

Stranger 751

Chapter 751: What Is Good

It was a shame Chu Wangsun managed to escape. This was easily the best chance he ever had at ending the pretentious bastard once and for all. It was also the closest he ever got to success. Unfortunately, the plan failed at the very end, and his next chance to kill Chu Wangsun would be so, so much harder to grasp.

After all, Chu Wangsun was only one step away from becoming a Trueman. The next time they met, he would surely have entered the next stage already and become much harder to kill.

Ye Qing wasn't too annoyed or worried though. After all, he had already surpassed Chu Wangsun. In the future, that gap would only widen until it became an impossible chasm. Why would he fear such an opponent?

It was only a matter of time now.

Murong Xianxian seemed to have lost her interest after asking about the Chief Libationist. She asked in a lazy voice, "Are you done resolving your personal matters? If not, then please resolve them before we continue!"

Hmm? Is it just me, or is she sneaking glances at me? She can't have noticed what I did... right?

He wondered if he was just paranoid, but he had this feeling that Murong Xianxian was glancing at him as she spoke. It was almost as if she wanted him to know that she knew.

No, there's no way.

Ye Qing mentally shook his head. His demonic thought was invisible, traceless, and extremely difficult to detect. If even the victim himself, Cui Qiuyuan, did not notice anything amiss, there was no way an observer would notice it.

As his thoughts raced, Ye Qing instinctively glanced at Murong Xianxian again. As if on cue, the woman met his eyes at the exact same time and... winked at him.

"..."

Unaware of the interaction, Zhang Lingyang was letting out a sigh of relief after confirming that Chu Wangsun was safe and sound. While glancing about the hall, a hint of pity flashed in his eyes as he drew Murong Xianxian's attention to himself. He said, "Miss Murong, this junior has an insignificant and immature suggestion to make. These people have no grudge against you, nor you they. Killing them just because they're convenient is a little too cruel, don't you think? You're such a gentle, beautiful, and intelligent woman. I'm sure you can come up with a better way to rid yourself of your predicament, right?"

"You want me to let them live, Little Heavenly Master?" Murong Xianxian asked.

"Got it in one!" Zhang Lingyang grinned.

"The only reason you're still alive is because Mistress Qu pleaded for your case. You best not ask for more," Cui Qiuyuan interrupted icily. Due to recent events, he was loathing these so-called promising geniuses more and more.

“It’s fine. It’s not everyday you encounter an interesting child like him.” Murong Xianxian stopped Cui Qiuyuan smilingly before answering, “Sure. I can let them live.”

Zhang Lingyang clapped his hands happily. “I knew you’re as kind as you’re beautiful, Miss Murong!”

“Don’t be so hasty. I’m not finished yet.” Murong Xianxian continued to smile. “I can let them live, but in exchange, you’ll have to give me your life.”

“Huh? You want me to give up my life for theirs?” Zhang Lingyang blinked. “Are you joking, Miss Murong?”

“All things come at a cost. Surely you understand this simple logic?”

Murong Xianxian’s smile widened. “It’s not like it’s an unfair trade. You’ll be saving so many people’s lives at the cost of just one. Isn’t it worth it?”

“Hahaha, it seems you’re quite the joker as well, Miss Murong.” Zhang Lingyang laughed in a deadpan manner.

“What’s wrong? You don’t like the trade? Is your kindness and benevolence all talk?”

Murong Xianxian’s smile grew scornful. “Tsk ts... eight hundred years ago, the Heavenly Master Mansion was already a bunch of hypocrites who say one thing and do another. It looks like nothing has changed even eight hundred years later. Truly, yours is a righteous and orthodox sect. Hahaha...”

Red-faced, Zhang Lingyang opened his mouth to say something. He couldn’t though. There was nothing he could say in retort against Murong Xianxian’s claim because it was the truth.

Even Cui Qiuyuan was sneering. “Indeed, what a righteous and orthodox sect. They always carry the words ‘mercy’ or ‘benevolence’ in their mouths, but never actually carry it out for real.”

“Powerless benevolence is just that, powerless. It is as amusing as it is feeble.”

Murong Xianxian then ordered in a lazy voice, “Whatever. You may leave.”

“Miss—”

Zhang Lingyang wanted to say more, but Cui Qiuyuan stepped forward and let loose his Trueman’s aura, threatening, “Didn’t you hear her? Get lost!”

It was at this moment Defeated interrupted, “Brother Zhang. You heard senior. Let’s leave.”

As for the Holy Son of Maitreya, he was a member of one the Nine Dark Ways despite not being a true villain. To him, benevolence too was nothing more but an interesting concept.

That was why neither Defeated nor the Holy Son of Maitreya felt much for these people’s inevitable demise. At most, they lamented the excessive loss of lives.

“Sigh...”

In the end, Zhang Lingyang gave in and said, “Very well. Miss Murong, Mistress Qu, and seniors, this junior shall take his leave.”

When he was at the exit though, Zhang Lingyang paused for a moment before declaring loudly, "All life is a reflection. What I do, the others will do. What the others do, I will do as well. To sacrifice oneself for others is a noble, sagely act, and right now, I am incapable of it. But just because I can't do it now doesn't mean I won't be able to do it in the future. Until then, I will hold a benevolent heart in my chest rather than an indifferent one, even if my path may become thornier as a result."

"Maybe I only carry my kindness in my mouth. Maybe my benevolence is all internal. Even so, I truly wish that all hearts will face toward the sun like the plants!"

.....

"He really is an interesting boy!" Murong Xianxian remarked after Zhang Lingyang was gone. "Anyway, those who should be gone are now gone, so without further ado, let us begin!"

"As you command, Miss Murong," Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan responded as they saluted her.

Ye Qing too stepped to the side to show that he had no qualms with this.

He did not know these warriors, and he did not really care to save their lives. He had also rescued Mountain Tunneling King and sent him away prior to entering this place, so he did not need to test Murong Xianxian's patience a third time.

Besides, there was a reason why people said that you reaped what you sowed. These people knew the risks when they came in search of fame and fortune. Now that the risks had come to bite them, they only had themselves to blame.

Murong Xianxian's lips parted, and blood flew out of everyone's eyes, ears, nose and mouth. They quickly joined into a river and entered the woman's mouth.

The victims withered away like grass, while Murong Xianxian's complexion grew rosier and rosier. By the time all the blood had entered her body, she looked even more lifelike and attractive than before.

Finally, she opened her mouth and blew at the consumed warriors. Their bodies immediately disintegrated and scattered into the wind.

"Alright, it's your turn now. Please remove 'Repentance' from my forehead."

Murong Xianxian instructed, "Be warned that you will suffer the same pain as me while removing 'Repentance'. If you cannot withstand it, simply give up and allow the next person to replace you. There is no need to strain yourself unnecessarily."

"Now, who will go first?"

Cui Qiuyuan, Qu Langhuan and Blood Rakshasa exchanged a look with each other. Then, Blood Rakshasa nodded and walked up to Murong Xianxian, declaring, "I will!"

"Very well. Grab 'Repentance' and pull as hard as you can. That is all you need to do."

"Got it."

Blood Rakshasa did as she was instructed, but...

"Hmm?!"

As soon as she started pulling, the Strange Artifact abruptly turned as red as blood and crystalline like jade. At the same time, mysterious runes appeared all around it. Blood Rakshasa managed to suppress a groan of pain, but she could not stop it from appearing on her face.

Every time she managed to pull 'Repentance' back an inch, her body would shake just a little harder, and her clothes would become just a little wetter. Her face was also growing increasingly pale.

Murong Xianxian mentioned that those who attempted to remove 'Repentance' would suffer the same pain as her, but it made sense that Murong Xianxian's pain was worse. However, the woman was smiling and looking as calm as ever, whereas Blood Rakshasa's face had contorted into a pained snarl in just a matter of breaths. Veins were bulging on her forehead, and she was so sweaty it looked like she had just climbed out of a pool. Even worse, 'Repentance' had only moved for a few millimeters.

Chapter 752: Plot and Counter Plot

"I can't..."

The next moment, Blood Rakshasa let go of 'Repentance' and staggered backward. She grabbed a nearby stone pillar and began panting heavily like she was exhausted.

"Miss, you... can't you feel it?"

A while later, Blood Rakshasa finally looked up at Murong Xianxian with disbelief and fear. The pain she suffered was akin to being dunked inside a pot of boiling oil and being cooked alive, or sitting naked in the coldest winter while a terrible hail was falling from the sky, or being cut into a million pieces by sharp blades, or being ground into paste inside a mill...

Long story short, it was horrible. Although it only lasted a few breaths, Blood Rakshasa felt like she had just experienced all of the eighteen hells. Death was preferable to this.

"I got used to it."

Murong Xianxian said calmly, "It's nothing special. If you were in my position, and you had to suffer for over eight hundred years without pause, then you'll probably get used to it as well."

Blood Rakshasa opened her mouth, but no words came out. The few breaths she endured had felt like an eternity, and each breath made her wish she was dead. She simply could not understand how Murong Xianxian was able to endure it for eight hundred years.

"Next. Don't waste time, or 'Repentance' will return to its original position, and you will have to restart from the beginning," Murong Xianxian said while looking at the others.

"My turn." Cui Qiuyuan immediately stepped forward and grabbed 'Repentance'.

"Hurkk!"

Despite being mentally prepared, Cui Qiuyuan still let out a muffled groan when the unimaginable pain assaulted his body. Just like Blood Rakshasa, blue veins were bulging everywhere on his body as well. He lasted a couple more breaths longer than Blood Rakshasa, but in the end, he had to let go and retreat to a corner, wiping the cold sweat on his forehead.

Qu Langhuan went next after Cui Qiuyuan was done. She too couldn't last more than a dozen breaths or so.

Now, it was finally Ye Qing's turn, and he did not hesitate. He grabbed 'Repentance' and began pulling strongly.

As expected, a wave of terrible pain assaulted his senses immediately. But unlike the trio before him, he was a body-tempering warrior. Some of the pain he suffered before were even worse than this, so he could endure it.

However, the more he pulled, the worse the pain became. It wasn't just physical pain either. His soul was showing signs of tearing as well. Not only that, the puny-looking peachwood nail was stupidly heavy. He wouldn't go so far as to say that he could now carry a literal mountain on his back, but half a mountain was well within his limit.

Despite this, he was unable to remove 'Repentance' immediately. Just like the others, he progressed at a snail's pace.

"Hmm?"

Suddenly, Ye Qing lifted an eyebrow as if something had caught his attention. However, he schooled his features in an instant.

A couple more breaths later, Ye Qing let go of 'Repentance' and staggered away from Murong Xianxian. His face was ghastly white, and he even fell on his butt after a few steps.

"Cough! Cough..." Ye Qing coughed twice before regaining his composure and waving weakly, "I... I can't... that's my limit..."

Cui Qiuyuan, Qu Langhuan and Blood Rakshasa glanced at Ye Qing before exchanging another look with each other, though this one was far more hidden than any of their previous exchanges. Then, they returned to their gruesome task as if nothing happened.

The group of four would continue to take turns pulling 'Repentance' out of Murong Xianxian's forehead. A dozen or so turns later, they were finally at the final hurdle. They should be able to remove 'Repentance' within this turn, if not the next.

Of course, it wasn't without a cost. Cui Qiuyuan, Qu Langhuan, Blood Rakshasa and Ye Qing all looked like they were about to die from exhaustion. Their faces were as pale as a ghost, and their pupils were mostly unfocused.

"Hmm? Is it my turn?"

When Qu Langhuan let go of 'Repentance' and returned to the group, Ye Qing jolted awake and let out a murmur. He looked incredibly unsteady. It took him a painfully long time to stand up, and the way he shambled over to Murong Xianxian reminded them of a sleepwalker. When he grabbed 'Repentance' and pulled, pain returned to his face once more.

Behind him, Cui Qiuyuan, Qu Langhuan and Blood Rakshasa smiled sinisterly at the same time. Then, Cui Qiuyuan suddenly appeared behind Ye Qing like a ghost and thrust his fingers toward the back of his skull.

“To destroy an enemy’s head like destroying a piece of rotten wood.” That was how the manual had described the “Bone Divine Claw”. A martial art technique specialized at breaking through tough defenses, it was best used against tough-bodied body-tempering warriors. It could easily pierce through their tough defenses and kill them where they stood.

Ye Qing was a body-tempering Grandmaster, and Cui Qiuyuan knew better than to underestimate his vigor or tenacity. That was why he took aim at Ye Qing’s head. This would allow him to end the Grandmaster in one hit.

But why was he—or more accurately, all three of them—trying to kill Ye Qing in the first place? It was simple. One, Ye Qing was the only one among them whose origin was completely unknown. Keeping someone like him alive was basically a recipe for disaster. Two, eliminating Ye Qing meant they wouldn’t need to share the pie with another person, so why not?

Although Murong Xianxian claimed that there were more than enough treasures in the Demonbearer Abode for all of them, who in the world would complain about excess fortune?

Everyone was a miser before a big enough fortune. Everyone was a ruthless bastard given a good enough opportunity.

The reason they hadn’t acted sooner was because one, they didn’t know how strong Ye Qing was and did not want to make the mistake of underestimating him. Two, there was no reason to not make use of Ye Qing and have him alleviate some of the burden of removing ‘Repentance’, not to mention that it would effectively weaken his strength.

As for them, it might look like they pushed themselves to their limits every time it was their turn to pull ‘Repentance’, when in reality it was all an act. They were all conserving their energy for the inevitable surprise attack.

Now, they were one turn or two away from removing ‘Repentance’, and Ye Qing had become so weak that he could barely stay conscious. He was also in the middle of removing ‘Repentance’ and thus could not afford to split his attention.

Now was the time to execute their plan and reap the spoils.

The sneer in Cui Qiuyuan’s eyes grew thicker as his “Bone Divine Claw” moved closer and closer to Ye Qing’s head. Then, at the last possible moment, the young man suddenly bent his head backward, and Cui Qiuyuan just barely scraped past his forehead. His surprise attack had missed its target.

Cui Qiuyuan blanked out for an instant. Was it just a coincidence, or was it something far more sinister? The brief distraction was all Ye Qing needed to grab his wrist.

At this point, Cui Qiuyuan knew that Ye Qing had seen through his ploy. He tried to pull back his arm and mount a hasty retreat, but he felt as if his arm was being pinned under a sky piercing mountain. He might as well be an ant trying to topple a tree.

He was hiding his strength too?!

At that moment, the full scale of his and his cohorts' mistake dawned upon him. They were acting and hiding their strength, but their target was acting as well. They thought the Grandmaster a fool, but he thought the exact same about them.

Cui Qiuyuan could only watch as Ye Qing's left elbow sailed through the air and ripped through his protective astral qi like it was paper. Then, it landed squarely on his heart.

Pop!

Cui Qiuyuan's body exploded in a shower of blood and gore just like that.

Cui Qiuyuan had just recently recreated his physical body using a Magia, which was why it was more fragile than normal. Not only that, the elbow strike he just took was one of the strongest he had ever received. Forget his current body, he wasn't sure his previous body could have survived it.

"Who are you?!"

After his body exploded, Cui Qiuyuan's yang god floated in the air and looked down on Ye Qing with hatred and fury. And how could he not be angry? This was the second time he fucked up and lost his physical body when he thought that everything was under his control, and it had all happened in the span of a couple of days. How could he not hate?

Chapter 753: Too Smart For Your Own Good

"What's wrong? You wish to know who is the man who bested you?"

Ye Qing turned around and patted the dust on his hands away, lips curling into a smile that was anything but weak. "Sure! I don't mind. It's not like there's anything you can do against me."

Cui Qiuyuan scoffed. "Hmph! Who do you think you are to make such a boast?"

"I am Chu Wangsun, student of the Chief Libationist." Ye Qing's smile grew diabolical.

"Do you recognize me now?"

"It's you!" Cui Qiuyuan's eyes widened in disbelief. He was so shocked that even his yang god was wobbling a little.

"It's me." Ye Qing made a face at him. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

"But... you're supposed to be a Half-Step Grandmaster. How..." Cui Qiuyuan arrived at the answer by himself. "You're the one whose ascension summoned a tribulation earlier!"

It wasn't a question. It was a statement of fact.

"So you can count to three after all. How very wise of you." Ye Qing teased.

"Well played. I remember you now. Pray that you don't run into me a third time, or I swear I will rip you to pieces!" Cui Qiuyuan uttered through gritted teeth.

Right now, the Mortician's eyes looked like a pair of burning coals. Since he began practicing martial arts, he had always been the one to toy others instead of the other way around. At one point,

he even toyed with an entire nation before escaping at his leisure. Never did he imagine that he would be played a fool not once, but twice by the same person. How could he not loathe Ye Qing to the very bone?

“I would say I look forward to it, but I’m not sure you’re going to leave this place alive!” Ye Qing chuckled.

Cui Qiuyuan laughed hatefully. “Hahaha! If I wasn’t sure before, now I know for sure that you are boasting! Who could possibly harm me while I still have the Undying Phoenix Feather?”

It was why he dared to stay behind despite losing his physical body.

Ye Qing did not say anything. No, it was a lazy voice who answered Cui Qiuyuan from behind. “Oh? Is the Undying Phoenix Feather that potent?”

The alarm bells in Cui Qiuyuan’s head abruptly blared in full force. At the same time, a streak of red light flew toward him. It moved so fast that it reached the Mortician before the lazy voice had finished talking.

“Scree!”

Cui Qiuyuan did not wait. A phoenix’s cry pierced through the air, and a phoenix covered in black flames manifested into existence. It flapped its flaming wings and enveloped Cui Qiuyuan’s yang god in a protective cocoon of black flames.

The flames were cold and black unlike your normal fire. It appeared just in time to stop the red light in its tracks.

It was only now the others realized that the red light was really a peachwood nail. It was none other than Repentance.

Qu Langhuan and Blood Rakshasa subconsciously turned and looked at Murong Xianxian. The peachwood nail that was nailed to her forehead was long gone, leaving behind only a single red dot. It didn’t mar her beauty though. On the contrary, it made her look devilishly charming.

“Scree!!!”

The Undying Black Phoenix let out a painful screech, and pain appeared on Cui Qiuyuan’s face as well. There was more fear than pain, however. The Undying Phoenix Feather was his final trump card. So long as it was present, his yang god would never die, and it was only a matter of time before he returned to power.

For the first time since he obtained the Strange Artifact though, he was afraid. This was the first time someone actually managed to hurt the Undying Black Phoenix and damaged the Undying Phoenix Feather. Not only that, he could sense that the surrounding space had been sealed. There was nowhere for him to run; nowhere for him to hide.

He was trapped, and death was slowly but surely coming to claim him. Naturally, he was afraid and panicked.

There was one thing he didn’t understand though. Why was Murong Xianxian helping Ye Qing?

“Why, miss? Why?!” Cui Qiuyuan roared.

“Because I like him more than I like the rest of you, naturally.”

Murong Xianxian gave him a gentle, dreamy smile. “Are you aware that one of the people I dislike the most are those who think of me as a fool? I especially loathe those who go back against their words thinking they’re infallibly smart. Am I right, Mister Cui?”

“You never planned on cooperating with us in the first place! You were going to toss us aside as soon as we freed you!”

Cui Qiuyuan roared in anger. “What else are you waiting for, Mistress Qu, Blood Rakshasa? Kill them already, or you will be next on the chopping block!”

Qu Langhuan hesitated, but she ultimately decided to take action. She crossed her palms in front of her, and her astral qi transformed into a storm of flowers. A bleak wind howled as the falling flowers sang of humanity’s greatest tragedy; the final parting.

When the song ended, so would its audience’s life. Hence, the technique was named “Heartbreaker”.

“Heartbreaker” was a killer move in the “Divine Art of Hateful Separation”. It could destroy one’s insides without a trace and especially influence their mind. Its victim would feel so much sorrow it was as if their insides were crumbling inch by inch.

“You broke my heart, and so I shall break yours.” ~excerpt from the “Divine Art of Hateful Separation”.

“You truly are the successor of that menial, Yan Qingyan. You are exactly as stupid as her.”

Murong Xianxian giggled as she raised her left hand and snapped her fingers. There was a soft pop, and both the howling gale and the storm of flowers disappeared like it was never there, leaving behind only peaceful quiet.

Qu Langhuan let out a grunt of pain and staggered away from Murong Xianxian. Her face was pale, and her eyes were widened in shock.

Murong Xianxian snapped her fingers again, and suddenly, Qu Langhuan felt her true qi running wildly inside her body. It refused to obey her command no matter what she tried, and her temperature kept rising and dropping at random. It was torturous to say the least.

“Ah...”

Unable to endure the torture any longer, Qu Langhuan let out a groan and collapsed in a heap.

Murong Xianxian simply shook her head with scorn and pity. “I already told you that I’m the one who invented the ‘Divine Art of Hateful Separation’, and you still attacked me with its technique? How hopelessly stupid you are.”

While Murong Xianxian was dealing with Qu Langhuan, Ye Qing was dashing toward Blood Rakshasa. The Trueman had no intentions of fighting him though. As soon as Ye Qing truly

revealed himself, she immediately recognized him as the man who had played her like a puppet on strings at the basin some time ago. She hated him as a matter of course, but she feared him even more.

This was a man she already couldn't defeat even after he overcame the Profound Yellow Tribulation, which was said to be the strongest of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends Tribulations. What were the chances she would be able to do it now that he had time to come into his power?

Now that both Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan were incapacitated, she dared not hesitate any longer. She transformed into a beam of red light and exploded toward the exit.

Ye Qing was a step too late to stop her. He could only watch as she made her escape and disappeared in the blink of an eye. He didn't feel too disappointed though. He shrugged and turned back to Cui Qiuyuan.

He could already kick Blood Rakshasa's ass right after he entered the Grandmaster stage. If she hadn't run away, he could have ended right where she stood. In the future, she wouldn't even deserve to be his prey anymore. With that in mind, why would he fear the consequences of escape?

Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan though, now they were a different story.

He had detected Cui Qiuyuan, Qu Langhuan and Blood Rakshasa's scheming almost as soon as the thought appeared in their heads. Although they hadn't communicated one word, he knew that they were plotting to kill him.

Ye Qing had never been kind to those who plotted to kill him, so naturally he racked his brain for a way to surprise them. If he could somehow kill them all in one fell swoop, then even better.

He was still thinking when it was his turn to remove 'Repentance' from Murong Xianxian, and the woman called out to him spiritually. Somehow, Murong Xianxian had noticed their scheming as well, and she asked if he wished to cooperate with her. As for why she was doing this, her reason was very simple: the trio meant to do her harm, and she did not take kindly to those who harbored malice toward her.

Ye Qing found her reasoning and her cooperation most agreeable, so they arrived at an agreement almost immediately. He would tackle Cui Qiuyuan, and Murong Xianxian would deal with Qu Langhuan. As for Blood Rakshasa, the Trueman would have to be insane to stay behind after her companions were defeated, so there was no need to worry about her.

Things went as expected. Well, almost. Ye Qing wasn't expecting Murong Xianxian to possess the power to trap Cui Qiuyuan despite his Undying Phoenix Feather.

No matter how hard the Mortician struggled, he was unable to break out of the prison Repentance prepared for him.

"What else do you have, Trueman? Show me."

Murong Xianxian watched the struggling Cui Qiuyuan like a cat would stare at a bird trapped inside a cage, playful and predatory. "I truly do not understand you people sometimes. Everything would've been fine if you had just done as I asked. Why must you overestimate your intelligence?"

"Fine. It is inevitable that the foolish will overestimate their intelligence. But why on earth did you think you could trick me? What gave you the courage to actually go

through with your foolish scheme? Youngsters these days must be quite arrogant and suicidal.”

A short while later, Cui Qiuyuan stopped struggling. His expression gradually returned to calm as well. It was because he noticed that Repentance could not truly breach the Undying Phoenix Feather’s protection and hurt his soul even though it could pin him in place.

Chapter 754: Do You Want To Live or Die?

“This junior has overestimated his capabilities. I hope you will forgive me, miss.”

Cui Qiuyuan knew that Murong Xianxian wasn’t talking about him trying to kill Ye Qing for his own benefit. No, it was about him plotting against her.

When he was removing ‘Repentance’ earlier, he had secretly executed a mental secret art known as the “Mind Control”.

As its name implied, it was a spell that allowed the practitioner to take control of another person’s mind.

“Mind Control” was an extremely hidden spell. It could be planted in a person’s headspace without a trace, and this enabled the practitioner to control or kill his victim with a single thought.

There were two reasons he was doing this. One, he did not believe Murong Xianxian and wanted some insurance. Two, he still wanted to stitch her into his Corpse Spirit.

After all, how could he possibly bear to part ways with such perfect material?

Unfortunately, he had given away the game somehow and alerted Murong Xianxian as to his intentions. So, she gave him a taste of his own medicine.

This wasn’t important right now. What was important was what he must do to survive.

“Give up already? How boring!”

Murong Xianxian slowly rose from her throne. Maybe it was because she hadn’t moved for eight hundred years, but her movements were a little stiff and wobbly. Deciding that she couldn’t trust herself to walk straight in her current state, she looked at Ye Qing and beckoned for him to support her.

Ye Qing hesitated for a moment, but he ultimately chose to step forward and grab her arm.

To be honest, he wanted to make his great escape as soon as he counter-tricked Cui Qiuyuan and the other Truemen. Murong Xianxian was just that dangerous. However, the woman also gave him a familiar feeling, one that felt neither artificial nor malicious. It was almost as if she was his blood relative or something. But how was this possible? There was no chance his original self was related to Murong Xianxian in any way, so why was he feeling this familiarity?

It was a mystifying sensation to say the least. This was one of the reasons why he accepted her proposal earlier, and why he chose to stay behind now.

Murong Xianxian seemed delighted by his decision, her smile growing even brighter and charming like the moon of a starry sky.

Seeing that Murong Xianxian wasn't paying attention to him, Cui Qiuyuan repeated himself a little urgently, "This junior really is sorry, miss. Please forgive me!"

Murong Xianxian finally looked up at Cui Qiuyuan and replied lazily, "If you really are sorry, then you need to pay for it. You didn't think I'm going to let you off over the hook just because of some empty words, did you?"

"What do you want, miss?" Cui Qiuyuan asked.

Murong Xianxian pretended to think for a moment before answering, "My request is simple. You will serve me as my humble servant."

"Don't you think you're asking for too much, miss?" Cui Qiuyuan sneered. He knew exactly what her request entailed, and he did not like it one bit.

"Really? You're the one who attacked me first, so I am in the right here. Not only that, your life is in the palm of my hand right now. Is it really such an unduly demand?" Murong Xianxian asked indifferently.

"You jest, miss. Not even you can kill me in my current state!" Cui Qiuyuan let out a cold chuckle. So long as the Undying Phoenix Feather was still intact, Murong Xianxian would not be able to kill him.

"I see. That's why you're so sure of yourself!"

Murong Xianxian's gaze shifted to the Undying Phoenix Feather embedded in his forehead. She said calmly, "The Undying Phoenix Feather of the Undying Clan of Wei is quite the troublesome Strange Artifact, and it is true I can't kill you as I am..."

"... but what on earth makes you think that I have no control over you?"

"Is that so? Please enlighten this fool then!" Cui Qiuyuan scoffed.

"Do you know that death is not the scariest thing in this world? No, it is a fate worse than death." Murong Xianxian said casually, "It is true that I can't kill you, but I can seal you in this place and make sure that you never leave."

Cui Qiuyuan blanched. He didn't think of that.

"Imagine this: You cannot speak, and you cannot move. There is no one to keep you company, and even death is denied to you. No one will come to save you, no one will know you're here. You will be stuck in this place for eternity." Murong Xianxian mused seemingly to herself. "That is how I had lived for the past eight hundred years. Would you like to give it a try?"

Cui Qiuyuan's complexion grew whiter and whiter. Maybe it was because he was afraid, but even his yang god started trembling violently.

"Rest assured that your seal will be the strongest, tightest, and most secure seal you've ever seen. Just in case, I'll apply a restriction over the seal so that there is

absolutely no chance you will ever escape, or anyone might find you. It's not all bad though. In this state, you'll live forever. You may enjoy immortality on your lonesome until the very world passes on to the next life."

In the end, Murong Xianxian beamed at Cui Qiuyuan. "If this is your wish, then I am happy to oblige you. So? Do you want to give it a try?"

Holy mother of... hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!

Ye Qing wasn't even the target of Murong Xianxian's ire, and goosebumps were breaking all over his body. This "immortality" was definitely worse than true death. Infinitely worse.

If Ye Qing was scared, then Cui Qiuyuan could only fare worse. Despite being a yang god, he was shaking like a leaf and had turned completely white. He was about to say something when Murong Xianxian interrupted him,

"Take your time to consider your answer. You only have one chance. If your answer is not what I wish to hear, then I shall assume that you desire my alternative and act accordingly."

Having said that, Murong Xianxian's gaze shifted away from Cui Qiuyuan's contorted expression and landed on Qu Langhuan. "Come. Take me to that girl who is as stupid as that menial, Yan Qingyan."

Ye Qing obeyed. When they reached Qu Langhuan, the woman was still curled up on the ground like a prawn, semi-conscious. She didn't even realize that they were there.

"Sigh... Yan Qingyan was already a stupid menial, and her successor is even worse. I almost can't bear to imagine what has become of that so-called Li Hentian Palace."

Murong Xianxian sighed as she stared at Qu Langhuan. "Foolish. So foolish. Do you think I should kill her? Or should I let her live?"

Ye Qing answered cautiously, "You should do whatever you want to do, miss."

"I should do whatever I want to do, hmm?" Murong Xianxian tapped herself on the forehead. "I'll let her live. It's bad enough that Yan Qingyan, that menial, dared to use his name to enrich herself, but to think she would do such a terrible job... How embarrassing."

"He may be dead, but I will not allow anyone to slander his name. Foolish she may be, letting her live may prove useful to me in the future."

Ye Qing didn't say a word, but a storm was brewing inside his heart. Murong Xianxian was clearly referring to Li Hentian, and unless he had gravely misinterpreted her words, she was clearly planning to do something to the Li Hentian Palace. Heavens only knows if she meant to destroy the sect or something else.

Having made her decision, Murong Xianxian bent down and tapped Qu Langhuan on the forehead. The pain tormenting the Trueman immediately began fading away until she regained her consciousness.

“Are you awake? If you are, then stand up.” Murong Xianxian rose to her feet and asked, “Speak. Do you wish to live, or do you desire death?”

Qu Langhuan hastily climbed to her feet. Her face was white and fraught with fear, and right now, she looked nothing like the Trueman she was. She begged, “Mercy, miss! Mercy! This junior is sorry. This junior will never offend you again, so please!”

It did not matter if you were a god, a demon, a celestial, a Buddha. Everyone quakes in fear when death is breathing down your neck.

“I’m asking you if you wish to live or die. Answer my question.” Murong Xianxian’s tone was calm but unquestionable.

“I wish to live,” Qu Langhuan swallowed.

“If you wish to live, then obey me faithfully. Otherwise, I will make you wish you were dead. Understand?” Murong Xianxian said gently while patting Qu Langhuan on her head.

The Trueman shuddered once before replying in a hurry, “I understand! I understand!”

“Good. If you perform well, then I may still teach you the complete version of the ‘Divine Art of Hateful Separation’ and cure your inevitable death. Sounds good?”

The tried and true carrot and stick approach showed its face again. Murong Xianxian was clearly a master manipulator.

“Thank you, miss! Thank you!” Qu Langhuan shed tears of gratitude.

Chapter 755: Blood and Origin

“Good. Go catch some rest.”

Murong Xianxian waved, and Qu Langhuan immediately retreated to a corner. She sighed, “People are so strange sometimes. The high road is right in front of them, and yet they must cross the log bridge where one slip may sound the end of their lives. Are they stupid, cheap, or both?”

Once done with her musing, Murong Xianxian glanced at Cui Qiuyuan and asked, “Cui Qiuyuan, is it? Are you done thinking?”

“This junior... surrenders himself to you, miss,” Cui Qiuyuan answered in a low and helpless voice.

“I guess you’re not stupid after all.” Murong Xianxian smiled. “You know what to do.”

Cui Qiuyuan might be a terrible person, but there was no denying his mental fortitude. Having made up his mind, he immediately withdrew the Undying Phoenix Feather and awaited Murong Xianxian’s machinations.

He knew what was coming next. Murong Xianxian was going to plant a restriction in his mind and turn him into her eternal slave. If she felt like it, she would be able to kill him with a single thought.

He didn't have a choice though. A life of slavery was still better than being forgotten inside a seal, forever. It was also better than being dead.

Besides, so long as he still lived and breathed—not inside an unbreakable seal, of course—there was always a chance. There was always hope.

After all, no one, not even Murong Xianxian, could say what the future held.

Cui Qiuyuan was a smart man. He knew what he should do and what choices he should make.

After Cui Qiuyuan put away the Undying Phoenix Feather, Murong Xianxian curled her finger and pierced his yang god in nine places using Repentance. Every time this happened, a smidgen of red would ripple out like blood, and Cui Qiuyuan would shudder a little.

When all was said and done, nine red spots were marked on Cui Qiuyuan's yang god. Together, they looked like a gorgeous, blood red flower with nine petals in total.

It was said that a flower called Red Spider Lily grew at the rivershores of the Yellow Spring. It was red as blood and gorgeous like a dream, and yet it was the symbol of death.

When a Red Spider Lily blooms, a person dies, and their soul would join the Yellow Spring.

The flower marked on Cui Qiuyuan's yang god was none other than the Red Spider Lily. Not only did it look incredibly lifelike, it was rocking from side to side as if swaying to the wind. There was a faint but distinct fragrance in the air as well.

A few breaths later, the Red Spider Lily vanished, and Murong Xianxian summoned Repentance back into her hand.

"It's done. I look forward to working with you, Mister Cui," Murong Xianxian said smilingly while playing with Repentance.

Cui Qiuyuan landed on the ground and bowed his head deeply. "I dare not call myself 'Mister' in front of you, miss. Just call me Qiuyuan."

Murong Xianxian nodded and flicked Repentance away. The Strange Artifact instantly shot out of the exit.

"You are terribly weakened in your current state, Qiuyuan. Follow Repentance. It will lead you to a Sage's body," Murong Xianxian ordered.

"A Sage's body?" Cui Qiuyuan exclaimed in surprise before delight overtook him.

"You've always wanted a Sage's body, right? The opportunity is yours. It's up to you to grasp it," Murong Xianxian declared.

"Thank you, miss! Qiuyuan will not disappoint you!" Cui Qiuyuan happily left the building after saluting her.

After Cui Qiuyuan was gone, Ye Qing supported Murong Xianxian all the way to the exit. The woman stared at the blue sky above her head and felt the cool breeze blowing against her face. For a long time, she did not say anything.

“It’s been so long since I saw the blue sky and white clouds, and smelled the fragrance of the grass and trees. It’s great.”

Ye Qing did not say anything. He did not want to interrupt Murong Xianxian’s musings. Even if he did, he didn’t know what to say in this situation.

“What’s wrong? Are you regretting your decision to stay behind?” Murong Xianxian turned around to look at him, smiling. “You had your chance to leave. Why didn’t you?”

It was at this moment Murong Xianxian said something unexpected, “Is it because I feel familiar to you?”

“Huh?”

Ye Qing was astonished. He did not expect Murong Xianxian to guess his thoughts so accurately.

Murong Xianxian revealed the answer a second later. “I’m the same too. I feel the same sense of familiarity from you. That’s why you have nothing to worry about. I have no intentions of hurting you in any way.”

“You too?” Ye Qing’s astonishment doubled when he heard this.

“Do you want to know why?” Murong Xianxian asked.

“Please enlighten me!” Ye Qing responded immediately.

Instead of answering, Murong Xianxian let loose a wave of vigor. Almost immediately, Ye Qing felt his blood shaking and responding to it.

“You... could it be...?”

Ye Qing’s eyes grew as wide as saucers. He could clearly sense that Murong Xianxian shared the same type of blood as him; a blood that could devour other blood to strengthen itself!

“Do you feel it?”

Murong Xianxian withdrew her vigor and explained, “You and I share the same Stranger blood. That is why we are naturally attracted to each other.”

“How did you come by this Stranger blood, miss?” Ye Qing asked immediately.

“And before you say that we might be distant relatives, know that I wasn’t exaggerating when I said that Li Hentian exterminated everyone in my clan except me. Therefore, you cannot be a descendant of the Murong Clan.”

“This blood belongs to the Murong Clan?”

Ye Qing wasn’t expecting this at all. He had no idea that his bloodline was related to the Murong Clan. His bloodline was perfectly ordinary until he absorbed a drop of blood from the mysterious female corpse slumbering within the sarcophagus at the Jade Dragon Lake. Did this mean that the female corpse was tied to the Murong Clan?

Ye Qing saw no need to hide this, so he told Murong Xianxian about the sarcophagus at Jade Dragon Lake and how he came to own this bloodline.

Of course, he did not tell her about the Annon Sutra.

"I see." Murong Xianxian hummed for a moment. "It would seem that the woman in the sarcophagus is a blood ancestor of my clan. I would like to visit her sometime after I get out of this place."

"Legend has it that our bloodline hails from a Stranger called the Blood Demon, and the Blood Demon was an ancient Stranger who feeds on the blood of the living. It is why we name our bloodline after it."

A meaningful smile danced on Murong Xianxian's lips as she glanced at Ye Qing. "The Blood Demon's bloodline is extremely potent, so much so that it cannot be subsumed by anyone but a member of the Murong Clan. To think you would be the exception to the rule, and to think that you would be the one to free me from my eternal prison eight hundred years later. In a sense, you and I are fated for each other!"

"My shock can only be greater than yours, senior!" Ye Qing said wistfully while rubbing his nose. Seriously, this was one helluva of coincidence.

"Since fate has conspired to bring us together, and you have obtained my bloodline, I consider you a member of the Murong Clan. From now on, you don't need to address me as senior. I want you to call me big sis."

Murong Xianxian noticed the hesitation on Ye Qing's face and asked, "What? You don't like it? Or do you think I don't deserve to be your big sis?"

"You must be joking! It will be an honor!" Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise.

"Good boy." Murong Xianxian looked very happy. "Now that we are properly acquainted, can you tell me your real name now?"

"Hahaha! Was it that obvious? Yes, my name isn't Ye Yipin. Sorry for lying to you earlier." Ye Qing rubbed his nose with a smile. "My name is Ye Qing, and my moniker is Joyless. Just call me Joyless."

"Joyless? 'In my dreams I am joyless, for I am overflowing with joy in the waking world'? It is a good name." Murong Xianxian instantly identified the origin of his name and complimented him. "Even better, you are a man who deserves it. A body-tempering Grandmaster at your age? Your potential and future have no end."

"You flatter me, big sis. I don't deserve such a compliment," Ye Qing replied humbly.

"Nonsense. You're my younger brother. Of course you are exceptional." Murong Xianxian smiled kindly. "I'll take you to a couple places and choose some welcoming gifts for you later."

Chapter 756: Palace In A Lake

Murong Xianxian chuckled. "What kind of sister would I be if I didn't shower you in gifts?"

The duo would continue to admire the passing clouds and converse for a very long time.

Ye Qing wondered if it was just his imagination, but Murong Xianxian seemed to be growing more and more human and lifelike as they spoke.

It wasn't like Murong Xianxian had changed her mannerisms or anything, but before, her every smile and frown—while beautiful—did not truly resemble a human's. It felt a lot more otherworldly like she was a Stranger, a ghost, a demon. It was cold, disturbing and eerie.

That was no longer the case. She truly felt like a living, breathing human now.

Buzz...

It was at this moment a terrifying aura shot into the sky. Such was its power that they could feel it even from where they were.

The aura was vast, profound, and exuded glimmers of Buddhist light. It was as deafening and obvious as the howl of a dragon elephant. However, a thick amount of yin qi was mixed in it as well.

"Is that... the Half Buddha?" Ye Qing asked while perceiving the aura in the air.

"You know the Half Buddha Chen Miaozen?" Murong Xianxian seemed surprised by this.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you about this, but I accidentally came across Ning Xiliu's memories earlier. There were scenes of the three Sages' battle against the Dark Overlord, which is why I'm aware of his existence." Ye Qing proceeded to tell Murong Xianxian about his encounter with Ning Xiliu.

"I see. You are a fortunate man, little brother." Murong Xianxian praised him before answering his question, "You are correct. The aura does belong to Chen Miaozen, and that place is where he passed away."

"Chen Miaozen was a legend during his time. He wasn't a Buddhist, but he obtained a Buddha's truth and forged his Dao with it. He is a non-Buddhist who became a Buddha, which is why they call him the Half Buddha."

"With Chen Miaozen's talent, he could have become even stronger than he was. Unfortunately, he did not survive the battle against the Dark Overlord."

"Even so, his aura is most terrifying. I can only imagine how powerful he was when he was still alive," Ye Qing said wistfully. "Can Cui Qiuyuan really suppress him? He only has his yang god now."

If Cui Qiuyuan was at his peak, then of course he wouldn't fear a dead Sage. However, Cui Qiuyuan had suffered additional injuries before he fully recovered and even lost his physical body

to him twice. He truly wondered if the Trueman could suppress Chen Miaozeng's body in his current state.

Murong Xianxian did not seem worried in the slightest, however. She declared, "It will be fine. He has Repentance."

Before she even finished, a streak of red light dispelled the sky of buddha light and the deafening roar in an instant. Its aura also became much weaker than before as if suppressed by something.

The red light was obviously Repentance.

"Cui Qiuyuan is a master at manipulating corpses and controlling spirits. If he obtained Half Buddha's body, he would become so much stronger than before. Aren't you afraid that he would slip out of your control, big sis?" Ye Qing asked curiously.

"He's just a dog. No matter how much he grows, he will never be anything more than a dog," Murong Xianxian replied easily. "A dog will never have the courage nor the right to bare its fangs at its masters, and that is all he is, a dog!"

Ye Qing shrugged. He was making conversation. If even he could ruin Cui Qiuyuan without too much effort, he could not imagine the eight-hundred-years-old Murong Xianxian would fail where he succeeded.

Ye Qing did not say anything else after that. Both him and Murong Xianxian simply stared at the distant sky as if waiting for something, or rather, someone.

About a teatime later, a man emerged from the horizon. It was a muscular man who, despite being a monk, had a full head of hair. He looked exactly the same as the Half Buddha Chen Miaozeng in Ye Qing's memories.

A powerful pressure enveloped Ye Qing and Murong Xianxian long before he got close. Neither of them reacted in the slightest, however.

When Chen Miaozeng was ten meters away from Murong Xianxian, he stopped in his tracks and saluted her. "I did not fail you, miss."

It wasn't actually Chen Miaozeng who was speaking, of course. It was Cui Qiuyuan.

"Well done. Tell little Qu that we are moving. We will be visiting a couple places."

Murong Xianxian waved, and Repentance flew over from a distance. It sank into the hole in her forehead until only the head of the nail was peeking out of the wound. It looked like a bindi[1], and it did not look out of place in the slightest. If anything, Murong Xianxian looked even more attractive than she already was.

"As you command, miss." Cui Qiuyuan saluted her and strode into the hall.

It was worth noting that Cui Qiuyuan had not looked at Ye Qing even once since he submitted to Murong Xianxian. Those who didn't know better would think that they were just strangers.

A short while later, Cui Qiuyuan emerged with Qu Langhuan behind him. Qu Langhuan shot Murong Xianxian a nervous look before bowing to her, greeting, "Miss..."

“Save the pleasantries. Let’s go.”

Murong Xianxian glanced at Qu Langhuan once before taking to the skies. Ye Qing and everyone else followed right behind her.

After the group disappeared into the horizon, the floating palace began crumbling bit by bit as if it had lost the power source that had kept it afloat. As the pieces fell, they disintegrated into dust and scattered into the wind.

.....

“What is this place?” Ye Qing asked.

The group was currently hovering before a huge, mirror-like lake. The water was so clear you could see it all the way to the bottom.

It was also why everyone except Murong Xianxian was confused. It was clear at first glance that there was absolutely nothing inside the lake.

Murong Xianxian smiled. Instead of answering, she made a number of hand seals.

The group’s eyes slowly widened. It was because the lake water slowly but surely transformed into a massive palace; one that was completely made of water. It was quite impressive to say the least.

“Back then, Li Hentian recruited some of the best craftsmen in the world to construct five buildings. They were the Eastern Yi Wood Garden, the Western Geng Metal Pavilion, the Southern Li Fire Tower, the Northern Gui Water Palace, and the Central Wu Earth Hall. Their purpose was to store his treasure hoard.” Murong Xianxian explained while staring at the water palace in front of her.

“This is the Northern Gui Water Palace, and it is mainly used to store all kinds of rare artifacts, antiques, calligraphy and painting.”

“Come.”

Murong Xianxian took the lead and began walking toward the palace. Somehow, the water was as firm as solid ground. When they arrived at the entrance, the doors automatically slid open to admit them. Murong Xianxian stepped inside, and Ye Qing and the others followed closely behind.

The interior of the Northern Gui Water Palace was made of water just like the exterior. Like mirrors, they were perfectly transparent and flawless. One could see out from inside the palace, but not the other way around.

Besides that, countless items enveloped by water were floating in the air. There were ancient texts, broken seals, expensive paintings, bronze vessels, stone cauldrons, stringless ancient qins and more. They dazzled the eyes to say the least.

Ye Qing reached out and touched an ancient qin that were about to float past him. The ancient qin stopped in its tracks, and the water surrounding it transformed into various ancient seal scripts. They introduced the ancient qin’s background and origin.

“This is the ancient qin, Stringless. It was once the instrument of the Qin Sage, Ruan Ji. It could play five notes that sound as sweet as a phoenix’s cry, one that could draw a hundred birds to pay homage to it[2].”

Murong Xianxian had somehow walked next to him while he was absorbed in his thoughts. She asked, “Are you interested? I can give it to you if you want.”

Ye Qing shook his head without hesitation. “Nah. Music and I do not mesh well. The Qin Sage’s instrument would be a complete waste in my hands.”

Stringless might be a legendary artifact for the literati or warriors who practiced music as their primary art, but it was without a doubt useless to him.

“The two of you may pick a few items from this pile as well.”

Murong Xianxian looked at Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan and said, “A good number of these items once belonged to ancient sages, great powers, and Gods-On-Earth, and they’re as rare as they’re useful to a warrior’s growth. Even in the worst case scenario, you can still sell them for a lot of money. I’m sure you can make use of them.”

“Thank you, miss.”

Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan thanked Murong Xianxian deeply. They were both excited about this opportunity.

Chapter 757: All One

“What do you want, Joyless?”

Murong Xianxian turned to Ye Qing with a gentle smile on her face after dealing with Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan.

“What do you recommend, big sis?” Ye Qing asked.

“If you ask me...” Murong Xianxian waved her hand, and two streams of water flowed over to them.

One of them was carrying an ancient text, and the other a broken armor.

“I noticed that you’re quite accomplished in the art of fists, so I believe that these items would be of use to you. Allow me to start with this ancient text.”

Murong Xianxian began, “This is a fist art manual written by a strange man named Trueman Old Moon after collecting every fist art in the world nine hundred years ago. It is called ‘One All Fist Manual’ because it extracts the essence of every fist art and boils it all down to one.”

Ye Qing’s eyes lit up immediately. Extract the essence of every fist art and boil it all down to one? That sounded amazing!

Murong Xianxian thought Ye Qing’s disgruntled expression was very cute and so did not explain herself immediately. She waited a good few seconds before she finally said, “However, ‘A floating pavilion may be unrealistic, but that just means that its vision is that extraordinary’. That is what Li Hentian said after reading the ‘One All Fist Manual’.”

“Huh?” Ye Qing raised a curious eyebrow. It would seem that Li Hentian held a surprisingly high opinion of the “One All Fist Manual”.

“Trueman Old Moon had never practiced martial arts in his life, so it’s only natural that the fist manual he authored was quite unrealistic. However, its flaw is also its merit.”

Murong Xianxian explained, “Because he had never practiced martial arts, the fist manual he wrote was idealistic to the extreme. But since it is a book that aspires to boil every fist art in the world into one, idealism was exactly how it should be written. It showed its readers an idealistic vision that, should all the stars align perfectly, was theoretically attainable. It was a glimpse into the ultimate ceiling of fist arts.”

“To a beginner, ‘One All Fist Manual’ was undoubtedly a poison. It would only harm the practitioner and do them not one whit of good. But for someone who became a Grandmaster through their fists, it is a potent tonic that would only do them good.”

“You are one of the few who meet the requirement, and your fist art is already starting to shape up nicely. Reading the ‘One All Fist Manual’ would rid you of the prison of realism you are unknowingly trapped in and show you how you might become the ideal version of yourself; a true master of the fists. I am sure you will greatly benefit from it.”

“I see! Thank you, big sis.”

Ye Qing felt much better after hearing this. The “One All Fist Manual” might be useless for most people, but in his case, it was the opposite.

Murong Xianxian then pointed at the armor and said, “As for this armor, it was worn by the fist art Grandmaster, Lei Zhenwei a thousand years ago. Its name is Force Shaker, and it could nurture your fist intent.”

“Thank you, big sis.”

Ye Qing thanked Murong Xianxian again and accepted both gifts without hesitation.

“You’re welcome.” Murong Xianxian smiled. “I would give you more presents, but the really good items aren’t stored in the Northern Gui Water Palace. They’re all in the Central Wu Earth Hall. I’ll pick you a couple more presents when we’re there.”

Ye Qing thanked Murong Xianxian for the third time, “Thank you, big sis, but I’m satisfied with just this.”

As grateful as he was, he didn’t allow himself to lose himself to his own greed. Besides, just because Murong Xianxian meant him no harm—on the contrary, she was pampering him like an actual younger brother—didn’t mean that he should let his guard down and grow careless.

Satisfied with his response, Murong Xianxian paid him another compliment, “Good. Burn with ambition, but do not succumb to greed.”

After Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan were done picking their items, the group of four quickly left the Northern Gui Water Palace. After that, the waves churned, and the palace began shrinking at a visible rate. It wasn't long before it transformed into a single bead of water and landed on Murong Xianxian's palm.

The lake from before was completely gone. All that was left behind was a deep, dry pit.

"The five buildings were constructed using the essence of natural Yi Wood, Geng Metal, Li Fire, Gui Water and Wu Earth." Murong Xianxian stared at the water droplet on her hand as she explained, "This is the natural essence of Gui Water, and it is the most valuable treasure of the entire Northern Gui Water Palace."

"Congratulations, big sis."

"Congratulations, miss."

Ye Qing, Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan all congratulated Murong Xianxian.

Murong Xianxian nodded. "Mm. Let us head to the next destination."

The group began traveling in a different direction. This place was a pit of pure chaos where even the natural laws were dysfunctional or outright missing. If Ye Qing, Cui Qiuyuan or Qu Langhuan had to navigate it themselves, they might have lost their way a long time ago. But for some reason, Murong Xianxian didn't seem to be affected in the slightest. She easily identified the safest, shortest path and led them to their next destination in no time at all.

It was a first filled with tall, massive trees that seemed to prop up the very sky. Unfortunately, they were all dead, and even the ground was a wasteland that was devoid of life. Not a single shoot of grass could be seen anywhere.

"This is the Eastern Yi Wood Garden." Murong Xianxian reminisced as she stared at the dead forest in front of her. "The Eastern Yi Wood Garden is where we nurtured all sorts of unusual flora, fauna, and natural treasure we collected from all over the world. It was the most beautiful location in the Demonbearer Abode bar none."

"Unfortunately, it would seem that it was completely destroyed in the war."

Murong Xianxian let out a small sigh before tapping the space in front of her[1]. Heaven and earth shook, and the entire forest began floating into the air like some sort of gargantuan painting. When it slowly shrank down to the size of a painting, it rolled itself into a scroll and landed in Murong Xianxian's hand.

With that done, Murong Xianxian led them south next. Obviously, they were headed for the Southern Li Fire Tower.

The "tower" in "Southern Li Fire Tower" made it sound like it was a tower, but it was really a volcano.

They were lucky that they hadn't encountered anyone since leaving the floating palace, but alas, their luck couldn't last. There was a very good reason for it though. The volcano was spewing not just lava, but all sorts of Strange Artifacts and other treasures from its crater. When they arrived,

they saw at least a dozen warriors fighting each other over the valuables, and dozens more bodies on the ground. It was a massacre.

“It looks like someone had gotten ahead of us.” Murong Xianxian examined the combatants with a cool eye while ordering, “Kill them all!”

“As you command!” Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan responded and rushed the fighters immediately.

To be honest, the dozen or so warriors were quite formidable in their own right. Three of them were even Truemen. Unfortunately for them, their opponents were Cui Qiuyuan and Qu Langhuan.

Qu Langhuan was a Trueman on the Earth Champions Ranking. She was much stronger than your common stock. It would not be an easy fight, but her victory was cemented from the beginning.

Cui Qiuyuan was also a Trueman, but unlike Qu Langhuan, he currently held the Half Buddha, Chen Miaozeng, in his possession. Cheng Miaozeng wasn’t just any ordinary Sage either. Generally speaking, Buddhist arts excelled and tempering the body, and Chen Miaozeng was no exception. He had long since attained an Arhat Body and became impervious to most weapons and elements.

That was why Cui Qiuyuan led the charge with Chen Miaozeng and used him to block all of his enemies’ attacks. No matter what they tried, they were unable to harm a hair on Chen Miaozeng’s body. Not only that, Chen Miaozeng slaughtered them like a tiger in a sheep’s pen. Every time he threw a punch, someone would explode into a shower of blood and gore. Whenever he swung his palm, an unfortunate soul would be cut in half. If his hand caught someone’s head, he would squeeze it until it popped like an overripe watermelon. As for his legs, it resembled a scythe that cut through both metal and body like wheat.

In just the span of a few breaths, Cui Qiuyuan had taken out over half of the combatants. In comparison, Qu Langhuan had only killed one.

Obviously, the remaining survivors panicked. They scattered in every direction like rabbits.

“Hahaha... none of you are walking away from this alive!”

Cui Qiuyuan snarled savagely and chased after the stragglers. Just a teatime later, he returned with several bodies in both hands. He was basked in blood from head to toe, but his expression was merciful and kind.

Ye Qing sighed internally. Chen Miaozeng was a powerful Sage with a Bodhisattva’s heart, but now a vile man was piloting his body to reap untold lives. It was a true tragedy.

Chapter 758: Dark Overlord

“It’s done, miss.”

Cui Qiuyuan dumped the corpses on the ground and seemingly glanced at Ye Qing. However, he looked away so quickly and masterfully that most people would not be able to tell if it was on purpose.

Ye Qing knew it was on purpose. Cui Qiuyuan’s killing intent had skewered like a blade during that brief moment. He paid him no heed though.

“Mm.”

Murong Xianxian replied noncommittally. Suddenly, the volcano shook violently, and what seemed like an infinite stream of lava and fire shot into the sky. The deadly elements did not fall to the ground, however. Instead, they floated in the air and circled around the volcano. It looked magnificent.

A couple of breaths later, the lava and fire slowly gathered together and condensed into a pocket-sized volcano. It landed snugly on Murong Xianxian's palm. Despite its size, Ye Qing could sense its immense power.

After putting away the volcano, Murong Xianxian took them to the Western Geng Metal Pavilion. At this point, it became clear that the woman did not care for the treasures stored inside the buildings. It was the natural essences that she was after.

The Northern Gui Water Palace was a lake, the Eastern Yi Wood Garden was a forest, the Southern Li Fire Tower was a volcano, and the Western Geng Metal Pavilion was a tall, massive stele that was covered in swords.

According to Murong Xianxian, the Western Geng Metal Pavilion was where the world's most famous swords were stored. Unfortunately, by the time they arrived at its location, the stele had collapsed, and the swords were nowhere to be found.

Unfortunately for the looters, they failed to recognize the most valuable item of them all: the natural essence of Geng Metal. Murong Xianxian took it as well.

“Are we going to the Central Wu Earth Hall next?” Ye Qing asked after Murong Xianxian claimed the Western Geng Metal Pavilion.

Before Murong Xianxian could answer, the wind howled, the ground suddenly shook more violently than ever before. It was like a high magnitude earthquake had struck the entire Demonbearer Abode, and space itself was shattering from the continuous impact.

The next moment, the churning earth began converging at a single point. Over time, it became a huge mountain.

The mountain was tall like a sword that pierced through the clouds above. At the peak was a bright yellow palace that shone golden. It looked like a second sun as it was suspended high up in the sky and filling the entire Demonbearer Abode with golden light.

“That mountain...”

Ye Qing furrowed his brow. According to the memories he received from Ning Xiliu, the Dark Overlord Li Hentian had passed away on that very mountain.

“Miss, is that...?” Qu Langhuan asked with a stunned expression.

“That is the Central Wu Earth Hall. Greenish yellow forms the foundation, and the earth forms the hall. That is why it was named the Central Wu Earth Hall.”

Murong Xianxian's face was etched with clear interest. “To think that someone is able to find the Central Wu Earth Hall. I suppose not all of the invaders are useless after all!”

As if on cue, five people appeared above the Central Wu Earth Hall. Murong Xianxian stared at them while asking, “Who are they?”

“They are the Sun Sovereign, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows, Laughing Buddha, Madman Chu, and Xu Xiu,” Cui Qiuyuan answered. “Sun Sovereign, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows and Laughing Buddha hail from the Demonic Mountain, the Way of Taiping and the Maitreya Sect respectively. They are all sects of the Nine Dark Ways, and everyone is a named warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking.”

“Of the three, Sun Sovereign is the strongest and ranked twenty-first on the Earth Champions Ranking. Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows is next and ranked thirty. Laughing Buddha is the last and ranked fifty-ninth.”

Cui Qiuyuan then looked at Madman Chu and Xu Xiu. “As for those two, Madman Chu is an independent warrior, whereas Xu Xiu is the Northern Spear King of Chu.”

“As an independent warrior, Madman Chu has no background or patron to call to his name. A free and uninhibited soul, he does whatever he wants without regard for societal norms. He could be good or bad depending on the circumstances, and he is ranked thirty-third on the Earth Champions Ranking.”

“Although his rank is technically lower than Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows’, Madman Chu is a body-tempering Grandmaster. In a fight to the death, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows would lose for sure.”

“As for the Xu Xiu, he is a military commander who is famed for his godly spear techniques. That is why they call him a spear king.”

“Hmm. That old man and the rat-like bastard lurking in the shadows are probably at the end of their martial journey unless they stumble upon a massive opportunity,” Murong Xianxian remarked while staring at Sun Sovereign and Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows. “As for the remaining three, they are all extraordinarily talented, and they have not yet reached the end of their paths. Madman Chu and Xu Xiu especially—one of them proved their way through strength, and the other through slaughter—are quite impressive.”

No one in the group thought that Murong Xianxian was talking about her ass. Although she was a pale shadow of herself, she was still a Sage. There was no reason to doubt her insight.

Ye Qing was especially concerned to find out that Madman Chu was a body-tempering Grandmaster just like him.

For a time, the four Truemen and one Grandmaster in the sky simply stared at the golden palace without saying anything. Then, Sun Sovereign took one look at the others and flew toward the palace at high speed.

Suddenly, Sun Sovereign hit something and was sent flying even faster. While he was busy arresting himself, the clouds stirred unnaturally, and an ominous rumbling resounded throughout the world.

Sun Sovereign's complexion went from blue to red. He stared at the golden palace with a severe expression on his face.

"Who dares to trespass into the Central Wu Earth Hall?"

An angry shout reverberated throughout the world, and a man wearing silken robes stepped out of the entrance.

The man was tall, muscular, and in possession of a singular and majestic face. His steps were dominant like that of a tiger or a dragon, and unshakeable like a bottomless abyss. It felt as if he alone belonged to the heavens, while everyone else only deserved to exist underneath his feet.

"He's... the Dark Overlord!"

The man hadn't revealed his name, but the same thought crossed everyone's mind at the same time. Only the Dark Overlord could possess such bearing. Only the greatest man of Spring and Autumn eight hundred years ago could look so magnificent.

Murong Xianxian's eyes grew a little unfocused a little when she saw the man in the sky. She was also wearing a complicated expression on her face.

Of course, everyone was aware that this Dark Overlord was just a wisp of the original's spiritual intent and not the real thing. Even so, not a single person dared to underestimate him.

"Are you the Dark Overlord?" Sun Sovereign asked while clasp his fist in salute.

"It is I," Li Hentian answered while still walking toward the Sun Sovereign. "Who are you people?"

"It is an honor to meet you, Dark Overlord!" Sun Sovereign, Madman Chu, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows and more saluted him. "We are—"

"Forget it. I am not interested in your identities."

Li Hentian interrupted them before they could finish. "All who dares to trespass into the Central Wu Earth Hall must die!"

As soon as he finished, Li Hentian took another step forward and appeared right in front of the Sun Sovereign with a low rumble. He then thrust his palm forward.

Sun Sovereign reacted quickly and engulfed himself in a ball of scorching light. It was so hot it felt like a third sun had appeared in the sky.

Li Hentian could not seem to feel it, however. He continued to stretch his palm forward as if he was going to smack away the sun with his bare hand.

He succeeded. The palm strike sent Sun Sovereign crashing through a massive patch of clouds.

After repelling the Sun Sovereign, Li Hentian turned to Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows next and ran along the stars toward him. He curled his fingers like talon and made a grab for the Trueman.

Having seen what just happened to the Sun Sovereign, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows did not think he could do better. He vanished into his shadows and attempted to escape.

A scornful look appeared on Li Hentian's face. He abruptly clenched his outstretched hand, and a deafening thunderclap broke out. Every space within a hundred meters of him suddenly exploded and churned like a lightning pool.

Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows was forced right out of his shadow. His face looked deathly pale as if he had just taken a huge blow.

Li Hentian brought his foot down, and the distorted space abruptly flipped upside down and crashed into Laughing Buddha, Madman Chu and Xu Xiu. The trio were attempting to ambush him from behind, but Li Hentian had seen through their ploy instantly. Laughing Buddha's Maitreya dharma was crushed into smithereens as a result.

While this was going on, Li Hentian landed a knifehand strike on Madman Chu's fist. Li Hentian did not move, and Madman Chu crashed into Xu Xiu. For a time, the two warriors tumbled helplessly across the sky like tumbleweeds.

"You dare covet the treasures of the Central Wu Earth Hall with such puny strength? The foolishness!" Li Hentian crossed his arms in front of his chest and scoffed.