

A Warrior Undefeatable 5891-5900

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"Who is it?" Vermilion Demon Lord asked wearily.

"It's me, Lindsay."

Her voice chimed clear through the door, yet beneath the brightness hid exhaustion and a brittle thread of worry.

Vermilion swung the door wide. Lindsay stepped in, a tray cradled in her hands.

Resting on the tray were several ornate emerald vials and a clutch of scarlet spirit fruits.

The moment her gaze found Jared sitting upright, relief blossomed across her tired face. "You're awake!"

Lindsay hurried across the room and set the tray upon the low table. "How do you feel? Does the pain still bite? I brought our best Crimson Flame Pills, and these Earthfire Spirit Fruits. They'll help rebuild your strength."

Jared noticed the swollen redness around her eyes and the pallor beneath them. Warmth stirred in his chest. "Thank you, Your Highness. The wounds are heavy, yet still bearable."

"No more titles," she murmured. "Just call me Lindsay."

Lindsay drew a shaky breath, shoulders trembling. "Jared, I thank you, truly. If not for you, none of us would have returned. Lyndon, Ethan, and so many of our people from Earthfire Pavilion fell. It was my foolish insistence on going with you."

Her words made Jared think of Lizbeth.

Faces of countless women flickered through his memory, swift as sparks across embers.

Yet the images vanished as quickly as they came. Now was no time for tender memories.

Jared offered a faint smile. "You need not blame yourself, Your Highness. Malevolent Path Hall planned this long ago. Even if you had stayed behind, they would have struck elsewhere. What matters now is finding the traitor and avenging the fallen."

Lindsay nodded hard, dashing a tear from her cheek. "Father is investigating with all his strength. But... about Elliot..."

The sentence died. Doubt clouded her eyes, yet refusal to believe sealed her lips.

Jared met her gaze, then steered the conversation away. "Your Highness, I have a favor to ask."

"Name it! If it's within my power, I'll do it," Lindsay said.

"I need a place utterly secluded, where no one will disturb me while I heal. This chamber is safe enough, but still has people passing by. And some of my recovery techniques are best kept from prying eyes," Jared explained.

Lindsay blinked, then understanding lit her face.

Jared had the Golden Dragon Bloodline and other secret techniques.

Lindsay bit her lip to think. Then, she lit up and said, "I have a place in mind! It's the forbidden ground. Aside from father and a few elders, no one can enter. I can bring you there."

"A forbidden ground?" Vermilion Demon Lord echoed.

"Is that okay?" he pressed. "If Mr. Ignatius finds out, Your Highness will be in trouble."

"I don't care!" Lindsay snapped.

"Jared pulled us back from the brink. Even Father would honor that debt. The forbidden ground stays empty year-round. It's perfect for healing unseen."

Jared traded a glance with Vermilion and nodded. "Thank you, Your Highness." "Let's go now. It's midnight. The guards are fewer. I'm familiar with the route to the forbidden ground. We can avoid the guards," Lindsay suggested.

From her satchel, she produced a black cloak and pressed it into Jared's hands. "Wear this. It can hide your aura."

Lindsay led Jared and Vermilion out of the chamber. They avoided the guards and headed for the deep mountains.

The land behind the Earthfire Pavilion was a crimson mountain range with a restriction spell.

The deeper the mountains, the higher the temperature. The air was filled with pure fire-type spiritual energy.

Sometimes people could find red crystals emitting a warm glow.

"That's the entrance to the forbidden ground," Lindsay said while pointing at a wall.

"This place has many illusion and defensive arrays. Only the core members of the Earthfire Pavilion know the way to enter the forbidden ground."

Then, Lindsay formed hand seals and chanted spells. Crimson runes flowed from her fingers toward the wall.

The wall rippled and revealed a cave.

Inside, a stairway curved downward, its walls studded with faintly glowing rubicund crystals that offered just enough light to show the steps.

"Follow me." Lindsay descended first.

Jared and Vermilion followed.

After entering the cave, the wall closed and blocked the sound from outside.

The cave was very quiet. They could only hear their footsteps.

The stone staircase spiraled downward. The lower they went, the hotter they felt.

After fifteen minutes, they reached a huge underground cave.

It was thirty feet high and a hundred feet wide.

A lava pool stood at the center of the cave. The lava flowed slowly, emitting hot gases and pure fire-type spiritual energy.

Rare fire-type spiritual plant and medicine grew around the lava pool. Some of them had lived up to a thousand years.

The cave walls had crimson crystals carved in, making the cave looked red.

"This is the forbidden ground, called the Earth Fire Core. My ancestors learned fire techniques and

established the Earthfire Pavilionet

The fire type spiritual energy here is ahundred times denser than n other places. It's a good place to cultivate fire techniques," Lindsay explained.

"However, the temperature here is too high. Normal cultivators can't withstand the heat. Jared, you're not recovered. Can you handle it?"

Jared felt the thick fire-type spiritual

energy in the air. His chaotic celestial energy had started to absorb the spiritual energy and turned it into celestial energy to repair his meridians.

"It suits me perfectly. Thank you, Your Highness," he said.

"I told you—just call me Lindsay." She waved the formality away.

"Stay here and heal. I'll bring pills and food on a schedule. For now, I won't tell Father. When you've recovered, we'll think about it later."

"Your Highness' kindness will not be forgotten." Jared bowed deeply.

A soft flush crept across Lindsay's cheeks. "Then rest well. I'll check on you tomorrow," she replied shyly.

She turned and ascended the stone staircase.

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Vermilion Demon Lord clicked his tongue as Lindsay's slim silhouette melted into the seething red haze at the tunnel's far end. "That girl thinks the world of you," he murmured, amused. "She even went so far as to smuggle you into a forbidden area."

Jared offered no reply. He simply folded his legs at the very rim of the magma pool, its molten glare rippling across his face like living bronze.

From that vantage, he felt the chamber breathe. Fire spiritual energy, thicker than molten gold, swirled in every breath, laced with an ancient, pristine strand of the Law of Fire—perfect for mending wounds and refining power.

"Mr. Vermilion, I intend to enter the Pentacarna Tower to heal my wounds. One hundred days within the tower is equivalent to one day outside. Therefore, you'll only need to give me a few days for me to fully heal," he said before drawing the Pentacarna Tower from his sleeve. "You may stand guard outside or join me within to work on your cultivation."

Vermilion Demon Lord shook his head, scarlet locks swaying like embers. "My body is fine. I'll keep watch out here and commune with the Law of Fire."

Jared nodded and flicked the tower skyward. The artifact met the heated air, unfurled, and swelled to a thirty-foot tower that hovered directly above the magma's roiling skin.

Its weathered stone exhaled a primeval aura that resonated with the cave's unseen threads of the Law of Fire.

Drawing a steady breath, Jared stepped through the entrance and vanished into the tower's depths. Inside stretched a vast realm where time crawled, a cosmos wholly distinct from the outer world.

He reached the cultivation chamber, crossed his legs, then produced the Ninefold Scarlet Flame Pill and the Earthfire Spirit Fruit Lindsay had given him, ready to pour everything into recovery.

Chaotic celestial energy began to circulate, like rain reviving a drought-stricken riverbed. Jared's Golden Dragon Bloodline awakened of its own accord, ribbons of gilded vitality weaving through torn meridians, knitting flesh and spirit alike.

The pill dissolved the instant it touched his tongue, releasing a heat both fierce and gentle that surged into every bone. Meanwhile, the Earthfire Spirit Fruit's pure fire essence folded into that current, merging with the chaos and hastening the mend.

Time flowed in silence within the tower's walls.

One day soon became three in the outside world, yet inside the tower, three hundred days had unfurled like the pages of a well-read chronicle.

Jared's wounds healed with breathtaking speed: shattered channels re-fused, cracked bones joined seamlessly, and the well of lost blood refilled, richer than before.

The aura around him settled-darker, deeper, like a volcano finally finding its core.

Finally, Jared exhaled, eyelids lifting. For an instant, bright sparks danced in his pupils before vanishing.

Power coursed beneath his skin, and a thin smile curved his mouth. "My wounds are gone, and my cultivation has advanced. Looks like the Heart of Earthfire truly deserves its legend."

With that, he rose, left the cultivation chamber, and strode toward the tower's exit.

Yet the very instant his foot crossed the threshold, the cavern beyond shuddered. Something-vast and unseen-twisted in the darkness. A sudden anomaly had erupted within the cave.

The magma pool shuddered like a beast awakened from nightmare. Scarlet columns burst skyward, then folded inward until they sculpted a towering shadow of molten flame.

Its body was nothing but seething fire and liquid stone. No face-only a pair of eyes, twin suns of molten gold that blazed with an age-old, sovereign menace.

At that very heartbeat, the entire cavern's Law of Fire seemed to bend the knee, rushing toward the apparition in silent worship.

Jared's pupils shrank to pinpoints. "What is that?"

The fiery apparition began to speak, his voice ancient and far-reaching,

as if he had traveled through countless ages of time. "Ah... It's the PentaCarna Tower. I never imagined the dying embers of my soul would behold this legendary item again. Young man, you carry the Golden Dragon Bloodline and have the Pentacarna Tower in your hand, yet you sought refuge in the tower to tend to your injuries. Looks like the outside world still knows no peace, huh?"

His gaze settled on Chen Ping, his golden, flame-like eyes seemingly able to see through all things.

Every warning bell inside Jared screamed. Chaotic celestial energy flooded his meridians, and the Dragonslayer Sword snapped into his grasp. "Who are you?" Flames rippled into a weary laugh-part scorn, part sorrow. "Who am I? Merely a ghost who should have perished long ago, clinging to the final spark. You may call me Great Elder Gerald Earthfire."

"Great Elder Gerald Earthfire?" Jared replied as he furrowed his brows. "Founder of the Earthfire Pavilion?"

Gerald's fiery apparition quivered,

memory stirring embers into brief frenzy. "Indeed. The Earthfire Pavilion was founded by me. Unfortunately, I was far too arrogant back then-I believed I could suppress the Earthcore Demonic Flame with my own strength alone. In the end, my physical body was destroyed, my divine soul severely wounded. All that remains is this wisp of a remnant soul, hiding within the Heart of Earthfire, barely clinging to existence."

With that, his burning gaze returned to the Pentacarna Tower. "However, fate seems to have taken pity on me by letting the Pentacarna Tower appear before my eyes.

Young man, do you think you can let me use it?"

Jared's gaze went icy. "Planning to steal it, sir?"

Gerald shook his head. "Steal? Look at me. I am merely a soul remnant—one thousandth the strength I once commanded. Theft is beyond me. That said... How about we do a trade?"

"What kind of trade are we talking about?"

"I give you the precise location of the Jadeheart Marrow. In return, you let me use the tower to temper my soul and rebuild my flesh. You're desperately in need of the Jadeheart Marrow, aren't you?"

A jolt shot through Jared's chest.

Jadeheart Marrow... That's my main goal of coming to level eleven! But I've never mentioned that here before, so how does this person know what I desire?

Despite that, he steadied his voice. "You truly know where the Jadeheart Marrow lies?"

"Of course," Gerald answered, his tone carrying the effortless surety of

a map etched into memory. "In all of level eleven, no one knows the Chthonic Abyss better than I. The Jadeheart Marrow pulses within the

Magma Heart at its deepest throat,

guarded by Earthcore Demonic Flame, which, unfortunately, is

untouchable to ordinary cultivators.

However, with my guidance, your Golden Dragon Bloodline, and the Pentacarna Tower, we may have a solid chance at this."

Jared hesitated. "And why should I trust you?"

"Of course, you are free not to," Gerald replied plainly. "But this is the only chance you will ever get. As you know, Jadeheart Marrow produces one drop every ten millennia. The Earthfire Pavilion may have some information on it, but they will never find its exact location. Besides, do you truly believe Ignatius Flameheart would hand such valuable information to an outsider he barely trusts?"

The words landed where Jared's armor was thinnest. Doubt pricked like embers under the nail.

Yes-Earthfire Pavilion might hold clues, but they would never part with them for love nor mercy.

Meanwhile, that single drop meant life or death for the woman the Vermilion Demon Lord treasured above all, and waiting was a luxury the latter no longer possessed.

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Jared drew a steadying breath, the molten air around the Heart of Earthfire rippling against his skin. "What would you need the Pentacarna Tower for?"

Gerald's eyelids lowered, as though he could already feel veins and sinew reforming around the scraps of his spirit. "To condense my soul and to resculpt my physical body. My soul remnant is too frail to stray beyond the Heart of Earthfire. But inside the tower—where time crawls, and the laws bend—I can forge a solid soul, seize a new vessel, or remake a physical body through a secret technique."

A faint, humorless smile cracked the elder's lips. "Don't worry. I will not use your magical item for free. In addition to the coordinates of the Jadeheart Marrow, I will impart to you the complete Earthfire True Scripture—and help reveal the traitor within Earthfire Pavilion."

Jared's gaze sharpened. "You know who the traitor is?"

"Even though all that remains of me is a soul remnant, the Heart of Earthfire is still bound to Earthfire Pavilion's defensive formation. Because of that, I can sense anything that disturbs fire-type energy within the Pavilion," Gerald replied with a cold chuckle. "Three nights ago, Elliot Ember secretly used a message talisman. Its aura carried the same stench of the Malevolent Path Hall that still clings to your robes."

Elliot Ember! It really is him!

Cold glittered behind Jared's eyes, bright as sparks that leapt from a fresh-struck blade.

"So?" Gerald asked, voice echoing through the furnace-lit cavern. "Do you agree to this trade?"

Jared let the silence stretch until the magma below popped like distant gunfire. At last, he nodded once. "I will. But on three conditions."

"Go on."

"First, your information on the Jadeheart Marrow must be complete, and you will help me secure it. Second, while I aid you in tempering your soul, you must not take any actions that would be detrimental to me. Third, the proof against the traitor must be irrefutable."

Gerald barked a laugh that sent ripples across the molten pool. "You're a cautious young man, huh? Very well, I agree. However, I also have a condition of my own."

A flare of suspicion lifted Jared's brow. "Name it."

"After you claim the Jadeheart Marrow, you will help me fashion flesh anew. For that, I require a single drop of your Golden Dragon blood essence as the catalyst. Of course, I will reward you handsomely. You don't have to worry about that."

Jared's fingers tightened. Golden Dragon blood essence was no simple gift; each drop carried a shard of his very life.

Yet one drop of Jadeheart Marrow would resurrect the woman who anchored Vermilion Demon Lord's heart-and the demon lord had risked his own hide for Jared more times than Jared could count.

There was a price to pay, yet loyalty mattered just as much.

Finally, Jared nodded. "All right. But only a single drop-no more."

"Deal."

Gerald's body-pure flame sculpted into the rough outline of an old man-shivered like a bonfire whipped by sudden wind. "Shall we begin now? I have waited far too long to feel my soul whole again."

Jared lifted a hand, the gesture calm yet immovable. "Not yet. I still need time to mend every wound and gather my strength. Besides, someone is still waiting for me outside."

That someone, of course, referred to Vermilion Demon Lord.

Gerald's flames settled to a steady glow. "Very well. I'll give you three days. On the third, we'll officially begin. As for Elliot..."

After sharing everything he knew, his blazing silhouette unraveled, ember by ember, and sank back into the molten pool until nothing remained but shimmering magma. Silence reclaimed the cavern. The air cooled just enough to pretend nothing extraordinary had occurred, yet Jared knew his plans now required an entirely new

map.

He possessed a trail to the Jadeheart Marrow, the traitor's face was clear, and an enigmatic elder of living fire had entered the game.

The road ahead looked sharper in outline-yet each twist felt even more treacherous.

He stowed the Pentacarna Tower, stepped out of the chamber, and climbed toward the stone stairs that wound upward like a spine carved through the rock.

The instant his boot touched the stairs, Lindsay's voice spilled down from above, thin with panic. "Jared! Jared, are you there? Something's happened!"

A chill flicked through Jared's chest, and he hurriedly went up the stairs.

Lindsay stood at the entrance of the forbidden ground, face bloodless, eyes wide and bright with fear.

"What happened?" Jared asked.

"Elliot went to my father and snitched. He told him you slipped into the forbidden ground with foul intent. Father is now on his way with several elders. You have to go -right now!"

Her news would have rattled most, yet Jared's remained unfazed.

He glanced back toward the magma pool; it lay as placid as if the last hour had been nothing more than a fever dream.

"Don't worry, Princess Lindsay. Since Mr. Flameheart wishes to come, let him. Some truths need daylight, and this cavern is as good a place as any."

Lindsay stamped her foot,

desperation edging her voice. "But Jared, the forbidden ground is

Earthfire Pavilion's deepest you

Outsiders who trespass are

executed by law. Elliot won't stop until you're dead! I think you should leave for now and wait til Father's anger dies down."

"Leave? And where do you suggest we go?" Vermilion retorted. "I'm sure the defense formation around Earthfire Pavilion has been activated. The moment we step outside, we'll be fugitives-cut down on sight."

Then, he turned to Jared. "What are your plans?"

A glint of frost slid through Jared's eyes. "Since Elliot wants to play, I'll gladly play along," he said before looking apologetically at Lindsay. "I'm sorry I've dragged you into this mess, Princess Lindsay."

Lindsay bit down on her lip so hard she tasted iron. "I'm not afraid. I brought you guys inside, so if

will

anyone must be punished, let it be me And anyway know Father Sort out right from wrong in the end!"

Just then, a racket of hurried boots and raised voices echoed beyond the cavern

mouth. Dust drifted from the ceiling in thin, nervous veils.

Lindsay's face blanched. "They're here!"

Jared smoothed the front of his travel-worn robe, then stepped to the threshold with unhurried poise, as though greeting dinner guests rather than an angry mob.

At his side, Vermilion Demon Lord shed every trace of earlier fatigue, straightening to his full, imposing height.

Boom!

The illusion array at the entrance of the forbidden ground burst apart. The mountain wall quivered, and a shower of broken stone clattered across the floor. Through the settling grit stormed a contingent of cultivators, every stride radiating

menace.

At their head strode Ignatius Flameheart head of Earthfire Pavilion. A robe of molten gold rippled over his broad shouldersmet

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aura

and his Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine pressed the cavern air into stifling heat.

Five senior elders fanned out behind him—each higher than Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Seven—faces carved from granite and eyes burning like banked coal.

Elliot lingered at the rear, a cold, triumphant curl twisting across his mouth. Ignatius clocked Jared, Vermilion Demon Lord, and—most galling of all—his own daughter. The fury that flared in his gaze could have melted steel.

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"Lindsay! So you were hiding here after all!" Ignatius thundered. "And you two outsiders—how dare you trespass upon Earthfire Pavilion's forbidden ground?"

Elliot stepped forward, thrusting an accusatory finger toward Jared. "Mr. Flameheart, I witnessed everything. Jared Chance and this demon slipped into the rear mountain under the cover of darkness. They dismantled the array using secret techniques, intending to steal the Earthfire Pavilion's core secrets. Thankfully, I reported it at once. Had I not, the consequences would be unimaginable. Furthermore, I suspect these two are spies of Malevolent Path Hall, here to gather intelligence and pave the way for an ambush!"

Lindsay quivered from head to toe, her fingers curled so tight her knuckles blanched. "Lies! I was the one who showed them in! Jared was gravely wounded and needed someplace quiet to mend, so I—"

"Lindsay, stop making excuses for them!" Elliot interrupted, his voice cracking across the courtyard like a whip.

He stepped forward—tall, fiery-eyed, every line of his face carved with injured righteousness—then raised his voice so that every disciple ringing the stone plaza could hear. "I know you're kind at heart, Lindsay. You mean well, but Jared Chance has blinded you. Think about it, will you? Why would a stranger convince you to risk breaking Earthfire Pavilion's rule and smuggle him into the forbidden ground? Clearly, he has bewitched you with some form of black magic!"

"I" The single syllable caught in Lindsay's throat, too fragile to become a sentence.

Words failed. The young woman's lips parted soundlessly before she looked away, lashes trembling.

I cannot admit I did it because I have already given him my heart.

Ignatius' face darkened to the color of banked coals. His gaze slid toward Jared as though he were already a corpse. "Jared Chance, have you anything to say for yourself?"

Jared lifted his head, calm as sunrise over still water. "Mr. Flameheart, it is true I've trespassed. Princess Lindsay's kindness made that possible, and I owe her more than I can repay. But going so far as to call me a spy from Malevolent Path Hall?"

He turned ever so slightly toward Elliot, a cold smile curling at the corner of his mouth. "Perhaps you should first ask Mr. Elliot who he contacted in his room with a message talisman three nights ago. The residual aura on that talisman is identical to that of the cultivators from Malevolent Path Hall."

A hush swept the assembly; disciples and elders alike stared, breaths caged behind their teeth.

Elliot's face drained of color, then blazed scarlet. "How dare you spew such lies! When have I ever used a message talisman? Mr. Flameheart, this man is sowing discord between us. Don't believe his words!"

"Is that so?" Jared said flatly. "Then pray tell, Mr. Elliot, why does the third button inside your left sleeve carry a thread of nether aura unique to a Spirit-Wraith Voice Talisman? That, as you know, is the signature tool of the Malevolent Path Hall."

Instinct yanked Elliot's eyes to his sleeve. Panic flashed and was gone, buried beneath forced composure.

He straightened, laugh brittle. "Nonsense! I've just changed into these clothes today, so what nether aura are you talking about? If Mr. Flameheart doubts me, I'm happy to let the elders inspect my clothes."

One elder stepped forward, spiritual sense sweeping through cloth and seam. Brow furrowing, he murmured, "Mr. Flameheart, I detect no nether aura."

Relief spilled across Elliot's features. He flicked Jared a victorious glance. "Well? Do you have anything else to say, Jared?"

To his surprise, Jared remained unperturbed. "Oh? Then perhaps I remembered incorrectly. But Mr. Flameheart, could you check what's hidden beneath the third floor tile under Mr. Elliot's bed?"

Upon hearing that, Elliot went rigid, smile shattering like glass.

Beneath that tile rested the other message talisman he used to communicate with Malevolent Path Hall, and a porcelain vial of Blood-Fiend Pills that Bennett had given him as payment.

"H-How could you know about that?" The admission burst out before Elliot caught himself.

He swallowed hard and blurted, "I mean—there is nothing under my bed! This is nothing but slander!"

Alas, the damage was done.

Ignatius needed no further proof; the faint twitch at the corner of Elliot's eye had told him enough.

"Search it!", he ordered, the words colder than falling ash.

Two elders bowed and hurried off.

Elliot wanted to stop the elders, but one sharp look from Ignatius nailed him in place. Cold sweat seeped through his robes.

Silence thickened, heavy as storm clouds sinking toward earth.

Lindsay glanced from Jared's tranquil face to Elliot's ashen one, realization dawning in her widening eyes.

Less than fifteen minutes had passed before the two elders stepped back into the cavern. One cupped a pitch-black message talisman that seemed to swallow the torchlight, while the other cradled a slender jade vial stained a deep, ominous crimson.

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"Mr. Flameheart, quarters and found these beneath his bed," the elder reported, voice gravelly yet steady. "The talisman is saturated with nether aura unique to Malevolent Path Hall, and this vial of Blood Fiend Pills is forged from the

blood essence of the living. It's pure

evil."

A thunderous detonation cracked the air, loud enough to rattle stalactites from the ceiling.

Ignatius answered with an inferno that wrapped his entire frame, a furnace-born aura that made the cavern quake and sweat molten tears.

"Elliot Ember!" Ignatius bellowed, eyes blazing hotter than the flames around him. "Have you anything left to say?"

Elliot's knees buckled; he collapsed onto the cold stone floor,

complexion-leached of all color. "Mr. Flameheart... I-I was forced! Malevolent Path Hall captured my parents and threatened to kill them

I unless I did what they told me to.

swear had no choice.

ase have

mercy!"

"Parents?" Ignatius' voice dropped to a glacial hush.

"Your parents perished twenty years ago in a cultivation mishap-consumed by their own wayward fire. Do not insult me with fantasies."

A violent shudder ripped through Elliot. His lie lay in ruins; despair flickered, then flared into unhinged defiance. "Yes-yes!" he screamed, lurching upright. "I serve Malevolent

Path Hall. So what? Earthfire Pavilion is nothing but small fry. Malevolent Path Hall is the true

power that reigns over the entire level eleven. Ignatius Flameheart, do you think you can kill me?"

Without warning, he plunged a trembling hand into his cloak, ripped out a blood-red device, and crushed it between his fingers.

The shattered charm screamed like a dying comet.

A geyser of crimson mist erupted from the device, twisting into a pillar that punched straight through the cave roof. Rock splintered, molten sparks sprayed upward, and the blood-beam carved a tunnel clear to the cloud-choked sky.

One of Earthfire Pavilion's elders blanched, robes whipping in the violent back-draft. "This is bad! He is calling for Malevolent Path Hall's reinforcements!"

Fury flashed behind Ignatius' eyes; he lunged, palm blazing. "Die, you abomination!"

The strike carried the full wrath of a Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine cultivator terrifying beyond measure.

A colossal hand of scarlet fire filled the cavern, blotting out every scrap of light and promising to incinerate all beneath it.

Madness glittered across Elliot's pupils as he flung up a blood-red shield. "Mr. Vayne, save me!"

Just then, a rasping chuckle oozed from the pillar of light. "Hahaha... Ignatius Flameheart, did you ask my permission before striking one of my people?"

Within the crimson beam, a figure congealed-Malcolm Vayne himself, wrought entirely from swirling blood.

Even as a mere projection, his aura pressed upon the cave like a mountain of knives.

A giant blood-stained hand burst from the column and crashed head-on into Ignatius' flaming palm.

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Boom!

The cavern convulsed; stone shards rained down while waves surged across the magma pool.

The shockwave drove everyone-save Ignatius and Jared-reeling backward.

Ignatius' beard flared with embers as he roared, "Malcolm Vayne! You dare project yourself into Earthfire Pavilion's forbidden ground?"

"Why not?" Malcolm's projection scoffed. "Listen up, Ignatius. Hand Jared Chance over, kneel, and swear fealty to Malevolent Path Hall, or Earthfire Pavilion will be erased from level eleven today."

"How arrogant!" Ignatius spat. "You think a single projection of yours frightens me?"

"Oh? Well, if one isn't enough, how about adding a few more?"

With that, three additional pillars of blood light speared through the ceiling, slamming into the cavern floor.

When the glow faded, three projections of Malevolent Path Hall elders stood— phantoms brimming with murderous intent.

Stifling nether aura flooded the chamber, grappling Ignatius' crimson flames in a clash of swirling atmospheres.

Malcolm's lips curled into a jagged smirk, the way molten metal cooled into cruel edges under moonlight. "Well, Ignatius-how do things look now? The four of us may be mere projections, yet together, we can stall you long enough. Outside, Malevolent Path Hall's army has already surrounded Earthfire Pavilion, waiting to smash your defense formation at my word."

Ignatius' face blanched to the color of ash beneath old embers. Sweat hissed where it touched the cavern's heat.

He never imagined that Malevolent Path Hall would act so boldly. Malcolm had come himself and even brought an army. They had, without a doubt, planned every step.

Earthfire Pavilion was strong, but against the Malevolent Path Hall, which had come fully prepared, victory seemed nearly impossible.

"Father..." Lindsay's voice quivered like a match about to gutter out. She clung to Ignatius' sleeve, knuckles white against the crimson fabric.

Around them, several Earthfire Pavilion elders raised their magical items— glimmering spears, blazing mirrors, rune-etched shields—forming a tense, flickering barricade of resolve.

Buoyed by Malcolm's threat, Elliot puffed out his chest. "Ignatius, surrender while you still can. Hand Jared over and every treasure in Earthfire Pavilion, and perhaps Malevolent Path Hall will spare you your pathetic life."

"You're courting death!" Ignatius' reply rumbled low, as though magma spoke through him.

Scarlet fury flashed in his eyes; he stepped forward, palm lifting to hurl a searing strike—then a new voice sliced through the cavern.

"Enough."

The single word echoed with quiet authority, neither loud nor hurried, yet it stilled every heartbeat.

No living throat in the chamber had spoken. The sound rose instead from the magma pool itself.

Bubbles burst. A fountain of lava roared heavenward, folding and folding until it shaped a towering figure of fire.

It was Gerald Earthfire-Earthfire Pavilion's myth, their long-departed founder, now reborn in living flame.

"Great Elder Earthfire?"

Ignatius and the elders gasped, disbelief turning instantly to savage joy. "Great Elder Earthfire, you're still alive?"

Earthfire Pavilion had kept paintings of Gerald so that the leaders and elders throughout the years could easily recognize their founder.

Although he was currently just a humanoid formed of flames, that aura, pressure, and unique fluctuation of the Law of Fire were unmistakable.

"I'm just a soul remnant," Gerald answered, golden-bright eyes sweeping the cavern until they pinned the four projections. "Yet even a remnant is more than enough to handle these projections. How dare these insolent ones run wild in my territory!"

The next second, he lifted one blazing hand.

A thunderous boom followed.

The Law of Fire awakened, weaving itself into four crimson-gold chains that lashed outward, coiling around each projection before resistance could form.

"What the hell is this?" one of the projections shouted.

"Chains of Law? What? How is this possible?" another wailed as the bindings tightened.

Malcolm and the others thrashed, but every struggle only made their images flicker, paling from bright specters to useless wisps.

"Perish."

With that single verdict from Gerald, the four chains of living fire coiled inward.

Links flared white-hot, tightened, and hissed around their struggling prey with the finality of a hangman's knot.

"No-!" the four looming projections shrieked in imperfect unison.

Alas, their voices were ripped apart mid-cry. Each projection imploded, dissolving into sparks that fluttered away like popped soap bubbles.

The accompanying crimson pillars fractured from base to crown, shattering into a blizzard of ember-red shards before vanishing altogether.

All of it transpired between one heartbeat and the next, as fleeting as lightning glancing off a blade.

Only moments ago, those same projections had threatened to erase the entire Earthfire Pavilion-yet now, as though a bad dream dismissed at dawn, they were simply gone.

Elliot stood rooted to the floor. Color drained from his face until it matched the pale ash drifting at his feet.

Ignatius and the assembled elders stared wide-eyed, tongues stilled, their collective awe too large for speech.

They had known their ancestor's might, of course, but never imagined that a single surviving wisp of Gerald's soul could snuff out four formidable projections so effortlessly.

It felt less like power than pure miracle.

A roar finally broke the silence. "All hail Great Elder Earthfire!"

Ignatius was the first to kneel. His voice trembled with emotion. "I, Ignatius Flameheart, pay my greetings to our ancestor, Great Elder Earthfire!"

"Greetings, Great Elder Earthfire!" the elders chorused, dropping to their knees in a thunderous wave of reverence.

Lindsay hurried down beside them. As she bowed, her gaze flicked toward Jared, eyes bright with confusion. How did Jared know the ancestor awaited us here? Is there some kind of connection between them?

Gerald's blazing outline rippled, voice low yet warm. "Rise, everyone. I am but a lingering soul fragment. I don't deserve such formality."

His attention swung to Elliot, and the heat in his gaze turned glacial. "Now, regarding this traitor..."

All courage fled Elliot. He slammed his forehead to the scorched tiles again and

again. "Great Elder Earthfire, spare me! This is all Malevolent Path Hall's fault. They coerced me! Please give me another chance to make amends!"

Gerald's laugh was soft and

iron-cold. "Make amends? You colluded with Malevolent Path Hall slaughtered dozens of Earthfire Pavilion disciples, plotted to murder your leader, and to overthrow the Pavilion. With crimes like these, not even killing you ten times over would be enough."

His fiery eyes shifted to Ignatius. "Ignatius, according to our rules, what fate befalls a traitor?"

Ignatius' reply cut like a drawn blade. "By the Pavilion's rules, all traitors will have their souls pulled, refined, and denied rebirth for eternity."

"Then let's do just that," Gerald said, voice quiet as settling ash.

"No!" Elliot screamed, spinning to flee.

Ignatius lifted a single hand. A scarlet flame leapt forth, engulfing the deserter.

Elliot had no time to cry out again. He became a silhouette of fire, then a pile of gray dust.

Ignatius closed his fist. A pale, quivering soul tore free of the ashes and spiraled into an emerald vial.

"The soul is drawn and scourged-may it warn the next would-be traitor," he said, voice colder than the bottle in his grasp.

When the duty was finished, Gerald's glowing regard drifted to Jared, the flames around him softening, almost curious.

Ignatius felt his heart snag. He stepped forward quickly. "Great Elder Earthfire, Jared Chance trespassed only to heal his wounds. More importantly, he exposed Elliot's treachery. Earthfire Pavilion owes him a debt. I beseech you to temper judgment with mercy."

His words hung in the heated air, a shield offered on Jared's behalf.

As much as he hated to admit it, it was impossible to ignore what Jared had done. After all, he had dragged Lindsay and Ferdinand out of the jaws of death, then exposed Elliot's hidden treachery. Stacked side by side, the scales of justice tipped decisively in Jared's favor-his merit eclipsed the crime of trespassing.

Gerald turned, his ancient eyes crinkling with a sly glint. "What do you think, young man? What punishment do you deserve?" he asked, his gravel-rich voice echoing off the obsidian walls.

Jared answered with an easy smile that belied the tension in the room, "Whatever you say, Great Elder Earthfire. It's all up to you," he replied, the words drifting out as calmly as falling ash.

"Up to me?"

Gerald let the phrase hang, rolling it on his tongue like fine wine before snapping the goblet in half. "Very well. Suppose I sentence you quite severely-for barging into forbidden ground no outsider should ever set foot in. How would that suit you?"

Lindsay surged forward, her crimson robes whipping like startled embers. "Great Elder Earthfire, it was me!" she blurted, voice bright with desperation. "I led him in. If punishment is due, let it fall on me alone!"

Ignatius cut through her plea with a single thunder-laden bark. "Lindsay!"

Alas, she refused to shrink. "Father, he only entered because I brought him here. If there must be a reckoning, then I—your daughter—will bear it." Her declaration rang across the chamber like iron striking iron.

Gerald's snow-white brows lifted. "You know as well as I do that outsiders are not allowed to so much as breathe near our forbidden ground."

Lindsay's composure wavered. "I know that. B-But..."

She glanced at Jared, drew in a trembling breath, and chose a perilous truth. "Great Elder Earthfire, what if I told you Jared isn't an outsider at all?"

Ignatius' brows knitted. "Not an outsider? What do you mean, Lindsay?"

Jared, utterly blindsided, felt his thoughts stall in mid-stride.

Lindsay steadied herself, eyes soft with apology, fierce with resolve. She understood that one sentence could upend every future she'd imagined—and yet she spoke it anyway.

"Jared and I have already shared the bond of husband and wife. H-He is my man."

Boom!

Like a bolt splitting a clear summer sky, her confession detonated in the grand hall. Gasps burst from every corner; shock rippled through stone and bone alike. Ignatius stood frozen, mouth ajar. Around him, the gathered elders stared, slack-

jawed, as though the flames carved into the pillars had come alive and scorched their reason.

Jared's mind went blank. Since when did that happen? Did I miss the ceremony? Why would she accuse me for no reason?

He blinked, stunned, half-waiting for someone to shout it was a jest.

Yet comprehension struck him a heartbeat later-Lindsay was shielding him, throwing her own reputation into the fire to drag him clear of the pyre. And, with those words, she had proclaimed their fate to every witness present. Ignatius' expression churned through storms of doubt, pride, and reluctant acceptance. He studied the soft flush on his daughter's cheeks, then the unwavering calm in Jared's eyes, and belief began to take root.

Objectively, Jared remained an enigma, but an enigma crowned with impossible talent—Golden Dragon Bloodline, devastating power, and a loyalty that ran deeper than magma. If such a man became his son-in-law, Earthfire Pavilion would surely

burn brighter.

That said, Ignatius couldn't help but wince at how brazen Jared was. The latter had only known Lindsay for a short while, yet he had already coaxed her into bed.

Several seconds later, Ignatius finally cleared his throat, the sound rough against the hush that had fallen over the chamber.

"Jared, regarding you and Lindsay... When did this happen?"

Jared's eyes flew wide for the briefest beat. Then, with the smooth confidence of a gambler inventing a winning hand, he spun a story on the spot.

"It was in Flame Gorge," he said-voice steady, gaze unwavering. "Lindsay was wounded, and while healing her... Well, one thing led to another."

The explanation held just enough truth to sound convincing. He had, in fact, tended her injuries in that scorched ravine-though his hands had never strayed past the flow of celestial energy.

To everyone listening, however, his words dripped with implication—more than enough to set tongues wagging.

Color instantly flooded Ignatius' weathered cheeks. He shot his daughter a glare that chastised her for her lack of modesty and restraint.

Lindsay bowed her head so low her hair screened her face, wishing the earth would swallow her whole.

Gerald, however, burst into booming laughter that rattled the pillars. "Excellent! Excellent! Ignatius, this young man is extraordinary. He carries the Golden Dragon Bloodline, rare treasures, and boundless potential. A fitting match for Earthfire Pavilion's princess!"

With that single declaration, the ancient patron had hammered the matter into iron.

Ignatius inhaled, shoulders tense beneath the weight of protocol. Since the old patriarch had approved, who in their right mind would dare object? Besides, there was no doubt that Jared was a prodigy. With such a son-in-law

beside him, Earthfire Pavilion's future would burn brighter than ever.

"Well, since Great Elder Earthfire has spoken..." Ignatius said before turning to Jared, his expression layered with pride and reluctant

sternness. "We'll address your net

relationship with Lindsay later. First, you did trespass into the forbidden ground. For exposing the traitors,

you escape death, yet punishment remains."

"I accept whatever judgment you deem fair," Jared replied without flinch or hesitation.

A Warrior Undefeatable

"Very well. Since you've admitted your mistake, I shall—"

However, before Ignatius could finish his sentence, Gerald interrupted, "Hold on! I will decide Jared's punishment."

Ignatius blinked, surprised that Gerald would personally intervene. He dipped into a respectful bow.

"Go ahead, Great Elder Earthfire. How should we punish Jared?"

Gerald's molten-gold eyes flicked from the young man to the crimson-faced princess, a knowing smile curling at the corners of his flame-lit visage.

"Since Lindsay has claimed him as her man, we should let them marry immediately. As husband and wife, Jared becomes a member of Earthfire Pavilion and ceases to be an outsider. The crime of trespass is thereby nullified."

"What?"

"Marry?"

"Immediately?"

A sudden chorus of shocked voices ricocheted off the lava-glazed walls, swelling through the cavern like a flock of startled birds.

Ignatius—usually so quick to rage—stood rooted to the stone, eyes wide, mouth half-open, as though the heat had welded his jaw shut.

All around him, the elders traded wary looks, their weathered faces illuminated by the glow from the magma, each wondering what on earth they had just witnessed.

Meanwhile, Lindsay's blush blossomed so fiercely it outshone the firelight, her head dipping while one slender hand twisted the corner of her robe until her knuckles whitened.

Jared, too, went perfectly still. He had never imagined that Gerald's notion of punishment would look anything like that.

Ignatius swallowed hard. "Great Elder Earthfire... T-This..."

The words jammed in his throat; nothing followed but the crackle of molten rock below.

"What's the matter?" Gerald asked. "Has my command suddenly lost its power?" The temperature spiked. Super-heated air rolled across the chamber, and the lava pool frothed like a cauldron brought to a violent boil.

Ignatius bowed so fast his hair whipped forward. "Of course not, Great Elder Earthfire. It's just that marriage is no trifling matter, and Lindsay is Earthfire Pavilion's princess. The ceremony should be grand, with guests invited from all over

"Why care about those excessive formalities?" Gerald cut in, flicking the thought away like an ember on his sleeve.

"With Malevolent Path Hall's army pressing down on us, what time do we have to hold a grand wedding? Let them get married at once. We can always host a celebration to make up for it once we've driven the invaders back."

Then, he turned to Jared, the magma's glow dancing in ancient eyes. "Well, young man? Do you accept?"

Jared's mind spun like sparks in a bellows.

Gerald's ploy, ridiculous on its surface, struck him as anything but foolish.

First, it wiped away the crime of trespassing: a son-in-law could hardly be branded an outsider.

Second, it chained Jared to the pavilion's war wagon; family ties demanded full support against Malevolent Path Hall.

Third, his Golden Dragon Bloodline—rare and coveted—would pour fresh strength into the pavilion and aid Gerald's dream of rebuilding a mortal body.

And as for himself...

Jared's gaze slid to Lindsay.

Head lowered, she still worried her robe's hem, crimson flooding her face until it seemed liquid enough to drip.

She was shy, yes-yet in her eyes lingered no refusal, only a shimmer of barely contained anticipation.

By any standard, she was extraordinary: beautiful, noble, brave, and unwavering in her affection for him.

To wed such a woman-especially one so devoted-was a blessing few cultivators dared dream about.

But Jared's heart was already tangled with other women and unfinished vows.

Then again, she had declared publicly that he was her man, binding her honor to his. On top of that, he can't deny that he had romantic feelings toward her.

Turning her down now would shatter her heart and ruin her reputation within Earthfire Pavilion.

Beyond that, he needed the pavilion's might against Malevolent Path Hall and Gerald's knowledge of where the Jadeheart Marrow lay hidden beneath the earth.

Jared drew a steadying breath. "I am willing," he said, each word clear as temple bells.

He had not spoken loudly, yet his answer carried through the sweltering chamber and rang in every ear.

Lindsay's slender shoulders jolted as

though a current of lightning had raced through her veins. Her head snapped up. In the copper-gold glow of magma joy disbelief glittered in her eyes, mingling like twinstars across a midnight pond.

"However, even though Lindsay and I are of one heart, marriage remains a solemn covenant. The choice must be hers alone. Should she decline, I will never press the matter," Jared continued.

All at once, every gaze pivoted toward the young princess.

Lindsay bit down on her lower lip. Molten reflections danced over her damp lashes as she looked at Jared, hope shimmering in each unspoken word.

"I-I'm willing too," she whispered, the words fragile as moth wings yet ringing in her chest with the weight of a lifetime.

Though softer than a sigh, her answer cut through the hush of the cavern like a lightning crack, echoing off stalactites and magma alike.

Gerald let out another booming laugh that rumbled the rock walls. "Excellent! Then let's hold a wedding at once. Ignatius, you shall preside!"

Ignatius managed only a rueful smile. He wasn't entirely on board with how things were rushed, but refusing their ancestor's decree was unthinkable.

He turned from the glowing pool, shoulders squared. "Very well. Since Great Elder Earthfire commands it-and the two are willing-let the ceremony proceed."

Facing an elder in ash-red robes, he added, "Spread word through Earthfire Pavilion. Prepare for the wedding of Princess Lindsay and Jared immediately. Keep it modest, yet flawless in form."

"Understood!" the elder replied, bowing before hurrying into the tunnels.

Gerald nodded, embers swirling

around his translucent frame. "After

the vows Jared will enter the

forbidden ground to aid me in rebuilding this old body. Once flesh is restored, I shall host you both a proper celebration."

His molten eyes rested on the young man, the glow turning hard. "Look after Lindsay and treat her well, boy. I have watched her grow from a spark. If you dare bully her... Hmph."

Jared dipped his head politely. "You have my word, Great Elder Earthfire. I will never fail her."

"Good! All of you-disperse and make ready."

With that, Gerald's towering flame-form thinned to ribbons of light, those ribbons curling back into the magma pool until only a faint glow remained beneath the roiling surface.

Servants, guards, and elders filed out, their footsteps fading into the network of tunnels beyond.

Ignatius lingered, watching Jared and Lindsay stand shoulder to shoulder beside the glowing lake. Unease, relief, and fatherly worry warred behind his eyes.

He laid a broad, heated palm on Jared's shoulder. "Young man, cherish my daughter. If you bully her or let any harm come to her, I will not forgive you." Jared answered without

missing a beat. "Understood, Father." Ignatius' mouth twitched, half amused, half resigned. With a final sigh, he strode away into the shadowed corridors.

Soon, the cavern held only Jared, Lindsay, and Vermilion Demon Lord, whose crimson cloak flickered at the edges like living cinders.

An awkward hush settled, thick as cooling lava.

The demon lord offered a knowing grin. "I'll head outside for a walk. Talk all you need." With that, he drifted toward the exit, cloak flaring like smoke.

Once he was gone, Lindsay's cheeks flushed scarlet. She toyed with a strand of hair and spoke in a tremor. "Jared, I'm sorry about what I said earlier. I never meant to put you on the spot. I only wanted to save you..."

"I know," Jared replied, voice gentle as falling ash. "Truthfully, I should be thanking you. Without your courage, today might have ended very differently."

Her eyes misted again. "B-But now Great Elder Earthfire wants us to get married.

Are you truly willing? If not, I can speak to him—tell him we need time—anything..."

Jared cut her off, his fingers wrapping warmly around hers. "Yes, I am. Lindsay, you are a wonderful woman. To walk the same path, to share the same sky with you that would be the greatest fortune of my life it's just that I carry too many burdens, and there are other women in my life as well. There may be many dangers ahead of us. If you follow me, suffering will follow too."

A Warrior Undefeatable

Tears shimmered at the edges of Lindsay's eyes, but her head shook with

unshakable resolve. "I'm not afraid. As long as I can stand beside you, no hardship can break me. And I don't care how many women there are in your life," she said, voice soft yet steady. "As long as I'm one of them, that's all that matters."

She pressed herself to Jared's chest, heartbeat steady against his ribs. "I know your road is long and lined with trials, but I will wait, and when I can, I'll fight beside you. Whatever tomorrow brings, I will never regret the choice I make today."

Heat bloomed behind Jared's sternum, spreading outward like sunrise across marble. He drew her close, arms firm and protective.

In that embrace, he finally, fully, accepted the brave and sincere woman before him.

After a lingering moment, Lindsay's cheeks flamed crimson. She eased from his hold and smoothed her gown. "I-I should prepare for the wedding. It's happening so quickly, but a wedding is still a once-in-a-lifetime rite..."

"Then I'll help," Jared said, a quiet smile lifting the burden from his eyes.

"Okay!"

The entire Earthfire Pavilion burst into motion the moment the unexpected wedding was announced.

Time was short, yet their princess' marriage demanded every ritual.

The hall was alive with celebration, decorated from ceiling to floor, every door and window radiating joy. Young disciples blinked in astonishment, then traded it for blessings whispered beneath the banners after all, Jared had once saved their princess, unmasked traitors, and wielded a strength worthy of her hand.

High noon was chosen for the ceremony.

The main hall was lavishly decorated. Although no outside guests were invited, all the elders, stewards, and key disciples were present.

Jared entered first, clothed in a scarlet robe that caught the torch-glow like liquid fire. His carriage was unbowed, resolute.

Then came Lindsay. A tiara rested upon her dark hair, and brocade robes the shade of dawn flowed around her like living flame. In that moment, beauty itself seemed to pause, studying how it might keep pace with her.

Under the steady guidance of Ignatius, father and head of Earthfire Pavilion, the couple exchanged vows, sealing their union as husband and wife.

The entire ceremony was simple, yet weighty as molten ore.

"Send the couple into the bridal suite!" the master of ceremonies announced.

Cheers cascaded through the hall as disciples formed an eager corridor, guiding Jared and Lindsay toward a newly prepared room steeped in petals and laughter. Inside, candles swayed in the gentle draft, spreading warm light across silks, lacquered screens, and every ribbon-tied blossom.

Lindsay perched on the edge of the bed, palms damp with nervous heat despite the confidence she had shown moments earlier.

Jared approached, heart beating in measured thunder. With infinite care, he lifted the veil from her face, letting it fall like a final curtain between past and future.

Under the warm lick of candle-flame, Lindsay's face glowed like a petal glazed in morning dew—so breathtakingly lovely that the small bridal suite seemed to shrink, as though beauty alone emptied the room of air.

"Lindsay..." Jared murmured.

She answered with the faintest hum, a single trembling note that fluttered between them like the wingbeat of a moth.

Jared sat beside her. His fingers found hers—soft, cool, nervous. "Lindsay, there's something you must know."

For a moment, Lindsay's heart seized. "What is it?"

"Before our marriage, there was indeed someone else in my heart," Jared replied candidly. "She is an old acquaintance who once saved my life. I swore I would protect her—that was my promise to her."

A shadow flickered across Lindsay's eyes, but calm returned almost immediately. "I understand. A man of your worth is bound to have a past. Care nothing for what lies behind us—only for what lies ahead. We will save her together then live the life we promised each other. Okay?"

Emotion swelled in Jared's chest. He drew her into his arms, breathing the single word that sealed every vow between them. "Okay."

That night, the candles burned low, and the joy granted to newlyweds proved as fleeting as it was sweet.

Lindsay crossed the ancient threshold every woman must pain laced with rapture, fear laced with trust.

Agony blurred into ecstasy; tears warmed into laughter.

Back at Malevolent Path Hall's headquarters in level twelve, a black palace hovered above an endless sea of blood. Swirling around it were countless vengeful spirits and fierce wraiths, wailing in bone-chilling shrieks.

At the heart of the fortress stood a throne sculpted from piled white skulls, and upon it lounged a man in black robes.

His face was sharp, predatory; his eyes, sunk deep, blazed an unnatural crimson.

Coils of murderous blood-mist writhed around him, as though he had climbed from a mountain of corpses and refused to wipe the gore away.

He was none other than Malcolm Vayne, leader of Malevolent Path Hall.

Bang!

A loud sound rang out as Malcolm's palm smashed the armrest. Bone splintered to powder and drifted like dead snow.

"Useless-every last one of you!" he bellowed, his voice cold like the winds of the netherworld, dropping the temperature of the entire hall. "I can't believe a soul remnant destroyed my projection. This is a huge shame to our Malevolent Path Hall!"

Below the throne knelt a dozen elders, trembling, foreheads pressed to cold stone.

Among them crouched Bennett, still badly wounded, skin the color of ashes yet forced to maintain his bow.

"Calm down, Mr. Vayne," a

white-haired elder said. "Our reports

have confirmed that the soul

remnant belonged to Gerald Earthfire, founder of Earthfire Pavilion. In his prime, his cultivation level was nearing High Immortal Realm Level Three. Even if all that's left of him is a soul remnant, he'd still be able to take on any ordinary projection Besides, that forbidde ground is his domain; sending mere projections there granted us no advantage. Had you descended in person, Mr. Vayne, Earthfire Pavilion

would already lie in ruins."

Malcolm's pupils flashed with a chill brighter than the torches ringing the blood-red hall. "Gerald Earthfire?" he repeated, each word tasting of disdain. "That decrepit relic... I'll make sure he dies."

After a moment of contemplation, he added coldly, "Pass down the order. Mobilize the elite forces. Have three deputy leaders personally lead the teams to level eleven to annihilate Earthfire Pavilion and capture Jared alive!"

"Yes, Mr. Vayne!" the gathered elders answered as one, their voices reverberating like iron gongs.

A greedy glint burned behind Malcolm's lids. "Also, tell the deputy leaders to keep Great Elder Earthfire's soul remnant intact. I intend to devour it. That way, I just might be able to have a breakthrough and attain High Immortal Realm Level Three!"

"Understood!"

Malcolm's gaze slithered toward the darkness beyond the pillars as greed twisted his smile. "And as for Jared Chance... That man has the Golden Dragon Bloodline, hidden treasures, and far too many secrets. Bring him back alive. I will interrogate

him myself."

"Yes, Mr. Vayne!"

"Go on, then. Get ready. Three days from now, the army moves-no delay!"

The elders scattered down dim corridors, leaving the vast chamber suddenly hollow.

Only Malcolm remained, a lone silhouette against the crimson braziers.

He rose, paced outside, and stared over the seething sea of blood that sprawled beneath the terrace, its waves stained black and scarlet.

"Gerald Earthfire... Jared Chance..." he murmured, eyes gleaming like coals. "How interesting. Looks like it's about to get rowdy in level eleven But the flames, they will only serve to fuel

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no matter how wild

my rise. Once I have a breakthrough to High Immortal Realm Level Three, it shall be time for Malevolent Path Hall to dominate all twelve levels! Hahaha!"

Malcolm's sinister laugh echoed above the sea of blood, and countless vengeful

spirits shrieked in response, as if the end of the world had arrived.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Back at Earthfire Pavilion in level eleven, Jared and Lindsay returned to the forbidden ground after the wedding.

Deep within, living flames coalesced, and the fiery silhouette of Gerald floated into view—majestic, ancient, unburned by his own heat.

Jared bowed low. "Great Elder Earthfire."

Gerald nodded, his gaze sweeping over the two of them with satisfaction. "Excellent. Your auras have merged and are now in harmony. It seems you have truly become cultivation partners."

Color flared across Lindsay's cheeks, and she dipped her head, shy as dawn.

Jared met the praise without flinching. "It's all thanks to you, Great Elder Earthfire. We are grateful for your help."

"Well then, I suppose you can finally honor your promise to me, yes?"

Lindsay blinked, puzzled, and turned to Jared. "Promise? What promise?"

Jared nodded calmly. "I promised to restore Great Elder Earthfire's body. For that, Lindsay, I'll need your help and also Mr. Vermilion's."

Lindsay inhaled, then gave a steady nod. "No problem!"

With that, Jared reached inside his travel-worn cloak and produced the Pentacarna Tower.

The ancient tower drifted upward, weightless and unhurried, until it hovered above his open hand. A dusky, primordial aura spilled from its bronze tiers, curling through the air like mist clinging to forgotten ruins.

Beside him, Gerald's blazing, humanoid form rippled like a candle seen through summer heat. Within the molten contours of his face, two eyes—twin gold furnaces—blazed with unconcealed anticipation.

"Great Elder Earthfire, everything is ready. Shall we begin?" Jared asked, his voice steady yet thrumming with restrained excitement.

Gerald nodded. "Inside the tower, you will help me temper my soul and rebuild my flesh. In return, I shall impart to you the complete Earthfire True Scripture and guide you to the location of the Jadeheart Marrow."

"Understood," Jared answered with solemn resolve.

"Good—into the tower, then!" Gerald declared, his words crackling like fresh logs catching flame.

At once, the elder's blazing figure collapsed into a streak of incandescent light, shooting into the mouth of the hovering pagoda.

Jared followed without hesitation, stepping across the threshold as though walking from night into dawn.

Inside, time thickened. One day here would equal one hundred in the outer world, every second stretched taut as silk.

Within the tower, Gerald's flame body gradually solidified, transforming into the spectral image of an elderly man with white hair and beard and a kindly countenance.

Although he was still in a soul state, he appeared much more substantial than he had earlier.

"Oh, this is simply wonderful!" Gerald's exultation echoed against the tower walls. He spread his arms, feeling the accelerated flow of time and the special laws that ruled this place. "The Pentacarna Tower truly lives up to its reputation! With such a treasure to aid me, there is hope for me to reconstruct my physical body! Let's not waste any more time, Jared. Familiarize yourself with the basic chapters of the Earthfire True Scripture. When my soul is sufficiently refined, I will teach you the rest of it."

"Got it!" Jared replied.

With that, he crossed his legs on the warm stone floor, closed his eyes, and began absorbing the opening passages of the Earthfire True Scripture.

The technique proved worthy of its legendary status—layer upon layer of hidden runes describing nine ascendant levels of flame, and each level would deepen one's grasp of the Law of Fire.

At the ninth level, the practitioner could summon wildfire from horizon to horizon, enough to scorch mountains and boil seas.

Jared carried chaotic celestial energy within his veins, energy that embraced all elements, so every line of the scripture melted into that chaos, doubling his progress.

In addition, he received personal guidance from the very founder-Gerald Earthfire himself which further accelerated his progress.

Days blurred. Outside, a single sunrise passed; inside, one hundred had flared and died. Jared lost all sense of ordinary hours, living only in deep cultivation, and the slow roar of invisible fire.

Meanwhile, Gerald made full use of the tower's time acceleration and unique laws, relentlessly refining his soul form.

His soul form, once insubstantial and illusory, gradually became more solid, even beginning to take on the sensation of a physical body.

At the same time, he was also making preparations to reconstruct his physical body.

Reconstructing a physical body required an enormous amount of rare natural materials and treasures. Fortunately, Ignatius had long made preparations, steadily sending the Earthfire Pavilion's millennia-old treasures into the forbidden ground. "Millennia-Forged Fire Crystal Jade, Heart-Flame Iron, Crimson Sun Essence, Lava Blood Essence..."

As he refined his soul body, Gerald simultaneously directed Lindsay and Vermilion Demon Lord in handling and sorting those materials.

Lindsay, still glowing with the thrill of her recent wedding, bit back longing and devoted every breath to the elder's resurrection.

Vermilion Demon Lord, on the other hand, stood guard at the spiral stair, arms folded, scarlet aura flaring any time footsteps so much as echoed beyond the stone.

Inside the sealed tower, time dripped rather than flowed. One day blurred into two, two into three-until the count itself felt meaningless.

A year passed in the blink of an eye, and during that time, Jared experienced transformative, monumental changes.

The Earthfire True Scripture now blazed to its sixth level inside him, granting a grasp of the Law of Fire so deep it seemed to speak.

Chaotic celestial energy braided

One

tightly with that law, doubling every pulse of power. Thanks to that, his cultivation climbed from Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level One to Top Level Heavenly immortal Realm Level Two, leaving him merely a step away from Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Three.

More startling still, his true combat strength far outstripped those numbers.

With chaotic celestial energy, the Golden Dragon Bloodline, the Earthfire True Scripture—and with weapons such as the Dragonslayer Sword and the Dragon Bell -Jared felt sure he could stand toe-to-toe with a High Immortal.

Gerald's transformation was even fiercer. Twelve months of compression had forged his soul into something almost indistinguishable from living flesh.

The materials for restoring the physical body were fully prepared. All that remained was the final step—using a single drop of Jared's Golden Dragon blood essence to merge his soul with the materials and reconstruct his body.

Gerald's eyelids lifted, and sparks of gold danced in his pupils. "Jared, the moment has come," he said, voice low yet ringing. "My soul is tempered to the limit, and the materials stand ready. All I need is one drop of your Golden Dragon blood essence as a catalyst."

Without hesitation, Jared bit the tip of his tongue. A bead of blood—pure gold, luminous—floated from his lips.

As soon as the essence emerged, the space within the tower was suffused with a divine, majestic dragon power.

Within that droplet, a tiny, five-clawed dragon circled lazily, radiating inexhaustible life.

Gerald, hands steady yet trembling inside, caught the droplet as though it were a newborn sun.

"Perfect! With this blood essence as my catalyst, the chances of successfully reconstructing my physical body increase by at least thirty percent!"

Then, he turned toward Jared, his gaze softening. "Thank you, Jared. And as for what I promised you, rest assured that I will keep my word."

"You're welcome, Great Elder Earthfire," Jared replied. "Shall we begin the reconstruction now?"

To his surprise, Gerald shook his head. "Not yet. The entire process requires forty-nine days and must remain undisturbed. Besides, I can sense that something outside has begun to stir."

Inside the Pentacarna Tower, molten-orange runes pulsed across the volcanic stone walls, bathing everything in an eerie glow. Gerald lifted three fingers, tracing invisible sigils that shimmered like embers in mida. Energy crackled around his knuckles, a silent equation only he could read. His brow furrowed, and a grim verdict fell from his lips. "The Malevolent Path Hall has sent their people. They are here," he murmured.

The final syllable had scarcely left his mouth when hurried footsteps and a high,

panicked voice spiraled up the tower's winding stair.

Lindsay's cry split the charged stillness, her words bouncing off the stone, urgent and raw. "Jared! Jared! Something has happened!"

A chill lanced through Jared. He met Gerald's gaze, a single heartbeat of unspoken understanding flashing between them. Together, they blurred into motion, robes snapping behind like banners of alarm as they swept out of the tower and into the open air.

Outside, Lindsay stood pale beneath

the tower's shadow, copper eyes wide with dread. "Malevolent Path Hall's army has reached the

mountain. Three deputy

are

at the lead, each at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm I Level Nine. Our defense formation is moments from collapse!"

Jared's breath caught. "What?"

Color drained from his face, replaced by the steely focus of a man who knew the difference between panic and action.

Gerald, too, couldn't help but furrow his brows. "Three Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine cultivators... Malevolent Path Hall sure has gone all out." "Jared, I've reached the critical stage of reconstructing my physical body—I cannot afford any interruptions. Otherwise, not only would all my previous efforts be wasted, but my soul form would also be severely damaged. Now, I can only rely on you to handle the invaders."

Jared drew a lungful of molten air, eyes flashing like steel polished on ice. "Don't worry, Great Elder Earthfire. Leave this to me."

Without further ado, he swung toward Lindsay. "Lindsay, stay here and assist Great

Elder Earthfire. Mr. Vermilion, you're with me. Let's greet our uninvited guests."

Vermilion rolled his scarlet shoulders, talons clicking. "Ha! Finally! I've been cramped in this cave long enough. Time to get moving and my blood pumping!" At the rim of the magma pool, Lucky—the small fire unicorn—dozed amid drifting sparks. Jared's shadow fell across its glinting scales.

A year of furnace heat had stretched the beast to thirty feet. Gold-and-crimson plates shone like hammered shields, and each hoof rested in a whirl of liquid flame.

Its aura, fierce and unbridled, was already at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Seven; the lava chamber had proven a perfect cradle for such growth. Jared patted the unicorn's head. "Let's go, Lucky!"

The creature answered with a guttural, thunder-deep roar, eyes blazing at the promise of battle.

With that, man, beast, and demon lord streaked from the forbidden ground, racing toward Earthfire Pavilion's front gate in a comet of red light.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Outside Earthfire Pavilion, black clouds sagged so low they seemed to crush the peaks, a city-wide weight of storm and smoke.

Thousands of Malevolent Path Hall cultivators swarmed like locusts, hemming Earthfire Pavilion in an unbroken ring.

Each invader wore an ink-black robe and a snarling demon mask; the weapons in their fists leaked a stench of fresh slaughter.

The entire sky had curdled into dark crimson under their nether aura, choking even the sunlight that dared approach.

Under the unceasing onslaught, the defense formation's protective light shuddered violently, flickering like a candle struggling against the wind.

Sparks danced where the shield mended itself, yet the wounds only widened with each heartbeat.

"Hit it again! We're about to break the formation!" a masked steward shouted as he sent his scarlet sword crashing against the barrier.

Boom!

At the impact point, the shimmering dome sagged inward, a fist-sized hole yawning open at its heart.

The rent sealed itself a breath later, yet the defenders' spirits plummeted with it, hope drowning in molten stone.

Everyone knew that the defense formation could not last much longer.

High above the gate, three black-robed elders hovered in stately silence, each one a mountain of power no mortal could climb.

They were none other than the three deputy leaders of Malevolent Path Hall— Soulbane, Bonefiend, and Annihilum.

Soulbane's face looked mummified, his crimson pupils sunk deep as dying coals. Sticky red mist coiled around him, and inside that fog floated countless human faces mouthing silent screams no mortal ear could bear.

Bonefiend appeared next, little more than a skeleton wrapped in slack human hide. His fingers were long and corpse-white, and a single lazy swipe from those bone-bright tips could shear open the fabric of space itself.

Annihilum was the strangest of the three-no body at all, only a shifting storm of gray vapor. Eyes winked in and out of that cloud, each one glimmering with a cold that made souls shiver.

Their combined auras locked together, weaving an unseen prison that swallowed the entire Earthfire Pavilion.

It was the crushing might of Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine cultivators, like oceans and mountains pressing down, forcing every disciple to gasp for air.

Soulbane's rasp scraped across the pavilion. "Ignatius Flameheart, this is your last chance. Hand over Gerald Earthfire's soul remnant and Jared Chance. Do that, and Earthfire Pavilion will be spared from being annihilated. Refuse, and we leave nothing alive-not man, beast, or bird."

Inside the defense formation, Ignatius stood at the fore. His crimson-gold robe, once regal, was soaked dark with blood-some his own, and others from the enemies he had slain.

Behind him, a dozen elders, every one wounded and gray, braced themselves against pain and despair.

Farther back on the plaza, fewer than one hundred disciples still clutched weapons; nearly all were bleeding, yet none stepped away.

After three days of siege, Earthfire Pavilion had paid a heavy price.

Out of nearly a thousand disciples, fewer than a tenth survived.

Were it not for the defense formation drawing on the near-infinite power of the Heart of Earthfire, it would have collapsed long ago.

"Dream on!" Ignatius roared, eyes bloodshot yet unbowed. "For three millennia, Earthfire Pavilion has never birthed a traitor. Even if we must fight to the very last person, we will never yield to your malevolent forces!"

Bonefiend shook his skull-thin head, voice regretful but eyes knife-cold. "What a stubborn fool. Since you insist on death, I shall oblige."

He lifted one pale hand, fingers spread, and slowly clenched toward the glowing defense formation. "Bone Hell—Myriad Manifestations."

A brittle crackle answered.

The earth convulsed. Tower-thick bone spikes burst from the dirt, each dozens of yards long.

They writhed like living things, twining into a forest of terror outside the defense formation.

Then the spikes attacked-ramming, drilling, wrapping.

Every blow made the light shield shudder, fractures spider-webbing across its surface.

"Hold the line-do not let it fall!" an elder screamed, his voice raw with desperation.

Blood essence burned off him in ribbons, feeding fresh power into the trembling array even as his limbs shook from the cost.

One by one, the elders bit through

their tongues, and flung blood essence into the heavens. More than a dozen scarlet jets knifed through the night and sank into the defense formation, flaring across its crystal dome like blood thrown against glass.

For an instant, the fractured barrier steadied, trembling but whole. Yet everyone on the ground knew the truth: they had only poured poison into an open wound.

Burning one's own blood essence came at the price of life itself. At this rate, in less than an hour, every last elder would fall like spent candles in the wind.

Just then, Annihilum's voice

slithered into their minds, cold and steeped in dread. "This is all

pointless. You are cornered beasts, thrashing in cage End this farce and will grant you a swift death. Wouldn't that be better?"

Before the echoes faded, a billow of pewter mist unfurled behind him. It split into countless hair-fine filaments that seeped through the spider web fractures in the array, slipping side like smoke through cracked stone.

"Ah!"

The cries tore from several Earthfire Pavilion disciples as the gray threads coiled around their limbs. Flesh shriveled against bone, life draining faster than breath. One after another, bodies collapsed into papery husks.

Pale souls were yanked screaming from those husks, reeled along the threads, and swallowed into Annihilum's chest-fuel for his growing darkness.

"You b*stard!" Ignatius roared.

He smashed a palm outward, and a tidal bloom of crimson fire erupted, scalding the threads to sour smoke.

But fresh strands flooded through every new crack-too many, too quick. Despair swept the courtyard like icy surf, drowning even the bravest hearts.

A young disciple dropped to his knees, tears streaking ash-stained cheeks. "It's over... We're all going to die here..."

Another elder, beard soaked with grief, whispered, "The defense formation won't last... Mr. Flameheart, take Princess Lindsay and flee! We will fight to the death to buy you some time."

Ignatius gave a broken laugh. "Flee? To where? Malevolent Path Hall has gone all out. What makes you think they'll let us go?"

His gaze drifted toward the inner peaks, sorrow flickering behind the flames. "All I hope is that Jared and Lindsay slip past this slaughter."

Just then, a sharp, crystalline snap echoed overhead.

Crack!

A jagged fissure zig-zagged from the very crown of the barrier to its base, spider- webbing into a dozen more. Soon, the defense formation—pride of Earthfire Pavilion -shattered like iced glass.

"Kill!" Soulbane ordered, his eyes like twin wells of blood-red light. "Leave no one alive!"

Thousands of Malefic Path cultivators surged through the broken gate, a black tide bristling with blades, banners, and shrieking war charms. "Kill!"

Ignatius inhaled, fire wreathing every inch of his armor. "Earthfire Pavilion disciples — stand and fight to the death!"

The remaining disciples, battered yet unbowed, raised their voices in a single, ragged cry. "Fight to the death!" The vow rippled across the shattered courtyard like

a final drumbeat before oblivion.

In that breathless instant, something vast and ancient awakened.

From the depths came a roar-raw, primal, endless.

A dragon's cry, bright as molten brass, thundered out of Earthfire Pavilion's inner sanctum.

It rang with sovereign majesty, a sound that brooked no challenge, no doubt—a monarch announcing judgment.

A Warrior Undefeatable

Where that note traveled, the very air shivered; even time seemed to hesitate, held spellbound by the call.

Every cultivator from Malevolent Path Hall froze mid-strike, as though unseen chains had snapped tight around their limbs.

Those already leaping toward the mountain gate fared worse. Invisible thunder pounded them from the sky; grunts burst from their throats as they were flung backward, blood streaming from eyes and ears.

At the front, the three deputy leaders blanched in unison.

"What's that sound?" Bonefiend asked, brow furrowing.

Annihilum hissed. "That's a dragon's roar... And one of absolute purity! Wait... Why are there Draconians in Earthfire Pavilion, though?"

Soulbane spat in the direction of the sound. "No matter. Whatever it is, it dies today." Before the echo faded, a lance of gold shot out from the pavilion's depths.

In the blink of a heartbeat, it crossed several leagues of sky and halted above the shattered gate.

The light peeled away, unveiling three figures.

The one who stood foremost wore a wind-stirred teal robe. Midnight hair whipped behind a face both handsome and calm, his gaze as still as lake glass.

He hovered a step above the void, hands clasped behind his back. Even though his aura was only that of a Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two, depth coiled beneath it like an ocean masked by morning mist.

To his left towered the Vermilion Demon Lord—a three-headed, six-armed colossus wreathed in billowing black fire. Each of the six fists brandished a demonic weapon, and the pressure of a Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Seven beat against the stones.

At his right, a gilded-crimson unicorn ten stories tall stamped hooves of living flame. Dragon-scaled armor glittered across its hide; its roar carried true draconic authority, its strength equal to the demon lord beside it.

Ignatius' eyes widened. "Jared?"

He froze for half a heartbeat. Color drained from his flame-scarred cheeks, then flared back, hotter than the embers that licked across his crimson armor. "Why are you out here? Go back—now! You shouldn't be here!"

Ignatius' terror made sense. Jared was gifted, yes, but he still hovered at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two.

The three deputy leaders, on the other hand, were all at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Nine. Going up against them would be a hopeless endeavor.

"Mr. Chance is here!" Around the fractured gate, Earthfire Pavilion disciples brightened when they spotted Jared, then immediately sagged back into dread. "Hurry up and leave, Mr. Chance! Don't worry about us!"

"That's right, Mr. Chance. Take Princess Lindsay and get as far from here as you can!"

Jared acted as though the cries never reached him. He swept a calm, unblinking gaze over the black-armored horde of Malevolent Path Hall, then fixed on the trio of deputy leaders who floated above the ruins like ravens scenting carrion.

"You three dare to storm Earthfire Pavilion, huh? Have you asked me for my permission yet?"

The words were spoken softly, yet they threaded every corner of the broken courtyard with crystalline clarity.

Silence dropped like a guillotine. Even the flames crackling in shattered braziers seemed to hold their breath.

A single beat later, time exhaled again and Bonefiend erupted in laughter, a harsh, scraping cackle that rattled loose stones off the pavilion walls.

"Haha! Who the hell are you, kid? A mere Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two fledgling dares address us as equals?"

He jabbed a bony finger at Jared, mock astonishment twisting his skeletal grin. "You think a pet unicorn and a Demonic Cultivator at your side will bend fate? To me, boy, you're only slightly better than an insignificant being."

Soulbane snorted, flicking ash from his blood-red gauntlet. "Ignatius, this is your so-called ace in the hole? A Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two young cultivator? Hahaha. How pathetic."

Annihilum's dead eyes locked on Lucky the fire unicorn. Grey mist writhed around his cloak like hungry spirits. "That's a pure-blood unicorn right there. Oh, it'd make for a splendid trophy," he crooned. "Hand it over, kid, and I may grant you a swift death."

Malevolent Path Hall's army roared approval.

"Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two? Does he have a death wish?"

"Earthfire Pavilion really is scraping the bottom of the barrel. I can't believe they're sending out such a weakling to stall for time."

"I pity that unicorn. It chose the wrong master."

Mockery rained down, yet Jared never once flinched. If anything, a ghost of a smile tugged at one corner of his mouth.

"Yes, I may only be at Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two..." he said, golden light flashing behind his pupils. "But to kill you three, that is more than enough."

Soulbane flew into a rage. "Such arrogance! Since you crave death, I will oblige you."

With that, he flung an arm wide. "Listen up, everyone! Continue attacking Earthfire Pavilion. Leave this kid to me!"

Before the last syllable faded, Soulbane dissolved into a streak of blood-red light, crossing a thousand feet in a blink to materialize before Jared-speed so savage it appeared as true teleportation.

"Soulbane Palm!"

Out of the clear sky, a blood-red hand coalesced, so vast it drowned the daylight. Every ridge in its titanic palm was a river of tormented faces, souls twisted together until the lines themselves writhed and screamed.

The spectral band, heavy with Soulbane's murderous aura, hurtled toward Jared. Its passage churned the air into a crimson vortex and the shrieks of the trapped spirits braided with the roaring wind like a funeral dirge.

Shockingly enough, he had only poured seventy percent of his strength into that single strike.

To him, such force was more than enough to erase a mere Top Level Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Two cultivator.

After all, it was a blow capable of annihilating anyone beneath Heavenly Immortal Realm Level Eight before they could even gasp.

"Jared, be careful!" Ignatius yelled.

He moved to intervene, but the

moment he gathered power, the chilling intent of Bonefiend locked

onto him. Invisible chains of

Qu

pressure pinned his limbs and spirit alike, leaving him rooted to the spot, furious yet helpless.

Inside the torchlit arena, every disciple of Earthfire Pavilion felt their hearts jump to their throats. A few of the younger women even squeezed their eyes shut, unwilling to witness Jared being smashed into a smear of blood and bone.

Meanwhile, cultivators from Malevolent Path Hall showed their teeth in vicious delight. In their minds, the scene had already played out the son-in-law sprawled lifeless, the floor awash in gore.

Jared, the object of both dread and malice, remained utterly composed. He did not even deign to lift an eyelid.

He raised his right hand, fingers loose, and closed them with lazy grace toward the blood-red palm that covered the sky.

The gesture looked no grander than shooing away a summer fly.

"Chaos Origin—Fire Domain."

The four words fell from his lips soft as drifting ash, yet they rang through every soul present.

Boom!

Space within a thousand-yard circle twisted around him, folding like burning parchment.

Ash-gray chaotic energy braided itself with molten-gold Earthfire True Flame, knitting a battlefield that belonged only to him.

Within that perimeter, the Law of Fire roared; chaotic energy drifted like newborn galaxies, forming a world all its own.

The blood-red giant palm entered that world and instantly slowed, its violent strength choked, like a mammoth sinking helplessly in tar.

The howling spirits housed in the palm touched the mingled flames and chaos, shrieked in terror, then vaporized as snow beneath a ruthless noon sun.