

### Chapter 181 - Two's No Different from One

Hao Pingyang said, "We're at the entrance!" Everyone's faces became much brighter after seeing the light.

The light drew closer and closer, becoming brighter and brighter. In the end, it swallowed the boat.

Their surroundings suddenly opened up into the endless wilderness. Red clouds filled the horizon. It had actually been less than half a day since they entered the cave, but it felt much longer than that.

The three of them were even more touched by this sight. They felt like an entire eon had passed.

Lao Xishan emerged from a corner and glanced past everyone before locking onto Li Qingshan in the end. "You're Li Qingshan?" This was the first time he had met this infamous figure who had shaken up the entire Hawkwolf Guard of Jiaping. Lao Xishan noticed that he was only a second layer Qi Practitioner, so he already began to look down on him. Since this fellow was bold enough to work against Zhuo Zhibo with this measly amount of strength, he sure was as reckless as they came. It was probably a fluke that he managed to kill Qian Yannian. Though, he sure was lucky to still be standing here alive.

Li Qingshan said politely, "I'm Li Qingshan. Greetings, commander. May I ask for your honourable name?"

"I'm Lao Xishan. You can just call me commander Lao." Lao Xishan nodded in a rather dignified manner before furrowing his brows. "Have you seen Zhuo Zhi- commander Zhuo?"

Li Qingshan said, "I only met him once in the morgue outside the town, but I didn't enter the cave with him. Instead, I entered with my friends from the school of Mohism, but I didn't see him again after that."

Lao Xishan sank into his thoughts. He knew that Zhuo Zhibo had come for Li Qingshan, but he did not suspect that Li Qingshan had killed Zhuo Zhibo. Even if there were a few disciples of mohism assisting him, it was impossible for them to be the opponents of Zhuo Zhibo and his group of elite Black Wolf guards. As someone who had endured Zhuo Zhibo for all these years, he understood Zhuo Zhibo's power the best.

He could only place all the blame on the tremendous daemon qi. He had heard rumors that many powerful daemons hid underground. Zhuo Zhibo must have been extremely unlucky to run into one of them!

Li Qingshan said, "Commander, what brings you here?"

"I've obviously come for the Zombie Daoist. I'm preparing to enter the cave to search for him." Lao Xishan had to distance himself from Zhuo Zhibo's death to avoid raising any suspicion as well.

Li Qingshan said, "Then there's no need for you to go in, commander. We've already killed the Zombie Daoist. His corpse is in the hundred treasures pouch. I'm about to report back on the success of the mission."

Lao Xishan was extremely doubtful. "What? You lot actually managed to kill the Zombie Daoist just by yourselves?"

Hao Pingyang was in a bad mood, and Lao Xishan's words only made it worse. He clasped his hands at Li Qingshan. "Qingshan, we're in a hurry to report back, so we'll bid farewell to you here!"

Li Qingshan ignored Lao Xishan and clasped his hands back at him. "Alright then. Brother Hao, I hope that you have a safe trip back. I'll see you in the future then. When that happens, I have to share a satisfying drink with you."

Hao Pingyang smiled as well. "Alright, then that's that. When that happens, I'll invite you to the wonderful liquor our school of Mohism has to offer."

Zhang Lanqing said, "Count me in too. We'll definitely meet in the future. The Academy of the Hundred Schools will be recruiting new students during the third month next year. You can't miss it, Qingshan."

Hao Pingyang said, "If Qi Practitioners in the world join neither clans or the hundred schools, they'll have to depend on their own comprehension for cultivation, which makes it almost impossible for them to achieve anything. You're young, and your talent is fantastic, so it's a perfect time for you to join the academy. Perhaps we might even become juniors and seniors." He glanced at Lao Xishan. "If you find it unsatisfying, you can just resign from the Hawkwolf Guard and come to Clear River sooner so that you can prepare for the entry exam."

Li Qingshan was quite touched by his sincerity. "If I can brother Hao senior, it would be my honour. I'll definitely be there next year."

Lao Xishan saw how none of them, including Li Qingshan, took him, a mighty sixth layer Qi Practitioner and a Black Wolf commander, seriously, so his face turned cold. "The Hawkwolf Guard is not a market. It's not a place where you can come and go as you please. Even if you join the Academy of the Hundred Schools, you'll be a disciple of the school of Legalism. You'll have nothing to do with the school of Mohism."

Li Qingshan and Hao Pingyang glanced at Lao Xishan. Both of them ignored him and told each other to take care.

Zhang Lanqing clasped his hands. "Qingshan, you have to come!" He Yishi, on the other hand, kept his head lowered the entire time, without uttering a single word.

It was getting late, and the birds in the trees were restless.

After the three of them departed, Lao Xishan basically commanded Li Qingshan. "Li Qingshan, tell me exactly what had happened. Did you really kill the Zombie Daoist, and you weren't fooled by a substitute? Where's the corpse? Let me check it!"

If this were all true, perhaps he would be able to get a share of the merit. The contribution for killing the Zombie Daoist amounted to twelve thousand points. It would be for the best if Li Qingshan offered all of it to him, and he would accept him as a trusted subordinate. Both of them would be satisfied.

Li Qingshan vaguely sensed what he was trying to get at. He said indifferently, "You'll see it once we get back to Jiaping city, commander."

“That’s rude of you. How dare you disobey my orders. You have no sense of respect at all,” Lao Xishan said furiously. He was as complacent as he could get right now. Not only had he split open a sea of qi and reached the sixth layer, Zhuo Zhibo was likely dead as well.

If nothing unexpected happened, he would take over the position of Black Hawk commander and claim the leader’s seat within the Hawkwolf Guard. With how much authority and status that came with the position, he could never allow such an arrogant subordinate to exist below him.

“That’s how commander Zhuo described me as well. Let me just give a word of advice to commander Lao. Don’t become arrogant from your successes, or it might very well lead you to misery.” Li Qingshan frowned. This bastard had basically become blinded by status, losing all of his humanity, just being some sh\*tty commander.

“How dare you try to teach me a lesson!” Lao Xishan was infuriated, and his murderous intent was stirred. However, before he could even draw his blade, his surroundings suddenly darkened. A tall, wide figure in a cape suddenly appeared before him. Within the shade of its bamboo hat was a vicious face half covered in metal plating. Lao Xishan cried out, “Zombie!”

Li Qingshan said, “That’s the Iron Plate corpse I managed to steal from the Zombie Daoist. It’s extremely powerful. Would you like to try it, commander Lao?”

Lao Xishan had some understanding towards refining corpses. Iron Plate corpses seemed extremely powerful, making them difficult to deal with. His expression fluctuated with uncertainty as he lowered his hand resentfully. He decided to just fall out with Li Qingshan completely.

“Li Qingshan, it looks to me that you’re closely related to commander Zhuo and the other Black Wolf guards’ disappearance. If you have some wits about you, it’ll be our combined efforts that resulted in the Zombie Daoist’s death this time. Once we return to Jiaping city, you’ll be someone on my side as well, and I’ll watch out for you. Otherwise, your contribution will just be a pile of useless numbers. It won’t even be worth a single Qi Gathering pill.”

Li Qingshan said, “You want to claim half of it? What an appetite you have, commander Lao.”

Lao Xishan said, “Moreover, your Iron Plate corpse is an existence of heresy. It’s evil. The Hawkwolf Guard will be responsible for dealing with it. You’ll have to hand over the method of control as well.”

Li Qingshan asked, “No room for negotiation at all?”

Lao Xishan said, “No room for negotiation at all. Since you’re my subordinate, you’ll have to follow my orders, or I’ll unleash hell on you. Don’t even think about running to the Academy of the Hundred Schools either. I have plenty of friends cultivating in the school of Legalism.”

Li Qingshan fell quiet as if he was thinking. Afterwards, he raised his head. “Then you can go die!”

“What did you say?!” Lao Xishan raised his guard, but Li Qingshan did not move at all. He did not even give off the slightest hint of killing intent. All he did was look at Lao Xishan like the fellow was a dead man.

However, a white bead flew out from the hand of the pretty child who gave off no aura at all beside Li Qingshan, whistling through the air.

The child was actually a sixth layer Qi Practitioner!

Only now did Lao Xishan understand that not only did Li Qingshan want to kill him, but he even had the power to kill him.

“Li Qingshan, you’re attacking a superior officer! Aren’t you afraid of being punished by the laws of Great Xia?” A flying blade, exactly the same as Zhuo Zhibo’s, flew out. It seemed like it was also a standard issue weapon of the Hawkwolf Guard.

Li Qingshan said, “Fuck you and your laws. I killed Zhuo Zhibo after all that difficulty, yet you’re even finding dissatisfaction in the things that literally fell into your lap. You’re even trying to blackmail me. Do you really think I’m really that easy to just walk over? Fuck your sh\*tty position as a commander? Two’s no different from one anyway, so you can go die!

Clang!

The flying blade collided with the prayer bead in the air. The prayer bead knocked away the blade and only paused slightly. Xiao An’s current strength was far more than just the sixth layer. With Lao Xishan’s abilities of having just broken through to the sixth layer, he could not even control an artifact dexterously, so how was he supposed to stand a chance?

“You killed Zhuo Zhibo!” Lao Xishan’s eyes widened in disbelief when he heard that. Moreover, Li Qingshan was clearly prepared to kill him now, which was why he was bold enough to tell him that.

Li Qingshan said, “Why is it that whenever I try to spare someone, they become so irritating in the end?”

Lao Xishan formed a seal with his hand. The flying blade spun around in the air and stabilised itself, clashing against the prayer bead with a series of clangs and clings. However, he suddenly saw another prayer bead shoot towards him. The kid could actually control two spiritual artifacts!

Lao Xishan was surprised, but he was unfazed. He knew that he could not defeat her, so he began to consider retreating. As long as he could return to Jiaping city and report this to the Hawkwolf Guard, Li Qingshan would be hunted down.

Hmph, don’t even think about killing me if two spiritual artifacts is all that you have! He extended his hand and fished out the talisman he had already prepared, activating it with true qi, but there was no response at all. He had lost all sensation in his hand as well.

He turned his head. His hand that held the talisman had vanished!

Only half of his forearm remained. It was bare, revealing a complete section of blood, flesh, and bone.

Xiao An stood nearby as she held her hidden blade in one hand and Lao Xishan’s hand in the other. It was currently burning away, turning into flames!

Li Qingshan was slightly surprised as well, as he had basically missed Xiao An’s movements. Apart from being even faster than her prayer beads, she gave off nothing at all, no aura, no killing intent.

It had been quite some time since he last saw Xiao An engage someone in close combat. He had never thought that she would have already become so fast. He could no longer grasp her movements unless he daemonified!

With some closer thought, he remembered how Xiao An had already devoured the essence of flesh and blood from several thousand people since the time they had gone to the Qian family. She used the bones of several thousand people to smelt and forge her own skeleton. Unknowingly, her strength and speed had grown tremendously.

The two Skull Prayer Beads had both been forged with her personal strength serving as the basis.

The Path of White Bone and Great Beauty had a section for forging artifacts, which detailed various kinds, each more powerful than the next. However, the very foundation of the cultivation method was still built on a pursuit of personal strength, to forge her own set of bones into the most terrifying set of artifacts in the world.

This girl was quiet most of the time, but he had never thought she had already become so powerful, and she was steady, accurate, and vicious when she moved. She had truly inherited his legacy.

### **Chapter 182 - Tremendous Wealth**

Lao Xishan clutched the stump of his arm and retreated in a hurry. He cried out, "What are you!" He stared straight at Xiao An. He wanted to lock onto Xiao An with his aura, but he found nothing at all.

Xiao An stood within the tall grass that had basically swallowed her and stowed her hidden blade away. She stared at him silently. The two Skull Prayer Beads did not pursue him either, both returning to her hands. They were just for drawing away Lao Xishan's attention.

The true battle had already ended.

Not a single droplet of blood fell from the wound. Soon afterwards, he lost sensation in the entire arm. All he felt was a faint sting, followed by numbness. The numbness spread across his entire body.

A layer of pale, red flames stuck to the severed arm, directly spreading across Lao Xishan's body.

Lao Xishan wanted to escape, but he fell to the ground. Deep fear filled his head. "What did you..."

Before he could finish, the firelight in the depths of his eyes became brighter and brighter. The flames spurted out from his eyes, nose, and mouth violently, setting him alight from the inside.

All of the flames flowed back into Xiao An's palm before vanishing completely. Everything was obviously no different from stabbing the ants under the great aspen tree. Afterwards, she looked back at Li Qingshan eagerly, basically telling him to praise her.

Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow. "Nicely done! You really are my Xiao An after all!"

Xiao An lowered her head bashfully as her face reddened and her lips curled slightly.

Li Qingshan placed his hand on his hips. "I really do need to work hard! If this continues, I'll end up depending completely on you in order to get by, despite being a man!"

He waved his hand, and his true qi swept the hundred treasures pouch and flying blade into his hand. Originally, he wanted to return to Jiaping city with commander Lao. That way, he would have a witness to prove that he had nothing to do with Zhuo Zhibo's disappearance.

However, since Lao Xishan wanted to abuse his power, he would have to change up the story. Commander Lao was worried about commander Zhuo, so he entered the Zombie cave searching for him. In the end, both of them became lost in the maze-like caves. I don't care if you're not convinced. All that matters is I'm convinced.

With that, he now possessed the hundred treasures pouches of three sixth layer Qi Practitioners, along with seven more from elite Qi Practitioners. That was a total of ten hundred treasures pouches, a tremendous piece of wealth.

He could not wait until he returned to Jiaping city. He just began looking through his spoils right there and then. The ten hundred treasures pouches were placed in a line before him as he could not help but become rather excited.

He opened the hundred treasures pouches that belonged to Ge Jian and the six other Black Wolf guards first. These people had served as Hawkwolf guards for many years now, and they were all Zhuo Zhibo's trusted subordinates, so they must have received quite a lot of care. Every single one of them were quite wealthy, so it was truly stunning when it was all combined.

In the end, he found a total of over four thousand Qi Gathering pills. Just Xie Nande's hundred treasures pouches contained over a thousand of them, along with three hundred Hundred Grasses pills and several dozen other pills of even higher quality. There were also over a hundred spiritual stones, over two hundred talismans, and several tens of million taels of silver notes.

Opening the hundred treasures pouches was not just about searching through his spoils. Instead, it was a very interesting and special process, as all cultivators would place their items that they valued the most or used the most within their tiny hundred treasures pouches. As a result, aside from the items that Li Qingshan had been looking for, there were many other interesting items as well. He could tell what kind of person the owner was from them.

The seven hundred treasures pouches represented the characters of seven different people.

Xie Nande's hundred treasures pouch contained a zither and many music sheets. This old bastard's hobby was quite refined. If he had not followed Zhuo Zhibo to the bloomy depths of the underground to become an enemy of his, he would have been able to look for some remote areas of nature to play his zither, allowing it to resound through the natural scenery. It would have been quite a delightful thing to do.

Ge Jian had fetishes. He had many dudous and handkerchiefs in his pouch. Who knows where he had obtained all of them. It made Li Qingshan develop disdain towards him.

He found a thick stack of letters within the hundred treasures pouch of an unknown Black Wolf guard, which made Li Qingshan fall quiet. It no longer mattered whether he was a husband or a father. He could never return home again.

However, Li Qingshan did not regret killing him. Ever since he had made up his mind about venturing beyond the Nine Heavens, the path that awaited him would not be one where he could afford to show mercy. If he did not kill, he would be killed. That was the reality.

However, when killing had already turned into a habit, enemies basically no longer seemed like people in Li Qingshan's eyes, but some kind of humanoid being that could talk and fight back. All he needed to do was destroy, rip, crush, and pierce them, and then their flesh and blood would be devoured by Xiao An's flames, as if they had never existed in this world in the first place.

Right now, those blurry, humanoid figures recovered their meaning as humans one by one, which made Li Qingshan sigh. It maintained his conscience and humanity.

The remaining three hundred treasures pouches belonged to the two commanders of the Hawkwolf Guard and the Zombie Daoist. Li Qingshan valued them the most.

The first one he opened was Lao Xishan's. Although he had only just broken through to the sixth layer, his hundred treasures pouch was still much larger in comparison to Xie Nande's.

However, the items in there were not worth his attention. Even Xie Nande had more items than him, which made Li Qingshan rather disappointed.

Due to the constant oppression from Zhuo Zhibo and the fact that he had just broken through, he had consumed a lot of resources during his secluded cultivation.

At least the Zombie Daoist did not disappoint Li Qingshan. There were close to two thousand Qi Gathering pills and fifty or sixty spiritual stones, equivalent to the wealth of three or four Hawkwolf guards. However, there was not a single talisman at all. He spent his entire time hiding in the darkness, controlling corpses, so he had no need for them.

Li Qingshan did find something very interesting. It was a strange map that seemed like a mental map. However, when he channeled true qi into it, it turned into a series of numerous, three dimensional lines.

Li Qingshan immediately managed to tell that it was an underground map, and it extended over a hundred times further than what Hao Pingyang had discovered with his mechanical insects. If he had not seen it in person, he basically would have struggled to believe that such a vast world existed deep underground.

As a matter of fact, there were even caves below Jiaping city and his feet right now. And, the Zombie cave was not the only entrance to the system. There was one near Jiaping city. The caves came to an abrupt end near the edges of the map, so clearly, the map did not cover the entire system. It was labelled with many specks of light, which temporarily stumped Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan stowed the underground mental map away carefully. Perhaps the map could even be more precious than a high grade spiritual artifact at times. It was exactly this map that allowed the Zombie Daoist to move about freely underground, avoiding the search of the Hawkwolf Guard and also allowing him to appear in various places at any time so that he could collect corpses.

The last one he opened was Zhuo Zhibo's hundred treasures pouch. As he channeled his true qi into it, the hundred treasures pouch opened up a huge space. It was much larger than the Zombie Daoist's hundred treasures pouch. It seemed like a huge warehouse, holding a great assortment of items.

Although Li Qingshan had roughly looked through it when he was underground, he still felt shocked by this sight. This was the largest hundred treasures pouch in his possession. Just the pouch itself was a

valuable spiritual artifact. The items inside would definitely match up to the hundred treasures pouch's value.

Just the Qi Gathering pills numbered at over three thousand. This was not a particularly special number when considering Zhuo Zhibo's status, but he soon discovered over seven hundred Hundred Grasses pills. They were probably the pills that Zhuo Zhibo usually used for cultivation, which was why he had not hoarded too many Qi Gathering pills.

Li Qingshan then opened a small, porcelain bottle. It held pills that were translucent like dew. They were actually Pearl Dew pills, which he had consumed before. Just a single Pearl Dew pill had stunned all the Qi Practitioners back then. He opened several bottles, and they all turned out to be Pearl Dew pills. Counting them up, they amounted to thirty five. The overall value of the Hundred Grasses pills had already exceeded the Qi Gathering pills, while the Pearl Dew pills probably raised the bar higher once more.

Aside from those, there were other types of pills as well, amounting to several dozen. They were not labelled, and with Li Qingshan's lacking knowledge of pills, he was unable to identify them. However, the fragrance they gave off was definitely no worse than the Pearl Dew pills.

There was also a mid grade spiritual artifact flying blade, thirty three mid grade talismans, one hundred and twenty low grade talismans, and two hundred and eleven spiritual stones.

In summary, he had obtained close to ten thousand Qi Gathering pills, over a thousand Hundred Grasses pills, around a hundred high quality pills, several hundred spiritual stones of miscellaneous quality, seven low grade spiritual artifacts, three mid grade spiritual artifacts, and several hundred talismans from this trip alone.

He did not have to worry about lacking the resources to sustain his cultivation anymore. If he ate all of these pills and converted them to true qi and daemon qi, just what level of cultivation would he be able to reach? Just the thought of it excited him.

It was just a pity that he required the recognition of a commander to complete his mission regarding the Zombie Daoist, so he was unable to exchange the contribution for pills. However, it would probably be a long time before he lacked pills again, so he was not worried. He believed that before long, new commanders would be sent over from above. However, the higher-ups would definitely send people to investigate the matter, seeing how they lost two commanders and seven elites in one fell swoop. He needed to come up with a good lie.

When Li Qingshan returned to Jiaping city by travelling through the evening, it had not even reached midnight. Just like before, he returned to his residence without disturbing anyone. However, he saw that his residence was ablaze with lanterns. He glanced at Xiao An and quietly approached the building.

The building gave off the aura of a Qi Practitioner, but it was not powerful, only at the third layer. Moreover, the smell was rather familiar. He racked his brains, trying to think of who this smell belonged to.

The window on the second floor suddenly opened from outside and Li Qingshan questioned loudly, "Qian Rongzhi, what are you doing in my room?"



The person in his residence so late at night was actually Qian Rongzhi. She sat on the bed, meditating. Her hair was disheveled and her clothes were messy as if this was her room.

Qian Rongzhi was slightly surprised before recovering her composure. She smiled. "Obviously waiting for you!" Charm overflowed as she smiled, shaking up the minds of people.

Li Qingshan frowned. "You've practised the arts of charm from the Sect of Clouds and Rain?" She had reached the third layer as well.

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's just a pity that I can't enchant you! And, this residence has already become mine. This is no longer your room."

Li Qingshan frowned. "What?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "You don't need to be surprised, as everyone on this mountain believes you're dead. They obviously won't leave a residence open for a dead person."

Li Qingshan said, "So you've moved in instead?"

Confidence that bordered lunacy appeared in Qian Rongzhi's eyes. "That's because I knew you'd return. Zhuo Zhibo's already dead, right? He died to you!" Zhou Wenbin had basically guessed that Li Qingshan had something that he could rely on as well, but only she was confident that not only would Li Qingshan return alive, he would kill Zhuo Zhibo as well!

Volume Afterword - Everything is just the Beginning

One author, three volumes, eighty-four days and nights, four hundred and seventy one thousand, seven hundred and six characters.

Of course, you can't forget the thirty five thousand, seven hundred and sixty three readers. I bow and I thank you for your support. Thank you. You were the ones who supported me to experiment, to change.

Of course, this wasn't easy at all. However, I don't want to spend too much time reminiscing about this. It's just like the title. Everything is just the beginning.

These things of the past might always seem rather familiar, but I'm not someone who'll repeat the past. From the next volume onwards, there will be some completely new things that will unravel before you.

Just as a spoiler, the name of the next volume is 'The Daemon City Underground'.

You know what I'm going to write now, right? A wondrous world of daemons, a group of strange daemons!

The path to Great Sage is obviously not one that can be carved within the human world alone. Daemon General, Daemon Commander, Daemon King. How can Li Qingshan go without his own domain in a world of daemons?

The story that I want to write, the world that I want to sculpt, has begun to take shape. I will devote my heart and soul to it, working hard to come up with the plot, such that it achieves the effect I want it to achieve. If you have any good ideas, please tell me in the reviews section. My own thoughts are limited, so let us advance forward together.

## Chapter 183 - Startling News from the Sect of Clouds and Rain

Li Qingshan was stern. He felt like he had still ended up underestimating this woman. She was not an ornament who used her body to climb upwards, nor was she a deviant with a twisted heart. Even someone like Zhuo Zhibo who considered himself rather clever could not match her sharp judgement.

“What do you want? Is that all you wanted to say to me after waiting here? Or do you want something from me?” He squinted his eyes. This was not the first time Qian Rongzhi had stirred his killing intent, but she would always manage to avoid crossing the line, giving him no reason to kill her. What about this time? Would it be an exception this time?

Qian Rongzhi smiled sweetly in response to Li Qingshan’s string of questions. “Did you know that the Sect of Clouds of Rain is utterly determined to obtain that child by your side? You have no idea what the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty is worth to the Sect of Clouds and Rain. The sect master has already personally given an order to obtain the child, even if it involves falling out with the Scarlet Wolf commander Hua Chengzan.”

“And then?” Li Qingshan’s eyes narrowed. The Sect of Clouds and Rain was actually willing to go so far for the sake of Xiao An!

“And then it’s impossible for you to hand over the child either, right? The reason why I’ve been sent back here is to monitor this. If Zhuo Zhibo isn’t capable of obtaining the child for the Sect of Clouds and Rain, even more powerful people will immediately be mobilised. If that fails as well, then the four grannies of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, or even the vice sect master and sect master, will come to Jiaping! I don’t know if this piece of information is useful to you or not.”

Li Qingshan did not deny that. If he were blocked by a group of masters within Jiaping city without any preparations, he would basically be done for. Qian Rongzhi’s information was extremely important to him.

“Why are you telling me this? Haven’t you joined the Sect of Clouds and Rain already?”

“The Sect of Clouds and Rain.” Qian Rongzhi sneered slightly in disdain. She walked over while swinging her hips in a flirtatious manner. She wrapped her arms around Li Qingshan’s neck and pressed her entire body against him. Her soft chest pressed against Li Qingshan’s, gently massaging against him. “That’s because I like you more!”

Li Qingshan, however, became even more cautious. All regular Qi Practitioners would be extremely careful, like they were treading on thin ice, whenever they joined a decent sect. There were not a lot of people who showed as much contempt as her. This was not arrogance born from ignorance, but because she possessed lofty ambitions right from the beginning. This was a form of arrogance that ran as deep as her bones. Li Qingshan had been no different in the past.

When she pressed against him, a sticky, sickly-sweet coldness from her soft, warm body prevented him from becoming aroused. Qian Rongzhi basically experienced the same thing as him. The raging sense of violence inside Li Qingshan made her feel danger beyond her control.

As a result, despite being alone and making intimate contact, they struggled to develop any feelings for each other. There was only an unbearable sense of danger and coldness.

Li Qingshan said indifferently, "Move."

Qian Rongzhi took a step back and tidied her hair. "Forget it. What a clueless man."

"Remuneration." Li Qingshan fished out several items from his Hundred Treasures pouch, which included the Pills of Passion and the Pills of Calming he had obtained from Zhao Liangqing, as well as his mid grade spiritual artifact flying sword and the Minor Method of Clouds and Rain. He did not need any of them, aside from the flying sword.

Qian Rongzhi smiled with her lips closed. "I like generous men." She accepted the items. She flipped through the Minor Method of Clouds and Rain first. When she reached a certain page, her eyes suddenly lit up before she tossed the flying sword back to Li Qingshan. "But I'm not stingy either. You have no use for the other items, so I'll be taking them."

A mid grade spiritual artifact that regular Qi Practitioners only dreamt of possessing was actually being tossed around by two weaker Qi Practitioners carelessly.

Li Qingshan said, "Then farewell." Since he had received the news, he could not remain in Jiaping city any longer. Otherwise, he would basically be waiting to be caught. A large sect had mobilised everyone they had, regardless of the costs. He had no confidence that he could oppose them, nor was there a need for him to oppose them. With the tremendous amount of resources he now possessed, finding a place to enter secluded cultivation and increasing his strength would be the correct choice to make.

As long as he became powerful enough, the Sect of Clouds and Rain would obviously cease to pose any trouble to him.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Hold on. Do you want the hundred treasures pouch of a sixth layer Qi Practitioner?"

Li Qingshan asked, "Where?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's right in Jiaping city. The new master of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain is a senior brother of mine. The sect master's original plan was for him to come for you if Zhuo Zhibo failed to capture the child." Her true intentions were finally revealed now.

"He's the son of the vice sect master. He likes raping innocent women. If he sees anyone pretty on the streets, he'll definitely pay a visit to their homes at night. He uses his abilities as a Qi Practitioner to do whatever he wants."

Li Qingshan questioned, "And the Hawkwolf Guard of Clear River city won't do anything about it?"

"It's very difficult for regular women to resist the tricks of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, and there's quite a few who end up being enchanted by him, while the strong-willed care for their own reputation. It's not something that can't be solved with some threats and then some bribes of silver. If no one reports it, no one will investigate it either. Obviously, nothing definite will come up."

Li Qingshan asked, "You want me to help you kill him?"

"No. I want you to help me capture him alive. There's quite a lot of good stuff in his hundred treasures pouch. That'll all go to you. I only want the cultivation method and pills of the Sect of Clouds and Rain that you can't use, alright?" Qian Rongzhi requested cordially.

Li Qingshan sank into his thoughts. As expected, this woman wanted something with how generously she behaved. She actually wanted to use his hands to finish off a senior from her sect. However, the Sect of Clouds and Rain had always been his enemy. He had already made up his mind about personally killing the West Gate Granny. Since he was going to be on the run, he might as well do this first. This was a request that he could not turn down.

Qian Rongzhi said, "On the way here, he constantly told me about how he wanted to try the woman with the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance of Beauty, even if it were just a tiny part of her."

Li Qingshan raised his head and red light flashed through his eyes. "Oh? I'd like to see him try!"

The lanterns were snuffed out and Qian Rongzhi left the residence. She saw Xiao An in the dark, and she immediately became stunned. "This child's... so pure!" What she was looking at was not the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty, but the wondrous sense of purity. Probably only someone like her who had gone through so much before could sense that so deeply. She could not help but extend her hand over, wanting to touch Xiao An's face, but she stopped herself, as if she was afraid that her own filthiness would contaminate the purity.

Xiao An extended her hand and touched the back of Qian Rongzhi's hand. This woman who had allowed her to comprehend the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty did not seem to bear any ill intentions towards her.

Qian Rongzhi's hand shrank back slightly like she had become extremely flattered. Afterwards, she smiled. "It's no wonder that you refuse to hand her over. Even I would be willing to fall out with anybody for her sake."

Li Qingshan said, "You're willing to fall out with anyone for the sake of your own interests in the first place."

Qian Rongzhi asked, "And what's wrong with that?"

Li Qingshan said nothing.

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As they walked through the gloomy streets and alleyways, Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi stuck very closely together. He did not believe in this silver-tongued woman completely. He was worried that the four grannies of the Sect of Clouds and Rain would ambush him the moment he set foot in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. He had to maintain a certain distance so that he could finish her off in a single strike.

Xiao An and the Iron Plate corpse tailed far behind, ready to reinforce Li Qingshan at any time.

The Parlour of Clouds and Rain in the distance glowed with gentle lantern light. It had already been repurchased by the Sect of Clouds and Rain, and it was being reorganised right now. It would open up once again soon. He listened closely the entire time and discovered that Qian Rongzhi's heartbeat and breathing were very steady the entire time. It had not become frantic.

"You don't actually have to be so cautious of me. Why would I do something that brings me no benefit? If the Sect of Clouds and Rain kills you, I'll probably get nothing from your possessions. When you serve

someone as a dog, all you get is scraps of meat that they cast aside. However, I prefer large chunks and fresh." Qian Rongzhi licked her lips.

Li Qingshan secretly admitted that he would never have to worry about her ever developing some great, heroic mentality, risking her life for the sake of the Sect of Clouds and Rain by turning herself into bait.

Qian Rongzhi continued, "Actually, if Qian Yannian had been willing to make me the leader of the family, I wouldn't have destroyed the Qian family." In order to magnify her personal interests and benefits, even revenge and hatred were nothing. "However, I would suck the Qian family dry of their value, and then I would find those people one by one and torture them to death slowly." She seemed to be venting a certain type of gloominess that she could not tell anyone else through her crazy laughter. It was exactly because Li Qingshan had seen through her that she no longer needed to try and hide it.

They arrived at the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

Li Qingshan erased all of his aura and took a step into the darkness. There were no ambushes or encirclements. The parlour was pitch-black. Only the women at the ceiling continued to dance.

Qian Rongzhi was intrigued. He was clearly right beside her, but she failed to sense him at all unless she looked at him. Just this ability to conceal his aura was enough to determine victory against enemies. It was perfect for assassinations.

Climbing to the top floor of the parlour, Li Qingshan sensed a powerful aura that was actually no worse than Zhuo Zhibo's. He became cautious.

Qian Rongzhi shot a glance at Li Qingshan before pushing and entering through the door.

Li Qingshan heard the indecent voice of a young man. "Junior sister, you're here. Do you miss your senior brother?"

Qian Rongzhi's voice was rather cold. "Don't go too far, senior brother." However, her coquettish voice only stimulated men's desire for dominance.

The man said, "I'll show you just how far I can go!" There was a ruffle of clothing, followed by sounds of hugging and kissing.

"Senior brother, let me go!" Qian Rongzhi put up some fake resistance. She hugged the man, spun around, and turned towards the open door. Excitement flickered through her eyes.

Li Qingshan stepped on the thick carpet and entered silently. However, no matter how thick the carpet was, it would still produce a sound. It was enough to fool regular people, but it could not fool the ears of a sixth layer Qi Practitioner.

Just when the man wanted to turn around, Qian Rongzhi's lips attacked. His mind wavered slightly, and his reactions were slowed down by a single beat. By the time he heard the whistling of wind from behind, it was already too late.

Li Qingshan crossed several meters in a single step and stuck a low grade Immobilisation talisman on his back. He had found it in Zhuo Zhibo's hundred treasures pouch. It was specially prepared for capturing Qi Practitioners alive so that they could be brought back and interrogated.

The talisman let out a ring of light that covered the man's body. He immediately stiffened up on the spot, like he was covered in a layer of invisible ice. He was surprised at first, before becoming enraged. He mobilised all of his true qi to smash through the invisible ice barrier. After all, it was only a low grade talisman. It probably could only last for a single instant against sixth layer Qi Practitioners, but that was enough.

Li Qingshan struck like lightning. He grabbed the joints of the man's arms, but a layer of true qi flowed out naturally to protect him. He felt like he had grabbed a tough, rubber tube, preventing him from unleashing his strength.

### **Chapter 184 - Lofty Ambitions**

Li Qingshan's eyes narrowed as the muscles in his arms shifted. He unleashed his explosive strength and produced a crack.

The man suddenly widened his eyes. What happened next became extremely simple. Li Qingshan moved repetitively, and a series of cracks rang out. He crushed all of the joints of the man's limbs. As soon as the man wanted to call out, Li Qingshan grabbed him by the neck and silenced him.

True qi swept up the hundred treasures pouch on the side into Li Qingshan's hand. Without their hundred treasures pouches, most Qi Practitioners were like fangless tigers. If their limbs were crippled as well, they would even be like paralyzed tigers.

It was so simple that it surprised Li Qingshan slightly. However, as long as a Qi Practitioner still had a strand of true qi in their dantian or sea of qi, they could not be considered as truly subdued. He was prepared for what would happen next as well, but all he saw was the man's face twist in pain. Then his true qi scattered chaotically, like he had lost the ability to fight back. Li Qingshan was rather taken aback by this.

Qi Practitioners like Zhuo Zhibo could still gather their true qi even if they were stabbed with swords or blades. Of course, Zhuo Zhibo would have never fallen for such a simple sneak attack in the first place. Even if he failed to sense any auras or hear any sounds, just his instincts for danger alone were enough to stave off everything.

However, as the son of a vice sect master, this man had been pampered his entire life. He had only ever been treated gently. Never had he been abused in such a violent manner, nor had he experienced such pain before. He was in so much pain that he forgot about everything. The Immobilisation talisman lasted a little longer before being destroyed by the scattered true qi.

Before Li Qingshan could do anything, Qian Rongzhi had already pulled out a metal pillory, locking it around the man's neck and hands.

The pillory glowed with light. It was actually a low grade spiritual artifact; moreover, it was an extremely rare one for capturing enemies. A black hawk was depicted on the top. Its pair of talons grabbed the man's hands, while it held the man's head in its beak. Li Qingshan could tell with a single glance that it came from the Hawkwolf Guard. Without a doubt, Qian Rongzhi had obtained it from Zhuo Zhibo.

The man's chaotic true qi became even less threatening after being locked up in the hawk pillory. Afterwards, his eyes rolled backwards, actually fainting from the pain.

This left Li Qingshan rather stunned. This was the first time that he had realised that the strength of Qi Practitioners could not be described through simple numbers like the fifth or sixth layer. Willpower, temperament, and reaction were all crucial elements as well.

If this man was sufficiently prepared, he could probably unleash the strength that corresponded to a sixth layer Qi Practitioner. Perhaps he might have been able to kill Qi Practitioners of the same level using trump cards from his father, but if anything happened suddenly, his actual ability would be exposed. He was utterly useless.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Take him below!"

Clank!

In the underground palace, Li Qingshan tossed the naked man with a pillory into an empty, stone room. Even without spiritual artifacts, sixth layer Qi Practitioners could still control objects around them, so he could still cause some trouble.

The man woke up from the pain. He was quite handsome, but his face was pale and utterly twisted. He roared in surprise and fury, "Qian Rongzhi, what are you doing? Y- you're Li Qingshan!" He had seen Li Qingshan's portrait before he had set off for here.

Li Qingshan said, "You're from the Sect of Clouds and Rain, aren't you?"

The man said, "I'm Wei Yingjie. My father is a vice sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain. If you have some wits about you, hurry up and release me. I might spare your life."

"What! Vice sect master! Qian Rongzhi, you tricked me! You've actually made me offend such an important figure!" Li Qingshan was startled. He showed fear as he said politely, "Young sect master, what brings you to Jiaping city?"

Wei Yingjie saw how Li Qingshan was afraid, so he said in an even more arrogant manner, "Release me, and then offer up that child with the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty by your side..."

The fear on Li Qingshan's face vanished. He exhaled. "Looks like I've got the right person." Qian Rongzhi was not telling the complete truth, but it was not far from it either. However, this bastard was basically the weakest sixth layer Qi Practitioner Li Qingshan had ever seen. Li Qingshan was truly clueless as to how he had managed to reach the sixth layer with his level of intelligence.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "What an idiot!"

Wei Yingjie seemed to realise something, "Qian Rongzhi, you traitor! Release me, or my father will never spare you! Ouch!" He struggled so another wave of pain hit him from his crushed joints. He collapsed onto the ground, now afraid to move any further.

Qian Rongzhi completely ignored him. She said to Li Qingshan, "Let's see what's in the hundred treasures pouch."

After checking the hundred treasures pouch, he discovered that there were not a lot of Qi Gathering pills in there. There were only five hundred. However, there were quite a few spiritual stones, amounting to over three hundred. There were actually two mid grade spiritual artifacts as well. One was a flying sword that could be controlled, while the other was a ring that seemed like a wristguard.

There were several dozen talismans in there as well, along with a rare high grade talisman. Li Qingshan was extremely familiar with the inscription on it. It was a Strength Talisman of the Guardian Kings, but the inscription was several times more complicated than the ones he had previously seen. As it seemed, this was the life-saving measure his father had given to him.

However, this was not the first time Li Qingshan had seen a naked disciple of the Sect of Clouds and Rain either. Even if you have countless techniques and methods hidden in your hundred treasures pouch, it would be useless if you don't have your hundred treasures pouch.

According to their deal, Li Qingshan gave the Major Method of Clouds and Rain to Qian Rongzhi.

Qian Rongzhi immediately flipped through it. She had joined the Sect of Clouds and Rain recently, so all she had learnt so far were some rules and commandments of the sect. She needed to wait some time before going through a test, and only then would she receive the sect's legacy. However, in less than two hours just now, she had managed to assemble both cultivation methods, the Minor and Major Methods of Clouds and Rain, finding a path that led to the very top among Qi Practitioners.

Li Qingshan found over a dozen bottles of Pills of Passion and Pills of Calming. He gave these pills that were for cultivation in the Sect of Clouds and Rain to Qian Rongzhi.

Qian Rongzhi accepted it all while smiling from ear to ear. When Wei Yingjie saw the two of them split up his possessions right in front of him, he could not help but fly into a fury. Ignoring the pain, he let violent true qi surged out of his sea of qi, surging towards the two of them like a tidal wave. It whipped up a violent gale within the tiny stone room. He had managed all of this while being restrained by the hawk pillory, or it would have been even more impressive.

Qian Rongzhi pulled out her Water-splitting bard and swung down with it, cutting the true qi in half, which landed on the stone walls behind her. With a rustle, some dust and sand fell down from the ceiling.

Li Qingshan stood there without moving, allowing the true qi to strike him. His extremely pure true qi appeared outside of his body automatically, protecting him. Combined with his tough physique, he was unscathed.

If he could launch an attack with his arms or feet, it might have been somewhat threatening, but it was completely pointless now. Instead, it was a waste of true qi.

Li Qingshan suddenly pulled out another bottle of pills. "What's this?"

Qian Rongzhi's eyes lit up. "This is also a special pill from the Sect of Clouds and Rain. It's a rare pill that can purify true qi."

Li Qingshan said, "Aren't you afraid that I'll take it for myself if you tell me that?"

Qian Rongzhi answered with a question, "Will you?"

"I won't." Li Qingshan tossed the bottle of Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain to Qian Rongzhi. He did not do this just because of their agreement. His true qi had already been purified using the sumeru ring, so he had no need for the Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain.



Qian Rongzhi smiled sweetly. These Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain were an extremely important component to her plan.

“That’s why I’m willing to work with you. I might even end up helping you in the future. If you plan on dealing with the Sect of Clouds and Rain in the future, feel free to come find me. I’ll definitely lend you a helping hand. I’ll eat those leftovers with you.”

Li Qingshan suddenly even felt like she possessed a sense of open-mindedness that regular women rarely exhibited. She was vicious and her ambitions were lofty. Compared to those crooks who only concentrated on small profits, a person like her was hundreds of times more terrifying. Leftovers? She would never be willing to crawl on the ground forever. She was a venomous snake. She would climb upwards constantly, until she climbed into the sky, becoming a venomous dragon that could overturn the world.

He had a feeling that perhaps the Sect of Clouds and Rain would suffer the same fate as the Qian family, destroyed by this woman. Based on the logic that the enemy of the enemy is my friend, perhaps she really could help her, but he would never take a liking to someone like her. After splitting up the items, he shoved the hundred treasures pouch into his bosom and left without second thought. He did not want to spend a moment longer with this woman.

With Li Qingshan’s departure, Qian Rongzhi’s face eased up. She felt much more comfortable now. She sat down where she was and read through the two cultivation methods.

At this moment, Wei Yingjie also seemed to realise that he was completely at her mercy. He solicited, “Rongzhi, we’re seniors and juniors, so why must you do this to me? If you don’t want to be a courtesan, then you can just not be one. I’ll talk to my father about it.”

Aside from sending Qian Rongzhi back so that she could watch over Li Qingshan’s movements, the Sect of Clouds and Rain actually wanted her to replace courtesan Furong’s position. It was not exactly an intended insult. The women of the Sect of Cloud and Rain all required the vitality of men to cultivate. However, at the end of the day, this could still be regarded as a form of probing and testing. Most women would still be reluctant to end up in a brothel, living a life where they just slept with people. Only when she completely accepted the ideology of the Sect of Clouds and Rain would she receive their legacy.

Qian Rongzhi seemed rather noble and cold before Wei Yingjie, which made him believe that she had betrayed him because she was dissatisfied with this arrangement,

Qian Rongzhi did not even look at him. She said without the slightest care, “So what if I become a courtesan? Though, if I just rely on the vitality of normal men, and I have to be squeezed out by you, when am I supposed to achieve success?!” Within the Sect of Clouds and Rain, there was a dominant and submission relationship when it came to dual cultivation. The weaker person would definitely lose something in the process. If she followed the rules of others, she would be under the control of others for the rest of her life.

Wei Yingjie was stunned. He forced out a smile. “You think your cultivation will be too slow? I’ll get my father to allocate some pills to you. He’s responsible for everything in the sect.” However, all he thought

of was how he would torture Qian Rongzhi once he had broken free. This was all just an act, but Qian Rongzhi paid no attention to his clumsy act either.

Qian Rongzhi said, "Yeah. If that old coot hadn't handed the women in the sect to you as human cauldrons, giving you the best pills, how were you supposed to reach the sixth layer as the piece of trash that you are? I heard there's quite a nice trick within the Method of Clouds and Rain... Found it! Looks like it's true. Only by combining the two cultivation methods will it be complete."

Wei Yingjie suddenly seemed to understand something. He became fear-stricken. "You're planning to use the Vitality Devouring technique!" This was an extremely brutal and forceful technique. It was taboo within the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Zhao Liangqing had wanted to use it on those kidnapped girls before.

Dual cultivation was about mutual benefit. Even at its worst, it would be treating the other person as a human cauldron to harvest from, but that could lead to an overabundance of one element and not enough of the other as a result. However, the Vitality Devouring technique was just straightforward robbery. It would cause great harm to one party in the process, or even death. It was forbidden to be used, whether in the sect or outside of it.

### **Chapter 185 - Cultivating Underground**

Wei Yingjie understood why Qian Rongzhi had not killed him. She wanted to use this method to forcefully steal the true qi he had cultivated after so much difficulty. He no longer cared about the pain as he desperately gathered his true qi.

Qian Rongzhi said, "If you dare to use your true qi, I'll cut off your arms and your legs. I'll turn you into a quadruple amputee. If you don't believe me, you're more than welcome to try it."

Wei Yingjie panicked inside and immediately became afraid to use his true qi. Crushed bones could be healed with medicine, but if his arms or legs were cut off, he would truly become a cripple. A great future still awaited him, along with many beautiful women. If he became a cripple, he would much rather be dead.

"That's clever of you!" Qian Rongzhi praised. She made her way over, grabbed a handful of Pills of Passion, and shoved them into Wei Yingjie's mouth. Wei Yingjie struggled and shook his head desperately. The Pills of Passion were an extremely powerful aphrodisiac, in order to make women lose themselves for the sake of harvesting from them. Just two days ago, he had forced Qian Rongzhi to eat two. Even one was far more than what he could endure, so how could he eat so many?

Qian Rongzhi smiled. "Weren't you so happy when you fed me them two days ago?" Her face suddenly coldened. "Eat it! If you don't, I'll cut off your limbs."

Wei Yingjie hesitated slightly before producing a howl. Qian Rongzhi cut off one of his fingers and showed it to him.

Wei Yingjie experienced pain, anger, and hatred. However, he was forced to oblige now that he was under the mercy of others. He ate all of the Pills of Passion reluctantly. Very soon, a raging flame of lust exploded in his crotch. His gaze towards Qian Rongzhi gradually became replaced with desire.

Qian Rongzhi smiled and ate a Pill of Calming.

Quite a while later, Qian Rongzhi put her clothes back on. She was brimming with energy, as if she had just drunk some nourishing soup. Her eyes were filled with vigour, and the true qi in her body had basically doubled. She only stopped when she could not withstand it any longer.

However, the additional form of different true qi was not particularly harmonious with her own. Fortunately, both of them practised the Method of Clouds and Rain, so it was not a particularly big problem. Moreover, the Sect of Clouds and Rain produced Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain to address this exact issue. She consumed one of those pills before meditating on the spot, purifying her true qi.

Wei Yingjie heaved heavily. He was haggard and extremely frail. Even if he wanted to release his true qi in resistance, he was powerless now. He recovered most of his clarity and begged, "Please spare me!"

No, I have to find a way to escape, or I'll be sucked dry by this woman. He moved a finger quietly. No matter how horrible of a shape he was in, he had gradually adapted to the pain from his crushed joints. As long as he could endure this agony and channel true qi into his limbs, he should be able to move around. By then, this woman would not be his opponent with her cultivation at the third layer.

"An idiot like you sure has a lot of true qi. However, I can go slowly. I have plenty of time!" Qian Rongzhi picked up the Water-splitting barb with a smile and made her way over to Wei Yingjie.

"W- what are you trying to do?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's too dangerous! I better cut them off!" There was a splash of blood, and a howl resounded through the underground palace.

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Under the starry skies, Li Qingshan left Jiaping silently with Xiao An, like they had never returned to there in the first place. He believed that Qian Rongzhi would behave like she knew nothing either. Everything that happened in Jiaping city would only erupt after a delayed period of time.

He made his way to the back of the Hawkwolf Guard and dove into the raging Clear river that flowed southward. Afterwards, he crossed it and arrived below the cliff on the other side. After quite the effort, he finally found the cave recorded on the map.

Li Qingshan dove in head first. Only after swimming for a whole hour did he emerge in a cave.

What he needed to avoid right now was not just the Sect of Clouds and Rain, but the Hawkwolf Guard as well. If the Hawkwolf Guard discovered him, they would definitely take him back for interrogation, and the Sect of Clouds and Rain would learn about it too. He heavily doubted whether the Hawkwolf Guard could protect him, or should he say, Xiao An, from a great group of Qi Practitioners under the determination of an entire sect. The gaze of the Hawkwolf Guard spanned the world. If he wanted to run around on the surface, he would be discovered sooner or later.

He would not be particularly well-hidden in the wilderness either given the various things cultivators were capable of. As a result, he decided to go to the Zombie Daoist's dwelling. It possessed all the facilities he required, and it was extremely well-hidden. It would be enough for him to cultivate peacefully for a while so that he could break through to the second layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength.

Underground was not like the flat stretch of land on the surface. Instead, it was extremely twisted. As one moved through the maze-like tunnels, even someone with a particularly good sense of direction would become lost if they did not have a map.

It was said that dark, narrow caves could make people claustrophobic, but Li Qingshan found it alright. Anyone who possessed a great piece of wealth would be in a good mood. He also had Xiao An as company, so he did not feel lonely at all.

Instead, he felt a wondrous sensation of relief in the dark depths of the earth, like a beast returning to the wilderness. He no longer needed to deal with humans under various guises and appearances. Right now, he possessed absolute freedom. From a certain perspective, he really did become more and more like a daemon.

Li Qingshan strode forward, while Xiao An sat on a huge skull that had transformed from a Skull Prayer Bead, studying the underground mental map from the Zombie Daoist with her head lowered. Whenever they encountered a fork, she would indicate which way to go. Li Qingshan did not have the patience to study the map.

This continued until they reached the Zombie Daoist's dwelling. Li Qingshan was in no hurry to immediately begin cultivating. Instead, he lit a fire and began cooking. There was quite a lot of food across the hundred treasure pouches he had obtained, so he cooked up a feast very soon.

Li Qingshan smiled. "Let's celebrate!"

The two of them brought their cups together in the pitch-black darkness, producing a clink.

Li Qingshan told Xiao An, "I might take some time with cultivation this time. Don't run around outside, alright?"

Xiao An nodded obediently.

Li Qingshan rubbed her head. He thought about how she either spent all day fighting and killing with him, or hiding and fleeing with him. This was not the lifestyle that a child should experience. However, just where in this world did no conflict exist? Even if he went to the legendary Academy of the Hundred Schools, would it really be different?

He activated a mechanism, and a great, stone door fell down, sealing off the cultivation room completely.

In the absolute darkness and silence, Li Qingshan took out a bottle of Qi Gathering pills. He would protect her. He had never doubted this fact, no matter when.

Raising his head, he directly tipped the entire bottle into his mouth. Li Qingshan closed his eyes and converted the medicine into true qi according to the methods detailed by the Innate Method of Practising Qi.

After who knows how long, he digested all of the pills. He stood up and daemonified, beginning to practise the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength. The medicinal effects then turned into daemon qi.

This repeated constantly. As he moved and paused, Li Qingshan comprehended the path of humans and daemons, constantly becoming stronger.

Time passed day by day, while the pills were consumed bottle by bottle.

The disappearance of the two commanders and seven elite Black Wolf guards of Jiaping city finally caused a disturbance that reached Clear River city.

### **Chapter 186 - Breakthrough**

A droplet of water fell from the stalactite on the cave ceiling in the darkness, dripping towards Li Qingshan's head.

Li Qingshan sat with his legs crossed on the stone platform without moving at all, but a tremendous change unfolded within his body.

Extremely pure true qi constantly flowed through his Yang Heel meridian before delving into his bones strand by strand, rinsing his entire body.

A month had passed. He had already eaten almost three thousand Qi Gathering pills. He averaged a hundred a day.

This was a terrifying number. It was enough to any cultivator. His true qi had increased tremendously once again, but what broke through first was his Innate Method of Practising Qi.

The falling droplet of water was smashed apart by the shaking true qi three inches above Li Qingshan's head. The waves of true qi were on the edge of breaking through now.

The true qi that had been purified through the sumeru ring was extremely effective now. It basically allowed Li Qingshan to break through to the sixth layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi without any obstruction at all, reaching the peak of the second layer.

Li Qingshan smiled. He felt both relieved and amazed. He was relieved over the fact that he had spent much less time compared to regular Qi Practitioners.

For example, Qian Rongzhi had been cultivating since a young age, but it had taken her several years to reach the second layer. Their talent could be described as no different from one another, or in other words, just average. As for Diao Fei, he originated from a sect and had the guidance of seniors. He was in his thirties, yet he was only at the third layer.

Li Qingshan's cultivation speed truly was fast, but it did not happen without the support of a tremendous number of pills. And, if it were not for the sumeru ring, it would have been pointless no matter how many pills he possessed, as refining the impurities in the pills would take him ten times longer than right now.

He felt completely refreshed. He could not help but think about how Xiao An was doing.

Li Qingshan held back his desire to emerge from seclusion. He was extremely close to the second layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength. He was basically only a step away. He could not afford to give up now. He needed to use this momentum to continue forwards and reach the second layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, as well as open his Yin Heel meridian and reach the third layer of Qi Practitioner. Sixteen year old third layer Qi Practitioners could be regarded as geniuses.

The daemon core flashed, and daemon qi rose up from his body like fire. He daemonified. After the month of cultivation, his height had finally exceeded thirty feet.

While this underground cavern was quite large, Li Qingshan's horns were close to touching the stalactites on the ceiling. If nothing went wrong, there would be a day when he would turn into a colossal monster like godzilla. No, he would be even more terrifying than godzilla. With a stomp of his feet, an entire city would collapse from the resulting earthquake, and with a roar, everyone's heads would explode.

.....

Wei Yingjie no longer remembered his past self anymore in the underground palace. His handsome appearance had completely fallen apart. His skin was withered and gloomy like an old man's, while his eyes had lost all of their lustre. Drool constantly leaked out from his mouth.

Ten days ago, he had been reduced to an imbecile from the medicinal effects after consuming too many Pills of Passion.

Before Qian Rongzhi's Vitality Devouring technique, his true qi had been sucked dry. Even his vitality was not spared. Finally, the last sliver of his life gave way. As a person who treated toying around with women as his hobby, he had lost his life from being toyed around by a woman in the end. He really was quite pitiful.

On top of him, Qian Rongzhi's snowy body was streaked with sweat. Her skin was utterly glowing, while her appearance had become even more charming. She was like a green, tender vine wounded around a withered tree, blooming with charming flowers.

She ravished with joy on her face that had been unperturbed the entire time due to the Pills of Calming. With the support of his father, Wei Yingjie's true qi was extremely abundant. It was ten times more than what Qian Rongzhi possessed at the very least.

Qian Rongzhi accepted all of it from him without holding back. Her true qi broke through to the fourth layer, and her body was filled to the brink too. The fifth layer was only a matter of time for her now.

While the Vitality Devouring technique was terrifying, it was unable to digest the true qi of a sixth layer Qi Practitioner completely. Most of it was lost, or she would have been able to reach the sixth layer directly. Qian Rongzhi was already quite satisfied with what she had achieved so far.

Of course, this did not come without disadvantages. Her true qi was extremely impure, so she required even more Pills of Spring Breeze and Rain. However, she was not worried about this. As long as her cultivation had increased, there would obviously be more ways for her to obtain even better pills.

She had never planned on using ordinary people to practise the Minor and Major Methods of Clouds and Rain. It would be far too impure and far too slow. Due to the differences in the element of true qi, it would be difficult to digest. It could even lead to issues like conflicting true qi. This was why she never bothered with hunting down regular Qi Practitioners. The people from the same sect who also practised the Method of Clouds and Rain were the best prey for her.

A fire talisman burned the corpse to ashes. She thought, It's time for me to report back to the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Young master Wei lost his patience and ventured into the Zombie cave in search of Li Qingshan!

She took out another pill and ingested it, suppressing her cultivation back to the third layer. Afterwards, she washed up and changed her clothes, emerging from the underground palace. She looked up at the clear, autumn sky and revealed a smile that was even more resplendent than the sun. "My fate lies in my own hands!"

.....

In a room with fine views, Wang Pushi dumped a thick pile of documents onto Hua Chengzan's long, sandalwood desk. "What do you think?"

Hua Chengzan sat back in his armed chair with his legs crossed on his desk. He extended his hand, and the documents flew over with a flutter, lining themselves up in the air.

Hua Chengzan looked through them as his eyes darted about rapidly. He glanced past each document, taking note of each sentence.

I saw them pass by... We emerged with Qingshan, but I don't know where he went... He had personally said that he had grievances with Zhuo Zhibo... Our sect master said we had to bring back the child...

It seemed like countless voices whispering into his ears with different tones. A while later, the stack of documents flew back onto the desk in a neat pile.

Hua Chengzan opened his eyes. "If that He Yishi is telling the truth, then..."

Wang Pushi asked, "Then what?"

Hua Chengzan smiled. "Li Qingshan led Zhuo Zhibo to his death through deception before killing Lao Xishan as well." After his clever mind sorted through the information, the falsehoods were weeded out, the blanks had been filled in, and what remained would never be too far from the truth.

Wang Pushi frowned. "That's impossible. He's just a second layer Qi Practitioner. How did he manage to kill Zhuo Zhibo and so many Black Wolf guards?"

Hua Chengzan said, "He's a second layer Qi Practitioner who has killed someone at the fifth layer. Moreover, he might not have personally done all of this. He might have lured Zhuo Zhibo into the nest of a daemon. You know that it's not safe underground. Even we're afraid to venture too deeply into many places."

Wang Pushi nodded. Below the earth was a forbidden zone for humans.

Hua Chengzan continued, "It's also possible that he set up a trap with several hundred Explosion talismans. Or, if he used a Lightning Fire bomb from the school of Mohism, all he would need to do is create a small earthquake in a chosen location, and it would not be too difficult to kill a group of Qi Practitioners. Anyways, there are plenty of ways to kill them. If they weren't killed by Li Qingshan, am I supposed to believe that Zhuo Zhibo lost his way underground?"

“Li Qingshan led them away, yet only he returned in one piece. Old Wang, if it weren’t for the sake of his cultivation, isn’t it very obvious? Only victors can return alive. Losers will obviously end up dead somewhere.”

“I think Zhuo Zhibo is probably done for as well!” Wang Pushi gradually became convinced. He had undergone a heavenly tribulation and reached Foundation Establishment, truly setting foot on the path of cultivation and becoming an influential Scarlet Hawk commander, but he still held great admiration towards Hua Chengzan’s intellect. He had to admit the existence of geniuses in the world. If it were not for that person, Hua Chengzan would have broken through to Foundation Establishment a long time ago, or even surpassed him already.

Hua Chengzan said, “Afterwards, the two groups separated, with just Li Qingshan and Lao Xishan left together. No one knows what happened to them. According to He Yishi, Li Qingshan gained an Iron Plate corpse. With Lao Xishan’s ability of having just broken through to the sixth layer, it’s possible that he was killed by the Iron Plate corpse. Perhaps the kid is cultivating in seclusion right now with his spoils of the battles!”

Wang Pushi said furiously, “That kid sure is a vicious ingrate. I shouldn’t have let him join the Hawkwolf Guard in the past.”

Hua Chengzan winked at him mischievously. “Back then, you never imagined he would be able to kill Feng Zhang and actually be bold enough to report to Jiaping city.”

Wang Pushi shot him a vicious glance. “He got lucky.”

Hua Chengzan raised his head and looked at the ceiling. “Once or twice is luck. If he can defeat those stronger than him and escape death every single time, that’s not luck anymore. That’s strength.”

Wang Pushi said, “Though, his luck has run out.”

Hua Chengzan lowered his head again and said in surprise, “What do you plan on doing?”

Wang Pushi said, “Hmph, I’ll obviously bring him to justice. In just the few months after joining the Hawkwolf Guard, he killed two of his superior officers. I’ve never seen such a bold Black Wolf guard. He has no respect for laws or authority at all.”

Hua Chengzan said, “Look, that’s just my guess. It might not be true. And, there’s no evidence, so why would he admit to it?”

Wang Pushi said, “Are we just supposed to drop this matter like this then?”

Hua Chengzan said, “Zhuo Zhibo was asking for it. He went as far as to mobilise everyone, and he tried to kill his own subordinate. Isn’t Li Qingshan allowed to fight back? Zhuo Zhibo has spent far too much time in Jiaping city, and he has gotten too close to the Sect of Clouds and Rain as well. It’s time for us to change him as well.”

Wang Pushi said, “Then Lao Xishan deserved it as well when he was silenced with death?”

Hua Chengzan pouted. “He probably deserved it. If he wanted to silence people, the people he should have silenced the most would be the disciples of mohism, particularly the one called He Yishi. His testimony is basically trying to incriminate Li Qingshan as the murderer, yet Li Qingshan still saved them.



If Li Qingshan were vicious, he would have left them to die in the hands of the Zombie Daoist. Since he has already cleaned up behind himself, and it doesn't seem like he did it on purpose, why must we be the petty ones here?"

He had quite a good impression of Li Qingshan. Aside from the one time they met in the past, he had close ties to Hua Chenglu, but he ignored her advice. Moreover, Li Qingshan never tried to seek help from the Hua family even when he was in danger. He never even tried to rat out Zhuo Zhibo through Hua Chenglu.

### **Chapter 187 - Geniuses and the Ordinary**

The deaths of two Hawkwolf Guard commanders was a ground-shaking matter in certain places, through the eyes of certain people. However, in other places, in the eyes of other people, this was insignificant.

The difference in authority and power resulted in differing focuses. Whether it be Wang Pushi who disliked Li Qingshan or Hua Chengzan who liked him, they both handled this matter as something unimportant. They reached an agreement after just a short talk.

Wang Pushi said, "Fair enough. It's not like we need to do anything to deal with the kid anyway."

Hua Chengzan asked, "How come?"

Wang Pushi said, "Vice sect master Wei of the Sect of Clouds and Rain has already ventured to Jiaping city with the four grannies. That sh\*tty son of his went underground in search of Li Qingshan and hasn't returned since. I think he's dead. What, didn't that cohabitor of yours mention it?"

Hua Chengsan said, "You've answered your own question. Even you said that she's just my cohabitor, not my wife. She's the sect master, so she obviously has to consider the interests of the sect. The child does seem to be rather important to them. They sure don't take me seriously as a vice commander!" He had forbidden the Sect of Clouds and Rain from laying a finger on Li Qingshan, but they defied his request now, forcefully going about the manner. That was equivalent to disregarding his authority.

Wang Pushi raised an eyebrow. "Once you get through the heavenly tribulation, we can work together. I'd like to see if there is anyone who's bold enough to defy your requests in the fifteen hundred kilometers of the Clear River prefecture by then." Two Foundation Establishment cultivators who were also Hawkwolf guards possessed absolute authority within the entire Clear River prefecture. In comparison, while only a step separated them from tenth layer Qi Practitioners, a significant difference existed.

Hua Chengsan smiled in a disappointing manner. "Cultivation is about going with the flow. You can't force it."

Wang Pushi said, "Forget it. We'll just stick with what you want. We won't bring him to justice, nor will we protect him. We'll just wait and see. I'd like to see if the kid can survive this!"

Hua Chengzan sprang up from his seat and crouched on the desk, patting Wang Pushi's shoulder. "At the end of the day, he can still be regarded as a person that boss Gu admires. Just stop being dissatisfied with him, old Wang. You'd better be careful if it affects your cultivation."

Wang Pushi said, "So what? I'm also a person that boss- commander Gu admires. You've almost carried me away! If it weren't for this dissatisfaction, I would be an old man gasping my last breath of air right now! I'll pay a visit to the Academy of the Hundred Schools and see which kids are willing to head down and take over the position of commander and vice commander."

Regular Qi Practitioners would have to work laboriously and risk their lives, and only then would they barely be able to become a Black Wolf guard. Yet, those from the Academy of the Hundred Schools could directly become commanders. There really was quite a difference between them.

After Wang Pushi departed, Hua Chengzan became slightly gloomy. He sighed gently. Even if he was as intelligent as they came, standing proudly as a genius, what was the point of all of it if he could not close this distance, even just by a tiny bit?

As geniuses stood where they were, sighing, the ordinary crawled along on the ground.

Smack! A crisp slap sent Qian Rongzhi flying. She rolled in the air and slammed into a wall viciously, falling to the ground. Her entire cheek had already swelled up as blood oozed from the corner of her lips. She no longer seemed charming at all.

"Why didn't you stop him? And why have you only reported it now?" A grizzled, middle-aged man in expensive, violet robes roared. His true qi surged in a formidable manner, crushing down on Qian Rongzhi from a certain distance away. She was immobilised like an insect about to be squashed.

The middle-aged man was the vice sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, a tenth layer Qi Practitioner, Wei Zhongyuan. He had already reached the highest level of the Method of Clouds and Rain. Only a step separated him from Foundation Establishment. He was a figure who stood at the apex among Qi Practitioners.

To the sides of the hall sat four shrivelled, old women, all covered in cosmetics. It was quite a strange sight. Even from ten steps away, it was possible to smell the cosmetics they wore.

They all tweaked their appearances, drawing their eyebrows, applying eye make-up, and manicuring their nails. None of them even glanced at Qian Rongzhi. A few young men stood behind them as they served them with their utmost attention.

One of them was the West Gate Granny. Two handsome young men massaged her shoulders, while she lowered her head and sipped some tea. She paid no attention to her disciple's miserable state.

Qian Rongzhi's eyes were teary as she said in a pitiful manner, "I tried everything, but I wasn't able to dissuade young master Wei. Sect master, you really can't blame me for this!"

"How dare you talk back!" Wei Zhongyuan extended his hand and true qi flew over thirty meters away, lifting Qian Rongzhi into the air. "With my son's temperament, he would have never tried to search for Li Qingshan if he hadn't been bewitched by a whore like you. There's no news of him even now." If it were not for the fact that Qian Rongzhi was just too weak, he basically would have suspected Qian Rongzhi to be the culprit behind it all. Of course, this did not originate from his rational thinking, but from the pure anger that he wanted to vent on her.

With a shriek, all of Qian Rongzhi's bones creaked. They were close to being crushed. "I... really..."

The door was suddenly flung open and several Black Wolf guards barged in. "What are you trying to..." After seeing what was going on, they all paled in fright. They received news that a Black Wolf guard was trapped in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, so they all rushed over in a hurry. However, they never thought that they would run into such a powerful group of Qi Practitioners. They had almost been left speechless.

"W- what are you trying to do? A- are you trying to kill someone from the Hawkwolf Guard?"

Wei Zhongyuan remembered how Qian Rongzhi possessed another identity. The West Gate Granny coughed gently. "Sect master, just leave the matter be. It's not Rongzhi's fault anyway. We better find little Jie quickly instead! I've watched that kid grow up, so I don't wish for anything to happen to him either."

Wei Zhongyang snorted coldly before tossing Qian Rongzhi aside resentfully. The Black Wolf guards were afraid to come help her up. Qian Rongzhi managed to get back onto her feet, and she knelt at the West Gate Granny in gratitude. "Thank you, granny!" Then she bowed her head towards Wei Zhongyuan. "Thank you, sect master!"

"If we can't find Jie'er, just you wait!" Wei Zhongyuan turned around swiftly and made his way out. The four grannies followed closely behind, while the young men all walked past Qian Rongzhi in a chattering manner, looking at her dishevelled shape in disdain. They discussed loudly, "Look at her! She looks like a bitch!"

A young man beside the West Gate Granny said, "Right? She even wanted to suck up to granny. How shameless."

Qian Rongzhi kept her head lowered, such that her messy hair hid her face, preventing anyone from seeing the light in her eyes.

Fortunately, she had thought of sending someone to seek reinforcements from the Hawkwolf Guard first, or she really might have been killed in this old bastard's rage, which would have been a waste. If she used the Vitality Devouring technique on a tenth layer Qi Practitioner, would it be enough for her to break through to the sixth layer and condense a sea of qi?

The Black Wolf guards glanced at Qian Rongzhi. One of them said, "Now you know the consequences that come from trying to cling onto the stinky feet of the Sect of Clouds and Rain!"

"When the Parlour of Clouds and Rain opens again, we'll take good care of the business considering the fact that we're colleagues. Rongzhi, once you recover from your injuries, hopefully you'll treat us well!"

A few people smiled nefariously as they fearlessly ogled Qian Rongzhi's lovely stature.

They were Black Wolf guards who had originally been pushed to one side by Zhuo Zhibo. They were filled with envy and disdain towards Qian Rongzhi, who had managed to get on Zhuo Zhibo's good side as soon as she had joined the Hawkwolf Guard. Now that Zhuo Zhibo was gone, they all felt like it was time for them to rise up. They felt extremely pleased with themselves, such that they became arrogant from their success.

Qian Rongzhi stood up. Under the soothing of true qi, her swollen face returned to normal, only leaving behind some dark, blue bruising. She wiped away the blood from the corner of her lips and smiled. "I

just happen to be interested in carrying out a mission, but I probably won't succeed if I go alone, so I'll have to ask for your help. I'll definitely pay back your kindness properly."

The Black Wolf guards looked at one another. They were all tempted, but the disdain they showed deepened. Qian Rongzhi was just a whore who used her body to climb up. Now that the person she relied on, Zhuo Zhibo, had collapsed, she obviously needed someone new to depend on. Out of them, one was at the fourth layer and three were at the third layer. They were basically all of the core strength that remained in the Hawkwolf Guard of Jiaping city. They were very good targets to curry up to.

It was perfect for them to try this woman. It was not like they had to be afraid of any tricks she could use with their strength.

Right after Qian Rongzhi and the four Black Wolf guards received the mission in the falconry and were about to set off, they ran into Diao Fei.

Diao Fei glanced at Qian Rongzhi and immediately moved to one side. He asked politely, "You're all...?"

The leading fourth layer Qi Practitioner said, "We're going on a small mission. Some daemons have been acting up, so we want to take a look. Do you want to come along?"

"Hehe, big brother, it's just a small mission. Won't that be a little too many people?" A Black Wolf guard smiled nefariously, leading to a wave of laughter.

Come along!? Diao Fei did not even have enough time to avoid this woman, yet they somehow had the courage to go on a mission with her. Ever since the mission in Ancient Wing city, he became extremely cautious about Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi. He swore that he would never do anything with them again. He maintained a low profile and went about his matters alone, accumulating resources and avoiding disturbances. He was preparing for his breakthrough to the fourth layer.

When he heard that Zhuo Zhibo had led a group of Black Wolf guards to hunt down Li Qingshan, he was not like the other Black Wolf guards who firmly believed that Li Qingshan was done for. The end result from all of this was the disappearance of nine Hawkwolf Guards, with two commanders among them. He was not bold enough to say that Li Qingshan was behind all of it, but he definitely felt that Li Qingshan had something to do with it.

This consolidated his thoughts all the more. He could not afford to travel alongside a tiger! However, it was possible to guard against tiger attacks, but venomous snakes were impossible to defend against. His gaze towards these Black Wolf guards was rather strange. He basically said with some pity for them, "I still have things I need to do." before leaving in a hurry.

"What a loner."

"Forget it. Let's go." The fourth layer Qi Practitioner placed his hand around Qian Rongzhi's hips in a natural fashion and brought it downwards.

Qian Rongzhi smiled. While different types of true qi would cause a slight problem, how could she turn down prey that was basically delivered to her?

The next day, Qian Rongzhi returned to Jiaping quietly with four round sacks. She returned to the palace below the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

Whether they were geniuses or ordinary, they all had to find a way to live, no matter what the method was. However, when the ordinary refused to remain in mediocrity and accept the arrangements of fate, desiring everything that geniuses possessed, they would have to rack their brains and pay a price. This price was not just hardships and hard work. It could even involve sacrificing their dignity, enduring abuse, abandoning their feelings, and throwing themselves into hellish misery.

Deep underground, in the Zombie Daoist's dwelling, Li Qingshan underwent a great trial as well as sweat poured from his black iron-like body.

### **Chapter 188 - The Strength of Two Oxen**

The effects from swallowing a thousand Qi Gathering pills at the same time was akin to swallowing a bomb. He felt like a fire raged in his belly, about to blow his stomach to shreds. If it were not for the fact that he had already daemonified, so his body was much tougher than regular people, this process would have been enough to claim his life.

Under the effects of the medicines, the daemon qi gradually became violent, losing control and rampaging about fearlessly as if it wanted to blow up Li Qingshan.

If it were not for the fact that the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength and the Tiger Demon's Fist of Bone Forging had made his body as tough as steel, even regular daemons would have exploded from that. If he had so many advantages, and he did not go a little tougher on himself, he would not be a man.

He ignored the pain as he forcefully moved his body, raising his leg, lifting his shoulder, and punching out, guiding the daemon qi along a fixed path. He unleashed the three forms, the Ox Demon Stamps its Hooves, the Ox Demon Butts its Horns, and the Ox Demon Forges its Hide, again and again. Who knows how many times he had unleashed them. He had sworn that he would only emerge to see Xiao An once he had broken through to the second layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength and attained the strength of two oxen.

Five figures moved rapidly over the wilderness. It was Wei Zhongyuan and the four grannies from the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Every single one of them was surrounded by a flow of qi. Their feet did not touch the ground as they moved with the wind while their sleeves ruffled in the breeze. They were extremely graceful.

A farmer saw this from afar as he worked in the fields. He immediately knelt down on the ground and proclaimed, "Immortals!"

The five of them did not even glance at him. They made a turn and arrived above the river, kicking up waves in the water. They followed the river straight to the entrance of the Zombie cave before stopping. As they stood above the water, they gazed at the pitch-black cave that seemed no different from the gaping mouth of a beast.

"It might be dangerous in the cave. The two commanders from the Hawkwolf Guard have probably lost their lives in there. It's very likely that Li Qingshan possesses an Iron Plate corpse." Wei Zhongyuan warned them, displaying his bearing as a leader of a sect at the same time.

“With what we’re capable of, an Iron Plate corpse is nothing,” said the East Gate Granny with a sneer. “If it were a Steel Plate corpse, then we’d need to be careful, and if it were a Bronze Daemon Corpse, then I’d leave without even looking back.”

The West Gate Granny sneered as she said, “Big sis, you’ve grown senile to say something as foolish as that. There are quite a few daemons and daemoniac beasts underground, or even Daemon Generals. There’ll be trouble if you run into a Daemon General. If we come across a Daemon General, all five of us will have to lay our lives down there.”

The East Gate Granny raised an eyebrow. She hated when people mentioned how old she was the most. She cursed, “You old hag, are you trying to call me ignorant? How can a Daemon General appear in such a shallow place? If there really are Daemon Generals, why would the Zombie Daoist build a dwelling here?”

Wei Zhongyuan said, “Stop arguing. There’s nothing wrong with being careful. We have to save my son, kill that Li Qingshan, and capture that child with the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty this time. Let’s go!” With a wave of his hand, he flew into the cave first.

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The burning sensation in Li Qingshan’s belly gradually spread throughout his body. His black skin reddened slightly. As soon as sweat oozed out, it turned into white steam, rapidly rising from his bulky, powerful body; it was like he was in a steamer.

His movements as he practised the Ox Demon’s Fist of Great Strength became slower and slower as well. In the end, he became so slow that he seemed like he was practising tai chi. As he slowed down, even the air seemed to thicken with him.

However, every punch he threw was able to make the air in the entire cave surge. The air was just like the daemon qi in his body, rampaging about and resonating in the narrow cave. It resonated in an oppressive matter.

He had reached the most crucial moment in his cultivation.

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The five of them had arrived at the first fork. Just when Wei Zhongyuan tried to sense for any aura, the West Gate Granny was already prepared. She took out a spherical, wooden ball.

“What’s this?”

“A Pathfinding Insect Hive.”

“That mohist by the surname of He sold it to me. He even made me keep it a secret.” The West Gate Granny twisted the mechanism, and a complete underground map appeared. This was a record of when the mohist disciples had ventured into here last time.

The five of them directly flew towards the Zombie Daoist’s dwelling. They were even faster than birds.

The scarlet red from Li Qingshan became more and more obvious. It basically flowed out of him, making him seem like a heated piece of iron.

The red light in his eyes became brighter and brighter as well. There was the sound of stretching iron as he rapidly grew taller, becoming even larger and stronger.

Thirty-three feet, thirty-five feet, thirty-seven feet.

The process was extremely painful, but he grinned widely, revealing his sharp teeth. He seemed extremely satisfied.

A while later, the five of them arrived at the Zombie Daoist's dwelling, and they barged in without any hesitation at all. They searched around, but all the rooms were empty. Only the cultivation room was blocked up by a huge piece of rock.

The West Gate Granny asked, "Is he in there?"

Wei Zhongyuan walked over without any hesitation and casually struck out with his hand. The rock shattered loudly.

Li Qingshan grew by twelve feet, reaching forty-two feet. He let out an explosive bellow and spread his arms to the sides and produced a roar!

The lakewater beside him was suddenly blown apart, ramming against the walls in the surroundings as waves several meters in height. The waterfall almost ended up flowing backwards. The muddy depths of the lake were revealed within a radius of ten meters from him.

As it turned out, Li Qingshan had found the ceiling of the cultivation room to be too low, so he came to the underground lake where he had fought Zhuo Zhibo and the others. The ceiling was two hundred feet high, so he could move around freely there. He just happened to avoid the people of the Sect of Clouds and Rain in there as well.

Li Qingshan laughed heartily. He had finally reached the second layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, and his physical strength had reached an extremely terrifying level. The lakewater flowed back towards him and formed a great vortex around him. It was enough to swallow boats, yet it only managed to reach up to his waist.

A figure flew towards Li Qingshan. He extended his hand, and the figure landed in his palm. She was Xiao An. She also grinned, feeling happy for him.

Li Qingshan felt like his body was filled with explosive power. He had never felt so great before. He waded through the water and arrived by the shore, pressing his hands against the stone walls. The rocks that had been left untouched for all these years were so tough that even blades would struggle to leave a mark. However, he only pressed gently, and his hand sank into it without any resistance at all, like he was pressing against mud. Moreover, he developed a weak connection with the rock.

Afterwards, he tried a new experiment. He took out a Wind-entwining blade and swung it at his own chest. With a clang, sparks flew and the blade rebounded away. It failed to even leave a mark on his body.

Afterwards, he took out Zhuo Zhibo's mid grade spiritual artifact blade and replicated the speed and strength when Zhuo Zhibo controlled it, stabbing it at himself. All he felt was a slight sting, but it failed to penetrate him as well.

Having reached the second layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, his strength was not the only factor that had grown; his terrifying defence had become greater as well. If he combined it with the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell, even Hao Pingyang's Yellow Dragon's Cannon of Devouring Light would struggle to leave a mark on him.

With his body as a daemon, he could massacre as many sixth layer Qi Practitioners as he wanted as long as they were presented before him. The only question he considered right now was whether this strength was sufficient to defeat ninth layer Qi Practitioners like the West Gate Granny. Killing intent flashed through his eyes. The Sect of Clouds and Rain was determined to take Xiao An away, which had crossed his bottom line. It made him determined to kill them.

However, he placated this killing intent afterwards. The Sect of Clouds and Rain was still a colossal, undefeatable existence in his eyes. He needed to keep enduring whatever they threw at him.

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Wei Zhongyuan looked at the empty cultivation room. "He's not here!"

"No, he's been here before!" The West Gate Granny wiped the stone table. There was not a speck of dust on there.

When Xiao An was bored, she would frequently order the puppet and Iron Plate corpse around to clean.

The West Gate Granny said in a sinister manner, "He'll definitely return here. We can set a trap here and just wait for him to walk into it!"

They glanced at one another and nodded together. Immediately, they hid themselves in the darkness and concealed their auras, waiting for Li Qingshan to walk towards his own doom.

They could imagine how Li Qingshan would be like a trapped tiger once he set foot here. He would never be able to escape.

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Li Qingshan returned to human form and looked at himself in the water. He smiled bitterly.

Right now, he seemed no different from the burly NBA stars from his former life. He was riddled with muscles. He seemed like a ferocious beast just by standing there. In no way did he seem like a sixteen-year-old teenager. He opened his mouth and rubbed his long canines as he felt even more helpless.

The first layer of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression just happened to be enough to suppress the first layer of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength and the Tiger Demon's Fist of Bone Forging. Now that Li Qingshan had reached the second layer with the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, that was equivalent to breaking this balance. Immediately, he gained many more features of daemons. If he reached the second layer with the Tiger Demon's Fist of Bone Forging as well, he probably would not be able to suppress these changes anymore. He would not be able to return to human form.

"Whatever! The most important part of a man is not his appearance!" Li Qingshan said to Xiao An, "I'm very manly like this, aren't I?"

Xiao An nodded firmly. She liked him no matter how he seemed.



Li Qingshan said, "Alright, let's go back!" He took a step forward, but all he felt was the ground give way. Looking down, he had left behind a deep footprint. He sighed gently and began to focus on controlling his power as he advanced step by step. He no longer felt like he was treading on air, and his steps grew faster and faster. Gradually, he felt like the firm ground was strangely springy, allowing him to travel even further with each step.

The five peak Qi Practitioners waited quietly in the Zombie Daoist's dwelling. They waited for a long time. One day passed, two days passed, and three days passed. A layer of dust formed on the stone table again.

As Qi Practitioners, they were all people with patience, but just when were they supposed to wait until?

Li Qingshan originally wanted to return to the dwelling, but his stomach growled. It was thunderous. He rubbed his belly. "I feel like I can eat ten oxen. Let's go find something to eat first!"

He had already emptied out the food in all of his hundred treasures pouches. Although he would not starve to death as long as he had Qi Gathering pills combined with absorbing the spiritual qi of the world through his daemon core, eating actual food still came with benefits, and it would be preserving one of his joys of living. He took out the underground mental map, found the closest exit that led to the surface, and made his way out.

### **Chapter 189 - In Search of a Place for Cultivation**

The exit was in a mountainous forest. As it happened to be the middle of autumn, the mountain had become dyed. Red, yellow, and green merged together to form a fluctuating landscape. As the brilliant sunlight landed on his eyes, he blinked, breathing in deeply to take in the fresh air of the surface.

As expected, he was much more suited for living on the surface. The Zombie Daoist's dwelling was too deep underground, so he could not come out and get a fresh breath of air whenever he wanted. It would be best if he could find a somewhat obscure cave and build a house over it. Afterwards, he would be able to dive into the ground or come out and get some fresh air whenever he wanted. That would be the life!

Of course, it was not like the Zombie Daoist preferred it underground. Instead, he had decided on this after some consideration. If his dwelling was too close to the surface, it would be too easy for the Hawkwolf Guard to storm his base and arrest him. He paid peculiar attention to the location of his dwelling as well. When Li Qingshan cultivated there, he could feel his true qi move about much faster. He could sense that the spiritual qi of the world in the cave was much denser than other places through his Fengchi acupoint.

Spiritual veins riddled the underground. The dwelling must have been located above a certain spiritual vein, abiding to the need of a good environment out of the four crucial elements to cultivation—wealth, companionship, method, and environment. Although it was not on the level of blessed lands mentioned in the legends, it still brought great benefit to cultivation.

However, Li Qingshan had never been walking a path of cultivation where he was supposed to advance steadily, step by step. Instead, he relied on tremendous amounts of pills to forcefully push his cultivation forward. A special place for cultivation did not hold much significance to him. It was not like he would need one until he had finished all the pills he had on him.

Opening the mental map of the Green province, Li Qingshan confirmed his location. He was in a place a hundred kilometers south-east of Jiaping city. It was on the boundary of the region that the Hawkwolf Guard of Jiaping city was responsible for, which was exactly what he wanted.

Fifteen kilometers to the south was a small city called Salt Mountain city, as it was located on a mountain of salt.

The value of salt mines was no less than gold or iron mines. Although they were not enough to attract interest from Qi Practitioners, they were places that people of the jianghu would fight over. Whether it be claiming a salt mine or transporting the salt, it all required the protection of masters. It was a place where the tradition of martial arts was deeply ingrained. All the people on the streets carried blades and swords, moving about however they pleased. They all seemed imposing.

The greatest organisation in the city was the Proud Sword manor. Its disciples amounted to three thousand, while their lord of the manor, Yu Shukuang, was a first-rate master, one of the leading figures in the orthodoxy of the jianghu. He had trained the sword to a level of perfection and had purged the city of evildoers. He was basically the actual person in charge of the city. Even the district magistrate had to bow to him.

However, great hero Yu had his troubles. The troubles of everyone powerful were mostly related to encountering someone even more powerful. He felt helpless.

“Manor lord Yu, I’ll be taking those kids then,” said a middle-aged man. He wore a set of green robes and wielded a sword in a green scabbard. His collar and cuffs were embroidered with green vines. Surprisingly, the aura he gave off was at the third layer. Beside him stood four children around twelve or thirteen years of age. They were all excited but rather reluctant to leave as well.

Yu Shukuang smiled along. “Alright. Feel free to take them, brother Liu. These children will definitely have a better future in the Green Vine mountain.”

These children were all of his most outstanding young disciples. Two of them came from humble origins, so he even went as far as to keep them fed and clothed for several years, just so the Proud Sword sect could gain a few more masters in the future. However, he never thought they would just end up being poached away. These disciples of the Green Vine mountain came over, flapped their gums, and took them away. It was painful.

Cultivation sects required outstanding talents as well as new blood, but with the tiny number of Qi Practitioners that existed in the world, it was impossible for them to go from household to household in search of suitable talent. Instead, they would directly come to these larger sects and gangs of the jianghu, which became an extremely convenient and effective method. Many cultivation sects even created their own gangs and schools, just to expand their influence so that it would be easier to recruit disciples.

“Our Green Vine mountain obviously won’t take advantage of you. Here’s a Qi Gathering pill. It’ll be very beneficial for when you break through to the innate realm.” Liu Fengrui left behind an embroidered box, and all that was inside the box was a pitiful Qi Gathering pill. However, he acted like he had just done Yu Shukuang a great favour.

Yu Shukuang cursed inside. Do you really think I'm an ignorant bumpkin!? With his wealth and how common Qi Gathering pills were among Qi Practitioners, even buying several dozen of them would have been a piece of cake. It brought no benefit to his future attempts at breaking through to the innate realm at all. However, he acted like he was flattered. "That's far too precious!"

At this moment, a disciple hurried over and reported, "Lord of the manor, someone wishes to see you."

Yu Shukuang said furiously, "Can't you see that I'm receiving a valued guest?"

The disciple said pitifully, "But he said he's your friend, manor lord."

Liu Fengrui said, "If that's the case, I'll take my leave then."

Yu Shukuang stood up in a hurry to see him off. He constantly nodded and bowed his head along the way, but he sighed inside. Zijian, oh Zijian, don't disappoint your father. You need to accomplish something with your cultivation so that you can back up your father when you return.

Sending him off at the front entrance, Yu Shukuang glanced from the corner of his eye and saw a figure as robust as an ox sitting on a long bench near the entrance. He wore a great big bamboo hat that obscured his appearance, and he had a large bamboo basket beside him. It was lidded, so it was impossible to tell what it was holding.

The disciple whispered, "Manor lord, that's him!"

Yu Shukuang was confident that he did not have a friend like that, or he definitely would have remembered such a stature. No, he should say that he had never seen someone with such a figure in his entire life before.

The figure stood up quickly and arrived before Yu Shukuang. "Great hero Yu, long time no see."

At that moment, Yu Shukuang basically felt his vision darken slightly. However, the sincere voice sounded rather familiar. "You're?"

Li Qingshan lifted his hat slightly. Although his stature and skin tone had changed tremendously, such that even his face had become rather strange, Yu Shukuang still managed to recognise him with a single glance. He cried out, "It's you!"

Liu Fengrui completely ignored Yu Shukuang. He directly boarded his carriage and departed. He had never taken great hero Yu seriously the entire time.

Yu Shukuang was no longer in the mood to lose his temper over that. The Tiger Butcher had come knocking, so what good could come out of that? He became temporarily stunned.

"Let's go in and talk!" Li Qingshan smiled. Originally, he wanted to express some good will through that, but he revealed his long, protruding teeth, which instead made him seem more vicious and up to no good. Yu Shukuang shuddered, following Li Qingshan into the manor at a complete loss. Just what had he done to deserve this?

Li Qingshan had specially selected a city that was slightly larger but without Qi Practitioners from the map, which would bring him convenience to purchase food; this was why he had chosen Salt Mountain city. However, his appetite was just too large, so if he went to buy food himself, it would be too

troublesome, and it would raise attention. If he were discovered by an informant of the Hawkwolf Guard, it would be bad. As a result, he needed someone with some influence in the local area to help him handle this matter.

He could vaguely recall that Yu Shukuang had once invited him to Salt Mountain city with great enthusiasm in the restaurant in Lakeside city. As a result, he located the city on the map and came knocking.

Yu Shukuang sent away his disciples tactfully and asked, "Sir Li, what brings you to such a remote place?"

Li Qingshan said, "There are a few matters that I need to trouble you with!" He casually pulled out a wad of silver notes. "That's around a million taels of silver. That's the deposit."

"Sir, I can't accept that. As long as there's any place I can be of use, I'll do anything, no matter the danger or the cost," Yu Shukuang said in a delightful manner, but what he thought was, Who would be bold enough to accept the Tiger Butcher's money?

"Take it!" Li Qingshan said indifferently.

"Yes, sir!" Yu Shukuang immediately accepted the money as cold sweat dripped from his forehead. Who was bold enough to turn down the Tiger Butcher's money?

Li Qingshan said, "There's a house between the mountains to the south-east of the city. I want to buy it and stay in it for some time. That's what the money's for."

"Yes! I'll send people to handle this immediately, no, I'll handle it myself. I guarantee you that you'll be able to move in by tonight." Yu Shukuang assured as he patted his chest.

"I don't want anyone to know that I'm here, including your friends and family, with your daughter in particular. If any news of me makes it out..."

"That won't happen. If I tell this to anyone else, I'll let myself be smited by the hea-" Yu Shukuang immediately lifted his right hand to swear an oath.

Li Qingshan interrupted him. "Forget about the oath. It's not like I'm relying on that either. As long as you're willing to help me out, I won't mistreat you. I won't be like that person earlier who tried paying you off with a single Qi Gathering pill."

Yu Shukuang felt both ashamed and astounded. Li Qingshan had actually managed to hear the conversation in the main hall several hundred meters away as he sat at the entrance.

Li Qingshan said, "Where's the Qi Gathering pill?"

Yu Shukuang took out the embroidered box in a hurry and Li Qingshan took it from him. He took out the Qi Gathering pill and tossed it in his mouth. "Quality's not too bad."

Yu Shukuang was devastated. Qi Gathering pills were still extremely precious pills to masters of the jianghu who practised internal martial arts like him. They were worth one or two hundred thousand taels of silver elsewhere. He was clearly just stringing him along by saying he would not mistreat him.

Li Qingshan took out a new pill from his hundred treasures pouch and placed it in the box. "Do you recognise this pill?"

Yu Shukuang's eyes widened immediately. "That's... a Hundred Grasses pill!" Now that was much rarer and more precious than Qi Gathering pills. It was basically never sold on the market. Even if he spent two hundred thousand taels, he would not be able to get his hands on one. If he could eat one of them, his chances at breaking through to the innate realm would increase.

Li Qingshan returned the box to Yu Shukuang. "That's a deposit as well. I hope we have a smooth cooperation." Fear and interest have always been the absolute methods to controlling people. Li Qingshan just happened to lack neither.

An hour later, Li Qingshan obtained the deed to the house. He stood up and bid farewell. "Oh right. Don't call me by my name in the future."

"What should I call you then?"

Li Qingshan thought about it. "Just call me Niu'er."

TL: Not a term of endearment this time. Niu'er translates to Ox-two in a literal sense, kind of like Li Er in the past. It's not a very sophisticated name.

Yu Shukuang was experienced, so he could tell from a long time ago that Li Qingshan was purposefully trying to hide his identity. However, he just utterly disagreed with Li Qingshan's naming sense.

Li Qingshan said, "Oh also, send ten, no, twenty tables of food over everyday." He had almost lost sensation in his tongue after cultivating underground for all this time.

Li Qingshan stood inside the house between the mountains. The entire place had already been cleaned, and everything had been watered too. Who knows how Yu Shukuang had managed all of that. The mountains and forests in the surroundings complemented one another, forming a very tranquil and beautiful scene. It was secluded, yet also close to Salt Mountain city. It was the exact place Li Qingshan wanted for cultivation.

Li Qingshan placed down his bamboo basket, and Xiao An crawled out from inside. She looked around and seemed very satisfied as well.

Li Qingshan took out the two mental maps of the underground and the Green province and compared them. The underground map indicated that a cave just happened to pass underneath this place. It was just a few meters below the surface, so he could link the house to it with just a little bit of effort.

### **Chapter 190 - The Third Layer**

By then, he could do whatever he wanted. If the Sect of Clouds and Rain found him, he could escape to the caves. He only needed to take a few twists and turns; with his aura hidden, the Sect of Clouds and Rain would never be able to capture him.

The estate occupied a few thousand square meters. As it was located in the mountains, many fallen leaves soon covered it again despite having just been swept earlier.

It was a secluded place, where the scenery and building complemented each other. The place gave off an antiquated aura within its tranquility. Who knows just what it had weathered already. The original, wooden carvings on the beams and columns had faded, which instead replaced the sense of extravagance with a certain weatheredness.

Li Qingshan was extremely satisfied. It was even better than his residence at the Hawkwolf Guard. He lowered his head and said, "Looks like we'll be staying here for a while." He rubbed Xiao An's head. "Once I rise up and accomplish something with my ability, I'll knock on their doors one by one and make the people of the Sect of Rain and Clouds bleed. They're dreaming if they think they can take you! Hahahaha!" His smile was as resplendent as the sun.

Xiao An was infected by his laughter and a smile formed on her face like a ripple in water. She thought to herself, Yeah, no one can take me away.

In order to buy this place, money alone would likely not have been enough to do the job for Yu Shukuang. He relied on the Proud Sword manor's influence as a gang as well. Just like the food chain, the Green Vine mountain could just send a disciple over and that would be enough to render great hero Yu docile, while great hero Yu could turn a few rich merchants docile just by turning around.

What a brutal social hierarchy!

Li Qingshan sighed. He looked through the manor, in search of a place to begin digging.

Xiao An pulled out a book on the shelf in the study, and with a creak, the shelf turned around, revealing a flight of steps downwards.

Li Qingshan gave Xiao An a thumbs up. "Nicely done. Let's go in and take a look!"

As soon as Li Qingshan and Xiao An set foot inside, the bookshelf closed automatically. With the strength that they possessed, they were fearless, so they ventured downwards with nothing to be scared of.

They discovered that this was a man-made secret room, divided into several dozen rooms and connected by several secret passageways. They led to a few important structures in the estate. There was also a large stockpile of grains and food in there.

Li Qingshan had once heard that rich and influential families would all construct secret rooms like this when they built their estates so that they could seek shelter during times of strife. With somewhere to hide, it might even be enough to shield their entire clan from destruction. However, this was the first time he had ever witnessed something like this.

This had instead saved him some trouble. He took out the underground mental map and matched it to the entire hidden structure. He arrived in a stone room, raised his right foot, and stomped down heavily.

With a thump, the floor became covered in cracks; followed by a rumble, the rock and soil all collapsed, kicking up motes of dust.

The dust settled and revealed a great hole in the floor. Li Qingshan stuck his head into the cave and looked around. As expected, it was connected to the cave system below. He smiled happily. With this path of retreat, he could cultivate in peace now.

Returning above ground, the twenty tables of food had already been delivered. Li Qingshan indulged in the food heartily. Xiao An ate some with him before placing down her chopsticks and watching him eat as she leaned on her hands.

After enough food and drink, Xiao An went to the study to look at the books, while Li Qingshan meditated in the courtyard. He swallowed ten Qi Gathering pills in a single gulp, and they were swallowed up by the daemon core as soon as they were digested, all converted into daemon qi.

He had decided to direct his focus back to the cultivation of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression from today onwards. If his cultivation of the spirit turtle was too low, it would be insufficient to keep the ox demon and tiger demon suppressed, preventing him from reverting to human form. It would lead to quite a lot of trouble.

The Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength and the Tiger Demon's Fist of Bone Forging could drastically strengthen his body, endowing him with extraordinary battle prowess. However, what controlled his cultivation as a daemon was the tiny daemon core condensed from the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression.

The first layer of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression was condensing a daemon core, allowing him to reach a level equivalent to the sixth layer of human Qi Practitioners. If he reached the second layer, it should result in him breaking through his current realm, allowing him to become a Daemon General. By then, he would not have to fear the Sect of Clouds and Rain anymore.

However, this would be far more difficult than reaching the second layer with the ox demon or tiger demon. Of course, now that he had mentioned it, this was not exactly difficult. Instead, it was an issue of time. He could not afford to waste a few decades or a century on this. He still wanted to go looking for Gu Yanying once he became accomplished in his cultivation.

If a century passed in a blink of an eye, perhaps she would not age, but it would already be a miracle if he could still remember her name. No matter how deeply he had fallen in love at first sight, how could it withstand the erosion of time? He had to try to win her over while this feeling for her remained.

He had also promised to take Xuanyue to the Dragon province. Who knows just how quickly her cultivation could advance with the pills from the provincial lord's estate. She might even end up achieving something before him during that century and run off by herself. By then, wouldn't his promise just be a joke?

And, if he spent too much time on the ground, his brother ox beyond the Nine Heavens would probably run out of patience, even though he had never seen him run out of patience before.

In short, it was simple. He had to devote himself to cultivation and advance aggressively. He wanted to use countless pills to pave a shortcut to success so that he could rise up.

He closed his eyes. Externally, he drew in the spiritual qi of the world, while he absorbed the pills internally. He constantly gathered, took in, and converted the energy.

The sky was clear, only awash with moonlight. He let out his daemon core, which spun into the air, radiating with deep blue light that pulsed like it was breathing. A smear of moonlight was absorbed into the daemon core as well.

His mind, on the other hand, constantly descended, like a spirit turtle sinking into a bottomless abyss, entering a sleep of millennia, almost like it did not exist.

The spiritual qi of the world constantly surged into his daemon core and body.

The part of him that was usually the most sensitive to the spiritual qi of the world, the Fengchi acupoint on the back of his head, seemed to have become the perfect entry point. Most of the spiritual qi just entered his Yang Heel meridian like that, flowing through his meridians.

Originally, this was supposed to be something that only Foundation Establishment cultivators could achieve, but this young man who walked both the path of humans and daemons managed to accomplish this unknowingly.

The extremely pure energy of the world was originally an elixir only powerful cultivators who had truly embarked on the path of cultivation could enjoy, yet it flowed through the body of a measly Qi Practitioner like him.

Compared to this spiritual qi of the world, the Qi Gathering pills refined from herbs that humans had devoted so much effort into picking were like dregs to fine wine.

Li Qingshan's cultivation of the Innate Method of Practising Qi had already reached the sixth layer. He had reached the peak of the second layer as a Qi Practitioner. The amount of true qi his Yang Heel meridian could hold was already full.

The mental cultivation method of the seventh layer of the Innate Method of Practising Qi filled his mind naturally, and he began to use it unknowingly.

The true qi in him surged towards the Zhaohai acupoint on his ankle. Because Li Qingshan was not directly controlling, it was unable to condense into a form that could pierce the obstruction. All of it accumulated there, unable to advance forwards.

However, with the support from the spiritual qi of the world, the true qi surged over in waves like the tide, rising up before the previous had even settled, unrelenting and without pause.

He did not rely on any pills, nor was his true qi consumed. It was endless. The waves smashed against the Zhaohai acupoint constantly.

Even if the 'dam' would not waver after a hundred times, what about a thousand, ten thousand, or a hundred thousand times?

Finally, the dam fell apart and collapsed. The true qi flowed through the Yin Heel meridian and encountered the second obstacle.

Originally, failure at any point would render all previous efforts null and void, forcing people to start over. This was why Qi Practitioners would always prepare enough pills and spiritual stones when they wanted to open up a meridian.

That would be like infusing more water into the river of true qi. But right now, Li Qingshan's river of true qi was directly connected with the boundless ocean. He had endless amounts of spiritual qi of the world.



No matter how many times his true qi was obstructed by the dams, it would never weaken and fade away. It would only advance slowly, washing up against the dam another ten thousand times. It was extremely gradual, but extremely steady as well. The acupoints were opened one by one, leading to the final destination of the Yin Heel meridian, the Jingming acupoint on his face.

The acupoint governed sight, which was why it was called Jingming, or the acupoint of Clear Vision. Once the acupoint was opened, Qi Practitioner could see further away and see smaller things, all to the utmost detail. This acupoint could not be avoided if Li Qingshan wanted to open his Yin Heel meridian.

There was no difficulty at all. The true qi flowed into the Jingming acupoint and connected with the Yang Heel meridian like the unity of two great rivers. It formed a strange environment, where yin and yang qi constantly flowed through his meridians.

However, Li Qingshan was ignorant of all of this. He had actually broken through to the third layer of Qi Practitioner unknowingly. Probably no one would believe him if he ever mentioned it.

The autumn wind swept through the trees. A withered leaf gave way, falling off a twig. It drifted over the white walls and fell towards Li Qingshan's shoulder.

A soft, white hand appeared out of nowhere and grabbed the leaf, tossing it aside. Xiao An had swept away all of the fallen leaves in the courtyard with a broom she had found somewhere, while the puppet and Iron Plate corpse were responsible for using woven dustpans to scoop up the leaves and pour them outside.

Thump, thump, thump. Someone knocked at the door, and Xiao An went over to open it. Two disciples of the Proud Sword manor removed several dozen large boxes of food and placed them on the stone steps at the entrance.

A mild-mannered young man said, "Little sister, here's today's food. Is great hero Niu still training?"

Xiao An nodded in a rather unpractised manner. Li Qingshan had always been responsible for communicating with people in the past. Now that Li Qingshan was cultivating, only she could handle them now. She had yet to grow accustomed to it.

The young man had already come a few times before. He knew that Xiao An never spoke, so he did not find it to be strange. He asked quietly, "Do you want me to deliver the food inside today?"

Xiao An shook her head.

The young man was slightly disappointed. He really wanted to check out this great hero Niu that his master basically worshipped, or should he say, treated like a great calamity.

Yu Shukuang was afraid to slight Li Qingshan. Just like what he had requested, he would send two trusted disciples to deliver twenty tables of food everyday. He had basically watched these two disciples grow up, so they were almost like sons to him. He had also reminded them countless times the importance of this matter, as well as the importance of keeping their mouths shut about this. However, this only made the two of them even more curious. Unfortunately, all they met was a mute little girl every time they came here.

The other young man asked, "Little sister, what kind of person is great hero Niu?"

Xiao An was slightly taken aback. Even if she could speak, she was unable to answer that question properly.

The mild-mannered young man raised the reins, and the horse pulled away with the carriage into the woods. All that was left was Xiao An standing at the entrance, stowing away the boxes of food. Suddenly, her heart trembled slightly.