

The Heavens 16

Chapter 16: Come here!

The faces of the surrounding Cultivators grew pale. Meng Hao's attack was both decisive and also filled with a ferocious hatred that he himself didn't even notice. This sort of thing was actually becoming a trend.

In the eyes of the onlookers, Meng Hao was now the number one person of the plateau. Perhaps in the entire Outer Sect, he was now one of the highest figures.

Many of the Cultivators thought back to the past half month. With a Cultivation base so high, Meng Hao could have robbed and taken at will. True, the customers of his shop weren't happy, but he did treat them mildly. People now began to look at him with awe.

There was no fighting on the plateau that day. After Meng Hao left, the news of Lu Hong's Cultivation base being broken spread like the wind. The fact that he had mentioned Wang Tengfei's name was especially talked about, and caused the news to spread even faster. By nightfall, everyone in the Outer Sect had heard about what happened, and by this point everyone knew who Meng Hao was.

The East Mountain, covered with wisps of colorful clouds, was the Reliance Sect's tallest mountain and also the Inner Sect's base of activity. It had more spiritual energy than the other mountains, and was where Sect Leader He Luohua went for meditative seclusion.

Back in the heyday of the Reliance Sect, the four peaks had been fully occupied by the Inner Sect. Disciples of the seventh level of Qi Condensation had abounded. Now, only the East Mountain was occupied, by disciples Xu and Chen, whereas the other peaks were abandoned.

On the East Mountain there was an Immortal's Cave which was much larger than Meng Hao's. It was actually the finest Immortal's Cave in the entire Outer Reliance Sect, rivaling even the dwelling-places of the Inner Sect disciples.

Inside was a Spirit Spring that was anything but dried up. It gurgled out dense, fragrant spiritual energy.

Of course, among all the disciples of the Reliance Outer Sect, the only one qualified to occupy such a place was the blessed Wang Tengfei.

He sat cross-legged in his white robe, his face placid, looking at Lu Hong kneeling in front of him. Lu Hong's face was pale-white, and his body trembled. His Cultivation base had already been destroyed by Meng Hao.

"...I beg Elder Brother Wang to administer justice," he said with bated breath. "He's beyond cunning, more than you could imagine. He's going to flee the Sect." Every time Lu Hong saw Elder Brother Wang, he could not help but feel that the other man was perfect, beyond ordinary. That feeling had grown stronger and stronger over the past two years in which Wang Tengfei's Cultivation base grew more and more powerful.

"If he flees," said Elder Brother Wang after a while, resplendent in his perfection, "it will be a violation of Sect rules, and I will send some people to kill him." He wore an amiable smile which would cause anyone to like him, and spoke with a lightness that caused him to seem even nobler.

Lu Hong had nothing more to say. He kowtowed, his face filled with entreaty, his body trembling uncontrollably.

"Very well," said Wang Tengfei. "His methods are too vicious. An example should be made. I shall prevail upon Elder Brother Shangguan and make a trip over there, although I will be careful not to offend Elder Sister Xu. Meng Hao shall cripple his own Cultivation base, distribute his treasures and sever an arm and a leg. That shall be his apology. Good enough?" He spoke as if he held sway over every single matter within the Reliance Sect, as if with a single word, he could take command over Meng Hao's Cultivation base as well as his arms and legs. His smile was as amiable as ever, perfect and without flaw.

"My profound thanks. This fellow... he's just filled with viciousness..." Lu Hong ground his teeth, his heart filled with enmity.

"Then I shall expel him from the Sect," said Wang Tengfei coolly, as if he were talking about an incredibly insignificant matter. "He can go off into the wilds, and things will take their natural course."

At that same moment, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in the Immortal's Cave in the South Mountain, looking at the jadeite bottle gourd in his hands with a dark expression. Having broken through the fourth level of Qi Condensation, then fighting that battle, he had consumed almost all of his spiritual energy. There was nearly none left. At least he had obtained the magical gourd.

It seemed as though everything had gone smoothly since his entrance into the Reliance Sect, but actually, it was mostly because of his quick wit and foresight. If it had been anyone other than him, he would most likely have put his life in danger on his first Pill Distribution Day.

Later, he acquired the protection of the copper mirror and its mysterious power. Shortly after that, Elder Brother Zhao began to lust after his Immortal's Cave. If he hadn't died, Meng Hao's situation would have been bleak, and he would have lost control of all of his belongings. That was the first time he had killed someone.

If he hadn't started doing business with his shop, he wouldn't have been able to arrive where he was now. But the wind that seemed to propel him from behind also held concealed within it hardships that he was unaware of.

Everything that had happened was like the thunder of an approaching storm. Meng Hao looked down quietly at the jadeite bottle gourd, thinking about the number one disciple in the Outer Sect, blessed Wang Tengfei. Thinking of him in all his perfection, Meng Hao felt as if the pressure of an entire mountain had come to rest on him. He almost couldn't breathe.

He wanted to flee, but he knew that he was no servant, but a sect disciple. Fleeing was a violation of Sect rules. That would arouse the notice of the sect elders, and he would surely lose his life.

"If I'd known earlier that Lu Hong had Wang Tengfei backing him..." muttered Meng Hao. Moments later, unswerving determination filled his eyes.

"I would do the same thing. If I didn't attack him, he would have killed me. I didn't force him, he forced me. The grudge would have built either way. Unless I had run into Cao Yang earlier and been willing to let him rob me, things would have ended up this way. Even if it came down to killing, I couldn't prevent people from coveting my business." His eyes flashed as he looked gloomily around the Immortal's Cave.

"It's too bad Elder Sister Xu is meditating in seclusion..." The first thing he had done after crippling Lu Hong's Cultivation base was to go looking for her. But he had been informed at the Inner Sect that parties in seclusion were not to be disturbed.

"This jadeite bottle gourd..." It was incredibly powerful, so much so that when he tested it out with his Cultivation base, it exploded out with a might that sent his heart thumping. He could only imagine how it could help him. Maybe now he would finally be able to break through to the fifth

level of Qi Condensation. The strange thing was that the gourd bottle could not be placed in his bag of holding, but rather had to be hung on his body. Sadly, he had no more Spirit Stones. He had used all of them to break through the third level of Qi Condensation. Otherwise he would try to make a copy of the gourd bottle.

“This sect is not of the mortal world. It’s easy to lose one’s life here. If I can prevent disaster by handing over the gourd bottle, maybe I should just do it...” He did not wish to do so, but it seemed he had no other choice. Even as he wrestled with these thoughts, a sinister voice drifted in from the dark night, past the sealed door of the Immortal’s Cave.

“I am Shangguan Song [1. Shangguan Song’s name in Chinese is 上官宋 (shàng guān sòng) - Shangguan is a relatively obscure family name. Song is basically just a name, with no special meaning], here to assist Elder Brother Wang in meting out justice. Meng Hao, please come out of the Immortal’s cave and kowtow to me.”

The dark voice seemed to fill the cave with icy cold shadow. Meng Hao’s eyes glittered, and he lifted his head. He didn’t look the least bit surprised; he had anticipated that someone would come looking for him.

Meng Hao was silent for a moment, then slowly said, “It’s late at night, not a convenient time. Elder Brother, if you have something to say, just say it.”

“How haughty,” said the voice, clearly displeased. A cold snort rang out.

Meng Hao said nothing, maintaining his silence.

“If you won’t open the door, very well. I shall convey Elder Brother Wang’s instructions. Meng Hao, disciple of the Outer Sect, has not focused whole-heartedly on cultivation. He has caused disturbances in the Low-Level Public Zone, arousing mass complaints from fellow disciples, and has used vicious methods on others. However, he is young, so these offenses cannot be considered worthy of the death penalty. Hand over your treasures, cripple your Cultivation base and leave the Sect. Henceforth, you are not a disciple of the Reliance Sect.” As Meng Hao listened to the sinister voice, his face grew somber. Then, when he heard the final words, it filled with indignation.

“Elder Brother Wang’s decrees are not according to Sect rules,” said Meng Hao defiantly.

“Elder Brother Wang’s word are the Sect rules,” said the person outside, indifferent to Meng Hao’s interruption. “The following day is Pill Distribution Day. You will kowtow to Lu Hong and apologize, then await your punishment.” With that, the man flicked his sleeve, turned and left.

Meng Hao sat in silent contemplation. Time passed, and dawn approached. His eyes were bloodshot. He could not figure out what to do. His opponent obviously wanted the jadeite bottle gourd, and to see him dead. Out of supposed to mercy, he would cripple his Cultivation base, sever an arm and a leg, and then expel him from the sect into the wild mountains. If that happened, he would truly be hopeless.

“What should I do...” he said, fists clenched, eyes red. He suddenly felt completely weak and helpless. This was the first time he truly wished he were more powerful. If he were more powerful, he wouldn’t be bullied like this. He thought some more.

“Don’t tell me my only option is to flee...” His eyes filling with determination, he lifted up his head and walked out of the Immortal’s cave. But even as he walked out, he stopped in his tracks, hesitating.

“No, this isn’t right...” He lowered his head for a moment in thought, then turned back into the Immortal’s Cave, where he sat down cross-legged.

The following morning, Meng Hao opened his bloodshot eyes. He had not practiced any breathing exercises, but had spent the whole night in contemplation. But his Cultivation base was simply too low. He couldn’t think of any method other than fleeing the Reliance Sect. But surely his opponent had considered that he would do that. Fleeing was the same as death, and then he would be remembered as a traitor.

Bells rang out in the distance. Pill Distribution Day had arrived. Meng Hao knew that even if he tried to hide away in the Immortal’s Cave, catastrophe would still befall him.

“The law of the jungle. All of my problems are because my Cultivation base is too low. A true man doesn’t just take the suffering, he does something about it.” He gave a small sigh. He had been pushed to the brink, and had no room to maneuver. He calmed himself, then straightened out his clothing. He looked around the Immortal’s cave, then opened the main door and stared out at the blue sky and the emerald sea of trees.

Some time passed, and then he stepped forward. He had only taken a few steps when he noticed a person walk out from the jungle behind him, staring at him coldly.

“You didn’t flee. So you aren’t stupid after all.” Meng Hao recognized the person’s voice: it was Shangguan Song. It turned out he had stayed behind.

Meng Hao had seen him before. He was one of the disciples walking with Wang Tengfei that day by the East Mountain. His grandfather was one of the sect elders. He clearly had stayed behind to see if Meng Hao would flee. If he had, he would have been branded a traitor, and would have forfeited his life.

Meng Hao turned and headed toward the Outer Sect.

Shangguan Song laughed coldly, his eyes filled with ridicule. Actually, he had left the previous night, to go call on his grandfather Shangguan Xiu. Even had Meng Hao chosen to flee in the night, he would have been entrapped, and suffered a horrible death.

Shangguan Song followed Meng Hao the entire way. When they arrived at the Outer Sect, other disciples caught sight, one by one, and many different expressions filled their faces. Regardless, it appeared as if all had expected this, and none seemed to take pity on Meng Hao. Most actually jeered at him.

Soon, he arrived at the Outer Sect’s square. The dragon-carved pillars glowed brightly, and disciples were everywhere. Off in the distance, he saw white-robed Wang Tengfei, surrounded by a crowd of disciples.

The sun shone down on his white robe, making it shine like snow, and his long hair trailed past his shoulders. He looked perfect, flawless, like an Immortal being from a painting. His bearing made people want to get to know him. He really looked like a Chosen.

He chatted amiably with the disciples around him, friendly with everyone, regardless of their Cultivation base. He would nod, giving tips about Cultivation, causing everyone to treat him with utmost respect.

The female disciples all seemed to be infatuated with him. They looked as if they needed to be at his side, as if his each and every action could drive them crazy.

Even the sect elders on the tall platform gazed down on him fondly and with admiration.

Wherever Wang Tengfei went, he became the center of attention. His good looks, his gentleness, his perfection, melded together into a dazzling glow which burned Meng Hao's eyes. He clenched his fists tightly.

As all the disciples arrived, and as the Pill Distribution concluded, gentle and cordial Wang Tengfei didn't even look once at Meng Hao. He knew Meng Hao was watching him, but it meant no more to him than if a cricket were looking at him. He wouldn't stoop so low as to return his gaze.

When everything concluded, and the dragon-carved pillars grew dark, Wang Tengfei's gentle voice filled the air.

"Come here!"

It was a simple sentence, but the instant it rang out, everyone looked at Wang Tengfei, watching as his gaze fell onto Meng Hao.