

The Heavens 17

Chapter 17: I shall rely on myself!

Meng Hao stood there stiffly, staring at Wang Tengfei. He could suddenly feel the gaze of all the disciples who stood in the square. The Cultivators standing next to him moved away, creating an open area around Meng Hao.

A feeling of aloneness filled his heart, as if the world itself were about to forsake him. It was as if Wang Tengfei's single utterance had pushed him over the edge of existence.

No one spoke a word. The Outer Sect disciples just looked at Meng Hao. Wang Tengfei was too famous. His words reverberated in everyone's hearts.

No one was surprised at what was happening; news of yesterday's events had spread, and many people had already guessed what would happen this day.

The sect elders remained unmoving upon the high platform, gazing down at Meng Hao.

"Sect rules state that what you take belongs to you," said Meng Hao, forcing the words out one word at a time. He knew that compared to Wang Tengfei, his voice was laughably weak and small, and that he might be attacked. But, he still spoke up.

He knew that if he took out the jadeite gourd bottle, handed it over to Wang Tengfei, and made some tearful entreaties, then Wang Tengfei couldn't reject his apology. Not in front of all these people. He might exact some punishments, but would leave Meng Hao with his Cultivation base.

Maybe if he begged and kowtowed, admitted that he was in the wrong, accepted the humiliation and even insult himself, then he would be completely out of danger.

But Meng Hao would never do such a thing! Call him stupid and crazy, but he would never do it!

Even though he knew he was facing a dire calamity, he would never beg. He would never humiliate himself, would never crawl on the ground and plead. Never!

This was his spirit, his integrity. Some things in the world are more important than life or death, and that noble, unbendable, unbreakable spirit is dignity!

That was why he had spoken first, one word at a time. Even though his opponent was the mountain-like Wang Tengfei. Even though he faced dire calamity. Even though the whole world was against him. Even though he was alone, with no one to rely on. Despite all this... he still had his dignity. He lifted his head up and spoke.

This, was Meng Hao!

His words seemed to galvanize all the energy in his body. Death? What is death? So what if I haven't even lived to see 17! You can humiliate me, you can cripple my Cultivation. But you can never make me yield! You can never break my spirit!

His voice had rung out in the silence, clear and distinct, yet filled with a certain loneliness. As he spoke, his bitterness was plain, but perhaps only Meng Hao himself could understand it. His hands clenched into fists. No one else could sense it, but along with Wang Tengfei's words had come an invisible attack that attempted to force Meng Hao to collapse.

His body seemed as if it were about to disintegrate, his bones about to shatter. He felt a massive pressure trying to force him to kneel. His body shook, but he gritted his teeth and stood there, ignoring the pain in his bones.

"That treasure is mine," said Wang Tengfei with a friendly smile. "It belongs to whomever I give it to. I didn't give it to you, so you have no right to take it." His words seemed friendly, but were filled with menace, clear for everyone to hear. Smiling, he walked forward, raising his hand and waving a finger in Meng Hao's direction.

Winds surged in the square, screaming around in circles, causing the robes of the disciples to flap. Meng Hao stood still, as if the air in the square had become death itself and held him bound. He couldn't move a muscle. Suddenly, a pink jade pendant flew out from within his clothes and hovered in front of him. A pink shield appeared, covering Meng Hao protectively.

Wang Tengfei looked as affable as ever. His movements seemed completely casual, and as he took a second step, his finger waved a second time.

A bang resounded as the second finger movement stopped. The shield warped and twisted, flickering three times, then shattered in a deafening explosion. The jade pendant in front of him, the

gift given to him by Elder Sister Xu, broke into pieces. Blood poured out of Meng Hao's mouth, and the pressure on him increased. He gritted his teeth, unwavering. He stood there, trembling, unwilling to yield.

An exceedingly dark look filled his eyes, and he clenched his fists harder. His fingernails dug deep into the flesh of his palms.

With his usual kind smile, Wang Tengfei took a third step forward, landing directly in front of Meng Hao. He waved his finger a third time, and a force like a giant invisible hand ripped open Meng Hao's clothing, revealing the jadeite gourd bottle hanging around his neck. The invisible hand snatched the gourd bottle, wrenching it away from Meng Hao and depositing it in Wang Tengfei's palm.

Meng Hao's face grew pale, and he coughed out a mouthful of blood. His body trembled, yet he couldn't move. Veins of blood appeared in his eyes, and his hands were clenched incredibly tight. He felt the pain of his fingernails digging deep into his flesh. Blood began to drip out from between his fingers and drop to the ground.

"Cripple your Cultivation base. Sever an arm and a leg. Leave the sect." Wang Tengfei continued to smile, his warm voice reverberating across the square. He extended a finger for the fourth time, pointing toward Meng Hao's chest.

Meng Hao glared back at Wang Tengfei. This entire time, he had only spoken once, never opening his mouth to say a second sentence. He did not scream or roar, but remained silent. More veins of blood appeared in his eyes and he clenched his fists even tighter. Because of the power he exerted, his fingernails snapped, lodged in his flesh. Blood dripped like rain.

Everything grew silent as people watched, their faces filled with derision. Their ridicule seemed to cut him away from the world, pushing him away until he was placed outside of everything.

And yet he still would not submit! What was a bit of physical pain?

Just as Wang Tengfei's finger was about to fall again, a sound rang out from a distant mountain peak and a gentle power appeared next to Meng Hao, blocking the crippling finger.

A bang rang out. Wang Tengfei flicked his wide sleeve and glanced to the side. An old man stood there, wearing a long gray robe. He had some mottled brown marks on his face, and though quite

tall and big, didn't appear to be very mighty. This was the same person who had admired Meng Hao on the two previous occasions.

"You've taken the treasure back," said the old man. "Let the matter drop." With a frown, he looked at Meng Hao standing there silently, blood dripping from his fists. He sighed, then looked back at Wang Tengfei.

"Since it is Grand Elder Ouyang interceding, junior will give in." Wang Tengfei smiled, looking indifferent. During the entire time, he had only spoken to Meng Hao twice. Sunlight shone down on him, illuminating his elegant figure, his long hair, his perfect demeanor. As far as he was concerned, Meng Hao didn't even match up to an insect. As of this moment, he'd already placed Meng Hao out of his mind.

Meng Hao, covered in blood, was like a bug standing up against an elephant, who could crush him with a single step.

To Wang Tengfei, the things that had just happened were nothing. It was not that he felt contempt toward Meng Hao. He just didn't care about him in the least bit. With a smile, he walked back into the crowd, chatting indifferently, as if nothing had happened. He began to give pointers to lower level disciples, emanating cordiality.

All the female disciples seemed obsessed with him. The other Cultivators viewed him with utmost respect. Everyone ignored Meng Hao, as if they had already forgotten about his existence.

Meng Hao was like the antithesis of Wang Tengfei. Covered in blood, his clothing in shreds, he cut a truly sorry figure.

Meng Hao could sense what Wang Tengfei thought of him. It wasn't scorn, it was disregard. As Wang Tengfei left, Meng Hao felt a bit more relaxed, although his body hurt so bad it seemed he might collapse. Gritting his teeth, he saluted Grand Elder Ouyang with cupped hands.

Without another word, Meng Hao coughed up another mouthful of blood, clenched his jaw, and slowly walked off. His feet felt as if they would disintegrate at any moment. He was soaked with sweat, and every step caused heart-rending pain. Looking like a whipped dog, he slowly disappeared into the distance.

As he walked off, Grand Elder Ouyang seemed to be about to say something, but decided not to, and simply watched him depart.

Meng Hao returned to the Immortal's Cave, and the instant the main door closed, he collapsed to the ground, unconscious. Wang Tengfei was already at the peak of the sixth level. There was no way for Meng Hao to compare to him. By refusing to give in and kneel, he had of course received internal injuries.

He was comatose for two full days, after which he finally opened his eyes, his body wracked with pain. It was difficult to move, but he lurched up into a sitting position. When he touched the ground with his hands, they burned painfully, as if the skin had been stripped off of them. Gasping huskily, he sat there quietly in the middle of the Immortal's Cave.

After some time passed, he looked down at his hands. Ten broken fingernails protruded from the skin of his palms. After two days of coma, scabs had formed over the fingernails, but in his struggle to sit up, they had broken, and now blood oozed out.

Meng Hao looked at his hands, expressionless. After a while, he began to dig the broken fingernails out of his skin, one by one. Blood flowed out of his mangled palms, dripping to the ground and filling the cave with the scent of gore.

Through the entire process, Meng Hao's facial expression did not change. It was as if the hands didn't belong to him. There was a certain ruthlessness within him that was now clearly visible.

He looked down at the ten bloody fingernails. After a while, he collected them together and placed them next to the stone bed in the room. He planned to look at them every day as a reminder of the humiliation he had endured.

The day would come when that humiliation would be repaid in double!

He hadn't spoken for a long time, but now he opened his mouth: "As for me, I shall rely on myself!" The hoarse voice almost didn't sound like his own.