

CULTIVATION SYSTEM: STRONGER WITH AGE

Chapter 11 - 10 Rapid Progress, Fingers Like Steel

Realm: Mid-grade First Layer of Transcendence

Cultivation Technique: [Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Initial Glimpse 32/80]

In just ten days, the progress of the Pine Crane Longevity Technique had already surpassed one-third. Through continuous Cultivation of the Pine Skill, Lin Xuankong's Transcendence Realm was also steadily improving. It had reached the Mid-grade of the First Layer, and his body had undergone a significant Metamorphosis! Especially his arms, which already boasted the strength to withstand a thousand pounds, with skin and flesh as tough as leather! The First Layer of Transcendence focused heavily on tempering the arms with Transcendent Qi Blood. When the muscles and skin of both arms were perfectly tempered, the First Layer would reach Perfection!)

One-third in ten days! At my current Cultivation Speed, when the Young Lady returns in another ten days, I estimate I'll have reached the Late Stage of the First Layer, just one step away from Perfection!

I wonder what kind of expression she will have by then?

However, the Young Lady said that her Entry Level speed in the Pine Skill was similar to mine. *I don't know if what she said is true... If her Talent is really that strong, she probably won't be too surprised to see me reach the Late Stage of the First Layer!*

It's unbelievable to think she could be on par with my fifty-times speed boost...

Fortunately, I am now in my fifties, with a fifty-times Cultivation Speed boost. Next year, when I turn sixty, I should have a sixty-times boost. By then, my Cultivation Speed will be even faster, far surpassing hers!

Lin Xuankong sighed for a moment, then looked at the bluestone in the courtyard. Gazing at the finger holes left by the Young Lady on the large bluestone, he thought to himself: *Once I reach the Perfection of the First Layer, I'll be able to do what the Young Lady demonstrated with her Spiritual Crane Finger—pierce the hard bluestone with a single touch!*

As for now... He glanced at the Old Willow Tree in the courtyard, then activated his Qi Blood and leaped to its side.

In the next moment, with a light HISS, the Old Willow Tree trembled slightly. His right hand had already pierced into its hard trunk. Effortlessly withdrawing his right hand, a hole several inches across and half a foot deep appeared on the trunk!

Lin Xuankong nodded in satisfaction. At the Mid-grade of the First Layer of Transcendence, though he couldn't easily pierce bluestone yet, his arm and fingers, when infused with Qi Blood, were nearly as tough as refined steel. With a single finger strike, he could now easily pierce an extremely hard tree trunk!

This level of power... if my self from ten days ago faced it, I'd undoubtedly be killed instantly!

Especially as his Pine Skill progressed, his use of the Spiritual Crane Finger became more refined. With such an exquisite Martial Skill, if everyone fought barehanded, even facing Zhang Wushi's fifty-odd fierce subordinates, it would only take a dozen or so strikes!

Just as he was contemplating this, a sudden knocking sound came from the old wooden building.

Lin Xuankong put those thoughts aside and quickly entered the wooden building. He walked towards the outer room and opened the door to see an unfamiliar man in servant's attire and a retainer's cap.

This man, seeing Lin Xuankong open the door, asked, "Are you Old Lin, the one who sells fried cakes?"

Lin Xuankong searched his memory but couldn't recall who this person was. "And you are?"

The retainer said, "I am Li An, a servant from the Li Mansion on East Water Street. Tomorrow, our Li Mansion is holding a birthday celebration for the Third Young Master, and we need to prepare a running banquet. I heard you're good at making fried cakes, so we'd like you to come and make some staple foods, like fried cakes and fritters."

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong finally understood. In his memory, his previous self was often hired by wealthy families to cook for running banquets due to his skill in making fried cakes.

The retainer continued, "The running banquet needs to last for six days, and during this time, a considerable number of fried cakes will be required. This job pays two ounces of silver. You can hire four or five helpers and give them a share of the payment."

Two ounces of silver! he thought. *When I sell fried cakes, it takes a whole month of hard work to earn just one or two ounces!*

Of course, working for such a wealthy household would be exhausting. An ordinary old man wouldn't be able to handle it and would need several helpers. So, dividing two ounces of silver among four or five people wouldn't amount to much for each person after all.

However, with my current physique, I could handle this job alone, easily and comfortably!

Thinking of the thirty-odd ounces of silver Lii Xiaolan had given him, he thought to himself: *I need to start earning more money; I can't keep freeloading!*

"Well? If you agree to it, I won't look for anyone else," the retainer asked.

"Alright, I'll head over early tomorrow morning. Brother Li, would you like to come in and rest for a bit?" Lin Xuankong nodded.

The retainer, seeing he had agreed, nodded and turned to leave, clearly uninterested in chatting with such an impoverished old man.

After the Li Mansion retainer left, Lin Xuankong closed the door and returned to the back courtyard to continue practicing the Spiritual Crane Finger.

The retainer left Wutong Village and headed straight for the Li Mansion.

After he had gone some distance, Ma Xiong, holding a birdcage, leisurely emerged from a tavern on the street. He watched the departing retainer, Li An, his eyes flickering.

A Black Tiger Gang member beside him said, "Brother Ma, it looks like Old Lin has accepted the job from the Li Mansion."

Ma Xiong teased the bird in the cage, then nodded with a smile.

Ever since he'd accepted the task from his Big Brother to eliminate Old Lin, the old fellow hadn't stepped out of his house for over ten days. *It was quite strange... However, money talks. There are plenty of ways to lure Old Lin away from that beautiful Young Lady!*

At this moment, many passersby on the street, upon seeing Ma Xiong, showed fear and gave him a wide berth. Even wealthy merchants and young masters in fine clothes, surrounded by their entourages, respectfully greeted Ma Xiong, Boss Zhang Wu's right-hand man.

Ma Xiong stood for a moment, then said in a deep voice, "The route from Wutong Village to the Li Mansion definitely passes through that dense forest path. Find two tight-lipped, ruthless brothers to stake it out early tomorrow morning! Also, bring the Hu Family Brothers!"

The gang member frowned. "The Hu Family Brothers? Why let them in on such a prime opportunity to earn merit?"

Ma Xiong smiled. "How could we monopolize such a chance to earn merit? The Hu Family Brothers are exceptionally talented; they reached the First Layer of Transcendence just a few days ago! They've only cultivated for five years and have already undergone the Mortal Transformation into Martial Arts, entering the Early Stage of the First Layer. That's even faster than me, and I've been cultivating for six or seven years. With such Talent, those two have a great future ahead of them, possibly even surpassing Brother Zhang... A man has to think about the future!"

The gang member was stunned for a moment, then chuckled. "Amazing, Brother Ma! You truly live up to your name, always thinking so far ahead!"

Ma Xiong, however, narrowed his eyes. *Calling the Hu Family Brothers wasn't just about currying favor with them...*

That Miss Lin is incredibly strong, yet Big Brother wants me to take out Old Lin. It's a task I can't refuse, but I need an escape route! If the Hu Family Brothers are involved and things go south, those two 'tall trees' will make perfect scapegoats!

To make it in the underworld, you need brains, not just brawn!

Chapter 12 - 11 I've Dug a Hole for You, Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw

In the backyard of the wooden building, Lin Xuankong, who had practiced the Spiritual Crane Finger several times, was satisfied to see the dry trunk of the Old Willow Tree. Dozens of neat finger holes were distributed there, all of which he had just created with the Spiritual Crane Finger!

The feeling of piercing a hole with each strike was truly invigorating and also helped to train his arms and fingers, naturally making him unable to stop!

Just then, Lin Xuankong also tried it on a large bluestone. The Spiritual Crane Finger, when pointed at the bluestone, was quite powerful, each time shattering a fist-sized piece and sending stone debris flying everywhere.

But it was still a bit lacking compared to the Young Lady's Spiritual Crane Finger, which could pierce bluestone as if it were tofu. He definitely needed to reach the Perfection stage of the Transcendence First Layer to create a smooth hole with one finger!

After practicing for a while, seeing the sun set in the west, Lin Xuankong returned to the wooden building and tidied up for dinner.

At noon, before the Young Lady left, he had bought seven or eight delicious vegetarian and meat dishes. However, with their parting imminent, neither of them had much appetite, so more than half remained.

At this moment, facing the sumptuous dishes on the table, Lin Xuankong sat there feeling somewhat lonely and distressed. He thought for a moment, then went outside and walked toward Little Hu's house, a few wooden buildings away.

That little glutton! If he saw so many good dishes, he would surely drool!

Lin Xuankong walked to Little Hu's door with a smile but saw the door was tightly closed. He knocked several times, but no one answered.

So early to bed? Lin Xuankong was a bit surprised.

He frowned and knocked a few more times, but still seeing no response from the father and son, he had to return to his own home.

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Early the next morning, Lin Xuankong finished practicing the Heart Method and Pile Technique. After drinking a portion of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup to replenish his Qi Blood, he left the wooden building, heading towards the Li Mansion in the west of the city.

After passing Lishui Street, he entered a dense forest path.

It was still early, and the dense forest path was quiet.

In the misty morning fog, trees stood tall on both sides, green and vibrant. Beneath them, young grass sprouted with vigorous life, and clear dew clung to the leaves.

Lin Xuankong, with his white hair, breathed the fresh forest air. *Such a beautiful morning! If the Young Lady were walking with me now, it would certainly be a different kind of pleasure!*

Just as this thought crossed his mind, his steps suddenly halted. He looked ahead with some caution. In the morning fog, several dozen feet away beside a giant tree, three burly men emerged.

These three looked quite unfamiliar, but their thick, rough hands, broad shoulders, and strong waists clearly showed they were long-term Martial Dao practitioners.

Encountering three such strongmen on a remote path so early in the morning, Lin Xuankong naturally became vigilant.

At this moment, footsteps suddenly sounded behind him. Lin Xuankong turned to look, his gaze tightening.

It was Ma Xiong, holding a birdcage and strolling leisurely towards him, flanked by two Black-clothed Strongmen. Moreover, those two strongmen had sharp gazes and proud expressions, appearing even more imposing than Ma Xiong!

Lin Xuankong's face darkened slightly as he recalled the warning Little Hu had given him. Facing such a situation now, how could he not understand that these men were here for him!

Just as he expected, when Ma Xiong walked over, the three strongmen who had been standing by the giant tree also rushed forward. The six of them spread out, surrounding him, each with a mocking expression, looking at Lin Xuankong as if he were a dead man!

"Old Lin, you might as well bash your head against that tree and have a quick death!" Ma Xiong stated bluntly. "If you wait for my brothers to act, you won't escape some flesh wounds!"

After speaking, he no longer looked at Lin Xuankong, instead busying himself with feeding a few grains of millet to the bird in the cage.

In Ma Xiong's view, killing an old and decrepit man like Lin Xuankong wasn't worth his personal effort. Of course, being as cunning as he was, he wouldn't act personally even if he could, to avoid accumulating heavy karma!

Seeing Ma Xiong's confident demeanor, Lin Xuankong's heart sank a bit, and his face showed a trace of tension.

The surrounding six were clearly elite Gang Members of the Black Tiger Gang, each experienced in killing and had taken countless lives!

Though he had reached the Mid-grade of the Transcendence First Layer and was proficient in the Spiritual Crane Finger, he had never fought anyone, let alone in such a life-or-death struggle. Suddenly facing six men, how could he not be nervous!

Silently touching the Manluo Demon Pearl in his breast pocket, Lin Xuankong restrained the impulse to use it immediately. *This is my trump card and can't be used lightly! Moreover, these six surely don't know my true strength. This is also my trump card, and I need to play it well...*

Thinking this, a ruthless glint flashed in Lin Xuankong's eyes, but his face gradually showed an extremely panicked expression.

His voice trembled and stuttered, "Ma... Ma Xiong, I haven't offended any big figures in your Black Tiger Gang. Is there... is there some misunderstanding?"

As he spoke, he moved back shakily, approaching the three Black Tiger Gang members behind him.

Ma Xiong had no interest in paying attention to this "dead man." He happily teased the bird in the cage, as if the bird's meal was more significant than the life or death of the old man before him.

One of the Black Tiger Gang members behind Lin Xuankong patted the dust off his hands. "Old Lin, don't worry. We've already dug a pit for you; we won't let your body be exposed in the wild. Remember to thank me, I'm Han Si!

"Oh, by the way, the pit is in the forest. Come with me!")

Hearing this, the fear on Lin Xuankong's face grew more evident. His legs weakened, and his body swayed as he moved closer to the three of them. Seeing him so cowardly, these three Black Tiger Gang members couldn't help but sneer, their eyes full of disdain.

Among them, the one named Han Si reached out to grab Lin Xuankong's shoulder, ready to lift him, and said, "Actually, being buried alive isn't bad. You'll even keep your body intact..."

SWISH! SWISH! SWISH!

Three sharp sounds suddenly burst forth.

Han Si and the other two Gang Members, initially sneering, were startled to find that Lin Xuankong, who had seemed almost on the verge of collapsing, suddenly moved like a startled rabbit, his fingers extended like a sword, striking at their foreheads.

His movements were extremely swift. Combined with the close distance, the three burly Black Tiger Gang members only had time for their expressions to change before each had a bloody hole in their forehead.

Soon, their eyes glazed over, and their bodies collapsed. They uttered strange gurgling sounds, their bodies twitching slightly. But with brain matter flowing from the wounds on their foreheads, it was clear the three were beyond saving!

This scene had unfolded too suddenly!

The seemingly frail old man, who looked as if he were about to kneel and beg for mercy, had unexpectedly killed three elite Gang Members as easily as slaughtering chickens. This completely caught Ma Xiong and the others off guard!

Even though the remaining Ma Xiong and his two men were battle-hardened elite Gang Members, who had weathered many storms, they couldn't help but reveal shocked expressions when suddenly faced with such a bizarre situation. Ma Xiong,

who had been leisurely feeding the bird and felt he had everything under control, turned pale. In his astonishment, he even dropped the birdcage.

At this moment, Lin Xuankong hesitated not at all. He turned swiftly and charged towards the remaining three. As his feet touched the ground, the earth sank slightly, while his figure moved with incredible agility, like a Spiritual Crane taking flight!

In a flash, Lin Xuankong had already approached the Black-clothed Strongman on the left, his Spiritual Crane Finger darting towards the man's face.

This Black-clothed Strongman was one of the Hu Family Brothers hired by Ma Xiong. Having reached the Early Stage of the Transcendence First Layer days ago, his strength was naturally far superior to that of the three ordinary Gang Members!

Seeing Lin Xuankong's fingers strike towards him, this Black-clothed Strongman roared suddenly. He shifted his steps to retreat, dodging the Spiritual Crane Finger aimed at his forehead. His hands then formed tiger claws, grabbing towards Lin Xuankong's right arm.

When this Hu-surnamed Black-clothed Strongman exerted force, his sharp nails turned a pale silver, creating sharp ripping sounds. He was using the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw, the renowned Martial Dao of the Black Tiger Gang, feared throughout dozens of cities in Great Marsh Prefecture!

Chapter 13 - 12: Breaking Evil with Secrecy, Flying Locust Stone

Lin Xuankong saw the man's tiger claws were sharp and his attacks ferocious; his own brows furrowed slightly. His body shifted. He evaded his opponent's tiger claws with his right hand while his left, seizing an opening in the man's guard, shot out with even greater speed.

The essence of the Spiritual Crane Finger was to counter ferocity with precision, pursuing extreme speed. Moreover, he was already at the mid-grade of the first level of Transcendence, his strength surpassing that of the Black-clothed Strongman.

With these advantages combined, Lin Xuankong's left hand, having seized the opening, struck like a crane's beak pecking at grain. Within half a breath, he had jabbed the Black-clothed Strongman's chest twelve times!

PPFT PPFT PPFT PPFT PPFT!

The sounds of sharp points piercing flesh were incredibly dense and rapid.

When Lin Xuankong stepped back, taking a shallow breath, the Black-clothed Strongman remained standing, his face a mask of terror and extreme agony. He

looked down at his chest. Twelve holes, piercing clean through him, were neatly lined up. His internal organs were already shattered. A large amount of blood, mixed with visceral fragments, gushed continuously from the twelve wounds.

THUD!

The Black-clothed Strongman fell backward, dead on the spot.

The other Black-clothed Strongman, seeing this, abruptly halted his charge. His facial muscles twitched, and he cried out in grief, "Damn it! Big Brother!"

Witnessing this, Ma Xiong felt his heart pound like a drum. He swallowed hard.

How... how is this possible? He'd seen this old man, practically one foot in the grave, more than once. The old fellow was missing teeth and nearly sixty! Normally, an old man like that would probably have to grunt and heave just to get into bed, and when he tried to piss, it would likely spray all over his shoes! The task his big brother had given him this time was supposed to be simple: just keep things secret, prevent Miss Lin from finding out it was the Black Tiger Gang who killed Old Lin. He'd made thorough plans, even roping in the Hu Family Brothers as scapegoats... But who could have ever imagined that this half-dead old man would be so ferocious? Three of his most elite henchmen, killed without even a chance to react! And Eldest Hu, an early-stage first level Transcendence cultivator, had only blocked half a move? Eldest Hu was a genuine early-stage first level Transcendence Martial Cultivator—a Realm Ma Xiong himself had struggled for six or seven years to reach, yet failed! Such an expert... poked to death in the blink of an eye by this half-dead old man?

Ma Xiong could hardly believe what he was seeing.

The remaining Black-clothed Strongman let out a few more mournful cries before slowly backing away, his face contorted with hatred. His voice was hoarse as he said, "His attacks are so swift! He must be at least mid-stage, if not late-stage, of the first level of Transcendence! Otherwise, no matter how careless my big brother was, he couldn't have failed to block even a single move!"

Already on edge, Ma Xiong's eyes flickered upon hearing this. The next moment, he spun and frantically shouted towards the area behind Lin Xuankong, "Brothers, this one's tough! Shoot him with arrows!"

Just as Lin Xuankong's eyes moved, intending to turn, Ma Xiong used every ounce of speed he possessed, whirled, and ran. The Black-clothed Strongman also turned and fled!

Seeing this, Lin Xuankong circulated his Qi and Blood to their peak and pursued without hesitation.

Since he had already killed four members of the Black Tiger Gang, he had to finish the job cleanly... That was the Black Tiger Gang—a colossal power entrenched for many years across more than a dozen cities in the Great Marsh Prefecture, with thousands of Gang Members and countless experts! At his current level, he was far from being able to challenge such a behemoth's authority! If either of these two escaped, the consequences would be unimaginable!

When a person is being chased, outrunning their companion means safety. At least, that's what the Black-clothed Strongman, Hu Lin, thought. Unfortunately for him, he was wrong.

He and Ma Xiong had started running for their lives simultaneously. After one breath, Hu Lin had already opened a five-zhang gap between himself and Ma Xiong. Then, he heard the thud of Ma Xiong being struck down by the old man, and a wave of relief washed over him. But when he risked a glance back, his heart leaped into his throat. The seemingly frail old man hadn't paused in the slightest while taking Ma Xiong down. As he ran, the old man's sparse silver hair streamed out, a few strands even whipping off behind him...

After two breaths, Hu Lin was forced to stop. *He knew that by running alone, he had absolutely no chance of escaping this dense forest!*

A cruel glint in his eyes, Hu Lin suddenly spun sideways, and several dark streaks shot from his hands.

SWISH SWISH SWISH!

The shadows flew faster than arrows loosed from a bow, streaking toward Lin Xuankong's face, heart, and knees.

Facing the flying projectiles, Lin Xuankong didn't slow down in the slightest. He spread his arms and leaped into the air, dodging all three projectiles. He simultaneously closed the distance between them, landing right in Hu Lin's path!

As Lin Xuankong landed—at the moment he was most vulnerable and least able to change direction—Hu Lin's eyes brightened. He unleashed a rapid-fire volley of hidden weapons.

SWISH SWISH SWISH SWISH!

The sound of objects slicing through the air became a continuous whine.

However, to Hu Lin's utter despair, all twenty of the Flying Locust Stones, dense as a rain shower, were shattered by Lin Xuankong's lightning-fast finger strikes just before they reached him!

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

The Flying Locust Stones exploded, scattering like twenty miniature fireworks. Stone fragments filled the air.

Landing amidst the swirling debris, Lin Xuankong strode swiftly towards Hu Lin. Hu Lin, in turn, continuously hurled Flying Locust Stones, his technique

astonishingly skilled. Lin Xuankong's sword-finger stabbed out repeatedly. Explosive cracks echoed continuously as stone fragments filled the air between them.

Three breaths later, having thrown his last Flying Locust Stone, Hu Lin spread his hands. He executed the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw. A sharp tearing sound ripped through the air as his claws aimed for Lin Xuankong's chest and abdomen.

Six breaths later, Hu Lin's body suddenly stiffened and then crumpled to the ground. A deep, bloody hole had appeared in his forehead.

Lin Xuankong stood beside him, exhaling heavily. Frowning, he vigorously shook his hands, now slick with the thick scent of blood, and barely managed to suppress the wave of nausea that came with killing for the first time.

After composing himself, Lin Xuankong walked towards Ma Xiong, who lay fallen not far away. Ma Xiong wasn't dead yet; Lin Xuankong still had questions for him.

Ma Xiong, whose leg bone was gruesomely shattered and exposed, stared at the approaching Lin Xuankong, his expression dark and uncertain. "If you're a man of honor, give me a quick death!"

Lin Xuankong crouched beside him, frowning. "First of all, I'm an old man, not a 'man of honor.'

"Even an ant clings to life; do you really not want to live?"

"Besides, even if you want to die, I won't let you until I've gotten the answers I want from you!"

Ma Xiong clutched his splintered, exposed leg bone, his gaze darting about.

Few people aren't afraid of death, and someone as shrewd as him feared it even more. But he knew that no matter what he said next, if this person before him wasn't a fool, he would never be let go! Still, there were different ways to die. He couldn't be sure if this flatbread seller would torture him... As an old hand in the underworld, he found himself completely unable to read this little old man. Everything that had happened today was too bizarre; his mind was a complete mess!

After a moment of silence, watching Lin Xuankong's hand slowly reach for his broken leg, Ma Xiong spoke dejectedly, "What do you want to know?"

Having said this, Ma Xiong glanced at the birdcage lying on the ground nearby. He knew he would never again have the chance to take his bird out for an airing.

Chapter 14 - 13 Acquiring the Stone-Throwing Skill, That Damn Old Swine Dog

Moments later, Lin Xuankong moved the bodies of Ma Xiong and the others into the depths of the forest and meticulously cleaned up the birdcages and other traces of evidence by the roadside.

Deep in the forest, there was indeed a freshly dug pit.

Unfortunately, the pit was somewhat small and insufficient for the task. Originally, it was intended for one person; trying to fit six people in it was impossible!

So, he had no choice but to use the shovel belonging to Han Si, the Black Tiger Gang member, to enlarge the pit a bit.

After burying the six bodies, Lin Xuankong stood by the dirt mound and gathered the items he had found on them.

There were over sixty silver taels in total, mostly from Ma Xiong.

There were also four Hundred-refined Steel Sabers, each worth about eight or nine silver taels, totaling over thirty taels.

What intrigued Lin Xuankong the most was a manual titled "Stone-Throwing Skill" found on Hu Lin. It wasn't a Martial Dao Technique, but rather a training guide for projecting Flying Locust Stones. *The Stone-Throwing Skill! During the earlier battle, Hu Lin's stone-throwing technique left a deep impression on me!*

He was certain that if Hu Lin's elder brother had also known how to use Flying Locust Stones and hadn't been killed early on, the two brothers using the Stone-Throwing Skill together would have definitely put him at a disadvantage.

After all, the gap between Mid-grade and Early Stage of a cultivation layer isn't insurmountable. No matter how strong the Spiritual Crane Finger is, it can't withstand two experts in concealed weapons! Now that this exquisite Stone-Throwing Skill is in my hands, I can properly cultivate it!

Looking at these gains, Lin Xuankong felt somewhat emotional. After being ambushed and then counter-killing his attackers, the silver and treasures he obtained could probably equal more than ten years of selling flatcakes—wealth indeed comes with risk.

At least, I won't have to worry about the cost of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup for the short term!

After leaving the forest, Lin Xuankong first visited the Li Mansion, declined the offer of being the flatcake master, and then quickly headed towards Wutong Village.

To save his life, or perhaps to die more comfortably, Ma Xiong had revealed a lot. The first revelation was Zhang Wu's arrangement. *This was consistent with my suspicions; Zhang Wu has always coveted my Young Lady's beauty and strength!*

But what made Lin Xuankong feel disgusted was that Wang Po had also received favors from Zhang Wu to specifically get close to the Young Lady. *That old hag's methods are even more revolting than Ma Xiong's! That old wretch, bringing food boxes and candied dates, speaking kindly to people's faces while plotting murder behind their backs!*

Moreover, Ma Xiong had told him a piece of news he wasn't sure was true or false: after Wang Po came over that day and saw Little Hu heading to the Lin Family, she, fearing that the meddlesome Little Hu would ruin her plans, had specifically sent someone to deal with him.

This is also why I directly refused the job at the Li Mansion and returned to Wutong Village to check on the situation! Little Hu and I have a good relationship, and he's warned me several times. If not for Little Hu's warnings, I would probably have been surrounded and killed by Ma Xiong and his men a few days ago! Back then, I hadn't even mastered the Spiritual Crane Finger; facing several Black Tiger Gang experts, I would have had no chance of survival!

Upon returning to Wutong Village, Lin Xuankong knocked on the door of Little Hu's house but received no response.

Glancing around and seeing no one nearby, Lin Xuankong leaped into Little Hu's courtyard.

He looked at the somewhat cluttered courtyard and had an ominous feeling.

He quickly walked to the wooden building, opened the door, and saw a dish of salted vegetables on the Li Family's outer table, along with two half-eaten flatcakes and two bowls of unfinished porridge.

Lin Xuankong took a closer look, his brows furrowing tightly. *The two bowls of porridge have long since gone cold, the corn flour settled at the bottom. They've clearly been here for a long time,* he observed.

"Little Hu!" Lin Xuankong called out loudly, but the wooden building was silent; there was no response.

He quickened his pace, searching the Li Family's wooden building thoroughly, up and down, but he couldn't find the father and son.

Remembering Ma Xiong's words, the vile deeds of that old hag Wang Po, and the fact that he hadn't seen Little Hu selling fruits on the street for the past two days, a surge of anger began to rise in Lin Xuankong's heart. He clenched his fists and walked out of the wooden building.

As he passed the outer room, Lin Xuankong suddenly paused, looking towards the rice vat in the corner. He thought he had just heard a faint RUSTLING sound coming from inside.

Could a rat have gotten into the rice vat?

Lin Xuankong continued walking out.

However, after stepping out of the wooden door, he turned back. *What if... what if the Li father and son haven't lost their lives? In that case, their stored old rice being eaten by rats would be such a waste...*

Approaching the rice vat, he reached out and lifted the lid. The sight that met his eyes made his expression change dramatically.

Li Dahu, whom he had seen just two or three days ago, lay twisted and curled up inside the large vat. His face was a ghastly pale blue, eyes wide open, and his expression contorted, clearly indicating he had suffered terrible pain before dying. A strong smell of blood mixed with a foul stench emanated from the vat.

What made Lin Xuankong's heart turn cold was that Li Dahu was not alone in the vat. Beneath Li Dahu's corpse lay Li Xiaohu, his body tightly bound with hemp

ropes, pressed underneath. His mouth was gagged with a dirty cloth, and his vacant, fear-filled eyes stared out at Lin Xuankong!

...

For nearly two days and a night, Little Hu had been bound like this, thrown into the large vat, unable to move, with his own father's gradually decaying corpse pressing down on him... I can't imagine the fear, hatred, and helplessness this boy before me must have experienced during these two days and nights! Li Dahu's family has no relatives in Great Marsh Prefecture, and people rarely visit their home. If I hadn't come, what would have happened? Just because Little Hu kindly reminded me a few times, potentially ruining Wang Po's disgusting scheme to ensnare and bewitch the Young Lady, were Little Hu and Dahu, two living souls, to die so wretchedly in this narrow, cramped, horrifying rice vat? If it weren't for the Young Lady's teachings, if I hadn't advanced so quickly to Mid-grade, today I, too, would have ended up like Little Hu and his father—dead in fear, wretchedness, and utter obscurity! Commoners, truly treated like grass underfoot! Those damn high and mighty Martial Cultivators! That damn old pig-dog! That damn Black Tiger Gang!

...

Lin Xuankong fought desperately to restrain the boundless anger and impulsive urges raging in his heart. *I know that no matter how much I want to eliminate Wang Po and Zhang Wu, no matter how much I yearn to wipe out the Black Tiger Gang, my current power is insufficient. I still need to grow stronger!*

Suppressing his fury, Lin Xuankong used his internal Transcendent Qi Blood to carefully regulate the flow in Little Hu's arms and body. \n(o)v.e\l.com

Having been bound with hemp ropes for nearly two days and a night, Little Hu's arms, legs, and torso had sustained varying degrees of damage due to the lack of blood circulation. When he was first taken out of the rice vat, his hands and legs were almost completely numb.

As blood flow gradually returned, the intense numbness, itching, and pain that followed were surely unimaginable. After all, when an ordinary person's foot merely falls asleep for a short while, the returning sensation is highly uncomfortable; Little Hu was experiencing this all over his body!

Little Hu clenched his teeth, his breathing ragged, but he didn't utter a single cry of pain from start to finish. This boy possessed a fierce, wolf-like tenacity.

「After the time it takes for an incense stick to burn,」

With the nourishment and regulation of the Transcendent Qi Blood, Little Hu's arms and legs gradually recovered. The madness in his eyes slowly receded, hidden deep within, and a look of astonishment appeared on his face.

When Lin Xuankong stopped the treatment, Little Hu immediately rolled off the bed, threw himself to the ground, and kowtowed heavily several times. "Elder Lin, words cannot express my gratitude! From now on, Little Hu's life is yours!"

Lin Xuankong reached out and pulled Little Hu to his feet. Looking at the boy who had survived such a great ordeal, he wanted to offer some words of comfort.

But I know... at a time like this, any words of consolation are meaningless. Only blood can bring solace!

Chapter 15 - 14 Cultivation of Stone-Throwing Skill, Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts

Lin Xuankong's eyes revealed killing intent and an unprecedented determination. *That despicable old hag Wang Po, worse than a pig or a dog, along with Zhang Wu and the others—they absolutely must be eliminated! Of course, Wang Po reached the First Layer of Transcendence years ago. Although her Qi Blood has declined due to her age, whether she's at the Early, Mid-grade, or Late Stage of the First Layer... that must be figured out first!*

After a brief contemplation, Lin Xuankong looked at Li Xiaohu. "For the time being, try not to go out, so you don't draw the attention of Wang Po and the Black Tiger Gang!"

Li Xiaohu nodded.

Lin Xuankong sighed lightly. "Even burying your father, I'm afraid we'll have to do it in secret!"

Li Xiaohu clenched his lips, his fists turning a bit white. "I understand, Elder Lin!"

They hastily buried Li Dahu.

After Lin Xuankong left, Li Xiaohu knelt by the small mound where his father was buried. He turned his head to look in the direction Lin Xuankong had departed, a fiery expression in his eyes.

Elder Lin's miraculous Qi Blood that nourishes his body... How powerful! He is definitely a strong Martial Cultivator; he's probably been cultivating for many years! And he actually hid it for so long, pretending to be weak and old all the time? Ever since I realized this, I've felt an overwhelming impulse. I want to ask to become his apprentice! I want to learn Lin Xuankong's Martial Dao! I want to avenge Father with my own hands! I want to become a majestic figure like other Martial Cultivators! But having roamed the streets for so many years, I know very well that Martial Dao isn't shared easily. Even the most inconspicuous Martial Arts Hall in Great Marsh Prefecture would require fifty taels of silver to learn just a bit of the basics! Elder Lin is such a mysterious and powerful Martial Cultivator... I'm as poor as a ghost; how could I possibly learn his Martial Dao? Being saved by Elder Lin has already indebted me too much. How could I have the face to ask to learn his Martial Dao without payment?

Thinking this, Xiaohu turned to look at his father's small grave. *Someone as poor as me probably has no chance of learning Martial Dao in this life! But Father's death must be avenged!*

His eyes flashed with a trace of frenzied hatred.

Standing in his own courtyard, Lin Xuankong contemplated the day's events.

No one saw when I killed Ma Xiong and the others, and I cleaned up the traces extremely thoroughly. But secrets don't stay secret for long. Ma Xiong and the others' disappearance will eventually make Zhang Wu suspect me, and then I'll definitely face revenge from the Black Tiger Gang and Zhang Wu... Zhang Wu currently fears my Young Lady. My current advantage is that Zhang Wu likely doesn't know the Young Lady has left. He also doesn't know my current strength, so he can't be sure if I was the one who killed Ma Xiong and the others! So, before I eliminate that old hag Wang Po and Zhang Wu, before I vent this anger in my chest, I absolutely cannot let anyone into my house. The fact that the Young Lady has been gone for many days must not be exposed to outsiders!

Having made up his mind, Lin Xuankong took out the "Stone-Throwing Skill" manual from his bosom and carefully flipped through it.

"Martial Artists prioritize Qi Blood; when Qi Blood is attained, even picked flowers and leaves can kill an enemy. The Stone-Throwing Skill is mostly used for stealth attacks, relying on speed, accuracy, and ruthlessness. In close combat, it can also be used: throwing stones to make the opponent defend, then taking that opportunity to attack with weapons—a small skill with great application..."

This Stone-Throwing Skill recorded several techniques for utilizing force in flicking, throwing, casting, and flinging. For example, flicking focused on the fingers, throwing on the wrist, casting on the arm, and flinging on the integration of the whole body's strength. It also recorded an extremely magical Stone-Throwing Skill: Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts.

This Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts enabled one to deftly throw six flying stones simultaneously. Not only could six flying stones attack six parts of an opponent's body, but they could also hit six opponents in different positions at the same time. The subtlety of the force involved was simply unimaginable, quite miraculous!

Lin Xuankong finished reading all the Cultivation Methods for the Stone-Throwing Skill, and a line of large characters suddenly appeared in his mind:

[Stone-Throwing Skill: 1/600]

This Stone-Throwing Skill isn't a Martial Dao Technique; there are no Realms. However, to cultivate it to a high level still requires a great deal of proficiency.

Lin Xuankong recalled the situation during his battle with Hu Lin.

When Hu Lin threw the Flying Locust Stones, maintaining speed, accuracy, and ruthlessness, it seemed he could at most throw out three at a time. According to the classification in the Stone-Throwing Skill, although Hu Lin's techniques were skillful, he was far from having cultivated the Stone-Throwing Skill to its most

exquisite realm—an utter waste of such a strong Concealed Weapons Manual in his hands! If Hu Lin could precisely throw six Flying Locust Stones at a time, with stones raining down like locusts, even with my Initial Glimpse Realm Spiritual Crane Finger, I would definitely get hit a few times. Even if I could avoid vital parts, I would still get injured. If injured and then facing Hu Lin’s Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw, the outcome would be uncertain... This Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts within the Stone-Throwing Skill, as an Attack Technique, is indeed fierce! It even offers the chance for the few to defeat many, or the weak to overcome the strong! In between cultivating Cangsong Posture and Spiritual Crane Finger, I can train in it, giving myself an extremely sharp Attack Technique. When the Stone-Throwing Skill achieves Great Success, dealing with Wang Po, Zhang Wu, and the others, no matter how many people they have, I’ll have no worries. If I can unleash Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts and knock down six Black Tiger Gang Members at a time, how many Gang Members would they even need to be enough for me to fight?

At this thought, Lin Xuankong felt a strong sense of anticipation.

He focused his attention on his mind, and the next moment, the four violet-gold characters of [Vigorous in Old Age] flashed: [Stone-Throwing Skill: 1/12]

A slight smile appeared at the corner of Lin Xuankong’s mouth. *It seems the time for me to master the [Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts] technique isn’t far off!*

Closing his eyes slightly, he carefully recalled the contents of the Stone-Throwing Skill. He then circulated his Qi Blood to his right hand, which began to form various strange seals as he meticulously started his practice.

An incense stick's time later, Lin Xuankong picked up several small stones from the ground. After sensing their shape and center of gravity, he looked toward the large bluestone several zhang away.

WHISH! A stone flew from his hand, accurately landing in the finger hole the Young Lady had made.

WHISH! WHISH! WHISH! Several more stones flew out consecutively, all landing in the hole.

Lin Xuankong nodded slightly. *With the Entry Level of Pine Crane Longevity Technique and my Mid-grade of Transcendence, it's easy for me to achieve speed, accuracy, and ruthlessness when throwing single stones. However, what about two, three, or even four, five, or six stones?*

He looked at the sides of the large bluestone, which was about a foot square. There were several notches he had made with his Spiritual Crane Finger.

He picked up another handful of small stones, selected two, and, following the Stone-Throwing Skill techniques, threw them forcefully. The two stones separated, flying several zhang toward two different notches.

CLACK! CLACK! The two small stones hit the large bluestone simultaneously.

Unfortunately, only one small stone hit one of the notches; the other missed by four or five inches. *Throwing two stones simultaneously with one hand to hit two targets several feet apart is evidently not easy.*

Lin Xuankong quietly analyzed his recent mistake and, with another flick of his hand...

Chapter 16 - 15 The Prestige of a Powerful Martial Cultivator

In the blink of an eye, ten days had passed.

On this particular morning, Lin Xuankong had just finished practicing the Pine Heart Method and the Stone-Throwing Skill. He sat down at the wooden table in the outer room, intending to eat, when a sudden knock sounded at the door. Immediately after, a gentle and kind woman's voice called out, "Is Lan at home?"

Wang Po's voice!

Lin Xuankong's expression turned cold. He glanced at the bowls and chopsticks on the table.

Currently, there were two bowls and two pairs of chopsticks laid out. Lin Xuankong touched his own bowl, then looked at the one opposite. In the other bowl, only a little porridge remained at the bottom, appearing as if it had just been finished.

Lin Xuankong concealed the murderous intent in his eyes, feigned weakness, and dragged himself to the door.

CREAK...

The wooden door opened. Lin Xuankong coughed. "Are you looking for my wife?"

Wang Po glanced at him, her eyes darting about as she peered past him. When she saw the two bowls and two pairs of chopsticks on the table, a flicker of understanding crossed her eyes, and she retracted her gaze.

She flicked her handkerchief and said with a smile, "Oh, Brother Lin, of course, I have business! Your young lady promised to help embroider handkerchiefs, but ten days have passed, and I haven't seen a single one. The customers who pre-ordered them nearly tore down my shop! I'm worried sick! This time, I came over specifically bringing twenty taels of deposit for the young lady first! Ah, your young lady's craftsmanship is so good, of course I have to try and butter her up!"

After speaking, she waved the moneybag in her hand. "Brother Lin, please step aside. I need to go in and discuss with the young lady which flowers to embroider!"

Let her in?

Lin Xuankong glanced outside. Wang Po's sedan chair was parked by the street.

Besides two tall, sturdy sedan bearers, several Black Tiger Gang members stood not far off, each with a hand resting on the Hundred-refined Steel Saber at their waist.

Some of the nearby neighbors were stealing glances in their direction, whispering amongst themselves.

However, with Wang Po and the Black Tiger Gang members present, these neighbors kept their voices extremely low, and not a single one dared to point or stare openly.

He had planned to take this old pig-dog's life in the next two days, but she had unexpectedly delivered herself to his doorstep. However, too many people had seen this. Now was not a good time to act; it would be better to wait until night! If he couldn't kill her now, he absolutely mustn't let her in, lest he expose his strength and the fact that the young lady was not at home!

Standing squarely in the doorway, Lin Xuankong blocked Wang Po, who was trying to squeeze past. "My wife is in a bad mood these days. She's not inclined to embroider handkerchiefs, nor does she wish to see anyone. You should go back for now."

Wang Po's expression shifted, adopting a look of concern and worry.

"Oh dear, the young lady is troubled? Then I simply must see her, Brother Lin, to help you comfort and persuade her!"

With that, she wriggled her body, attempting to push her way into the wooden house.

Lin Xuankong's face darkened. He snapped, "I said my wife is in a bad mood and doesn't want to see anyone! Are you deaf?"

Wang Po, who had been all smiles, froze, looking at Lin Xuankong with some surprise.

This poor old man selling flatbread actually dares to be so rude to me? He dares to call me deaf in front of so many people! What I fear is Lii Xiaolan's martial prowess, not this useless old man before me. Does he have a single useful thing about him?

How dare such an old man scold me? Has he eaten a bear's heart and a leopard's gall?

Wang Po frowned at Lin Xuankong, her expression gradually turning sour.

However, before she could speak, one of the two strong sedan bearers, a red-faced man, started shouting abuse. "Old Dog Lin, you pauper, have you gone mad? Don't you know Aunt Wang's power and status? People of Aunt Wang's stature—even wealthy landlords have to call her Dry Mother Wang when they see her. How dare you curse Aunt Wang as deaf?"

As he was shouting, the other bearer, a yellow-faced man, also cursing, drew the saber hanging at his waist and advanced on Lin Xuankong. "If I don't cut out your old dog tongue today, my surname isn't Huang!"

Seeing this scene, most of the neighbors looked panicked. They hurriedly slammed their wooden doors shut, afraid they would be implicated if Old Lin were hacked to death by the bearers. A few others, however, widened their eyes in excitement, staring intently as if terrified of missing a thrilling moment.

The few Black Tiger Gang members watched with thoughtful expressions, their eyes flickering.

Lin Xuankong ignored the cursing bearer approaching him.

He suppressed the urge to strike immediately and stared at Wang Po. He even took a step closer to her. "I told you, my wife is in a bad mood. If she loses her temper, people might die. Many people might die!"

He paused, then enunciated each word clearly, "Boss Wang, aren't you afraid you'll be among the dead?"

Lin Xuankong was very certain that the old pig-dog would not turn hostile right now, because the young lady was 'at home'!

Hearing his words, Wang Po studied his composed expression carefully and suddenly felt a pang of unease.

Where did he get such confidence? Could Lii Xiaolan really have developed some feelings for this wretched old man? Otherwise, where did his confidence come from?

She hesitated, her gaze drifting back to the two sets of chopsticks and two bowls on the table.

Gritting her back teeth, she quickly retreated a few steps.

By now, the sedan bearer with the drawn saber had reached Wang Po's side, preparing to strike Lin Xuankong.

To the bearer's surprise, Wang Po turned and blocked him. Then, she raised her hand and delivered a rapid series of slaps—SLAP! SLAP! SLAP! SLAP!—across his face. "You cur! How dare you speak like that! Didn't you see I addressed him as Brother Lin? Is he someone you can insult? Get lost!"

The slaps were so heavy that several of the bearer's teeth were knocked out, flying some distance away. Blood gushed down, soaking a large patch of his chest.

Yet, the bearer dared not dodge, only stretching out his neck to receive the blows.

Only after Wang Po yelled at him to get lost did he stumble back to his position by the sedan chair.

Wang Po glanced up at the second floor of the Lin Family's wooden house, then, in an instant, her face was wreathed in smiles again. She chuckled at Lin Xuankong, "Oh dear, what a scene today! Brother Lin and the young lady are magnanimous, please bear with us. I'll teach this blind fool a proper lesson when I get back! Brother Lin, just remember to have the young lady help with the handkerchief embroidery!"

With that, she strode to the sedan chair and entered. Once inside, her smiling face instantly contorted.

An almost uncontrollable murderous intent gleamed in her eyes. I, Wang Qiluo, have navigated the Great Marsh Prefecture for so many years! When have I ever been so humiliated by a pauper like this! Lin Xuankong, you will die a miserable death! But before you die, I will make you watch with your own eyes how your wife is ravaged by others!

Soon, the group departed from Wutong Village.

From the wooden houses in Wutong Village, countless faces with peculiar expressions peeked out.

These neighbors looked from the retreating figures of Wang Po's group to the Lin Family's now-closed wooden house, utterly unable to comprehend what had just transpired.

That was Wang Po from Wang's Clothing Shop, a genuine Martial Cultivator in the Transcendence Realm, with connections to powerful figures in the Black Tiger Gang. How could such a Boss Wang seem to be fawning over this old flatbread seller?

Especially those neighbors who had openly or secretly ridiculed Lin Xuankong; they were now dumbfounded and uneasy, completely baffled as to how Old Lin had managed it.

Inside the Lin Family's wooden house, Lin Xuankong, having closed the door, sat at the table. He looked at the bowl and chopsticks at the opposite seat, a smile playing on his lips.

This was the deterrent power of his lady, a truly formidable Martial Cultivator. Merely a pair of bowls and chopsticks placed here, without her even showing her face, had scared off Wang Po and those Black Tiger Gang members! I wonder when I, too, will possess such prestige!

After finishing his meal and completing a round of Cangsong Posture training in the backyard of the old wooden house, Lin Xuankong sat beside the Old Willow Tree to rest for a while.

He frowned as he looked up at the second floor of his house. The young lady had been gone for ten days.

According to what she said when she left, if everything went smoothly, she should have returned by now. *Since she hasn't, she must have encountered some trouble or setback. I wonder if she's in danger...* Thinking of the young lady who loved to eat pies, brew medicine, serve soup, and had diligently taught him the Martial Dao for many days, a trace of worry appeared in Lin Xuankong's eyes.

Unfortunately, she didn't tell me where she was going when she left. Even if I wanted to find her, I wouldn't know where to start! She's so powerful, she could probably handle two hundred of me. She shouldn't be in any danger, right? She said

ten days at the earliest, half a month at the latest. Maybe she'll be back in another five days!

But do I still have five days to wait for her? Wang Po showing up today, insisting on seeing the young lady, is the most dangerous sign. It indicates that Zhang Wu and Wang Po might suspect the young lady isn't home! It might be because the young lady hasn't gone out recently, or perhaps they simply can't hold back any longer! I managed to deflect Wang Po's probing this time, but that doesn't mean their suspicions will be completely dispelled. If they just thought about it, they could come up with countless other ways to test if the young lady was truly at home! I must act immediately. Tonight, I'll eliminate that old pig-dog Wang Po first! My strength has progressed to this extent; it's enough to make a move now.

He then looked at the lines of large text in his mind.

Chapter 17 - 16: Stone-Throwing Skill Great Success, Wang's Clothing Shop

[Realm: Late Stage of Transcendence Layer One]

[Transcendent Qi Blood: 366/100,000]

[Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Initial Glimpse 67/80]

[Stone-Throwing Skill: 12/12]

After glancing at the few lines of large characters in his mind, Lin Xuankong stood up from under the Old Willow Tree and walked to the large bluestone in the courtyard. Circulating his Transcendent Qi Blood, he formed a sword finger with his right hand and stabbed out repeatedly.

CHH CHH CHH CHH!

The large bluestone trembled continuously, emitting a series of muffled thuds.

A moment later, six half-foot-deep finger holes appeared on the bluestone, neatly surrounding the hole Lii Xiaolan had made in the center.

What was slightly different from Lii Xiaolan's finger holes was that around the six Lin Xuankong had made, many cracks appeared. *This indicated that the power of his Spiritual Crane Finger was not yet fully condensed... However, they were already very close in quality to the finger holes Lii Xiaolan had casually made!*

Looking at those finger holes, a hint of satisfaction appeared in Lin Xuankong's eyes.

From the beginning of cultivating the Pine Skill to this very moment, only a few dozen days have passed, and I've already transformed from a dying old man into a powerful Martial Cultivator at the same realm as Boss Zhang Wu!

Since I already possess such strength, of course, I have to go and make them pay!

Killing intent surged in Lin Xuankong's eyes. He decisively turned and headed towards the wooden building.

As he reached the back door of the wooden building, his left hand flicked upwards.

Six shadows shot out from his hand, drawing six straight lines in the air, landing precisely in the six different finger holes on the large bluestone!

Stone-Throwing Skill, Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts—Accomplished!

Guangju Pavilion was the most well-known tavern on Shuinan Street.

The reason for its fame was, naturally, its delicious dishes and authentic wines. However, the most important reason was that the tavern's owner was Xuu

Zhongxiong. Boss Zhang Wu of the Black Tiger Gang controlled the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes. Among his most famous subordinates were Ma Xiong and Xuu Zhongxiong, the latter having a close relationship with Wang Po.

Unlike Ma Xiong, who, despite his mediocre martial prowess, relied on scheming to act as a White Paper Fan, Xuu Zhongxiong was famous because his strength was second only to Zhang Wu's, and he was Boss Zhang Wu's deadliest enforcer!

It was even said that while mingling in the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes, including places like Shuinan Street, you could offend Zhang Wu, but you must never offend Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong. Offending the lustful Zhang Wu could still be mitigated by sending over a beauty. However, Xuu Zhongxiong was not lustful; he only enjoyed killing and confiscating property!

Sitting in a corner on the first floor of Guangju Pavilion, Lin Xuankong watched the setting sun outside the window. He had naturally heard these rumors.

However, he hadn't come here just for Xuu Zhongxiong.

The window at this spot happened to offer a view of a three-story building across the street. A couplet was hung at its entrance: "Tailored with craftsmanship and unique ingenuity; watching the fleeting scenery, spring blooms naturally." Above the couplet was written: Wang's Clothing Shop.

For the past ten days or so, Lin Xuankong hadn't just been hiding at home. According to the information he had secretly gathered, Wang Po owned many residences, but her favorite was this one on Shuinan Street.

Her favorite food was the wine and dishes from Guangju Pavilion.

Her favorite spot was the Celestial Private Box on the first floor of Guangju Pavilion.

Retracting his gaze, Lin Xuankong, dressed in dark green clothes and wearing a veiled hat and a mask, put a peanut in his mouth. He chewed it with the two remaining molars on his left side, patiently waiting.

"Sir, sorry to bother you, but all the seats are full. There are two new guests who wish to share your table. Is that okay?" A waiter approached him, bowing.

Lin Xuankong frowned slightly and turned to look.

He saw two people standing behind the waiter: a man and a woman, both with swords at their waists. The man, who had three strands of a long beard, smiled and said, "Brother, we apologize for the inconvenience. How about this? We will cover your food and drink bill. I'll settle the tab later."

Sharing a table is no big deal. I won't be sitting here for long anyway. Once Wang Po and Xuu Zhongxiong arrive, it'll be time to act! Lin Xuankong nodded and said, "Fine!"

After they sat down, the bearded swordsman took a cup, filled it with wine, and raised it. "Meeting by chance is destiny. My name is Gu Beicheng, and I offer you a toast, elder brother. How should I address you?"

Lin Xuankong also raised his cup and said casually, "A wanderer, don't ask for my name. Just call me elder brother!"

The bearded swordsman drained his cup in one go and sighed. *This elder brother is so carefree, while I, Beicheng, am bound by conventions!*

Seeing his gentle nature, Lin Xuankong grew somewhat fond of him and also downed his drink.

The Female Swordsman beside them, however, frowned and glared at Lin Xuankong, her small mouth pouting slightly in a clear look of disdain.

Gu Beicheng and Lin Xuankong chatted casually for a while, finding some rapport.

Moments later, Gu Beicheng looked at Lin Xuankong, whose face was covered, and said in a low voice, "Elder brother, you are an interesting man, quite to my liking. So, I'll give you a heads-up: things might get a bit chaotic here soon. You'd better leave Guangju Pavilion early."

Lin Xuankong glanced at Gu Beicheng's Longsword, which was placed beside the table, a guess forming in his mind. Then, he smiled and said, "I love a good spectacle, the more chaotic the better! Besides, this is Guangju Pavilion, under Xuu Zhongxiong's protection. How chaotic could it possibly get?"

Hearing this, Gu Beicheng sighed and said no more, lowering his head to drink his wine.

The Female Swordsman, however, snorted. "Kind words can't persuade a stubborn fool. Senior brother, why are you wasting your breath on an old man?"

This Female Swordsman had apparently guessed Lin Xuankong's approximate age from his voice.

Lin Xuankong frowned slightly. Gu Beicheng, looking apologetic, said, "Elder brother, please don't mind. My junior sister is young and straightforward, and her tongue can be a bit sharp..."

Just then, a commotion erupted at the entrance of Guangju Pavilion.

Soon, more than a dozen burly Black Tiger Gang Members walked in. Leading them were Xuu Zhongxiong and Wang Po. Xuu Zhongxiong, dressed in black robes, stood nearly nine feet tall. He had broad shoulders, a thick waist, a square face, thick eyebrows, and leopard-like eyes, exuding a naturally intimidating aura.

The diners on the first floor were mostly wealthy businessmen and landlords from the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes, as only they had the financial means to dine there. Upon seeing Xuu Zhongxiong and Wang Po walk up, at least seventeen or eighteen of these affluent diners stood up, bowing to them from a distance.

The remaining diners did not stand to bow but lowered their voices and watched with expressions of awe.

Xuu Zhongxiong stood at the door of the first Celestial Private Box and returned the gestures to those who had stood. "Mr. Zhang, Landlord Li, Boss Zhao... everyone, please sit. Eat and drink well. I won't keep you company!"

"Brother Lu, you're too kind! Please, attend to your business!"

"Yes, you and Dry Mother Wang should head to your private box!"

The dozen or so people who were named all replied with beaming faces, yet none of them sat down.

It wasn't until Xuu Zhongxiong and Wang Po entered the private box that these individuals glanced around the dining hall with some pride before sitting down, looking quite pleased with themselves.

Their expressions seemed to say that being acknowledged by Xuu Zhongxiong, being called out by name, was a tremendous honor!

"Landlord Li, when did you get to know Mr. Lu of the Black Tiger Gang?"

"Boss Zhao, you know Mr. Lu? Could you put in a word for me? I've been having some issues with the street-cleaning fees for my shop recently..."

The well-dressed diners gathered around those dozen or so people, whispering amongst themselves.

As Lin Xuankong looked at that despicable Wang Po, he thought of all the disgusting things she had done and said, and recalled the scene when the Li Family's rice jar was uncovered. *That vile creature... After everything she's done...* Killing intent had already risen in his eyes.

However, he suppressed the urge to act immediately, thoughtfully looking at the two people sharing his table. Just as he had expected, the bearded man and the

Female Swordsman had both gripped the hilts of their Longswords, their faces frosty as they stared towards the first Celestial Private Box.

Chapter 18 - 17 Black Tiger Evil Claw, Yin Talisman Miracle Technique

These two are definitely here for Xuu Zhongxiong or Wang Po. Just as well, let them probe Wang Po's and Xuu Zhongxiong's depths, Lin Xuankong thought.

"Xuu Zhongxiong!"

As Lin Xuankong had expected, the long-bearded man grabbed his sword, suddenly rose, and bellowed.

His shout echoed, and the normally bustling main hall of Guangju Pavilion instantly fell silent.

In the spacious hall, dozens of tables were occupied by nearly a hundred richly dressed diners, all of whom stared in surprise at the long-bearded man and the female swordsman.

In their view, here in Guangju Pavilion, on Shuinan Street, throughout the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes, who would dare to call Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong by his full name?

Who, upon seeing Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong, wouldn't respectfully call him Brother Xuu or Master Xuu?

"Who is this, with such guts to call the Blood Tiger by name!"

"I guess it's a Martial Cultivator with some skill! But this is Guangju Pavilion, isn't he courting death!"

The crowd murmured, and a dozen or so timid wealthy merchants had already quietly risen and were sneaking out.

BANG!

The red sandalwood door of the Heaven Suite Number One swung open, and over a dozen grim-faced Black Tiger Gang members filed out.

Walking last was Xuu Zhongxiong. He scanned the room with his panther-like eyes, which finally settled on the long-bearded man and the female swordsman.

His eyes flashed a few times, then he suddenly laughed. "So, it's the remnants of the Gu Family. What, does joining the Yin Talisman Sect make you so special?"

Your Yin Talisman Sect's Master of the Great Marsh Hall was defeated by our Hall Master and obediently relinquished Qingshui Street. And you two small fry think you can stir up some trouble?"

Hearing this, the long-bearded man's brows tightened.

The female swordsman, however, spoke coldly, "Xuu Zhongxiong, today's matter has nothing to do with the Yin Talisman Sect. Three years ago, you sparred with my father. Even though my father had already admitted defeat, you continued to attack furiously, leading to his death. This debt must be settled. Today, my brother and I have come to 'spar' with you!"

As she spoke, she heavily emphasized the word 'spar,' her eyes filled with killing intent.

"Spar? I only know how to kill, not spar!" Xuu Zhongxiong laughed heartily, his face full of mockery.

"Who do you think you are, daring to spar with Brother Xuu? Come on, let's see how many moves you can take from me!" Among the dozen or so Black Tiger Gang members, one with a fleshy, fierce face pushed aside a nearby table and strode directly towards the female swordsman.

The nearby diners immediately scattered. Some ran to the far end of the hall, while others fled out of Guangju Pavilion's main doors, watching from outside.

Lin Xuankong, still chewing peanuts with his left molars, carefully observed the approaching Black Tiger Gang member.

This gang member's movements were swift, and his sharp fingernails were remarkably similar to those of Hu Lin, whom Lin Xuankong had fought before. He was clearly an expert at the early stage of the first layer of Transcendence.

Just over ten days ago, I would have needed several rounds to deal with such an opponent. But now, with the speed and sharpness of my Spiritual Crane Finger, one blow would be lethal. Still, I wonder how strong Gu Beicheng and his sister really are?

While he pondered, the female swordsman had already drawn her longsword. "Today, this is a matter solely between my Gu Family and Xuu Zhongxiong!" she cried. "If you insist on interfering, then don't blame my sword for being merciless!"

With that, her figure blurred as she charged forward. The Black Tiger Gang member sneered, his palms forming claws as he lunged at her.

The two clashed instantly.

Claw shadows danced like the wind, and sword light flashed.

In the blink of an eye, they had exchanged over twenty moves. As their figures intertwined, the female swordsman suddenly let out a muffled groan and stumbled back several steps.

Her face was deathly pale as she looked down at her abdomen. Her clothes there were torn, revealing four bloody gashes—the work of the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw.

The Black Tiger Gang member stood his ground, licking the blood from his right fingernails. He sneered, "This young lady's blood tastes pretty good! Too bad she's not strong enough!"

The female swordsman's face flushed crimson, her body trembling slightly from the intense pain.

Lin Xuankong, watching from his seat, frowned slightly. *This young woman has quite a temper, but her strength is lacking. Fortunately, that claw struck her abdomen. If it had been a few inches higher... If her brother is this weak too, they won't even get a chance to test Xuu Zhongxiong and Wang Po for me!*

At this moment, Gu Beicheng was already supporting his trembling sister.

After helping her to a nearby table, Gu Beicheng turned, his eyes glinting fiercely as he stared at the Black Tiger Gang member.

His Qi Blood surged, and in the next instant, the longsword in his hand emitted a sharp CRACKLE, arcs of bright, fine lightning dancing around the blade. It was an extremely wondrous sight!

Lin Xuankong's eyes lit up, a look of surprise on his face. *What kind of Martial Dao does this Gu Beicheng practice that allows him to command lightning? A Martial Dao like this, even if it can't compare to that young lady's 'Immortal Traces' that let her walk on water, is still astonishing enough!*

The previously arrogant Black Tiger Gang member's expression changed, a look of caution appearing on his face.

From among the diners hiding in the distance, someone exclaimed softly, "Lightning coiling around his body! That's the Yin Talisman Thunder of the Yin Talisman Sect!"

"It's said that among the countless disciples of the Yin Talisman Sect, fewer than forty can cultivate the Thunder Surrounding Body. Each one is a prodigy of exceptional talent!"

A genius disciple of the Yin Talisman Sect? The Black Tiger Gang member's face now showed a hint of dread.

Just then, Xuu Zhongxiong's voice cut in, "You're no match for him. Stand down!"

That Black Tiger Gang member visibly relaxed and decisively retreated.

Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong, however, advanced towards Gu Beicheng. His panther-like eyes widened, a flicker of excitement on his face. "To think you're a genius who cultivates Yin Talisman Thunder! Now I'm actually interested in killing you myself!"

With that, he shook his arms, and his palms turned into claws. The ten nails, which were already quite sharp, gradually elongated until they reached nearly half a foot in length.

This bizarre sight made it seem as if Xuu Zhongxiong had suddenly transformed into a Demon.

His Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw nails, now a chilling silver-white and exceptionally sharp, glinted under the hall's candlelight. They emanated a dazzling, imposing aura, no less impressive than Gu Beicheng's Yin Talisman Thunder!

"Three years, Blood Tiger! I've been painstakingly cultivating, waiting for this day for three whole years!"

Gu Beicheng roared, suddenly accelerating. His longsword, wreathed in lightning, thrust straight at Xuu Zhongxiong's throat!

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

The sharp sound of nails clashing against the longsword erupted.

Both men's Cultivation levels were nearing the late stage of their respective realms. During their exchange, their movements were incredibly swift, generating gusts of wind that made the candle flames in the hall flicker violently.

Nearby tables, chairs, and dishes shattered into pieces from the shockwaves of their half-foot-long claws and several-foot-long sword.

The diners watching the commotion had already fled Guangju Pavilion before the fight even began. Now, they observed from a safe distance, their voices buzzing with exclamations of awe.

Lin Xuankong, seated in a corner, watched the duel intently.

The Yin Talisman Thunder on Gu Beicheng's sword is quite remarkable. Each time it makes contact with Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong, arcs of lightning shoot from the blade onto Xuu Zhongxiong's body.

Each discharge of lightning makes Xuu Zhongxiong's attacks falter momentarily. After dozens, perhaps hundreds, of these lightning strikes, even Xuu Zhongxiong's hair is standing on end from the electricity, making him look quite disheveled!

The only pity is that either Gu Beicheng's Yin Talisman Thunder Cultivation isn't profound enough, or Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong is simply too tough. Those seemingly brilliant lightning strikes aren't causing enough damage to Xuu Zhongxiong in a short amount of time.

In contrast, Xuu Zhongxiong's Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw is vicious and sharp, each blow aimed at Gu Beicheng's vital points. It's forcing Gu Beicheng onto the defensive, preventing him from capitalizing on any openings created when Xuu Zhongxiong is momentarily stunned by the lightning!

Furthermore, Gu Beicheng's Yin Talisman Thunder seems to consume a tremendous amount of Qi Blood. After more than a hundred exchanges, his face has gradually turned pale, and the lightning coiling around his longsword has visibly thinned!

Seeing this, Lin Xuankong frowned slightly and discreetly reached for the leather pouch at his waist, filled with Flying Locust Stones.

Just as he was about to grab a handful, the situation on the battlefield abruptly changed.

The female swordsman's anxious cry reached Lin Xuankong's ears, "Brother!"

The two combatants simultaneously retreated two steps.

Gu Beicheng swayed. His left shoulder had been struck by a claw, severing his arm completely at the shoulder and exposing the white bone beneath. Blood gushed from the wound, and his face, already pale, became even more ashen.

However, lying on the ground near his feet were two severed arms. One was his own. The other, its fingernails nearly half a foot long, was unmistakably Xuu Zhongxiong's right arm!

In that last exchange, Gu Beicheng had deliberately taken a blow, enduring the mutilation of his own arm to seize the opportunity to sever Xuu Zhongxiong's right arm!

Lin Xuankong looked at Gu Beicheng, a silent admiration in his eyes. *This Gu Beicheng is truly ruthless! He broke the stalemate by sacrificing his left arm. His Yin Talisman Thunder technique is channeled through his right-hand sword, so he can still fight even with his left arm gone. Xuu Zhongxiong, on the other hand, relies heavily on both claws for his Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw; losing one arm will significantly impair him!*

At this, Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong stumbled back several steps, his face twitching. The Black Tiger Gang members quickly surrounded him, forming a protective circle.

Gu Beicheng, gripping his longsword in his right hand, pressed the flat of the blade against the stump of his left arm. Countless tiny arcs of lightning shot into the mangled flesh. The wound quickly blackened, and the profuse bleeding soon stopped.

Then, he raised his lightning-wreathed longsword and pointed it at the Black Tiger Gang members. "Today is a private matter between my Gu Family and Xuu Zhongxiong! Those who don't wish to die, get out of the way!"

The Black Tiger Gang members' eyes glinted fiercely, and they were about to charge forward as one. But Xuu Zhongxiong raised a hand, halting them. His panther-like eyes darted around before he retreated two more steps. Then, he called out towards the private suite, "Dry Mother Wang, Zhongxiong has disgraced you. I implore you to lend a hand!"

Lin Xuankong, who had been about to make his move, frowned upon hearing this. *What's this? Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong is asking her for help? ...Could that*

shameless old crone, Wang Po, actually be stronger than Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong, or even Gu Beicheng, the genius disciple of the Yin Talisman Sect?

"Oh dear, I'm over fifty years old, my bones have grown rusty. I just want to open a shop and earn some money!

This old body truly has no desire to meddle in such violent affairs. But, Gu Beicheng, oh, Gu Beicheng, how could you harm my most precious godson!"

Wang Po's voice, laced with an icy chill, drifted from the private suite. Then, clutching a handkerchief and swaying her hips, she emerged.

Chapter 19 - 18 Twin Vine Demon Pearl, Flying Rocks Demonstrate Power

Gu Beicheng stared at Wang Po, who had just walked out of the private room, and involuntarily tightened his grip on the longsword in his hand.

The Female Swordsman beside him said coldly, "Wang Qiluo, even though you are at the Late Stage of the first layer, you're over fifty years old and your Qi Blood is waning. You are no match for my brother. You'd better not get involved in this mess!"

Wang Po completely ignored the Female Swordsman.

She stared at Gu Beicheng with a face full of cold hostility.

Having roamed the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes for many years, she had never officially joined the Black Tiger Gang. However, this Xuu Zhongxiong was her carefully nurtured protege, in whom she had invested countless resources. As her talented godson Xuu Zhongxiong's fame grew, he became her solid support for the future. But now that someone had severed his arm, she naturally harbored deep resentment!

Gu Beixiong tightened his grip on the longsword, his face radiating fighting spirit. He stepped forward. "Wang Qiluo, if you want to fight, then let's fight!"

Wang Po glanced at him and sneered, "You severed my godson's arm; now repay with your head!"

After saying that, she reached into her sleeve, taking out a spherical bead the size of a red date and grasping it in her hand. Immediately, her entire body's Qi Blood surged, channeling into the bead.

Seeing this, Lin Xuankong, who was sitting in a corner, felt his gaze shift as he touched the walnut-sized Manluo Demon Pearl in his bosom.

The bead Wang Po brought out flickered with a dark light, and tiny vines seemed to float inside it. Although that Demon Pearl couldn't compare to the Manluo Demon Pearl given to him by the Young Lady, it still exuded intense Demon Qi, creating an obvious sense of oppression and danger.

She also possesses a Demon Pearl? Lin Xuankong's eyes flickered.

Witnessing this as well, Gu Beixiong's face changed dramatically. The fighting spirit on his face completely vanished, and he halted abruptly. "The Twin Vine Demon Pearl! The Twin Vine Demon Pearl from the Liang City auction, fought over by countless Martial Cultivators—it actually fell into your hands!"

Before he could finish speaking, he had already retreated violently, pulling his sister towards the entrance of Guangju Pavilion.

"A bit perceptive, but it's too late!"

Wang Po snorted coldly, her eyes fixed on the escaping Gu Beicheng.

Suddenly, black smoke rose from the ground in front of Gu Beicheng.

Two vines as thick as a child's arm burst through the marble floor of Guangju Pavilion, rapidly wrapping around the legs of Gu Beicheng and the Female Swordsman, swiftly tightening and spreading over their bodies.

The Female Swordsman cried out in alarm, her face filled with horror as she swung her sword to cut at the vines spreading over her body. Unfortunately, she was only at the Early Stage of the first layer of Transcendence and her power was too limited. A few strikes only left some sword marks on the black vines; she couldn't even sever them!

In the blink of an eye, coarse vines had wrapped all over the Female Swordsman's body, leaving only her terror-filled face exposed. The vines tightened around her, and continuous muffled sounds of breaking bones emanated from her body, followed by horrifying screams from her mouth.

His eyes looking as if they were about to crack, Gu Beicheng frantically mobilized his Qi Blood, slashing at the vines with his lightning-wreathed longsword. Unfortunately, although his continuous attacks managed to sever some vines, those emerging from the ground seemed endless. They wrapped tightly around his legs, leaving him unable to break free, let alone save his sister who was about to perish beside him!

Wang Po continued to channel her Qi Blood, gave the two a cold look, then shouted at the somewhat terrified and dumbfounded Black Tiger Gang members, "Kill Gu Beicheng!"

The dozen or so Black Tiger Gang members sensed the intimidating Demon Qi emanating from the two Demon Vines and hesitated to approach. But with Xuu

Zhongxiong's godmother giving the order, how could they not comply? They nervously approached Gu Beicheng.

These Black Tiger Gang members, who had been practicing Martial Cultivation for years, were terrified facing the Demon Vines driven by the Demon Pearl. Naturally, the onlookers outside had wide eyes filled with horror.

"Is that the legendary invaluable Demon Pearl?"

"It's said even High Realm Martial Cultivators may not have one, and Aunt Wang actually possesses a Demon Pearl!"

"The power of the Demon Vines driven by the Demon Pearl is too strong. If they wrapped around an ordinary person, their intestines would probably be squeezed out!"

They glanced at the fearsome, writhing Demon Vines and then at the Demon Pearl in Wang Po's hand, feeling that tonight was truly an eye-opener, having actually witnessed the invaluable Demon Pearl firsthand!

I spent decades of savings to buy this Twin Vine Demon Pearl. If Zhongxiong weren't in danger and I wasn't outmatched by Gu Beicheng's Yin Talisman Thunder, I would never have used it! After this battle, now that the Twin Vine Demon Pearl has been exposed, how can I, someone at only the first layer of Transcendence, possibly keep it? After dealing with Gu Beicheng tonight, I'll have to immediately present the Twin

Vine Demon Pearl to Hall Master Wu of the Black Tiger Gang to curry favor and save my own life! Wang Po thought, listening to the distant murmur of the crowd, her heart filled with hatred towards Gu Beicheng.

As Wang Po's thoughts raced, the Black Tiger Gang members had already closed in on Gu Beicheng. They shouted and swung their blades.

Gu Beicheng felt a tinge of despair. *With so many Black Tiger Gang elites attacking at once, even if I weren't trapped, it would take considerable effort to escape. Now, trapped by the Demon Vines, unable to dodge or maneuver, I have no chance of survival!*

Suddenly, SWISH SWISH SWISH SWISH SWISH!

A series of whooshing sounds broke the air as over a dozen hard Flying Locust Stones shot out, striking the Black Tiger Gang members who were wielding their knives. All of them were hit. One was struck on the forehead and immediately knocked unconscious. Another was hit in the throat, their throat bone shattering instantly. Yet another was hit in the lower back, their liver and kidneys rupturing, causing them to collapse. In the blink of an eye, all dozen or so Black Tiger Gang members were down. Seven or eight died instantly, four or five were unconscious, and the rest writhed on the ground in pain. Even the elite Gang Member at the first layer of Transcendence, who had previously defeated the Female Swordsman, was struck in the back of the head and killed instantly!

Lin Xuankong stood up while chewing on peanuts. *He rescued Gu Beicheng not because he had promised to pay for the meal... Rescuing Gu Beicheng is partly to create a diversion, and partly because I understand a simple principle: the enemy of*

my enemy has the potential to become my friend! Since I've already started opposing the Black Tiger Gang, the Yin Talisman Sect, which frequently clashes with them, can definitely be of assistance!

At this moment, aside from the few Black Tiger Gang members moaning and writhing in pain, everyone else at the scene stared in surprise at Lin Xuankong, who had suddenly acted. It was only then that most people noticed a figure wearing a conical hat lurking in the shadowy corner of the bustling Guangju Pavilion! *And this Conical Hat Guest took down over a dozen elite Black Tiger Gang members with just a flick of his hand?*

"Trying to kill a disciple of our Yin Talisman Sect? It's not that easy!"

Lin Xuankong stood up, circulated his Qi Blood to his throat, and shouted in a raspy voice completely different from his own.

At this moment, Xuu Zhongxiong, who had just finished bandaging his left shoulder, saw the dozen of his capable subordinates falling to the ground in the blink of an eye. A deep look of apprehension appeared on his face.

His leopard eyes flickered a few times and he shouted, "You and Gu Beicheng killed so many brothers of my Black Tiger Gang. Are you trying to provoke a war between the Black Tiger Gang and the Yin Talisman Sect?"

Wang Po, who was infusing Qi Blood into the Demon Pearl, looked a bit pale due to the rapid consumption of Qi Blood. Hearing Xuu Zhongxiong's words, Wang Po glared at her godson. "The people are already dead. Why waste time talking to him? You go deal with Gu Beicheng, I'll handle this skulking coward!"

Xuu Zhongxiong nodded, a fierce look flashing in his eyes. He channeled all his Qi Blood and quickly charged towards Gu Beicheng, who was still struggling with the Demon Vines.

At that moment, urged by Wang Po, the vines entangling the Female Swordsman suddenly disappeared. Her body went limp and collapsed to the ground, her entire skeleton shattered, reduced to a bloody pulp. She was beyond dead!

At Lin Xuankong's feet, a large amount of black smoke rose instantly. The floor shattered with a boom, and thick vines entangled his legs at a horrifying speed!

At the same time, Xuu Zhongxiong, who had been charging towards Gu Beicheng, suddenly roared, spun around, and lunged at Lin Xuankong with his Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw!

The pair coordinated seamlessly, understanding each other's intent with a mere glance. This feint was clearly aimed at first eliminating Lin Xuankong, who was remarkably skilled with concealed weapons!

At this moment, Xuu Zhongxiong roared and charged, while the Demon Vines on the ground grew and constricted. Seeing this, the distant onlookers couldn't help but shake their heads. *This guy in the conical hat, despite his terrifyingly impressive Concealed Weapon Technique, is still doomed against the legendary and dreadful Demon Pearl!*

The speed of these Demon Vines is indeed too fast to evade with my Late Stage first layer Transcendence strength. But I never intended to dodge anyway! Lin Xuankong thought, a slight raise of his eyebrow the only sign of his reaction to being entangled.

The Qi Blood of his Pine Crane Longevity Technique surged wildly as his left fingers jabbed repeatedly at the Demon Vines coiling towards his abdomen. Simultaneously, his right hand flicked rapidly, sending a barrage of shadowy projectiles whistling through the air towards the approaching Xuu Zhongxiong!

Seeing the concealed weapons looming everywhere, each aimed at his vitals, Xuu Zhongxiong's expression changed slightly. His attack hesitated as he twisted to evade, using the Black Tiger Shattering Golden Claw to constantly block.

「Inside Guangju Pavilion,」

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

The sound of Flying Locust Stones shattering filled the air, far denser than New Year's firecrackers!

A breath later, the sound abruptly stopped.

Xuu Zhongxiong, who had just been overwhelmingly powerful, froze and fell backward. His eyes, Adam's apple, temples, chest, and knees were all shattered by Flying Locust Stones!

Xuu Zhongxiong—who once menaced the Four Streets and Thirty Lanes, whose strength was second only to Boss Zhang Wu, and who had fought Gu Beicheng, the genius of the Yin Talisman Sect, to a standstill for over a hundred rounds—had lasted only a single breath under the assault of the Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts...

The most terrifying part was that this Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts technique was executed single-handedly by Lin Xuankong!

Chapter 20 - 19: The Death of Wang Po, Acquisition of the Demon Pearl

Silence reigned both inside and outside the Guangju Pavilion. The diners outside, who had been gossiping and convinced the Conical Hat Guest was dead, now stared at Lin Xuankong in his conical hat as if he were a Demon.

Even Gu Beicheng, who was hacking at the Demon Vine, was momentarily distracted by the sight. Consequently, the Demon Vine nearly ensnared his chest and abdomen. He quickly refocused and resumed his battle with the Demon Vine.

Lin Xuankong relentlessly attacked the Demon Vine with his Spiritual Crane Finger.

With a single throw of the Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts, six hits out of six, Xuu Zhongxiong only lasted for a single breath. He truly lived up to his name as the Blood Tiger!

A piercing shriek suddenly tore through the air.

"Zhongxiong! Zhongxiong!"

Seeing Xuu Zhongxiong fall, motionless and clearly dead, Wang Po finally reacted, her disbelief palpable. She shrieked, her face contorted with murderous intent, "You dare kill my son Zhongxiong! No matter who you are, I'll flay you alive!"

Lin Xuankong gazed at the vile old hag who treated human life as worthless, his own eyes burning with equal killing intent.

"If you want to kill me, then come. Why shout so loudly?"

"You claim you want to kill me, yet your knees are bent, and your eyes betray fear. Are you preparing to flee?"

"Is it because the Demon Pearl has consumed too much of your Qi Blood? Can you no longer sustain it, old sow?"

Before he could finish, the Demon Vine binding him and Gu Beicheng abruptly shuddered, then dissolved into black smoke and vanished. Wang Po, who had just been screaming about flaying Lin Xuankong alive, saw her expression shift. She pushed off with her legs and retreated rapidly.

Lin Xuankong was correct. As Lii Xiaolan had said, the Demon Pearl consumed a vast amount of Qi Blood; ordinary first-layer Transcendence Martial Cultivators couldn't sustain it for long.

Now, Wang Po, nearly seventy percent of her Qi Blood depleted by the Demon Pearl, continued her backward retreat. Despite being a Late Stage first-layer cultivator, stronger than Xuu Zhongxiong, she didn't dare flee towards the Guangju Pavilion's entrance. Lin Xuankong's Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts had terrified her.

She frantically channeled her Qi Blood, hurtling towards the private room behind her, intending to crash through it and escape via the wall.

Unfortunately, though she retreated with the speed of a galloping horse, she couldn't outrun Lin Xuankong's Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts!

Inside the Guangju Pavilion, the intense sound of objects slicing through the air erupted once more. Countless shadowy projectiles shot from Lin Xuankong's hands, hurtling towards Wang Po.

Half a breath later, Wang Po, having retreated several zhang and crashed into the private room, went rigid and collapsed limply.

Her elbows, shoulders, abdomen, and knees were all struck by Flying Locust Stones. Bones shattered, flesh tore, and blood gushed forth. One Flying Locust Stone, arcing through the air, slammed into her mouth, shattering her teeth and mangling her tongue.

Grievously wounded, Wang Po lay on the ground, wailing in agony. Lin Xuankong stepped into the ravaged private room. He stood over Wang Po and said coldly,

"You must be desperate to know who I am. And I very much want you to know!"

With that, he lifted the black veil on his conical hat and revealed a corner of his mask.

"NGH... NGH... NGH..." Wang Po, on the verge of death, struggled to gaze at the face before her.

When she clearly saw Lin Xuankong's face, her features twisted violently. The expression in her eyes shifted rapidly from disbelief to utter astonishment, then to sheer terror, and finally settled into a profound, venomous hatred.

She mustered her last vestiges of Qi Blood, channeling them to her throat, desperate to scream the name of the man before her. She wanted the news to spread, for the Black Tiger Gang to avenge Zhongxiong and herself. But her ruined tongue could only produce garbled, incoherent whimpers.

"This stone is for the brother you murdered in the vat!"

Lin Xuankong flicked a Flying Locust Stone, striking Wang Po.

"This stone is for the young man you imprisoned for a day and a night!"

Another Flying Locust Stone struck Wang Po.

"This stone is for my wife!"

"This stone is for me!"

"And this stone is a gift for you," Lin Xuankong continued, his voice cold, "for all the innocent women you abducted and tormented!"

With that said, Lin Xuankong ignored Wang Qiluo, who was succumbing to death consumed by hatred. He waved his hand, picking up the Twin Vine Demon Pearl lying nearby. He left the private room, swiftly dispatched the remaining Black Tiger Gang remnants, and quickly collected the silver taels from the bodies of Blood Tiger Xuu Zhongxiong and the dozen or so others. Then, he turned and walked towards the entrance.

By now, the onlookers outside had long since fled. They hadn't fled when Xuu Zhongxiong fought Gu Beicheng. They hadn't fled when Wang Po produced the Twin Vine Demon Pearl. But after witnessing Lin Xuankong's terrifying Concealed Weapon Technique, not a single one dared to remain. They knew that even Xuu Zhongxiong and Wang Po had only withstood it for a mere breath. If this mysterious man in the conical hat decided to silence witnesses, none of them would survive.

"Thank you, Senior, for saving my life. I, Beicheng, am eternally grateful," Gu Beicheng said. "Might I ask for Senior's name? I will surely repay this debt in the future!"

Gu Beicheng wrapped his sister's corpse in his outer coat and looked at Lin Xuankong, a trace of fear on his face. He knew he was no match for the formidable man in the conical hat before him. This Martial Cultivator didn't seem to be any Steward from the Yin Talisman Sect, which made Gu Beicheng extremely apprehensive. Thus, he had expressed his gratitude without hesitation.

"A wanderer at the ends of the earth; no need to ask my name."

Lin Xuankong strode past the entrance and leaped away.

...

Standing on the rooftop of his wooden house, Lin Xuankong gazed towards Shuinan Street.

Soon after he returned home, the unmistakable sounds of fierce battle—shouts and cries of killing—erupted from the direction of Shuinan Street. Countless Gang Members of the Black Tiger Gang's Great Marsh Hall and disciples from the Yin Talisman Sect were converging on Shuinan Street. Torches flickered along the thoroughfare, and innumerable figures darted between the wooden buildings.

The Black Tiger Gang and the Yin Talisman Sect had been feuding over territory for years, their enmity already deeply entrenched. Gu Beicheng's challenge to

Blood Tiger, along with the deaths of Blood Tiger and Gu Beicheng's sister, was merely the spark that ignited the flames. Even if Gu Beicheng's sister and Xuu Zhongxiong hadn't died today, the deaths of a Gu Nancheng or a Xuu Zhongci tomorrow would have inevitably triggered this massive conflict.

How many arrogant Martial Cultivators, once so proud and mighty, will lose their lives tonight? And Zhang Wu, who's always scheming to kill me... will he die in this war?

Lin Xuankong watched for a while longer before leaping down from the wooden building.

Entering the outer room, he examined the silver taels on the table by the light of the oil lamp.

Xuu Zhongxiong and Wang Qiluo, notorious for their greed, had clearly hoarded more wealth than Ma Xiong. The silver they carried on them alone amounted to over two hundred taels. Added to what he'd taken from Ma Xiong, Lin Xuankong now possessed more than three hundred silver taels.

So much money! Selling sesame seed cakes for a hundred years wouldn't earn me this much!

With this much silver, I can afford a daily bowl of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup for over half a year. I shouldn't have to worry about money for a long time!

When my Young Lady returns, I can take her to the old man who sells meat pies. She can eat to her heart's content! That little glutton, her belly will be round even if she only takes one bite of each pie!

Of course, the most delightful acquisition for Lin Xuankong was Wang Qiluo's Twin Vine Demon Pearl!

According to Gu Beicheng, this Twin Vine Demon Pearl once appeared at an auction in Liang City, inciting countless Martial Cultivators to bid for it. Who would have guessed that such a precious Demon Pearl would fall into the hands of an old woman like Wang Qiluo, who wasn't even part of a gang!

Lin Xuankong clutched the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, his eyes shining brightly.

He had already tested the Twin Vine Demon Pearl. Just as he'd anticipated, when activated, the Demon Vines moved with incredible speed, perfectly obeying his will.

Never mind a first-layer Transcendence cultivator; even those at the Second Layer or Third Layer would likely fail to evade its sudden entanglement. And as long as he had sufficient Qi Blood, the Demon Vines could proliferate almost endlessly!

As for Qi Blood consumption...

Compared to the Manluo Demon Pearl, which consumed nearly ten points of Qi Blood per breath, the Twin Vine Demon Pearl used about three points per breath. This was still a substantial amount.

An ordinary Martial Cultivator, like Wang Po—a Late Stage first-layer cultivator—could only sustain it for seven or eight breaths before exhausting all their Qi Blood!

However, his Life Plate possessed a Qi Blood storage ability.

[Transcendent Qi Blood: 386/100,000]

With this much Qi Blood, he could sustain the Twin Vine Demon Pearl for over a hundred breaths!

Being able to activate the Twin Vine Demon Pearl for so long meant that even facing foes at the Second Layer or Third Layer of Transcendence might not be too dangerous! He could first use the Demon Vines for control, then bombard the 'stationary target' remotely with the Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts. Even if he couldn't kill Second Layer or Third Layer experts, he could certainly leave them battered and humiliated!

If Zhang Wu didn't die in this conflict, how would he react when he eventually encountered my Twin Vine Demon Pearl and Heaven-Covering Flying Locusts?

