profound, mysterious balance.

Clearly, Chu Wangsun was attempting to meld his Confucianism and martial way into one and become a Grandmaster this way. In fact, he was just moments away from succeeding.

It was at this moment Chu Wangsun sensed the unusual tremors in the heavens and glanced up once. However, he quickly immersed himself in his own world once more.

Nothing could distract him from his work.

Chapter 718: Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation

Everyone in this unusual world had heard the supernatural resonance and felt its vibrations. They were all looking up at the sky and staring at the direction where it came from.

Some people were envious, some people were jealous, some people were curious, some people were seething with greed, and some people were cooking nasty plots in their brains.

Regardless of their thoughts, the next action they took were synced almost as if they had rehearsed this before: nearly everyone began moving toward the basin.

Ye Qing had no idea that his breakthrough had drawn so much attention, of course. He was busy preparing to face the Heavenly Way's final trial.

After he broke free from his restraints and pushed open that door, he suddenly felt like he was being watched by someone or something. At the same time, his sixth sense warned him of an incoming danger and trial.

Thump!

There was a thump that sounded like a heavenly drumbeat. As soon as it faded, a huge, dark yellow cauldron appeared in the sky.

The cauldron had three feet and two handles. Runes of Heavenly Way covered its surface, and at its heart lay the breath of all living things and great virtue. It was profound to put it mildly.

As soon as the cauldron manifested, the world was engulfed in dark yellow light. The air suddenly became heavy and suffocating like the weight of a mountain was infused in it.

“Is that the... Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation?”

Pedant Earth trembled with shock and disbelief as he looked up at the cauldron.

“I... I think so.”

Shangguan Hongjin replied shakily, mouth just as dry as Pedant Earth's. She had heard of the legendary Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation, but she had never witnessed it until now.

The Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation was the greatest tribulation of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations.

The sky was profound, and the earth was yellow. Together, they make up the world. When the world first came into existence, the karmic qi that was born was known as the Profound Yellow Mother Qi.

The Profound Yellow Mother Qi was the origin of all qi and mother of all creations. Such was its karmic weight that it defied explanation.

The Profound Yellow Mother Qi was born only during the creation of a world. Naturally, it could only be obtained by those with great virtue and destiny.

Those who wished to obtain it despite not being born at the right place and the right time must face a tribulation instead. They must overcome the trials of the mother qi and the obstacles of the earth: the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation.

The Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation promised a great boon for the challengers who managed to overcome it. However, with great boon comes great terror.

The boon was a wisp of Profound Yellow Mother Qi. There was a saying that went something like this, “One wisp of profound yellow to forge a Sage.” It meant that a single wisp of Profound Yellow Mother Qi could transform an ordinary, post-natal mortal with zero cultivation foundation into a natural, flawless, and perfected being. Provided they didn't purposely ruin themselves, they were guaranteed to enter sagehood[1] one day.

Naturally, the Profound Yellow Mother Qi was a life-changing treasure everyone dreamed of getting. It would not be an exaggeration to say that anyone who obtained it would go from zero to hero in a snap of a finger.

But of course, the one who wishes to wear the crown must bear its weight. To obtain the Profound Yellow Mother Qi, one must overcome the trials of the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation.

This was what the ancients meant when they chose the words “great terror” to describe it.

The Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation was the greatest tribulation of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations. Naturally, its dangers could not be understated. Forget a Grandmaster, even a Sage would shudder at the thought of facing such a tribulation.

“Who in the world is warrior Ye? He’s just ascending to the Grandmaster stage, and he’s drawing the king of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations, the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation?” Pedant Earth muttered in complete astonishment.

It was said that there were seventy two Fiends on the earth and thirty six Stars in the sky. A Trueman represented the earth, and a Sage the sky. That was why those who wished to become a Trueman worthy of representing the earth were met with the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations.

Just the same, those who wished to become a Sage or living god worthy of representing the sky must face the Thirty Six Heavenly Stars Tribulations.

Not all Seventy Two Heavenly Stars Tribulation were made equal. Some were stronger and loftier, and some were weaker and lower.

The lofty ones were as high as the palace in the heavens. Those who got to see it were few and far between.

The low ones were as common as mountains and waters. They were present anywhere you looked.

The world gave birth to tribulations so as to temper all creations and make eternal the Dao. Naturally, the trials must be balanced accordingly against the challenger’s talent, accumulation, and karma. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be a trial.

To put it in more secular terms, the greater a warrior’s natural talent and accumulation, the stronger and deadlier the tribulations they would face when attempting to enter a certain cultivation level.

On the other hand, the lousier one’s natural talent and accumulation, the weaker the tribulation they would trigger.

On that subject, a warrior’s behavior and conduct would result in karmic hindrance or karmic virtue, and that changed the strength and type of tribulation they faced as well. As the people loved to say, what goes around comes around, and you reap what you sow.

Out of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations, the lower thirty were common, the middle thirty were uncommon, and the upper twelve were very rare.

To put it from a different perspective, the lower thirty of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations were the weakest and least threatening. Only warriors with weak talent but were still good enough to become a Grandmaster would attract them, and that applied to most people.

The middle thirty of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations were average tribulations. It was reserved to those who were guaranteed to become a Grandmaster, but were unlikely to ever become a Sage. About one in one hundred warriors would attract such a tribulation during their breakthrough. They were uncommon, but they definitely weren't rare.

The upper twelve tribulations were the strongest and most dangerous tribulations of them all. They were reserved only for the exceedingly talented and hardworking. Only one in one hundred million warriors would have the fortune—or misfortune, depending on how you looked at it—to face such a tribulation, and the actual ratio was likely lower than that.

On top of that, jianghu warriors commonly believed that another hierarchy existed in the upper twelve tribulations. There was a saying that went something like this, “Those of the lower four would enter the Earthly Champions Ranking, those of the middle four might dream of Sages, and those of the upper four would roam the heavens as they pleased.”

To put it in more secular terms, the warriors who overcame one of the lower four tribulations was guaranteed to be named on the Earth Champions Ranking, those who defeated the middle four tribulations was very likely to become a Sage in the future, and those who prevailed over the upper four tribulations was guaranteed to become a Sage and “roam the heavens”.

But of course, it was just hearsay. Nothing was certain, and anything was possible. Still, it illustrated just how rare the upper twelve tribulations of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations were.

In any case, Ye Qing hadn't just attracted an upper twelve tribulation of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations, it was also the greatest of them all. Naturally, Pedant Earth was beyond speechless.

He was also worried. The upper twelve tribulations of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations were famous for a reason. If Ye Qing succeeded in overcoming it, he would surely gain an unimaginable boon and soar to the heavens.

The current ninth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, Nin Liuyun the “Wandering Celestial”, had met the seventh Seventy Two Earthly Fiend Tribulations known as the Yu Qing's Boundless Tribulation of Primordial Beginning. After he overcame its trials, the heavens had bestowed him an Auspicious Primordial Beginning Cloud.

Legend had it that the Auspicious Primordial Beginning Cloud was one of the auspicious clouds that appeared around the head of Yu Qing, the Primordial Beginning Heavenly Sovereign, when he was proving his Dao. It could maintain the purity of the mind, protect it from foreign influence, and ensure that one's heart would always stay true to oneself.

The current sixth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, the “Heaven Turning Great Sage” Yuan Zhantian, had met the fifth Seventy Two Earthly Fiend Tribulations known as the Twelve Capitals

Heavenly God Fiend Tribulation. After he overcame its trials, he was bestowed a wisp of demonic intent belonging to the Progenitor Demon, Rahu himself.

It was thanks to this wisp of true intent that Yuan Zhantian successfully mastered the “Heaven Turning Scripture” and gained unparalleled fighting power. It was also how he managed to climb to the sixth spot of the Earth Champions Ranking.

Examples like these were a dime a dozen. In fact, the large majority of warriors dominating the Earth Champions Ranking right now had overcome a middle thirty or upper twelve Seventy Two Earthly Fiend Tribulation during their ascension. The warriors just didn’t publicize the fact for one reason or another.

All tribulations shared one common characteristic, however. Without exception, the ultimate price of failure was true death.

When the people looked up into the night sky and found the moon and the many stars that hung around it, they really should be looking down at their own feet where countless bones lay.

It was never an easy thing to break free from one’s mortal restraints and join the celestial bodies themselves. The number of people who failed their tribulation and died far, far exceeded the number of those who succeeded.

This was doubly true for the upper twelve tribulations of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiend Tribulations. Even the most frivolous, uncaring warrior would not dare to underestimate them.

There were only two outcomes when one was facing a great terror: either they emerged victorious and gained a new lease of life, or they failed and died right there and then.

There was no judge fairer than the Heavenly Way. Blessing and life lay on one side of its coin, and disaster and death on the other!

Chapter 719: I Hide In My Sleeve A Fist That Is Worlds Wide

“Who do you think warrior Ye is, Miss Shangguan?” Pedant Earth mumbled.

“How would I know? I’m not a god!” Shangguan Hongjin replied before beckoning him to follow her. “Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

“But warrior Ye...” Pedant Earth hesitated.

“But what? You know it’s suicide for us to stay here, right?” Shangguan Hongjin grabbed Pedant Earth’s elbow and started dragging him away. “Besides, you know there’s nothing a tribulation hates more than intervention. If we stay here, the only thing we’ll do is make trouble for warrior Ye.”

“Are we just going to do nothing then?” Pedant Earth asked.

“Of course not! When did I ever say that?” Shangguan Hongjin snorted. “No one can help him against the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation except himself, but the minor tribulations, now that’s something we can help him with, can’t we?”

“Minor tribulations?” Pedant Earth repeated in confusion before realization struck him. “You’re talking about outsiders!”

That's right. The world had many trials and tribulations, and not all of them came from the world one lived in. The people who lived in it were a form of tribulation as well.

The world is harsh, and the human heart harsher. It was never an empty saying, and it never will be.

Ye Qing's ascension had caused such a commotion that even a person with all their senses cut off would be hardpressed to miss it. Countless people would be intrigued by it, and a good number of them would surely recognize the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation. When the time came, Ye Qing would surely be targeted by all.

After all, the reward for overcoming the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation was a wisp of Profound Yellow Mother Qi, and the Profound Yellow Mother Qi could transform one's body so that sagehood was guaranteed.

To say that this was an unimaginable boon would be an understatement. To give a comparison, it was almost as good as obtaining the Dark Overlord's inheritance. Who in their right mind would give up such an opportunity?

Sure, for most of these warriors, the chances they might become the chosen one to obtain the Profound Yellow Mother Qi was, frankly, non-existent. But wait, the person who attracted the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation must be a once-in-a-century genius, and it did not take a genius to know that they must carry a fortune on their person. If they couldn't get the meat, the juices that seeped through the cracks of the winner's fingers were perfectly acceptable as well, no?

That was why the tribulation from the heavens wasn't the only danger Ye Qing must face. He must endure the threat of human greed as well.

"What should we do?"

"Stop and wait!" Shangguan Hongjin declared succinctly.

It did not take Pedant Earth much effort to decipher Shangguan Hongjin's cryptic words.

"Stop" meant stopping all those who harbored malicious intent toward Ye Qing.

A heavenly tribulation was dangerous, but the greatest danger came after it was over. No matter how strong Ye Qing was, he could not possibly overcome the legendary Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation and remain pristine and energetic. When he was at his lowest, weakest point, that was the moment all who bore him ill will would act. That was the moment the deadliest knife would arrive to kill Ye Qing.

Their job was to stop these people from getting to Ye Qing.

As for "wait", she meant that they needed to stall Ye Qing's would-be killers until he recovered.

Neither he nor Shangguan Hongjin were weak, but they definitely weren't powerful either. It was unrealistic to think that they could stop everyone who wished to do Ye Qing harm on their own, not to mention that a good number of those people were Grandmasters as well. Scratch that, it was just impossible.

Therefore, their goal was just to buy as much time as possible. They would stall Ye Qing's enemies long enough for him to refine the Profound Yellow Mother Qi and restore his body. They would win once Ye Qing had recovered enough strength to join them.

Ideally, they would live, and so would Ye Qing. It would be the perfect ending.

In reality, both of them knew just how dangerous and difficult the task would be. Who would've thought it would be so difficult to carry a task consisting of just two words?

In fact, Pedant Earth knew very well that the perfect ending might only exist in their dreams. It was far more likely that they would die in defense of Ye Qing or worse, they all perished.

Shangguan Hongjin walked a few steps when she suddenly said, "Say, we're quite stupid, aren't we? Even an idiot would know that what we're trying to do is next to impossible."

"Quite stupid? You give us too much credit. It's easily one of the stupidest decisions of our lives," Pedant Earth replied matter-of-factly. Of course it was. It was bad enough that they were putting their lives on the line for a stranger, but the task they set themselves to do were practically impossible. If this wasn't stupid, then what was?

"Come on, man. You're making me wish that warrior Ye would fail his tribulation." Shangguan Hongjin sighed.

"Hahaha! What a coincidence! I was thinking that as well!" Pedant Earth let out a hearty laugh.

Shangguan Hongjin abruptly wrapped an arm across Pedant Earth's shoulders and chuckled. "But then again, I've been a cunning, underhanded, cowardly and scheming bastard my whole life. I think it's fine to be stupid once in a while, yeah?"

"Well said, Miss Shangguan. We're humans, right? How can we be humans if we don't fall prey to stupidity every once in a while?" Pedant Earth chuckled in agreement.

"I wholeheartedly agree. You know what, you're a pretty good guy. If we survive this, I want to treat you to a drink and become friends with you." Shangguan Hongjin gave Pedant Earth a smack on the shoulder.

"Hahaha! For this promise, this old man swears to give it his all and live just a little longer!"

Pedant Earth laughed loudly, and so did Shangguan Hongjin.

Make light of life and death in the epics,

For heroism lasts eternal.

Scream!

Fight!

.....

“The Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation?”

Ye Qing was quite surprised when he saw the dark yellow cauldron in the sky and felt the terrible power floating all around him. He seriously wasn't expecting to attract the king of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations for his Grandmaster breakthrough.

In hindsight though, it made a lot of sense.

For one, his martial foundation was exceptionally solid. His body in particular had been built up painstakingly. It was no sky pavilion supported by a single base or a rotten apple with a pretty exterior.

Two, he had refined a lot of Profound Yellow Qi, which was derived from the Profound Yellow Mother Qi. It made sense that they would attract each other to an extent.

And three, the headless Sage's gift. The headless Sage was dead, but he was still a Sage and the closest being to the origin of the great Dao.

The headless Sage had given him his purest power of the origin of Dao and his martial insight. It was a once-in-a-lifetime, life-changing boon for anyone, much less a Spirit Master like him.

All things considered, it made sense that he would attract the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation.

“Foo...”

Ye Qing let out a deep breath. Despite facing the king of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiend Tribulations, he was surprised by how fearless he felt. In fact, he very much looked forward to it.

It was at this moment the headless Sage slowly rose to full height and seemingly looked upward. From the looks of it, he was actually planning to take a hit or two for Ye Qing, if not see him through until the end of the tribulation!

“Senior, please! You've already given me an unimaginable gift. I cannot trouble you for such a minor matter as well!”

Ye Qing did not hesitate to stop the headless Sage and pleaded sincerely, “Just leave this to me, and go keep Giggle company. He misses you very much.”

Ye Qing could sense that the headless Sage was on his last legs after the gift. It wouldn't be long before he faded away completely. If he allowed his benefactor to block a tribulation for himself as well, then he would be lesser than a pig, no?

Two, he knew that the only reason the headless Sage gave him such a boon was because of Giggle. That was how much the little Stranger mattered to him even after death. That was why he wanted Giggle and the headless Sage to enjoy their last moments together. If there was one thing they deserved, it was happiness.

Three, this was his tribulation and no one else's. How could he possibly allow someone else to overcome it for him?

Forget the Heavenly Way, even he wouldn't accept such a compromise.

Speaking of the Heavenly Way, there was a reason it was viewed as the ultimate judge. It was entirely possible that allowing the headless Sage to interfere with his tribulation would bring forth unexpected consequences. He would rather not risk such a thing.

And four, he was that confident in his martial way. Since he embarked on this path a few years ago, he had worked tirelessly to better himself. Besides that, he had been lucky to stumble upon opportunity after opportunity like the protagonist he was. If he couldn't even overcome a mere tribulation, then he might as well ram his head against a tofu and kill himself!

Despite having no head, it seemed like the headless Sage could hear his words. He gave Ye Qing a complimentary pat on the shoulder before walking away.

A good distance away, Giggle also called out to him before giggling brightly. The little Stranger was cheering him on with all it got.

“Come.”

After the headless Sage and Giggle were out of the way, Ye Qing finally looked up at the gathering clouds above with calm eyes.

The clouds of tribulations looked so big it was as if it was mere inches away from his head.

That was fine though, for his sleeve hid a fist that was worlds wide.

Face me, my tribulation!

Chapter 720: Profound Yellow Mother Qi Transforms Into The Earth Sovereign

The huge dark yellow cauldron in the sky shook a little as if it could hear Ye Qing's mental challenge. A profound, indescribable sound reverberated throughout the area like an endless field of spring.

To others, the sound was the sound of the Great Way: profound, enlightening, and impossible to ignore. But to Ye Qing, it was like a million thunderclaps erupting inside his headspace at the same time. It threatened to rip the earth apart and tear a hole in the sky.

Ye Qing looked inward. Sitting high above the nine heavens, his Heavenly Demon Yin God slowly rose to its feet and grew infinitely tall and wide. It wasn't long before its feet were planted on the ground, and its head towering over the heavens.

His crumbling headspace immediately stopped deteriorating and started mending itself. No world shall crumble while Man becomes the pillar that supports both heaven and earth!

While his headspace was still recovering from the assault, the dark yellow cauldron began rotating and emanating waves of dark yellow qi. They were thick and heavy like nothing Ye Qing had ever felt. From his perspective, it felt like the world above the heavens had tipped over, and infinite stretches of mountains and rivers were falling right on top of him.

“Hmph!”

A muffled groan escaped his lips as the earth beneath his feet split into giant cracks. It truly felt like the weight of an entire world was sitting on top of his shoulders.

Every time the dark yellow light descended an inch, the world would darken a tad, and the burden on his shoulders would double in weight.

Strange sounds were reverberating throughout the area. It was a mixture of Ye Qing's muscles and bones straining under the weight they were bearing and the sound of crumbling earth.

The young man did not collapse, however. No matter how heavy his burden grew, his neck remained straight, his waist remained strong, his legs did not bend, and his heart did not succumb to fear. He stood like a spear or a sword—straight and unbending.

The dark yellow light was stretching from one end of the horizon to another by the time it was merely one meter away from Ye Qing's head. Not only that, mountains and rivers were manifesting into existence here and there.

The dark yellow light was transforming into a literal world to suppress one man.

If the profound sound of the Great Way from before was an attack against Ye Qing's mind, then the dark yellow light and the world it was transforming into was an attack against his body.

Ye Qing opened his mouth and sucked in a small breath. His muscles and bones popped, and his energies soared high.

The mountain wind flowed into one's abdomen like rumbling thunder.

The muscles and bones popped and cracked like a tiger's roar.

And the vigor rolled in like a raging river.

The one whose qi, essence and spirit were united as one could not be stopped.

And the one whose heart held no fear would dare to challenge the heavens themselves.

Ye Qing looked up and punched upward. Like a raging tide defying gravity to touch the skies, his raging fist force and vast fist intent exploded like a volcano.

The roar. The roar was unending. The vast world that threatened to crush Ye Qing shook like a leaf as cracks spread out from the center and toward everything. At the same time, the mountains and rivers began crumbling bit by bit.

When the false world had fully disintegrated, a clear, blue sky greeted Ye Qing's vision once more, and the dark yellow cauldron fell completely silent.

“That was fun!”

Ye Qing barked out a laugh and stared at the motionless cauldron for a couple of seconds. When nothing happened, he wiped away the bloodstain on his lips and declared, “If you're not coming to me, then I'm coming to you!”

His words were still lingering in the air when Ye Qing pushed off the ground in one swift motion. He looked like he would crush the dark yellow cauldron before it could launch its next attack!

Ye Qing was about halfway to the cauldron when suddenly, it spat out a dark yellow spiritual light.

The spiritual light was practically puny compared to the all-encompassing Profound Yellow Qi from before. However, the presence it gave off was another story. Although it was just a wisp, it felt immense, vast, heavy, profound, and unstoppable. It felt like the virtuous earth that bore all living things on its shoulders and nourished all living things with its rich soil.

“The Profound Yellow Mother Qi!”

By now, many warriors were already gathered at the edge of the basin. Their eyes widened with all kinds of thoughts when they realized what the spiritual light was.

No one made a move though. It was because they knew that the Profound Yellow Mother Qi Tribulation wasn't over yet. Acting now would only be a waste of breath and energy.

The next moment, the wisp of Profound Yellow Mother Qi took the form of a huge man. He wore a tall crown and a huge dark yellow silk robe. He had a dignified and upright countenance and a noble bearing. Anyone could tell at first glance that he was born to rule. However, unlike a normal emperor, he was neither lofty nor overbearing. If anything, he gave off the kind, warm, grandfatherly feeling of an elder, a senior, or a close friend.

“Is that... the Earthly Sovereign?”

Someone murmured in both shock and disbelief.

“Most likely,” another person declared with confidence. “But of course, it's not the real deal. It's just a copy conjured by the Heavenly Way.”

The explanation was unnecessary. Everyone knows that the Earthly Sovereign before their eyes was just a copy since the real Earthly Sovereign had passed away a long, long time ago. They were shocked and in disbelief despite knowing this.

Who was the Earthly Sovereign? He was the powerhouse who slew the Strangers, exterminated the evil, and killed the demons back in the olden days. He was one of the Three Sovereigns who had forged a heart for this heartless world, gave humanity a life, and established a longstanding peace for humanity that still hadn't been broken to this day[1]. It was no exaggeration to say that every man and woman in this world owed their life to the Earthly Sovereign. That was why his appearance, even if it was just a copy, was enough to steal everyone's breath away.

“Mother of heavens, now this is what I call an eye-opening experience. Who would've thought that that man would be strong enough to summon the Earthly Sovereign?”

Zhang Lingyang was sitting on a rock looking like a complete slouch while calling out to a man standing next to him, “Who do you think that guy is, Young Yun?”

Yun Qingxiao sighed. “Brother Zhang, my name is Yun Qingxiao. You may call me Dao Brother, Qingxiao, Brother Yun, or even address me by my full name. Just please don't call me Young Yun.”

Yun Qingxiao could not help but shake his head when he saw Zhang Lingyang slouching on the rock like he was a street hooligan or worse. What would the jianghu warriors think if they knew that this unsightly man was none other than the one they called the living god of Heavenly Master Mansion of Dragon Tiger Mountain, the Little Heavenly Master?

“Cultivation is a matter of the heart and the Dao, not names or titles. So what if I call you Young Yun? It’s not like it’ll cost a hair on your skin, no? You’re still too attached to the pointless stuff, Young Yun!”

Zhang Lingyang tilted his head to one side and sighed. “It’s okay though. He who keeps company with the good becomes good. Now that you’re in my company, I promise you that your Dao heart will surpass your temple master in a couple of years at most.”

“Speaking of which, when it is finally time for you to succeed the old bastard, do remember to repay your old buddy’s kindness, okay? Though, I would become the Heavenly Master of my Heavenly Master Mansion by then, so I wouldn’t need your favor anymore.”

“Thanks, but no thanks. I’m pretty sure that the only thing I’ll pick up from you is the loss of my integrity and shame.” Yun Qingxiao sighed again while palming his forehead. It truly was a miracle that this guy managed to survive this long without being beaten to death by the old Heavenly Master.

“Say, do you know who that guy is, Young Yun? I thought it was Beiqiu at the beginning, but clearly I was wrong.”

“Unfortunately, I have no idea.” Yun Qingxiao shook his head.

“I guess I asked a stupid question. If even I, a man of vast experience and knowledge, have never heard of the guy, then how could you?”

Zhang Lingyang scratched his head in puzzlement. “And for whatever reason, that guy isn’t on the Human Champions Ranking either. What the hell is White Jade Capital doing? How can someone like him not appear on the Human Champions Ranking?”

“It might just be my imagination, but I’m pretty sure the guy’s body is on par with the bald donkey’s Mahāvairocana Body or Beiqiu’s Heavenly Demon Tribulation Body of Primordial Beginning.”

“I am weaker than him.”

Suddenly, a cold voice interrupted their conversation. A woman covered in black from head to toe emerged from the distance.

“Beiqiu! I knew you would come! Here, I purposely reserved this seat for you. I even warmed it so you wouldn’t catch a cold.”

Zhang Lingyang’s eyes lit up like a pair of light bulbs. He immediately leaped to his feet and ran toward Mo Beiqiu.

“Get out of my sight.”

Mo Beiqiu uttered icily.

“Flirting with me already, Beiqiu? Do you miss me that much? We are in the presence of others though. Let’s reserve the banter for a more private setting, alright?” Zhang Lingyang beamed at her.

Yun Qingxiao frowned deeply. He did not understand why Zhang Lingyang was happy at the abuse. Was he a masochist or worse?

As if he could hear Yun Qingxiao’s inner thoughts, Zhang Lingyang shot him a disdainful look. “And that’s why you’re single, and I’m not. Don’t you know that harsh words are a sign of affection?”

Yun Qingxiao’s eyes widened a little. By the Heavenly Sovereign, I’ve never seen such a shameless man in my life.