

Chapter 261 - The Fifth Layer

Below the mountain, they ordered a few side dishes, three bowls of congee, and a few steamers of steamed buns at a breakfast stall.

Originally, Diao Fei wanted to go to a restaurant, but Li Qingshan said, "Morning is not the time to drink." As a result, they came here.

With three Hawkwolf guards seated, no one else dared to set foot into this place anymore, while the people originally there dispersed in a hurry. Only when Diao Fei tossed out ten taels of silver did the boss's bitter expression ease up.

Xiao An had her head lowered as she ate a steam bun. Diao Fei faltered. "How old is she?"

Li Qingshan smiled. "If you have something to say, you're welcome to cut right to the chase!"

Qian Rongzhi helped Xiao An to another steamed bun and smiled too. "So why are you looking for me? We're all familiar with each other, so there's no need to hold back. You can just tell me what you need."

Diao Fei stifled his voice. "Did you know that the disciples of the three mountains have all died underground?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "Everyone in the Clear River prefecture knows about that." However, everyone was focused on how the disciple of the Sword Collection palace had appeared and killed a Daemon General, so this matter actually did not receive much attention. The decline of three small sects was nothing compared to the turmoil of the entire world.

Diao Fei sighed heavily. "You know, I'm technically a disciple of the Green Vine mountain too."

Li Qingshan said, "Then I need to congratulate you on avoiding a disaster."

"Curses and blessings come hand in hand. Who knows which is what." Diao Fei's eyes became lost. He had been squeezed out of the sect in the past, which was why he had joined the Hawkwolf Guard. Originally, he wanted to focus on cultivation and find an opportunity for revenge, but the people who had squeezed him out were all dead now.

In just a single day, his grievances had turned into nothing. Diao Fei had also received a letter personally penned by the Green Vine Elder, who requested him to come back to the Green Vine mountain.

Li Qingshan understood what he meant by curses and blessings coming hand in hand. All the disciples of the Green Vine mountain were dead, so they obviously had to gather the disciples scattered outside. There were not a lot of disciples like that, but they would immediately go from outcasts to core figures of the sect.

Although most of the disciples of the Green Vine mountain were dead, their foundation and resources remained. When the resources of an entire sect were concentrated on these few core figures, the benefits would be tremendous. At the very least, it would be better than staying in the Hawkwolf Guard. However, just what kind of place was the Hawkwolf Guard? It definitely was not one where people could come and go as they wished. He needed to plead with the vice commander, Qian Rongzhi.

Sure enough, Qian Rongzhi said, "Resigning from your post in the Hawkwolf Guard won't be easy."

Diao Fei knew he needed to back up what he said, so he had already prepared a bribe. He glanced at Li Qingshan, hesitating over whether to take it out before him or not.

"I need to pay a visit to the government office, so I'll be leaving first." Li Qingshan immediately stood up and lifted up Xiao An, making his way out the door.

At the back of the government office, Zhou Wenbin was strolling through the garden as the caretaker reported, "Sir, Li Qingshan is waiting outside, wishing to see you."

Zhou Wenbin said, "Welcome him in!" As Li Qingshan strode over, Zhou Wenbin became slightly surprised inside. Li Qingshan seemed to have changed in these few months. He had gone from the third layer to the fourth layer, but just describing it as rapid progress in cultivation did not seem to be sufficient. He seemed to have developed a frightening bearing.

"Greetings, sir."

Zhou Wenbin returned the greeting in a hurry. He no longer dared to consider himself a senior or sir to Li Qingshan anymore.

Li Qingshan stated his reason for visiting and Zhou Wenbin agreed to it, guaranteeing him that it would be no problem.

Satisfied with that, he caught up slightly with Zhou Wenbin before turning down Zhou Wenbin's urgings to stay a little longer, bidding farewell and leaving.

After he left, Zhou Wenbin sighed gently. "He truly isn't someone who would be satisfied with dwelling in a small pond!"

Li Qingshan returned to the mountain. He did not run into Qian Rongzhi and Diao Fei again. He directly entered the dwelling, turning the stone disc and closing the door.

Exhaling gently, Li Qingshan took out over a dozen spiritual stones and placed them in the grooves of the Spirit Gathering formation. The lines engraved in the rock immediately lit up, and spiritual qi rapidly gathered into the formation. The densest part was the centre of the formation.

Li Qingshan handed a few things over to Xiao An, reminding her to feed Milliped regularly.

Afterwards, he sat down at the centre of the formation and began practising qi, urging on the flow of true qi through his body.

Since he had returned to human society, his cultivation as a Qi Practitioner was very important. Once he went to the Academy of the Hundred Schools, there would probably be many Foundation Establishment cultivators there, so he could not always rely on transforming to kill his opponent. Even if he left behind no traces, it would still raise suspicion as time went on. And, there would be less trouble if his cultivation was higher.

Li Qingshan placed most of his attention on practising qi this time.

However, that did not mean Li Qingshan had stopped his daemon cultivation. Daemon cultivation was just much simpler than practising qi. All it required were large amounts of resources, and right now, the last thing that Li Qingshan lacked was pills.

The hundred treasures pouches, over a thousand of them, had provided Li Qingshan with a tremendous quantity of various pills. It would be enough to sustain his cultivation for several months at the very least.

He took out a handful of Qi Gathering pills first. Even on the lower end of the scale, there would be several hundred of them. He then shoved it all into his mouth. As soon as they reached his belly, it would be surrounded by a layer of daemon qi as flexible and as tough as flowing water. The daemon core in him would bob up and down, gradually transforming the pills into daemon qi.

As his daemon body had grown stronger and stronger, dissolving and absorbing several hundred Qi Gathering pills no longer caused him a particularly great burden. This process was like a person who had just eaten a meal, and they were slowly digesting it now. It did not affect his other actions.

Li Qingshan took out the jade slip and carefully looked through the mental cultivation method of the fifth layer of the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi. His mind then began to rapidly sink, sinking into a boundless sea. This was Li Qingshan's sea of consciousness. Before long, he had entered a meditative trance.

He began to use the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi as the spiritual qi gathered by the Spirit Gathering formation surged into Li Qingshan's body, rapidly being converted into true qi. He was pushing for the Yin Linking meridian.

A visible haze of light rose up from Li Qingshan's body. At a closer glance, the haze of light did not disperse into the surroundings. Instead, it gathered towards his body. This was something that only appeared when spiritual qi had reached a certain density.

Li Qingshan could not help but admire the cleverness of human cultivators. Although this tiny Spirit Gathering formation was not as great as Milliped's bed of spiritual stone, the effects were almost the same.

Qi Practitioners were not suited for directly absorbing the spiritual qi in spiritual stones for cultivation, but they could use spiritual stones to power formations to gather the spiritual qi of the world before seemingly processing it, making it suitable for absorption.

Extremely pure Gui Water true qi surged like the tide, constantly churning towards the Zhubin acupoint. This was the beginning of the Yin Linking meridian.

The Zhubin acupoint opened and true qi entered the Fushe acupoint. After the Fushe acupoint opened too, the true qi smashed through the Chongmen acupoint, reaching the Daheng acupoint on the waist.

Reaching there, the true qi should have been depleted, but spiritual qi flowed in violently, almost pushing the true qi forward.

The Daheng, Fuai, Qimen, and Tiantu acupoints opened one by one, reaching the final acupoint on the throat, the Lianquan acupoint.

Li Qingshan shuddered, and his true qi flowed smoothly. The Yin Linking meridian was open now. He had finally reached the fifth layer.

The entire process was smoother than he had expected. Now, the Yang Heel, Yin Heel, Yang Linking, and Yin Linking meridians were all opened. Li Qingshan's four yin and yang meridians were open and connected, allowing true qi to flow through them endlessly. He felt his body grow lighter.

It felt extremely similar to ascending to a soaring immortal described by regular people. However, Li Qingshan knew that this was just a feeling. If he actually wanted to fly, it would not be so easy.

However, this goal was not far off either.

Li Qingshan opened his eyes. Three days had already passed, while the several hundred Qi Gathering pills in his belly had all been digested. The spiritual stones in the Spirit Gathering formation had dimmed, almost running out of spiritual qi.

Xiao An sat facing a wall, as if she was cultivating too. She had devoured a large quantity of flesh and blood underground. Qi Practitioners could not be compared to regular people. The vitality and essence they possessed was enough to rival ten or even a hundred regular people. She used this opportunity to refine this energy.

Li Qingshan did not disturb her either. He quickly peered into his body, sensing the raging flows of true qi. He tried to make the true qi gather in his dantian, and they coalesced like a sea of qi, but the true qi would return to the meridians as soon as he lost focus.

Yes. Li Qingshan wanted to use the secluded cultivation this time to break through to the sixth layer in a single stroke and split open a sea of qi. By then, he would be able to use all the spiritual artifacts in the hundred treasures pouches in his possession. He would actually be able to control artifacts.

And, his speed and strength would definitely grow drastically as well. Even without transforming, he would be able to fight any Qi Practitioner.

However, according to the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi, the first five layers of practising qi were regarded as easy. It would become more and more difficult from the sixth layer and onwards. Opening the Conception, Governing, Penetrating, and Girdle meridians would not be easy. It could not be achieved with just an endless supply of true qi and recklessly smashing through acupoints.

It would involve using the sea of qi as a foundation and balancing the four yin and yang meridians, using an extremely complicated and delicate method. Opening the Girdle meridian would be the most difficult. Apart from being difficult to open in the first place, it was directly related to the sea of qi.

The Girdle meridian was just like what its name suggested. It was like a girdle, wrapping around the waist. It was the only horizontal meridian within the human body, and it was for controlling and binding all the other meridians.

The dantian happened to be surrounded by it. It was exactly because of this controlling and binding effect that the person would be able to gather all the true qi in their meridians and condense a sea of qi. The process of opening the Girdle meridian required great caution, as the slightest carelessness could lead to the risk of suffering from cultivation deviation and harming the meridians.

However, there was a good piece of news too. The Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi was the easiest for condensing a sea of qi. Gui Water true qi was relatively gentler and milder, making it difficult to suffer from cultivation deviation. However, the process still required caution.

Li Qingshan also understood the principle that haste was less speed. He had only just reached the fifth layer, so he needed some time to consolidate his cultivation. He was in no hurry either. He had plenty of time for secluded cultivation anyway.

After cultivating for a while longer and depleting the spiritual qi in the spiritual stones, he removed them and replaced them with new ones, reactivating the Spirit Gathering formation.

At the same time, he shoved another handful of pills into his mouth.

Li Qingshan contemplated for a while before taking out the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi again and studying the techniques it contained.

Water elemented techniques were not as great at killing as metal or fire, nor were they as great at ensnaring as earth or wood. They were primarily auxiliary.

For example, there was a Water Mirror technique that allowed the user to spy on the surroundings, giving them utmost perception. The higher the cultivation of the user, the greater the range of the technique.

The Invisibility technique also happened to be of the water element. It was an extremely powerful technique. The effect of invisibility would grow stronger with cultivation. In the beginning, it could only turn the user into a hazy mist, which was perceptible with the naked eye. However, as long as the user reached a high enough cultivation, they could truly achieve invisibility.

However, Li Qingshan had the high grade spiritual artifact, the Glazed Mirror of Invisibility, so he was in no hurry to practise a technique like that.

Chapter 262 - Cloud Riding and Mist Wielding

As for those Water Arrow techniques and Water Prison techniques, Li Qingshan had not even considered them. He was not lacking in terms of attacks.

Finally, his gaze landed on two images. Every single technique had a simple image like that.

One of the images depicted a cultivator standing on a thin, white cloud, while the other image depicted a cultivator surrounded with churning mist as if he was accelerating forwards.

What he wanted to learn right now was the Cloud Riding technique and the Mist Wielding technique.

These two techniques were both interlinked and independent of one another.

The Cloud Riding technique focused on hovering vertically, but it was not even as fast as a horse, while the Mist Wielding technique focused on movement, but it was restricted to flying along the ground. With the two combined, the user could ride clouds and wield mist, allowing them to fly freely through the air.

He did not have any particular reason for this. Flight was the dream of all people, and Li Qingsahn was no exception. And, the value of flight in battle was self-explanatory.

When he emerged from seclusion, he could directly fly into the sky and use the Glazed Mirror of Invisibility to hide himself. By then, even Foundation Establishment cultivators would struggle to find him in the expansive sky.

And, learning techniques could deepen his control over Gui Water true qi and consolidate his cultivation.

He did what he wanted to do and immediately began to study it. In the sealed room, Li Qingshan formed seals with his hands as he steadied his breath and controlled his heart. A white cloud began to gather in his hand.

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In another dwelling for secluded cultivation, Qian Rongzhi began her own cultivation.

Diao Fei watched as the stone door closed slowly with a mixed expression. Qian Rongzhi waved at him with a smile. "I hope you have a safe trip back." In the very depths of the stone cave were a pile of black bags. The items in there were round and even seemed to be moving, with fresh blood slowly oozing out. They should have been out right now, carrying out a mission.

The smile that could be regarded as gentle and kind instead made Diao Fei shiver inside. Qian Rongzhi did not accept any bribes from him. Instead, she only requested him to help her with something "small". He had wandered the world for many years now, and he had never been soft-hearted when it came to killing people, but compared to how this woman killed people, he seemed as simple and cute as a child.

These people would vanish from the world forever, and no one would even suspect her.

The stone door closed loudly, and Diao Fei left eagerly, like he was running away from something terrifying. With Qian Rongzhi's assistance, he managed to place his post in the Hawkwolf Guard on hold, allowing him to return to the Green Vine mountain to cultivate.

The verdant mountain that he once hated suddenly seemed like a wonderland to him, like a verdant pearl. At the very least, the Green Vine mountain was much safer compared to constantly residing with those two people on the Hawkwolf mountain.

Whenever he wondered about whether she would come for him after learning about her secret, he would struggle to find peace. Fortunately, he could finally return now.

The horse galloped for several days, and Diao Fei returned to the Green Vine mountain once more. Compared to its past prosperity, it seemed particularly quiet and lonely now.

Arriving in the main hall, the Green Vine Elder personally received him and gave him a few words of encouragement in an amicable manner. However, Diao Fei had already been through and seen too much of life, so his heart did not rile up over just a few words. He only put on an act that he was moved to tears out of gratitude.

Apart from him, there were a few other men and women he was not too familiar with. Some seemed slightly familiar, while he was completely unfamiliar with the others. However, none of them had a particularly high cultivation. With his cultivation at the fourth layer, he actually ranked third out of them.

They had all been elevated to internal disciples, and they were each allocated a position in the sect. Every single one of them were easy jobs that they could never get their hands on no matter how hard they tried in the past, but now, there were almost not enough people for all of these jobs. The resources and treatment that came with the jobs could almost rival what the first senior brother received in the past.

Diao Fei had been allocated the job of managing and guiding new disciples and their rudimentary cultivation method. This job seemed nothing special, but it was the most prestigious.

The Green Vine Elder gave them a few words of advice before returning to where he cultivated. The remaining disciples of the Green Vine mountain all greeted one another.

One of them was a man with a stubble. He stepped up and said, "I'm Yu Shukuang. Greetings, senior brother Diao." Looking around and seeing how there was no one around, he stifled his voice. "Senior brother Diao, I heard you recently returned from the Hawkwolf Guard of Jiaping city, right?"

Diao Fei frowned slightly. Serving as the hawks and hounds of the government was not well-received within sects. He had basically touched on Diao Fei's sore spot, but Diao Fei still affirmed the answer.

Yu Shukuang asked, "Then, are you familiar with Li Qingshan?"

Diao Fei immediately became afraid to cold-shoulder him. "You know him?"

Yu Shukuang said, "Who doesn't know the great name of the Tiger Butcher?" Seeing how Diao Fei did not believe him, he added, "You can say that I've met him once."

There was no point in hiding anything, so Diao Fei told him about Li Qingshan's return.

Yu Shukuang seemed like a coarse person, but he was very quick-witted and careful. He maintained a neutral expression and naturally changed the topic of the conversation, going on about the daughter he took pride in.

However, he sighed gently inside. In the past, Liu Fengrui had placed the Proud Sword manor under the Green Vine mountain's governance, so as the lord of the manor, he was basically half a member of the Green Vine mountain. However, the reason why he could come to the Green Vine mountain was all thanks to Yu Zijian.

After learning that Yu Zijian had a tremendously bright future ahead of her, the Green Vine Elder wanted to establish a positive relationship with her, which was why Yu Shukuang went from half a member of the Green Vine mountain to a full member of the Green Vine mountain, and an internal disciple at that.

Originally, not a single sect would be willing to accept an adult like him. No matter how much the Green Vine mountain had declined, the Green Vine Elder would still much rather start with babies. Why would an experienced member of the jianghu like Yu Shukuang display any loyalty to sects?

Apart from being grateful in general, the main reason why he asked about Li Qingshan was because of Yu Zijian. Yu Zijian had returned safely from the Green Vine mountain and told her father about everything that had happened.

Although Yu Shukuang found that it was quite the pity for Yu Zijian to turn down the Sword Collection palace's invitation, he still felt he had been quite lucky this year, so he held a great celebration in the

manor. However, Yu Zijian always seemed to be in thought, becoming much quieter. She was no longer as lively as she was in the past. Yu Shukuang could not help but lament over how her daughter had grown up.

Before he came to the Green Vine mountain, Yu Zijian asked him to watch out for a certain person with great seriousness. This person was obviously “Niu Juxia” who had fallen silent after the Herb Gathering ceremony.

Yu Shukuang obviously knew who Niu Juxia was, so he leapt in fright. Surely he had not stolen his daughter’s heart, right? However, looking at Yu Zijian, she did not seem like a young girl falling in love for the first time either, so he added something.

“Under these circumstances, he’s probably already... What are you going to do?” He was afraid she would say something along the lines of mourning for the rest of her life, never to fall in love again, or dying for love.

Yu Zijian lowered her head in silence for quite a while before answering, “I will definitely avenge him!”

The determination in her words made him wonder whether the person before him was still his daughter. He could not help but sigh inside, Zi’er, oh Zi’er, it seems like our daughter really isn’t as gentle as you.

Now that he had learnt that Li Qingshan had returned safely, he felt pained once again. How was he supposed to contact her?

Diao Fei said suddenly, “Li Qingshan is going to the Academy of the Hundred Schools to study soon. Perhaps he’ll be a fellow student of your daughter.”

Yu Shukuang was surprised inside, which was followed up with a bitter smile. As it seemed, there was no need for him to be pained over this. Though, was there really some destiny between them? Hopefully it was nothing bad.

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“Li Qingshan is back.” Hua Chengzan tossed a document before Wang Pushi.

It was Fang Enshang’s report. Not only did it have Li Qingshan’s explanation of the case on Zhuo Zhibo’s death, but it also detailed Fang Enshang’s praise for him as well as a personal recommendation for Li Qingshan to join the school of Legalism.

This was not solely due to Qian Rongzhi. Li Qingshan had swept through several dozen older cases as soon as he had joined the Hawkwolf Guard, and he had brought back the head of the most wanted criminal on the blacklist, the Zombie Daoist, with the assistance of the disciples of mohism. He was truly capable. Although he was a little fierce, it matched the stern spirit of legalism to uphold the laws.

Wang Pushi saw and became slightly angered. “He’s actually bold enough to return. Does he really take us for idiots who can’t see through his tricks? Little Fang is far too inexperienced with the world. He has no idea about how vile human nature can get.”

Hua Chengzan said, “Old Wang, don’t get taken away by your first impression of him. Enshan has been telling the truth. You can definitely call Li Qingshan capable when it comes to the job, and he cultivates

extremely quickly too. He's quite a rare talent. He can expand the prestige and renown of our school of Legalism."

Wang Pushi glanced at him in surprise. "Why do you have such a favourable impression of him all of a sudden? Forget it, let's just go with that then. I can't afford to be bothered by this kid. Destroying the remnants of the White Lotus cult is what's important." With that, he left in a hurry.

Hua Chengzan looked out the window. The winter snow had begun to melt, and the creatures were beginning to awaken. He did not tell Wang Pushi the real reason.

Back then on the Green Vine mountain, before Gu Yanying had left, she casually said, "If you meet him again in the future, feel free to keep an eye out for him and take care of him. After all, he's still a person I've given guidance to."

How could he not pay heed to something she had said? It was inappropriate to tell Wang Pushi this in the first place, or it would earn him quite the scolding.

As for the young man who was bold enough to directly ogle her, he was rather interested too, but it was impossible for him to feel any jealousy. Over all these years, who knew how many people she had given guidance to.

On the way back to Clear River city, Hua Chenglu said something to him that he believed to be the most mature thing she had said over all these years, "Brother, you'd better give up. She's not someone I can imagine falling deeply in love with a man."

Hua Chengzan could only smile even more bitterly after smiling bitterly. He could not imagine that either. She was as graceful and unrestrained as the wind, and she never demonstrated any emotions, whether it be joy, anger, or sorrow. Even now, he still could not see through her thoughts. She could be as gentle as the spring breeze or as cold as the frigid winds. She was just as unpredictable as the wind. Since she was the wind, why would she remain tethered to someone's bosom?

Xiao An opened her eyes after rousing from meditation. She had condensed a third Skull Prayer Bead in her hand.

Soon afterwards, she heard Li Qingshan's eager voice. "Look, Xiao An. I can fly."

Xiao An looked over and burst out in laughter. Li Qingshan sat with his legs crossed and his hands in seals as white clouds appeared from beneath him, lifting him from the ground. However, he was only a foot off the ground, and he even tottered about. He was nowhere close to flying.

Li Qingshan was not embarrassed. He chortled and said, "This is the first step of a long journey. Just you wait for the day I fly beyond the Nine Heavens!"

Xiao An's gaze became gentle. "Together."

"Of course."

Chapter 263 - To the Academy of the Hundred Schools

For the past few days, Li Qingshan had focused on studying the techniques. He had managed to gain a basic grasp over the Cloud Riding technique in just a few days. Although he still could not “fly”, he had already made it past the basics, so all he needed was practice now.

This was not because of how great he was at comprehension, but the fact that his affinity with water among the five elements was extremely high. In particular, his true qi was extremely pure. When he used techniques, his advantage would be on full display. He could control true qi as he wished. It was like a group of elite soldiers under strict orders, able to move according to their commander’s wishes and fall into various formations without the slightest disorder. These various formations were the crux to using the technique.

Then, Li Qingshan switched to the Mist Wielding technique. In just a few days, the entire cave became filled with clouds of mist, while Li Qingshan circled around and flew through the cave like he was going for a space walk.

As long as he could combine these two techniques, he would truly be able to fly. However, the difficulty of this was even greater than just practising one of the techniques at a time. All he could do about this was gradually merge the two techniques and accumulate experience. There were no tricks in this at all.

However, Li Qingshan was extremely patient. He took his time to think it through and learn and practise. With Xiao An by his side, he did not find it boring.

The so-called secluded cultivation was actually akin to being in prison, but to be able to temporarily leave all the disputes and conflict at the stone door, he felt indescribably relaxed. He was not pained by this, instead finding peace. If cultivation went with the flow without insisting on a particular thing to happen, the effects would instead be optimal.

This mentality was even more important than the Spirit Gathering formation in the cave. In the path of cultivation, resources were a crucial foundation, but just stockpiling resources could not create powerful cultivators.

Only with a certain disposition and a certain understanding could people perform wonders.

At this moment, Li Qingshan gained a deeper understanding of the importance of the Spirit Turtle’s Method of Sea Suppression. As more and more pills were being converted into daemon qi and stored in his daemon core, his thoughts became calmer too, without any impatience or restlessness.

Time passed bit by bit, while the clouds and mist permeating the cave grew smaller and smaller, denser and denser. They seemed even more corporeal than before. Li Qingshan grabbed at it, and he felt like he had grabbed a ball of pliable, elastic rubber. However, it was also extremely moist, smooth and light as he sped around in the cave.

Li Qingshan smiled happily. He had finally gained an initial mastery over flight. He plonked his bottom down on a cloud, and the cloud rose up, lifting him up in a stable manner. He sat on it with his legs crossed and asked with a smile, “Don’t I look like an immortal?”

“You don’t!” Xiao An answered honestly.

“In what way?”

“If you don’t, then you don’t.” Xiao An refused to make eye contact with him.

“Alright you, Xiao An, how dare you say this immortal doesn’t seem like an immortal! Get over here!” Li Qingshan extended his hand, and the true qi sprayed over like water, wrapping around Xiao An.

Xiao An giggled, but she did not dodge. She allowed him to grab her, pinch her cheeks, and squeeze her nose, wreaking havoc on her face.

If Diao Fei saw this, he would definitely feel that Li Qingshan was not as terrifying as he imagined him to be. However, if it were not for the fact that Xiao An was here, why wouldn’t he bare his fangs in the dangerous world outside?”

Suddenly, there was a rumble in the distant sky.

Li Qingshan said, “It’s springtime thunder!”

Spring had already arrived. The earth was returning to life.

The bug pouch twitched constantly as Milliped awoke from his lengthy sleep. He was wriggling his body.

Xiao An said, “It’s the stirring of insects!”

Note: The stirring of insects, also known as hibernating insects awaken, is a name of one of the 24 solar terms used in ancient China, which essentially breaks a year into 24 time periods, each with a different name describing the period.

Insects stirred, thunder rumbled, bugs awakened.

Li Qingshan opened the bug pouch and Milliped emerged. He seemed to have grown slightly bigger as he waved his feelers. “Food! Food!”

“You glutton!” Li Qingshan teased him before taking out the food so that Milliped could bury himself in it.

Two months had already passed now. There was less than a month until the Academy of the Hundred Schools began to take in new students.

Li Qingshan wanted to use this month to break through to the sixth layer.

The fifth layer and sixth layer of Qi Practitioner were two completely different concepts. Whether it be in terms of strength or status, they both represented completely different things. As long as he reached the sixth layer, he believed that he would not have to worry about being smothered out even in the Academy of the Hundred Schools, a place teeming with talented people.

He was not going to the Academy of the Hundred Schools to seek refuge. He was not planning on following the principle of remaining discreet and keeping himself safe. No matter the environment, there would always be the survival of the fittest, the laws of the jungle. Only the fittest would receive better resources and be able to enjoy better environments to cultivate in.

This was the path he wanted to walk.

Through this period of waiting, the true qi in his four yin and yang meridians was already full. This was nothing difficult to him, as he could absorb the spiritual qi of the world. Moreover, he had become extremely familiar with the tricks for controlling Gui Water true qi.

Am I ready? Even he did not know, but it was time to go!

Li Qingshan's gaze became determined.

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Below the mountain, the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

It was pitch-black within the parlour. After the few incidents, the Parlour of the Clouds and Rain was heavily weakened, and due to pressure from various sides, it struggled to recover its former prosperity.

The hollow centre of the building had once carried and linked the prosperity and liveliness throughout the entire place, but now, it seemed particularly quiet. Only the paintings of flying and dancing women continued to smile.

In the underground palace, a middle-aged man with pepper hair asked, "Is that little bastard really on the mountain?"

The current master of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain replied carefully, "Sect master, we're absolutely certain. Many people have seen him. L- Li Qingshan is in secluded cultivation in a cave on the mountain."

"As soon as he emerges, contact me. I refuse to believe that he won't leave the mountain." Surprisingly, the middle-aged man was the vice sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, Wei Zhongyuan. He no longer wore his fancy violet robes, but a set of old, grey robes. Clearly, he was here in secret. He ground his teeth the moment Li Qingshan's name was mentioned.

Ever since Li Qingshan splattered the Parlour of Clouds and Rain with blood and killed the procuress, he had developed grievances with the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Until now, even Wei Zhongyuan's son and the two grannies of the sect had died under mysterious circumstances.

Wei Zhongyuan refused to believe that Li Qingshan possessed the strength to kill the two grannies, but he was thoroughly convinced that he had something to do with their deaths.

He was hiding below the mountain with great determination. As soon as Li Qingshan appeared, he would capture him and torture him savagely to force out a confession. Only then would he be satisfied. As long as the Hawkwolf Guard did not possess direct evidence, there was nothing that they could do about him.

Of course, he also lacked the courage to charge up the mountain and directly kill Li Qingshan right now.

"Don't worry at all, sect master. Everything that happens on the mountain and below the mountain is within the range of my perception. As soon as he emerges, the sect master will know immediately."

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As Li Qingshan tried to open the Girdle meridian, he finally realised that the latter four meridians of the eight extraordinary meridians were different from the former four.

Right now, just opening and connecting all the acupoints was not sufficient. During that process, he needed to constantly balance the flow of true qi through the four yin and yang meridians, but the difficulty did not just increase by four times. The difficulty was compounded for each meridian.

In the beginning, he tried to have true qi circulating all four meridians, but he soon realised that this was an impossible mission for him right now.

He could only slow down and urge on the true qi in the Yin and Yang Heel meridians first, but even with his foundation built from using techniques, he often still lost focus over one of the meridians.

Fortunately, Li Qingshan had bought the Gui Water Method of Condensing Qi that was complete with comprehensions. The experiences of the past people were extremely detailed, but when Li Qingshan tried replicating them, it would always end in failure.

At a time like this, Li Qingshan obviously went to Xiao An for guidance. Just how was he supposed to balance the true qi?

“Can’t you just split your focus a little?”

“Split my focus? How am I supposed to split my focus?”

Xiao An’s eyes widened. For the first time ever, she was unable to help Li Qingshan, as she completely failed to understand where the difficulty lied.

“I know my talent for comprehension is only so-so, so you don’t need to verbally strike me like that.” Li Qingshan patted Xiao An’s shoulder and said to the upright Milliped, “Yeah, Milliped? How can we grasp something like that so easily?”

Milliped spat out a clump of daemon qi. It was a very small amount, but it was divided into over a dozen thin strands that wove and overlapped with one another, forming an oscillating image.

He might have lost his daemon core and a tremendous part of his cultivation, but he was still once a Daemon General, having reached levels that Li Qingshan had never even experienced before. He seemed slow-witted when dealing with people, but how could something as simple as controlling daemon qi stump him? Li Qingshan had found the wrong daemon if he wanted sympathy.

Xiao An shrugged. “It’s very easy, right?”

Li Qingshan fell silent. He returned to cultivation. In the blink of an eye, half a month had passed, and only then did Li Qingshan learn how to split his focus into two, allowing true qi to flow through his Yin and Yang Heel meridians as he wished.

Another day later, he managed to achieve the balance required to condense the sea of qi in the Yin and Yang Linking meridians too. However, doing this with all four meridians still posed extreme difficulty.

He could only single-mindedly try again and again, without eating or drinking, without sleeping or resting. In the eyes of others, he seemed like he had gone crazy.

Xiao An could not help but become slightly worried.

However, Li Qingshan himself understood that he was neither impatient nor discouraged. All he could do was constantly search for the feeling. Since he was not a genius, he would have to make it up with hard work. If he failed a hundred times, then he would try a thousand times. If he failed a thousand times, then he would try ten thousand times.

However, no matter how patient a person was, they could not help but feel restless and discouraged, especially after trying ten thousand times. Though, Li Qingshan did not. The Spirit Turtle did not only suppress daemon qi, but also his temperament.

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During the ninety-one thousand, one-hundred and twenty-second time, the four groups of true qi rose up together. They were almost depleted, but they managed to maintain a wondrous balance. At the same time, the true qi in the Girdle meridian circulated rapidly, binding the four groups of true qi together like a girdle, allowing them to flow into the dantian.

Just when the sea of qi was about to form, the true qi dispersed again, resulting in failure.

However, Li Qingshan smiled instead. Reaching this step was definitely a great improvement, but actually splitting open the sea of qi would take a few months at the very least, or even a year. However, there were just a few days before the entrance examination of the Academy of the Hundred Schools.

Apart from hard work, money could make up for one's lack of talent too. He took out all of his Sea of Qi pills, almost a hundred of them. He placed them in a line before ingesting one. The effects of the Sea of Qi pill was to merge these four groups of true qi, but it did not guarantee success.

Unsurprisingly, the first Sea of Qi pill resulted in failure.

He failed, so he ate another.

This went on.

Even after ingesting over twenty Sea of Qi pills, he still failed to succeed, but Li Qingshan remained unfazed.

If regular Qi Practitioners saw how he ingested these Sea of Qi pills, they would definitely erupt with curses over how wasteful he was. They would all wait until they had some confidence before taking out the precious Sea of Qi pill in hopes of succeeding the first time.

However, Li Qingshan was not afraid of being wasteful. The very purpose of all pills was to reduce his time spent on cultivation. As long as he could become stronger, he could obviously obtain even more and even better pills. Unfortunately, time did not wait.

When he ate the thirty-seventh Sea of Qi pill, the four groups of true qi surged into the dantian at the same time while bound by the Girdle meridian. Under the effects of the Sea of Qi pill, they merged together. A significant amount of the effects from the previous thirty-six Sea of Qi pills lingered, so they basically glued the true qi together forcefully.

But this time, there seemed to be a boom in his belly. The four groups of true qi reached harmony in yin and yang and merged together.

True qi rose and fell in his dantian like an ocean. It no longer reached out. Instead, all rivers ran into the sea, becoming the source and destination of all the true qi in his body.

He had broken through to the sixth layer and condensed a sea of qi!

Li Qingshan finally smiled in relief and energy seemed to drain from his body. The exhaustion and fatigue that had been forcefully suppressed by the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression surged out once more. He almost could not help but tip over to one side and fall asleep.

In the past half a month, he had forcefully used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression to keep his mind at peak condition, just so that he could avoid wasting away the sliver of experience he had accumulated from each attempt from pausing and resting.

This brutal method took a great toll on his mind. As a matter of fact, there was even the danger of making his mind snap. However, he managed to endure it all and make it to the other side.

Xiao An came up to him and rubbed his forehead gently. She said softly, "Sleep a little!"

"Don't forget to wake me up..."

Xiao An's voice seemed to possess irresistible charm. Before Li Qingshan had even finished talking, he collapsed and fell asleep.

He slept extremely heavily this time, in a state that seemed like a dream, yet not like a dream. He felt like he was floating in the ocean, being washed around by the currents and the waves. He would sometimes be submerged underwater and float on the surface at other times.

Before Xiao An could wake him, he had already awoken from his sleep. He felt that his head still ached slightly, so he shook it and asked, "How long have I slept for?"

"Roughly fourteen hours."

"It's time to set off!" Li Qingshan leapt to his feet and revealed a toothy grin.

"Yep!"

Li Qingshan opened the bug pouch and said to Milliped, "You'll have to bear with it a little more. Don't worry, it won't be too long."

Milliped dived head first into the bug pouch. He discovered the various kinds of food Xiao An had prepared for him, so he immediately began devouring it. He did not seem like he was putting up with anything at all.

Li Qingshan turned the stone disc, and the stone door opened slowly. Fresh air flowed in. Spring was already in the air.

The place for seclusion was located towards the back of the mountain, so it was quiet. He did not bother to inform anyone about his departure, directly using the Cloud Riding Mist Wielding technique. A cloud gathered below his feet.

After splitting open his sea of qi, he discovered that using techniques was easier than ever now, and their effects were much more powerful than before too.

The cloud carried Li Qingshan and Xiao An off into the sky, but as soon as they reached an altitude of a few meters, they vanished as a soft streak of light.

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“Sect master, Li Qingshan has emerged from seclusion!” The parlour master reported in a hurry in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

“Where’s he right now?” Wei Zhongyuan had run out of patience a long time ago, so he beamed when he heard the news.

“H- he has vanished,” the parlour master stuttered. The news from the mountain was that the dwelling was wide open, but not a single person was in sight. No one knew where Li Qingshan had gone to.

“That little bastard!” Wei Zhongyuan launched a palm strike and sent the parlour master flying, slamming into the wall heavily and spurting with blood. However, he did not dare to fight back or talk back against the enraged Wei Zhongyuan.

Wei Zhongyuan roared, “No matter where you flee to, I will find you and tear you to shreds!”

The cloud and mist had already reached the highest point that it could reach. The blueness of the sky was dazzling. Li Qingshan extended his hand towards the sky, as if he wanted to touch that vision, his promise beyond the Nine Heavens.

However, he touched nothing, but he smiled instead. The light from the springtime sun was so bright and beautiful that he was unable to look at it directly.

Xiao An stared straight at him, like staring at a vision, silently thinking about her own promise, not returning to her long-forgotten home in the south, but accompanying him all the way beyond the Nine Heavens.

After quite a while, Li Qingshan lowered his head and looked at the ground and the mountains below. The raging waters of the Clear river glistened like a stream of light. The Hawkwolf mountain seemed like a small hill, while Wei Zhongyuan’s roar was probably not even as loud as a mosquito, which Li Qingshan missed completely.

He took out the mental map of the Green province and checked his bearings before pointing towards the south-east.

“To the Academy of the Hundred Schools!”

PS: The path has already begun, and Dream Teller is beginning his advance. During the double tickets event, I eagerly plead for monthly tickets. To me, the true challenge has only just begun. I want to determine the victory and defeat with the plot! I refuse to believe I’ll lose to others! And, I want to ask, which schools of thought do you think Li Qingshan and Xiao An will be joining? The answer is coming right up. I don’t think anyone can guess it. ^_^

Chapter 264 - Arriving in the Prefectural City of Clear River

The cloud and mist surged, shooting across the sky with a small, white tail.

The gusts of wind blew into their faces and ruffled Li Qingshan and Xiao An's clothes. The spring wind in the third month was still slightly chilly, but the warmth from the sun was truly intoxicating.

The landscape below them rapidly receded. Li Qingshan had been on aeroplanes in his past life, but it was impossible to compare the feeling of flight to sitting in an aircraft cabin.

Under Li Qingshan's control, the cloud and mist suddenly rushed down towards a large lake. The crystal green lake hurtled towards his face. In the moment he was about to collide with the lake, he suddenly slowed down, kicking up a clear splash that landed on Li Qingshan's face. He sped along the surface of the water, leaving behind a trail in the lake.

When he was about to crash into a hill, he suddenly pulled up, rushing towards the blue sky.

The surrounding scenery constantly changed. The cities, towns, and villages appeared before disappearing once again, while the mountains towered before flattening out.

During early spring, he took in all of the natural scenery that had yet to be destroyed by humanity.

For a moment, Li Qingshan felt that his mind had never been so open before.

Li Qingshan took out Milliped from the bug pouch to show the scenery of the sky to this guy who spent his entire life crawling around underground. As soon as Milliped came out, he shrank into a ball.

Li Qingshan laughed aloud, while Xiao An giggled.

His flight speed was not particularly fast. At least, it was not as fast as when Li Qingshan moved along the ground. However, the benefit was that there were no obstacles in the sky, so they could fly along a straight path.

Although there were five hundred kilometers between Jiaping city and Clear River city, covering that much distance in a single day was nothing difficult while flying.

They had set off in the afternoon. The sky above them gradually dimmed, lighting up with stars. In the end, it turned into a resplendent galaxy of stars.

The tiny cloud was like a tiny, lone island, hovering beneath the starry sky. Li Qingshan could not help but be shocked by the scenery around him, which he praised, "So beautiful!"

Xiao An nodded. Li Qingshan rubbed her head before taking out the mental map of the Green province. Taking a look, he said, "We're almost there."

The Clear river turned into a jade band glistening with starlight, leading to the very core of the entire Clear River prefecture. More and more boats began to appear on the river.

As the cloud sped along, a ball of fire suddenly lit up in the distant, gloomy horizon. It burned in a dazzling manner.

As Li Qingshan drew closer, he saw the fire split up into thousands of lights, which surprised him slightly.

Originally, he thought the prefectural city of Clear River was just an enlarged version of Jiaping city. At most, it would cover an area a few times larger.

But when he saw it with his own eyes, he felt like he had transmigrated back to his original world, arriving in a modern city towering with skyscrapers. Skyscrapers seemed to grow from the ground. There were plenty that towered above ten storeys, and their designs were extremely exquisite. The city was like a gigantic art gallery instead of the concrete jungles of modern times.

These traditional structures should not have been able to stand in such an imposing manner. In particular, there were a few buildings and pavilions of special design that even a non-professional like Li Qingshan felt did not conform to the principles of engineering, yet there they stood without any issues at all.

Li Qingshan immediately understood that this was the civil engineering techniques of mohism.

Now, this was a cultivator's world. Their influence had already penetrated every corner of the world. They did not spend every single day flying around in the air and blasting one another with techniques.

Before the city, Li Qingshan dispersed the cloud and mist and walked over with Xiao An by foot. However, he still used the Glazed Mirror of Invisibility, concealing his body while withdrawing all of his aura. It was unlikely for him to run into the people of the Sect of Clouds and Rain in such a large city, but there was nothing wrong with being more careful.

On the ground, he discovered the city to be even more imposing. Just like Jiaping city, there were no city walls here either. If there really was a day when war erupted, the end result would be determined in the sky. City walls on the ground were just a small, earthen slope to the enemy.

There was even less of a reason to use city walls to guard against bandits and thugs. This was the supreme headquarters of the Hawkwolf Guard for the entire Clear River prefecture, with two commanders stationed here. Anyone who dared to make trouble here would be captured immediately and taken away.

Li Qingshan's first destination was the headquarters of the Hawkwolf Guard. Originally, every single person who joined the Hawkwolf Guard would come to Clear River city to meet the two scarlet bronze commanders after a period of trial. It was basically a formality.

Qian Rongzhi and Diao Fei had already come to Clear River city before, but only Li Qingshan had not done so. Before he had entered secluded cultivation, Fang Enshang had specially reminded him to report there as soon as he arrived in Clear River city.

If he wanted to cultivate in the Academy of the Hundred Schools, this was crucial. He could not help but think about what had happened over a year ago, with the handsome "commander Hua" and the stern "old Wang". He wondered how they would react when they saw him again.

And, with how late it was, the two of them probably were not in their office anymore. Suddenly, his heart skipped a beat. He sensed a spiritual pulse scan past him.

Li Qingshan immediately raised his vigilance, but he saw no one approaching him. He could not help but become rather perplexed.

Xiao An said, "This is a formation."

"How do you know?"

“The Book of All said so.”

Li Qingshan was astonished. This was a formation that enveloped such a large city. That was equivalent to invisible city walls, guarding against Qi Practitioners that could actually threaten this place. However, he guessed that the formation was probably much more useful as a deterrent than whatever other purposes it could serve.

Li Qingshan travelled along the river. The multi-storeyed ships on the wide river were like cities among the city. There were loud commotions at the harbour, while the lights were so bright that it seemed like daytime, illuminating all of the willow trees that were currently blooming along the riverbank. It all seemed hazy like mist.

On the main road, people flowed to and fro, weaving between each other like cloth. It was both busy and lively.

Li Qingshan suddenly realised something. These regular people were living in the care of gods.

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Li Qingshan wove through the road with Xiao An and found his destination very soon, a scarlet building that stood several dozen storeys high. At the very top of the building was a bronze hawk, even larger than the one in Jiaping city. It also had its eyes wide open and its wings spread. It was very imposing.

Li Qingshan could not help but wonder whether there would be a bird even larger than this made from white silver where Gu Yanying stayed in the Ruyi commandery. If it was the South Centre city, it would probably be a golden hawk.

However, just what significance was all that gold and silver supposed to hold at that cultivation realm?

Li Qingshan removed his invisibility and climbed up the steps, entering the majestic building. The lobby was quiet, and the only thing that connected it to the higher floors was a spiral staircase.

The marble tiles were reflective enough for Li Qingshan to see himself clearly. Only a woman sat behind a marble table as she dozed off.

Li Qingshan purposefully made his footsteps quite obvious, but he failed to awaken the woman. In the end, he discovered that she was just a regular person. The security here was so lax that it was almost impossible to connect it with the Hawkwolf Guard. All he could do was walk over and knock on the desk.

The woman jerked awake. “Who are you looking for?”

Li Qingshan said, “Black Wolf guard of Jiaping city, Li Qingshan. I’ve come to meet the two commanders.”

“Commander Wang has already gone home.” The woman saw the tablet on Li Qingshan’s waist and immediately answered diligently.

Li Qingshan said, “Then what about commander Hua?”

The woman immediately said, “Commander Hua has already gone drinking with women.” She covered her mouth in a hurry, knowing that she had said too much.

Li Qingshan curled his lip. As it seemed, this commander Hua was not particularly dignified here.

The woman was clearly just a regular receptionist. It was probably because no Qi Practitioner was willing to work a job like this, which was why they chose a decent-looking regular person.

“You are welcomed to go upstairs and rest for the night. You can meet the two commanders tomorrow.”

The purpose of this majestic building clearly was not just for work. It also provided lodgings for guards who had come to the city.

Just as Li Qingshan was contemplating on what to do, footsteps began to ring out above.

“You’ve finally arrived.” Qian Rongzhi slowly made her way down the spiral staircase. She was not wearing the uniform of the Hawkwolf Guard, having changed into a thin, long, violet spring dress. Her hair was styled in a fancy manner, revealing her snow-white nape. Compared to the gentleness and kindness she showed in Jiaping city, she seemed more elegant now.

At this moment, even Li Qingshan struggled to connect her with the Qian Rongzhi of the past. Her bearing had not just changed, but improved as well. Her cultivation had already reached the sixth layer, which probably played a crucial role in all of this.

Li Qingshan frowned. “Why are you here?”

Qian Rongzhi touched her hair. “I’m also going to the Academy of the Hundred Schools to cultivate. Perhaps we might end up as fellow students. Right, Xiao An?” She winked at Xiao An before saying to Li Qingshan, “Congratulations, you’ve reached the sixth layer.”

Although she showed none of it on her face, she was surprised inside. When she initially met him, he was only at the first layer. In under a year, he had reached the sixth layer. He had truly been cultivating at an amazing speed, and his true strength was much more than just that.

Even though she had the brutal cultivation method of the Vitality Devouring technique, the reason why she could cultivate so quickly was closely linked to all those years of accumulation, which was why she managed to split open her sea of qi successfully in a single attempt.

Li Qingshan replied, “Same to you.”

The joy that came from her success was not an act. Reaching the sixth layer as a Qi Practitioner was worthy of celebration for all cultivators. However, with her exquisite outfit, it no longer seemed so simple anymore.

“Rongzhi, what are you doing here? Didn’t we agree to eat together?” A young man made his way down the staircase and arrived beside Qian Rongzhi.

Li Qingshan glanced at him quickly. He had met this man in the past too. He was Wu Gen, the one who led the group that had surrounded the Truth-seeking society.

It was not strange at all for Qian Rongzhi to be acquainted with him. Fang Enshang favoured her heavily, and Fang Enshang and Wu Gen were familiar with one another. As such, now that she had come to Clear River city, Fang Enshang would obviously ask his friend to take good care of her.

When he saw how Wu Gen looked at Qian Rongzhi, Li Qingshan understood even further. That was how a man looked at a woman. Although he intentionally disguised it, the lust was still as clear as day.

The prey had already bitten the bait.

“Brother Wu, this is a fellow colleague of mine who joined the Hawkwolf Guard with me. He’s Li Qingshan. Qingshan, this is a good friend of our commander, Wu Gen.” Qian Rongzhi gave a natural and graceful introduction, but she maintained a certain distance from Wu Gen the entire time. She seemed closer to Li Qingshan.

However, exactly because of that, Wu Gen felt restless and found it to be unbearable. When he met her below the Green Vine mountain in the past, he could feel that this woman was different. Now that he had met her again in Clear River city, and she had changed into a spring dress, she seemed to have transformed completely, causing his heart to thump for her.

Chapter 265 - Visiting the Parlour of Clouds and Rain Again

Qian Rongzhi was no longer the same Qian Rongzhi as before. She was not in a hurry to change her fate by seducing a superior officer like she had been when she first arrived in Jiaping city. She had the time to wait for the biggest fish now. She knew extremely well that all men were worthless creatures. It would be easier for her to achieve her objective if they could not obtain her.

However, all of this was established on the basis of cultivation. Only with her cultivation at the sixth layer did she attract Wu Gen’s proper attention, preventing him from resorting to more forceful methods.

In the past in Jiaping city, even if she wanted to control Zhuo Zhibo like this, it would have been impossible. Only with strength could she win respect. This was one of the most fundamental principles in the cultivation world.

Li Qingshan saw exactly what was happening, but he did not expose her either. Originally, he had some small grievances with Wu Gen, but now, he instead pitied him. He bowed. “Greetings to sir Wu.”

Wu Gen saw how Li Qingshan was at the sixth layer, but he did not behave particularly arrogantly, so Wu Gen casually returned with a bow. “Not bad. You have some talent. You can consider changing your uniform. Once you join the Academy of the Hundred Schools in a few days’ time, we’ll be one big family, so we’ll need to know each other better. Come with me. I’ll take you to see commander Hua.”

“May I ask where commander Hua is?”

“In the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, obviously. Let’s go together.”

Li Qingshan was slightly surprised, while Qian Rongzhi seemed troubled too. She had just been expelled from the Sect of Clouds and Rain. She had personally killed Wei Zhongyuan’s son, while her cultivation all came from the Method of Clouds and Rain too.

“Rongzhi, I’ve already told you before. That place isn’t like what you imagine it to be. There’s quite a lot of interesting stuff there. Almost all of the best chefs of the entire Clear River prefecture are there. You won’t be disappointed if you go.” Wu Gen had thought Qian Rongzhi was reluctant to visit a brothel, so he persuaded her softly.

Qian Rongzhi tactfully explained Li Qingshan's grievances with the Sect of Clouds and Rain.

Wu Gen sized up Li Qingshan. "I couldn't tell, but you sure know how to make trouble."

Li Qingshan said, "Things never happen according to plan. I'll stay here for the night and see commander Hua tomorrow."

"Hold on!" Wu Gen fished out his Scarlet Wolf tablet and flicked it gently. With a flash, he actually began to talk through it, "Big brother Hua, there's someone from Jiaping city called Li Qingshan who wants to see you, but he seems to have some disputes with big sis Qiu. Yep. Okay!"

Afterwards, he raised his head. "Just wait here. He said he'll be here in a moment."

Li Qingshan felt like he had transmigrated back to his previous life and fell into a trance for a moment. He wondered, Just who is this big sis Qiu?

Qian Rongzhi whispered, "The sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, Qiu Haitang. A Foundation Establishment cultivator."

Li Qingshan shuddered. The Hawkwolf Guard of the Clear River prefecture actually had such deep ties with the Sect of Clouds and Rain.

Wu Gen did not behave as arrogantly and recklessly as he did in the Quiet Spring valley in front of his own colleagues. However, he did have to fulfill his ego.

Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi thought of the same thing. They played along with him reluctantly while constantly looking at one another, which displeased Wu Gen slightly.

A while later, there was a long whinny, and a fine horse with a silver mane stopped at the entrance. It actually hovered above the ground, having galloped over on the wind.

The horse was a head taller than regular horses, and it was covered in fine scales. It was more than just a fine steed, but almost a divine steed. A robust figure dismounted from the horse. He was Hua Chengzan.

Wu Gen smiled. "Brother Hua, how about you sell me this Silver Dragon horse for a thousand spiritual stones?"

Hua Chengzan glanced at Wu Gen. "More like just a leg of the horse." He was clearly tipsy. His face was flushed from drinking, like he had put on rouge. It made him seem extremely beautiful, but his gaze was still clear. As soon as he saw Li Qingshan, his eyes lit up. He never thought the person mentioned by her would appear before him so soon.

After seeing through Li Qingshan's cultivation, he was surprised. He clicked his tongue in wonder. "The sixth layer! Impressive, impressive!"

Li Qingshan said without being too polite or rude, "Greetings, commander Hua."

Hua Chengzan waved his hand. "We're not working right now, so you're forbidden from calling me commander."

Wu Gen said, "When I was his age, I was around the sixth layer too. What's so impressive about that?"

Having reached the eighth layer at such a young age, Wu Gen was known as a genius even among Clear River city that was teeming with talented people. The only person he openly admired was Hua Chengzan. Hearing how he praised Li Qingshan's cultivation, even doing it before Qian Rongzhi, he was rather unwilling to accept it.

Although Li Qingshan was only seventeen, he gave off a mature bearing. No one who saw him would treat him like a regular teenager. Instead, he was a man who possessed his own charm.

Hua Chengzan said, "How long did it take for you to reach the sixth layer?"

"Around ten years? What's it got to do with this?" Wu Gen came from a prominent clan too. He had begun cultivating in his youth. He had been sent to the Academy of the Hundred Schools after developing a slight foundation.

Hua Chengzan raised a finger. "He only used one year."

"Brother Hua, don't kid around with me!" Wu Gen was immediately stunned. He looked at Li Qingshan in surprise and doubt. He was unable to tell that this slightly unrefined kid had such great talent.

Hua Chengzan asked Li Qingshan, "Am I right?"

Li Qingshan replied, "Basically."

Wu Gen's gaze towards Li Qingshan now became much more cautious.

Hua Chengzan wrapped his arm around Li Qingshan's shoulder naturally. "Come! Let's go take a look at the Parlour of Clouds and Rain with me!" He immediately felt Li Qingshan's body stiffen. He smiled, revealing his pearly, white teeth. Although he was slightly tipsy, he seemed quite charming.

Qian Rongzhi thought, So that's all there is to the man of so-called unmatched handsomeness! She was afraid of carelessly targeting this man, even though he had great value in being used, as she had personally witnessed the sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, Qiu Haitang, before.

Li Qingshan never thought he would be immediately entering the den of his greatest enemy so far as soon as he arrived in Clear River city. There was a Foundation Establishment cultivator there, so was he not walking into the belly of the beast? He could tell how Hua Chengzan had close ties to the Sect of Clouds and Rain, so surely he was not working with the sect to screw him over, right?

Hua Chengzan said, "Don't be so nervous. Relax. Women might be as fierce as tigers, but they're not man-eaters at the end of the day. Right, Rongzhi?"

Qian Rongzhi let out a shallow smile. "Yeah."

Wu Gen took an even deeper liking towards her. Now that's a woman I would admire. Regular women would just ogle Hua Chengzan uncontrollably when they met him. They would never be able to deal with him as smoothly as Qian Rongzhi did.

Li Qingshan hesitated slightly. Hua Chengzan slapped Li Qingshan's back. "Don't worry, this is my territory, so I can guarantee that you'll be fine. If there's anything you want to say, you can spit it all out. As mighty Hawkwolf guards, we can't just hide around every single day."

Qian Rongzhi said, "Yeah, Qingshan. Let's go take a look!"

"As the commander wishes." Li Qingshan knew that he could not decline. Hesitating would instead attract suspicion, so he agreed firmly.

Qian Rongzhi had a sinister mind, but her insight was sharp too. Since she was bold enough to go, it meant she had already made a judgement. He trusted her judgement. The two of them were in the same boat for this matter. As a matter of fact, her crimes as a traitor were much larger than his.

If even she was bold enough to go, why was he supposed to be afraid? Being able to resolve this issue of living in constant fear of being attacked would be good too.

"Didn't I say not to call me commander? Though, agreeing is more like it."

Then, Hua Chengzan crouched down and said to Xiao An beside Li Qingshan, "You must be the Xiao An that the Sect of Clouds and Rain is searching for!"

Xiao An ignored him. She only clung onto Li Qingshan's hand.

Wu Gen laughed aloud. "Looks like even you have times when you are defeated."

Hua Chengzan rubbed his nose. "Looks like my charm isn't enough to affect girls at such an age. Grow up quickly. Then you'll know just who's better compared to this Li person."

Wu Gen laughed aloud, while Li Qingshan grinned. It was difficult to develop any ill will towards him.

The five of them left the building. Li Qingshan looked at the Silver Dragon horse there. Up close, it was even more beautiful. Every single muscle of its body possessed rippling beauty, while the spiritual qi flowing through it was extremely pure too.

Li Qingshan knew this was a spiritual beast that had been tamed by humans. If he measured it according to the scale of daemons, it was already a rather powerful daemoniac beast. The stirrups and horseshoes on the horse all shone with light. Together, they were equivalent to a high grade spiritual artifact at the very least. Along with the daily costs to feed and take care of it, it was not something that any regular Qi Practitioners could afford to keep. Even if they could afford to keep it, there was no need for them to keep one either.

However, these unnecessary aspects only demonstrated the Hua family's strength.

"Do you want to try riding it? Come, I'll lift you onto it." Seeing Xiao An ogle at the Silver Dragon Horse, Hua Chengzan seemed to refuse to accept the fact that his charm had failed, so he smiled.

Xiao An refused again. Li Qingshan directly lifted her onto the horse and patted the side of the horse. "Just ride it. There's still quite a long way!"

"Be careful!" Hua Chengzan warned in a hurry, but he saw how the Silver Dragon horse just stood there without moving. He seemed stunned. "That's strange. This guy usually has a fiery temper. If I don't tell him beforehand, he never lets anyone ride him."

Horses might not be as clever as humans, but they had senses for danger that humans did not possess.

Wu Gen took out something like a tablet and summoned a fine steed. It was not as great as a divine steed like the Silver Dragon horse, but it was still an extraordinary spiritual beast. He invited Qian Rongzhi to mount it.

Qian Rongzhi thanked him with a nod before mounting the horse elegantly.

Hua Chengzan and Wu Gen walked as they led the horses along. The ground followed the main street towards the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. Along the way, Hua Chengzan and Wu Gen discussed the advantages and disadvantages of various mounts, not just horses. Sure enough, they were extremely expensive. Including the entire set of equipment, they would cost several thousand spiritual stones at the very least.

Li Qingshan was unable to chime in either. He felt like a kid from the countryside listening to the young masters of the city discussing which car to buy.

While he could afford one, he would never waste his spiritual stones on an aspect like this. He would convert every single spiritual stone in his possession into his own power so that he could fly to higher skies.

Of course, if he really wanted a mount, there were quite a few impressive ones among the demonic beasts underground. Even if humans managed to catch these wild demonic beasts alive, they would be impossible to tame, but it was perfectly justifiable for a demon soldier leader to harass his subordinates.

However, if he wanted to return there, just his identity as a demon soldier leader would be nowhere near enough. He needed to undergo a heavenly tribulation and successfully become a Daemon General. Only then could he return to the region and reclaim it.

Hua Chengzan would introduce the local customs, cultures, and stories of the prefectural city from time to time as well. He was full of witty remarks, such that no one found it boring.

They arrived before a glorious building. The four words, Parlour of Clouds and Rain, hung high on the building.

Chapter 266 - Sobering up with Alcohol

The halls were magnificent, and the entire building was lit with lanterns.

It stood several hundred meters high. Even in the city filled with large structures, it stood out.

A string of great, red lanterns dangled down from the edge of the tall, slender eaves. The walls depicted large, enchanting paintings of dancing and floating women. The most unbelievable part about it all was that the wall paintings actually moved about. They winked and gestured at the passersby as their snow-white hands plucked the pipa, resulting in actual music. It was magnificent, just like a wonderland.

Wu Gen said proudly, "What do you think of this place, Rongzhi?"

Qian Rongzhi said, "It's very beautiful." She had already been here once before.

Then, Wu Gen asked, "What about you, Qingshan? You won't be able to see something like this in a small place like Jiaping even if you spent your entire life there."

Originally, Hua Chengzan thought that Li Qingshan would be utterly dumbfounded and left speechless. Most people who came here for the first time behaved like that. However, Li Qingshan only demonstrated amazement, but he maintained his composure. It earned some praise in Hua Chengzan's heart.

Li Qingshan said, "It makes me think of home."

Wu Gen laughed aloud. "That's the funniest joke I've heard all day."

Li Qingshan did not refute him. This place was indeed like his former life, the world of blurred lights, the flickering neon lights, and the movies that confounded fiction with reality. There probably were not a lot of sights that could make him dumbfounded.

Wu Gen took out the item that seemed like a tablet again. Li Qingshan knew that this was called a seal, which was specially used to control spiritual beasts. Hua Chengzan sent the Silver Dragon horse away too.

Entering the parlour, a fragrance rushed into his face. A group of young women in thin, spring dresses came up to receive them. Every single one of them were as charming as flowers and gave off the vigorous aura of youth. They touched and prodded Hua Chengzan, gabbling and chirping at him together. They called him young master Hua, young master Hua endlessly.

Hua Chengzan did not push them away either. He embraced them with both hands and named all of them with great familiarity, which excited these young women again.

"How undisciplined. Don't you all have things to do?" A woman who seemed like a caretaker walked over and dispersed these unwilling women.

Originally, Li Qingshan wanted to say that this place was quite different from regular brothels, but he saw how the young women immediately changed when they dispersed to receive customers. They were all very courteous, clearly having undergone strict training. They were even more dignified than young ladies from noble families.

The caretaker woman bowed towards Hua Chengzan gracefully before quickly glancing around. She said bashfully, "Young master Hua, you've returned. Your friends have almost run out of patience waiting for you."

Only then did they know that Hua Chengzan was receiving special treatment. The two other men, Li Qingshan and Wu Gen, had been reduced to mere foils to enhance Hua Chengzan's charm. They glanced at each other and felt some pity for one another.

Li Qingshan raised his head. The Parlour of Clouds and Rain had the same structure of a hollow centre, but it was not round. Instead, it seemed like a fish, and the entire building was more than ten times larger than the one in Jiaping city. Countless passageways bridged the centre in the air as people walked around on them. It was like a city within a building.

People flowed in and out of the building, including people of different ages and sexes. A few Qi Practitioner were mixed among them, looking around like regular tourists and admiring the strange sights of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

Hua Chengzan teased the caretaker woman a little before asking, "Where's Haitang?"

"The sect master is cultivating in the back."

"Get her to come over. I have a few friends I want to introduce to her."

The woman glanced at Li Qingshan and Qian Rongzhi before speaking in an unwilling manner, "I'll go right now."

However, Li Qingshan raised his vigilance even more. Hua Chengzan directly called this sect master by her name, and he could even invite her over so easily. It was more than enough to prove their relationship.

"Let's go up first!" Hua Chengzan led the way at the front. When they arrived in a corner of the building, Li Qingshan felt a white cloud surge out from beneath his feet, gently lifting everyone up slowly. Only then did he spot the tiny formation carved into the ground. It flickered with light. Clearly, it was a formation that could create a cloud for riding.

Hua Chengzan saw Li Qingshan's expression change. He joked, "What, has it reminded you of home again?"

Li Qingshan, "Yep." Wasn't this just an elevator? While the exact methods used were different, humans basically all travelled in roughly the same direction when it came to indulgence.

Wu Gen patted Li Qingshan's shoulder and smiled. "I couldn't tell, but you sure like to joke around, Qingshan."

As they pulled higher and higher, Li Qingshan spotted that the Parlour of Clouds and Rain was divided into several spaces according to their floors. He could see this thanks to his extraordinary eyesight. There were spaces furnished with gambling tables and games, as well as spaces filled with people feasting.

Of course, the traditional "services" took up a very large space too. Every single person there was overflowing with smiles. Even Li Qingshan could not help but be infected by this joyous atmosphere. His mind gradually loosened, temporarily forgetting about his worries and grievances. He smiled too.

Hua Chengzan said, "Here, no matter what your identity is, no matter what your interests are, you can get whatever you want. There is boundless joy here."

Li Qingshan suddenly sensed that something was amiss. He used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression to stabilise his mind, and his smile immediately vanished. "Are there formations here that can influence the minds of people?" Afterwards, he saw how Xiao An was unaffected, just as expected, while Qian Rongzhi's expression remained the same too, likely due to the Method of Clouds and Rain that she practised.

"That's right!" Hua Chengzan nodded. He appreciated Li Qingshan's sharp senses.

Li Qingshan said, "Don't tell me it's fine to delude people like this?"

Wu Gen said, "What delude people? You'd better stop exaggerating."

Hua Chengzan said, "Just what part of wine, women, avarice, and pride isn't deluding people? And, just who dislikes them? Compared to those, don't you think that using some techniques to bring joy to people in a way that is neither harmful to the body or the mind is much better?"

Li Qingshan shook his head. "I'd rather go without joys like that."

Hua Chengzan smiled. "Everyone is drunk, so why must you be the only one sober?"

Li Qingshan looked into Hua Chengzan's clear pupils and asked, "Are you drunk?" He did not feel like Hua Chengzan was one to wallow in these kinds of things.

Hua Chengzan blinked his eyes. "Haven't you ever heard of sobering up with alcohol?"

The two of them smiled at each other.

Wu Gen said impatiently, "Just what riddles are you throwing at each other?"

The surroundings suddenly quietened. They had already arrived at the very top of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. The stars twinkled overhead, while the surroundings were now a garden. Tall bamboo grew in verdant clumps, with both fake mountains and ponds present in the surroundings. As a matter of fact, there was even a small, gurgling stream. It was impossible to imagine that this was on the top of a tall building. The sound of traditional instruments rang out from a few pavilions in the distance.

They walked along a small path and ran into a half-drunk, middle-aged man who was supported by a gorgeous woman. Both of them were Qi Practitioners, while the man was actually at the tenth layer. His green robes were wrinkled, and he had his hand on the woman's perky bottom. Even his beard struggled to make him seem even the slightest bit more dignified.

The middle-aged man saw Hua Chengzan and moved away from the woman in a hurry. He tidied up his clothes and put on a gentleman's act. "S- so it's commander Hua."

Hua Chengzan smiled. "What are you doing here, sir?"

The middle-aged man coughed gently. "Collecting material, collecting material."

The woman rubbed his chest. "Didn't you say you'd make me feel good once in bed?"

The middle-aged man refuted awkwardly, "Stop talking nonsense." The woman only smiled, clearly completely unafraid of him. She even tossed a few flirtatious glances at Hua Chengzan.

Wu Gen sniggered, while Hua Chengzan stepped aside to give way. "You can go first, sir. Let's not delay your proper business."

Wu Gen said disdainfully, "Shameless degenerate."

The middle-aged man left in a disheveled manner. Li Qingshan asked curiously, "Who is he?" He had seen quite a few powerful Qi Practitioners before. Whether they were enemies or friends, they all had quite the bearing about them, unlike how unsightly that man was.

Chapter 267 - The Sect Master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain

Wu Gen said, "A shameless degenerate."

Hua Chengzan said, "Shh, be quiet!"

"What's so scary about him? Let's head over!"

Between the bamboo was a bamboo building. Two strange, stone, humanoid statues held lanterns at the entrance, giving off the feeling of a foreign land. The stream flowed into a bamboo basket on the side.

Li Qingshan entered the building with Hua Chengzan. There were around a dozen young men and women currently drinking happily.

All of them were Qi Practitioners, and none of them were below the sixth layer.

Seeing Hua Chengzan walk in, a young man with some whiskers and fair skin grabbed Hua Chengzan by the sleeve. "Senior brother, you ran off before you were even done drinking. What's that supposed to mean? You need to be punished with three additional cups."

Everyone kicked up a fuss together. "Three additional cups!" There were also people who asked, "Who're they?"

Hua Chengzan said, "Alright, alright, alright. Don't fuss around. Let me introduce these two friends to you. This one is Li Qingshan and she's Qian Rongzhi. They're both joining our school of Legalism."

"These people are all the talents of our school of Legalism in the Clear River prefecture. They might seem a little unbearable, as they are a bit unbearable. I'm not going to introduce them one by one, but let's all get along in the future!"

Before he was done, everyone had already begun mocking him, "You're unbearable."

Before he had come here, Li Qingshan had already learnt a little about the school of Legalism from the Book of All. The current leader of the school of Legalism was the Scarlet Hawk commander, Wang Pushi.

The Academy of the Hundred Schools was not completely cut off from the outside world. Instead, it had an extremely close connection throughout the many levels of the Great Xia empire. The disciples there had great freedom. As long as they had paid their fees, they could do whatever they wanted. Of course, the fees were large amounts of spiritual stones.

This freedom was exactly what Li Qingshan wanted. The rules were not rigid and restrictive like sects. It was relatively more convenient if he wanted to head out to handle some matters.

Some disciples of legalism would study in the academy while doing their job as a Hawkwolf guard, which was possible as long as they killed a few figures on the blacklist every now and then.

The current primary disciple of legalism was Hua Chengzan, which made it even more difficult for Li Qingshan to decline. The people before him must have been the elites among the school of Legalism. They were unable to disguise their aggressive pride that came with their young age.

Li Qingshan clasped his hands at everyone, but most of them ignored him. However, when Qian Rongzhi emerged from behind and bowed gracefully, it made the eyes of a lot of the men present light up.

“Alright, Wu Gen. I was wondering why you didn’t come find us in the past few days. You said you had a friend coming into town, but turns out you’re just hiding a beauty to yourself.”

“Quit your bullsh*t.” Wu Gen refused to admit it, but his smile grew even wider.

Everyone saw Xiao An and praised her too. For a moment, the atmosphere was boisterous.

Hua Chengzan pulled Li Qingshan with him to sit down. He poured him some alcohol and smiled. “Just wait a moment. Your enemy will be arriving very soon.”

The others became rather surprised by the treatment that Li Qingshan received. Although Hu Chengzan treated everyone courteously, he was probably prouder than everyone else here. It was very rare for him to be so close with someone.

Li Qingshan said, “Let’s just hope we don’t blaze with hatred when we see our enemies.”

Hua Chengzan patted his shoulder. “Don’t worry.”

Li Qingshan smiled. Suddenly, he felt a gust of wind from behind and his body stiffened. Hua Chengzan patted his hand with a smile, as if he was telling him to relax.

A woman wrapped her arms around Hua Chengzan and Li Qingshan’s necks from behind. A pretty face appeared between them and smiled. “What enemy?”

Li Qingshan felt something soft press against his back as fragrance assaulted his nose. He was slightly surprised, as this woman was not a disciple of the Sect of Clouds and Rain drinking with everyone else, but a disciple of the school of Legalism. Her cultivation was even higher than Wu Gen’s, at the ninth layer. She was only second to Hua Chengzan among the disciples of legalism.

Hua Chengzan said, “Stop frightening people. If he punched you, you probably wouldn’t be able to take it.”

“He’s able to bring himself to do something like that?” The woman turned towards Li Qingshan. “You’re able to bring yourself to do something like that?”

Her vermilion lips were inches away as the smell of alcohol assaulted Li Qingshan’s nose. With that, the feeling on his shoulder grew clearer. Li Qingshan coughed gently. “Even if I can bring myself to do something like that, I’d miss.”

“You’re actually able to bring yourself to do that?” The woman stared into his eyes and drew closer to him.

And I definitely wouldn’t miss, thought Li Qingshan.

Hua Chengzan introduced, “Han Qiongzhi, the secondary disciple of legalism, the young miss of the Han family.”

Han Qiongzhi said, “If you put it like that, you’ll make me angry. What young miss of the Han family? You can just call me senior sister! Oh right, hasn’t my little brother come today?”

Hua Chengzan said, “He never comes to places like this. It’s not like you don’t know. Now go. Don’t get in the way of my drinking.”

Han Qiongzhi said, "No, I refuse. They're all gathering around the new girl, so of course, I have to gather around the new guy."

As expected, Qian Rongzhi had completely joined in with the disciples of legalism now. Han Qiongzhi suddenly sensed a gaze look over. She turned around and saw Xiao An staring straight at her. She raised an eyebrow and said with displeasure, "Kid, what're you looking at?"

"She's not looking at anyone." Li Qingshan's voice coldened slightly as he scooped up Xiao An. He lowered his head and asked her, "Do you want to eat anything?"

"Oh? Pretty cocky are we?" Han Qiongzhi raised her voice and attracted quite a few gazes.

Hua Chengzan thought, Oh no. Han Qiongzhi had always been headstrong, but she never liked being brushed off.

"You're just a bumpkin-" Before Han Qiongzhi could finish talking, Hua Chengzan had shoved a cup of alcohol into her mouth. "Go drink your wine!"

Han Qiongzhi said unhappily, "Exactly why s-" However, she could see how Hua Chengzan's gaze was warning her despite still smiling. Her anger immediately subsided, and she snatched the cup. "Fine then."

"Senior sister has been taught a lesson by big bro Hua again!" A female disciple of legalism teased from nearby.

"I'll rip your mouth out!" Han Qiongzhi glared at Li Qingshan before going off to mess around with that girl.

Hua Chengzan said, "That's just how her personality is like. She has no ill will towards you."

Li Qingshan smiled. "That's fine. Among ninth layer Qi Practitioners, her personality is one of the better ones I've seen." Her personality was so horrible that he almost wanted to kill her.

"If you can yield to her a little, it'll be very beneficial to you in the Academy of the Hundred Schools, no, the Clear River prefecture. Seeing how she doesn't dislike you, you might even get the chance to become the son-in-law of the Han family!"

Li Qingshan smiled. "You'd better make use of an opportunity like that yourself, brother Hua!"

Hua Chengzan chuckled. There was a laugh from outside. "He has had far too many opportunities like that. Even if he wants to, he can't make use of them all."

The voice was slightly husky, but extremely feminine, while the laughter was infectious, enough to make people feel joy for some reason.

Li Qingshan looked out the door. A woman stepped in. She held a circular fan with peach blossoms, covering half of her dimpled face. Li Qingshan's eyes widened. She seemed like a sweet maiden around fifteen or sixteen years of age, but the charm and bearing she gave off made her seem like a mature madam. Her body was startlingly curvaceous. Her erect chest pushed her clothes to the limits, her waist pulled together thinly, and her round bottom filled her dress. As she looked around with her beautiful eyes, she had already attracted everyone's attention.

Li Qingshan had seen quite a few supreme beauties before, but he still gasped in amazement slightly inside. With such grace, who else could she be apart from the sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain?

However, he became even more cautious. There was not a single Foundation Establishment cultivator that he could afford to treat lightly.

“Big sis Qiu, what brings you here?” The fair-skinned disciple of legalism with thin whiskers rushed over. He desired her inside, but he refused to show any of that on the surface.

Qiu Haitang smiled and spoke gracefully, greeting everyone. When she saw Qian Rongzhi, she paused. Qian Rongzhi lowered her head in a hurry, but she only sneered inside.

In the end, Qiu Haitang’s gaze landed on Li Qingshan, but it moved onto Xiao An without stopping. She touched her fan and exclaimed, “The Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty! As expected, that’s my impressive disciple. Thanks, Chengzan.”

With a fragrant breeze, Qiu Haitang had already arrived before her in the blink of an eye. She said to Xiao An, “Kid, come with me!”

Li Qingshan growled, “Don’t even think about it!”

Qiu Haitang waved her fan like she was shooing away a fly. “You must be Li Qingshan. For brother Hua’s sake, I’ll clean your slate with my Sect of Clouds and Rain.”

All Li Qingshan saw was the images on the fan begin to move and change as the world spun around him. He used the Spirit Turtle’s Method of Sea Suppression in a hurry to compose himself. He was about to strike.

A slender, pale hand extended over from the side, emerging like a butterfly from a bush and grabbing Qiu Haitang’s hand. The fan immediately stopped.

“Haitang, you can’t just abduct people the moment that you see them. You need to ask whether they’re willing to leave with you or not.” Hua Chengzan frowned. He did not know what the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty meant to the Sect of Clouds and Rain. He had not even managed to say everything he had prepared. She had come to take Xiao An away the moment she appeared, even using her arts of charm in the process.

Qiu Haitang was surprised, but not because of Hua Chengzan. She had been expecting Hua Chengzan to stop her. It was not particularly surprising for Li Qingshan to be able to keep his composure either. Instead, she had basically used all of her arts of charm on the child, yet she actually managed to remain unfazed. It was rather unbelievable to her.

However, she was not discouraged. For a moment, her eyes rippled like water, producing many illusions as she asked softly, “Are you willing to leave with big sister?”

Xiao An said crisply, “I don’t want to.”

Qiu Haitang’s expression changed slightly.

Li Qingshan said, “You heard her!” He had to make the Sect of Clouds and Rain give up first.

Hua Chengzan said, "Haitang, it looks like you're not destined to take her as your disciple, so please just give up on it. I brought Qingshan here to resolve his misunderstandings with the Sect of Clouds and Rain."

Only then did everyone learn the reason why Hua Chengzan had brought Li Qingshan here.

"If that's the case, let's calculate the total debts. Li Qingshan, I suspect you to be connected to the deaths of a few disciples from my sect." Qiu Haitang's expression changed once more.

In Li Qingshan's eyes, she had immediately gone from being a charming beauty to a vicious fiend, enough to stun people. However, he only sneered. Tempting him with the arts of charm might have been somewhat effective, but she was nowhere close to being enough to frighten him.

If he was even afraid of that, then wouldn't he frighten himself to death once he transformed and checked the mirror? Actually, he was very satisfied with his appearance as a daemon.

Li Qingshan said, "That's right. I did kill the procuress in Jiaping city's Parlour of Clouds and Rain. However, she was working with Zhuo Zhibo, and she infringed upon me first. She also abducted innocent girls and forced them into prostitution. I executed her as a criminal according to the laws of Great Xia. The district magistrate ruled over this case too. What do you have to say about it?"

Everyone was stunned. They never imagined that Li Qingshan would actually kill a member of the Sect of Clouds and Rain, and he was even bold enough to stand up against a Foundation Establishment cultivator. He was basically out of his mind. They were extremely familiar with Qiu Haitang, all calling her "big sis Qiu", so when they looked at Li Qingshan again, their gazes were rather hostile.

Chapter 268 - A Gamble

Only Han Qiongzhi pursed her lips as she thought, This guy has some backbone, unlike regular men who can even forget about their own mothers when they see this whore. Originally, I wanted to find a chance to teach him a good lesson, but I'll forgive him this time.

Let alone the men here, even the women present struggled to resist Qiu Haitang's charm. Han Qiongzhi was basically a special exception. People with higher cultivations were more resistant to the arts of charm as well, but at the end of the day, the thing that played the decisive role was a woman's jealousy.

Whether it be in terms of cultivation, background, appearance, or figure, Han Qiongzhi was first-rate, but Qiu Haitang just happened to be slightly better than her no matter where she went.

Qiu Haitang looked at Hua Chengzan. Hua Chengzan said, "Since you only suspect it's him, then there's no evidence. Our Hawkwolf Guard will get to the bottom of this matter ourselves. Sect master Qiu, it's best if you take a step back."

"Sect master Qiu? Hua Chengzan, all you know is how to help others against me!" Qiu Haitang lost her temper as the rim of her eyes reddened slightly.

The others never expected Hua Chengzan to stand on Li Qingshan's side so firmly either. This matter had become a dispute between Hua Chengzan and Qiu Haitang, no, the Hawkwolf Guard and the Sect of Clouds and Rain. They really were unsure with which side to stand on. They were filled with displeasure towards Li Qingshan.

But at the end of the day, Hua Chengzan was still the one in charge of them, so they all tried to persuade her. "Big sis Qiu, isn't it just the death of someone insignificant? Let's just forget about it!"

Li Qingshan looked at Hua Chengzan with some surprise as well. He was slightly touched too. This was basically kindness that Li Qingshan did not see often. If he were in Hua Chengzan's position, he would be all the more willing to help this great beauty Qiu Haitang, not some Li Qingshan he had only met once.

Qiu Haitang said frigidly, "Don't you even think about that!" Her voice softened, and she said with some hidden bitterness and powerlessness, "Chengzan, two of our sect's grannies have gone missing. Even vice sect master Wei's son has died mysteriously. All of this is connected to Li Qingshan. As the sect master, how can I just spare him so easily?"

From how she seemed, everyone felt sympathy towards her, but they were stunned by what her words.

Han Qiongzhi said, "Sister Qiu, don't kid around. The grannies are all ninth layer Qi Practitioners. I can tell he has only reached the sixth layer recently, so how can he be connected to the deaths of two ninth layer Qi Practitioners?"

Qiu Haitang said, "Qian Rongzhi, get over here and speak. Just how did vice sect master Wei's son die?"

Qian Rongzhi had originally been standing behind everyone silently. When she heard that, she knew it was unavoidable now. She smiled at Wu Gen beside her before walking out without the slightest worry. "The son of vice sect master Wei, Wei Yingjie, wanted revenge on Li Qingshan, and he went missing."

She said the exact same thing as she had said before, but Qiu Haitang's heart skipped a beat. She felt like she had made a wrong move.

Li Qingshan said loudly and clearly, "Listen up, everyone. I was just carrying out formal matters, but this bastard actually wanted revenge on the Hawkwolf Guard. Let's not say that I did it, but even if I did, is there anything wrong in that?"

Out of the disciples of legalism present, some had already joined the Hawkwolf Guard, while the others would probably end up joining the Hawkwolf Guard eventually. The education they received was that sects were targets to repress and restrict, yet they were actually bold enough to come for revenge against the Hawkwolf Guard? Not to mention that Wei Yingjie had never been on good terms with them with his obscene acts. They all felt that he was better off dead.

Li Qingshan saw Qiu Haitang's expression waver. She probably would not lay her hands on him in front of so many people, but he had already prepared the Glazed Mirror of Invisibility, ready to receive any sneak attacks on his way back.

He was obviously bold enough to come to the Parlour of Clouds and Rain not just because he believed in Qian Rongzhi's judgement. He was confident in his own strength too. Qiu Haitang might have been a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but she was skilled in the arts of charm, which were not particularly effective against him. Her battle prowess was probably below the elders of the three mountains.

And, the number of supreme grade talismans on him numbered almost ten now. At the very least, it would not be a one-sided slaughter. If Qiu Haitang actually tried to touch him, she would definitely fail, and she would become pressured from all sides after that.

Hua Chengzan said, "Forget it. Haitang, this was all just a misunderstanding."

Qiu Haitang said, "I don't mind taking a step back, but this was originally a matter between Li Qingshan and the Sect of Clouds and Rain. Li Qingshan, you're a man too, so are you just going to hide behind others like this?"

Li Qingshan asked, "What do you want?"

Qiu Haitang said, "Are you bold enough to gamble against me?"

Li Qingshan said, "You really do know how to joke around, sect master Qiu. You're a mighty Foundation Establishment cultivator, so how am I capable enough to gamble against you?" If he could transform, he had some confidence in himself, but in human form, it was impossible for him to defeat a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

Qiu Haitang said, "The person who will face you in the gamble obviously won't be me. His cultivation will only be lower than yours. Are you bold enough to gamble with me?"

Li Qingshan said, "If we're gambling on who's better at embroidery, needle-threading, or birthing children, it'd be a certain loss for me."

Han Qiongzhi broke into laughter. She never knew that he was a bit of a flippant rascal too.

Hua Chengzan smiled too, but he could see that Li Qingshan really was interested in gambling, so he did not stop him. While he had promised Gu Yanying to take care of him, he was not a babysitter. Men obviously had to make their own decisions.

Li Qingshan was indeed interested. He completely refused to believe that a few words from Hua Chengzan could stop the Sect of Clouds and Rain from seeking revenge against him and make them give up on Xiao An. At most, their disputes would be temporarily repressed, which would erupt again in the future. He could only depend on himself.

Even if the Sect of Clouds and Rain were willing to drop this matter, it would depend on whether he was willing to as well. If he did not grab these sexual predators and whores by the neck and beat them to a pulp, he refused to be called Li. Once he went through his heavenly tribulation and became a Daemon General, he would go through all four debts with the three mountains and the Sect of Clouds and Rain one by one.

Qiu Haitang said, "We'll obviously gamble on what men are best at."

Li Qingshan asked, "What is it?"

"Drinking, strength, and fighting." Qiu Haitang named three areas.

Li Qingshan almost burst out laughing. He just happened to be adept in these three areas. He looked at Qiu Haitang and thought, You're just begging for defeat now. However, he remained composed on the surface and asked, "What's the wager?"

Qiu Haitang extended a slender finger at Li Qingshan. "You." Then the finger slid over to Xiao An. "And her!"

Li Qingshan said, "If I lose, you're more than welcomed to take my head." He rubbed Xiao An's head. "But I'll never wager her, unless sect master Qiu is willing to wager yourself." But he shook his head soon afterwards. "No, even that still wouldn't be worth it."

Qiu Haitang's expression changed drastically. It had already been an insult for Li Qingshan to label her as a wager, but with a quick twist of his words, he basically told her to her face that even if she was willing to wager herself, in no way was she equal to Xiao An.

This was a stark-naked insult directly to her face. Despite her identity as the sect master of the Sect of Clouds and Rain and her cultivation at Foundation Establishment, she was not even as great as a little girl?

The disciples of legalism were thrown into an uproar. They were familiar with Qiu Haitang, so their gazes towards Li Qingshan became even more hostile.

Wu Gen said, "This kid's in big trouble."

Han Qiongzhi praised inside, Nice one, kid. Does this whore really think the world spins around her? You know embarrassment now, don't you?

Hua Chengzan sighed gently. This grievance was just too difficult to resolve, not just because of what Li Qingshan had just said. He could already tell that the Sect of Clouds and Rain was determined to obtain this child, while the child happened to be a soft spot to Li Qingshan that could not be infringed on. If it was infringed on, it would definitely enrage Li Qingshan.

Chapter 269 - Giant Lumberman

Actually, Li Qingshan had no intentions of insulting Qiu Haitang, as these words originated from the bottom of his heart. Qiu Haitang was obviously a supreme beauty, and just like any regular man, he became interested in her, but that was it. It was nothing compared to his familial bond with Xiao An.

However, probably the only person present who approved of this idea was Qian Rongzhi.

"I'm willing to serve as the wager!" A tender voice suddenly rang out. Xiao An had suddenly spoken up after so much silence.

"Xiao An!" Li Qingshan reprimanded.

Xiao An shot a glance at Li Qingshan. "And what will you be wagering?"

The anger in Qiu Haitang's heart was temporarily repressed by this wonderful news. She said coldly, "I'll wager this." She took out an embroidered box and opened the lid, revealing a jade-green pill.

Haze-like mist dispersed, permeating the entire room. Li Qingshan found the jade-green pill to be extremely familiar. It was what Xuanyue had fed him originally. This was the exact type of pill that had saved him from a lengthy period of accumulation, allowing him to directly condense a daemon core.

"A Virtue Accumulation pill!" Han Qiongzhi cried out.

The other disciples of legalism all stared straight at the pill in interest.

In essence, Virtue Accumulation pills were the same type of pills as Qi Condensing and Qi Amassing pills. They were helpful for cultivation. They were called Virtue Accumulation pills because ingesting one was equivalent to a year of accumulating virtue, which was also a year's worth of cultivation.

Time was the greatest enemy of cultivators, and Virtue Accumulation pills could save an entire year. A pill like that was extremely precious to all cultivators.

"You're actually willing to take out this pill?" Hua Chengzan furrowed his brows. It was not a small wager for her to risk a Virtue Accumulation pill for a sixth layer Qi Practitioner's life. As a matter of fact, it was just too great of a wager. This only demonstrated just how determined she was to go forward with this gamble.

Qiu Haitang ignored Hua Chengzan. She said to Li Qingshan, "I don't want your head. If you lose, then you will have to remain in my Sect of Clouds and Rain and serve as a slave for the rest of your life."

Quit dreaming!

When Li Qingshan and Xiao An had glanced at each other earlier, they had already made up their minds. If he lost, was he really supposed to cut off his head? He would obviously take off immediately and flee. The only reason why he was willing to wager Xiao An was because he was not wagering anything at all.

Qiu Haitang had obviously considered this too, but she refused to believe that a sixth layer Qi Practitioner could slip away under her watch. This gamble was just to shut up Hua Chengzan.

Li Qingshan acted like he was hesitant before finally agreeing, "Alright!"

"Wait here. I'll go make some preparations." Qiu Haitang turned around to leave, but she heard Li Qingshan call out, "Hold on, leave the wager here!"

Qiu Haitang shot a vicious glare at him before tossing the Virtue Accumulation pill to Hua Chengzan. "You can be the eye witness!"

After Qiu Haitang left, the disciples of legalism all gathered over. None of them dared to look down on Li Qingshan anymore. Although he was labelled as arrogant and ignorant to be bold enough to challenge a Foundation Establishment cultivator, his courage was quite admirable at the same time. However, everything aside from the admiration was deep disgust.

Even Li Qingshan was not capable enough to sway all these people that Qiu Haitang had spent many years familiarising with over to his side in just a few words.

Wu Gen whispered, "Brother Hua, why'd you fall out with big sis Qiu over this kid?"

Hua Chengzan only smiled. Why would anyone take what he had said earlier seriously anyway? He said to Li Qingshan, "It's still not too late for you to back out. As long as I'm here, she can't do anything to you."

Li Qingshan said, "But I have some confidence in these three areas."

Wu Gen sighed. As it seemed, Hua Chengzan was determined to support this kid.

Han Qiongzhi suddenly slapped Li Qingshan's shoulder. "Nice one, kid. I think you can do it. Win over that Virtue Accumulation pill and make the Hawkwolf Guard proud."

An hour later, Qiu Haitang returned, "Come with me!" She had already recovered her grace, without any resentment or anger anymore.

The cloud landed on the rooftop slowly. With a series of mechanical whirlings, huge beams of wood glided about, colliding in the air and opening up the top floors of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

It made Li Qingshan think of what he saw in the Town of Flowing Clouds. Clearly, the Parlour of Clouds and Rain was also designed by mohists. When the last two large beams merged together, it formed a huge, empty space. In the several floors around the space, there were at least several hundred Qi Practitioners leaning against the railing, watching on.

It was almost time for the entrance examination to the Academy of the Hundred Schools. Most of the non-local Qi Practitioners would choose to check out this renowned parlour within the prefectural city, while Qiu Haitang had already set up a round of betting for everyone. Not only could she make money off it, she could have everyone serve as an eye witness too.

This place seemed like a huge arena.

Li Qingshan landed in the arena and stepped on the ground. He felt that it was firm enough. Afterwards, he had Xiao An wait to the side as he walked into the centre of the space alone. He called out, "Sect master Qiu, where's the person who will be competing against me?"

Qiu Haitang clapped gently, and Li Qingshan saw a huge door open loudly. A massive figure slowly walked out with heavy steps, along with a series of clatter.

Hua Chengzan said, "Oh no, it's an otherperson!"

The giant figure emerged from the darkness, arriving below the light. There were gasps from all floors.

Li Qingshan stood quite tall and straight, but when the figure arrived before him, he had to raise his head to see the latter's fearsome face.

A messy beard covered most of the face, with a large nose protruding out and two deeply-set eyes, which gave off a vicious light.

He seemed human, but he stood over four meters tall, almost as tall as three people. His rippling muscles were a pale yellow, like freshly-cut lumber, but his arms, legs, and neck were all wrapped in chains.

Apart from regular humans, there were many "otherfolk" in the world as well. They seemed like humans, but they possessed many other, strange features, perhaps longer legs or four arms instead of two, and so on.

It was said that these otherfolk were originally widespread throughout the nine provinces, forming their own tribes and countries. However, with the rise of humans, not only had they purged daemons and demons, but these otherfolk had been expelled as foreign people too. Gradually, they vanished from the view of regular people. They only appeared in distant, remote lands rarely visited by humans.

This giant happened to be a type of the many otherfolk, called the Giant Lumberfolk. They lived deep within the mountains. It was rumored that they were similar to trees, able to extract nutrients from the ground and constantly grow larger like trees, which was why they were gigantic and called Giant Lumberfolk.

Hua Chengzan had never thought that Qiu Haitang would actually find a giant lumberman to compete against Li Qingshan either. The odds were truly against Li Qingshan this time. Just with this giant's huge stature, Hua Chengzan believed that Li Qingshan would lose even without competing when it came to drinking and strength.

"Haitang, that's almost like cheating to use an otherperson in the gamble."

Qiu Haitang smiled indifferently. "An otherperson is still a person, and his cultivation as a Qi Practitioner definitely has not reached the sixth layer. Is there anything wrong with that? If he wants to forfeit, he can do it before the match. You can be quiet now."

Although the giant had not reached the sixth layer, the amount of true qi his giant body could contain definitely surpassed sixth layer Qi Practitioners.

Han Qiongzhi was rather reluctant to accept this, but she had to admit that Qiu Haitang was crafty. She truly lived up to her identity as a sect master and a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Looking at Li Qingshan now, he seemed to be utterly frightened, and she felt some pity for him. He was quite brave to be bold enough to gamble against a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but he was a little lacking in the brains department.

The bit of admiration the other disciples of legalism felt towards Li Qingshan had completely vanished. All of them mocked and made fun of him now, like he was an idiot trying to break rocks using eggs.

Wu Gen said to Qian Rongzhi, "We really can't blame him for this. He's come from a small place after all. He doesn't know the power of Foundation Establishment cultivators."

Qian Rongzhi said instead, "You can't be too sure about that."

A person called out from above, "Sect master Qiu, are you playing a joke? How can you still call this a gamble?"

Qiu Haitang said, "Just cast your bets as you please. I'll treat all the spiritual stones you win as gifts to you all."

"Can I place a bet too?" Li Qingshan said suddenly.

Hua Chengzan was slightly surprised. There was no dejection in Li Qingshan's voice. It was still filled with confidence.

Qiu Haitang's gaze landed on Li Qingshan again, and she scorned, "As long as you're bold enough!"

"I bet a thousand spiritual stones that I'll win!"

A moment of silence descended on the entire place before it erupted with laughter.

Three floors up, two beautiful, young girls surrounded a young man in white clothes. One of the girls asked, "Big brother Tian, has that person lost his mind?"

"There has always been plenty of madmen in the world, but without these madmen, the world would be much duller." The young man's gaze circled around, glancing past Qian Rongzhi and Han Qiongzhi before landing on Qiu Haitang in the end.

A girl said unhappily, "Brother Tian, you're being lustful again. Aren't the two of us enough?"

The young man in white smiled. "You gotta experiment around when you're young, y'know!"

"Sigh, I know that no one in the world can compare to brother Tian, nor can brother Tian be bound by societal norms. We don't care how many women you have, as long as you don't forget about us."

The young man in white said with deep affection, "You will always be my precious babies!"

Qian Rongzhi felt the gaze from above, but she ignored it. All she heard was Wu Gen smile and say, "He still knows how to joke around. Though, if he loses, he'll become a slave anyway. His possessions won't be his anymore, so there's no risk in betting."

However, he heard Qian Rongzhi say, "I bet five hundred spiritual stones that Li Qingshan will win."

Wu Gen was stunned. His face sank. "What are you doing?" He really suspected something was going on between Qian Rongzhi and Li Qingshan now.

Qian Rongzhi smiled, "I feel like I can win the bet."

Hua Chengzan suddenly said, "I'll bet a thousand spiritual stones on him too. I also think I can win the bet."

Qiu Haitang said, "Since you're giving the spiritual stones to me, I can't turn them down, can I?"

A while later, the bets were closed. The majority betted on the giant lumberman's victory, including the young man in white who casually betted a thousand spiritual stones. Very few people betted on Li Qingshan winning, so the odds were startlingly large.

Qiu Haitang waved her hand, and the chains fell off with a series of rattles, flying into the air. The giant lumberman suddenly turned around and stared straight at Qiu Haitang. He leaned forward, as if he was ready to lunge at her at any time.

Chapter 270 - Drinking Heartily

Qiu Haitang completely ignored the giant lumberman's hostility. "If you lose, you know what your fate is, right?"

The giant lumberman growled and turned around powerlessly to face Li Qingshan.

At this moment, over a hundred jars of fine alcohol had been hauled over, placed to one side.

Nearby, a long stick of incense was planted within a censer.

"We'll time it using the incense. Whoever drinks the most within two hours will win." Qiu Haitang clapped her hands gently.

The giant lumberman basically lunged over. Reaching out with his large hand, he lifted up a jar of alcohol and glugged it down like he was trying to quench his thirst. The large jar was like a big cup to him. Immediately, the jar had been emptied out, which he then tossed aside.

Based on aura alone, the people who still thought Li Qingshan could get lucky now believed he would lose for sure.

Li Qingshan walked over unhurriedly, opened a jar, and sucked with his mouth. Like a whale taking in water, a clear stream of alcohol flew into his mouth, and before long, the jar had been emptied out.

He praised, "Fine alcohol!" There was a heavy flavour to it and the taste was sharp. It was not spiritual alcohol, but it was still some fine, rare alcohol. When the spirits reached his throat, it left behind a scorching satisfaction.

The giant lumberman glanced at him. He had already drank his third jar of alcohol.

Li Qingshan's interest in drinking had been piqued. From the moment the black ox had taught him how to drink, he had fallen in love with this taste, but ever since he went to Jiaping city, numerous matters had constantly disturbed him, actually preventing him from drinking to his heart's content. He found it to be quite a pity.

He could finally drink heartily tonight.

Li Qingshan sat down as if no one was watching. He placed a hand on a jar and said to Qiu Haitang. "Drinking without meat is just lacking some flavour."

Han Qiongzhi was surprised. In a situation like this, other people would only be bothered by how small their stomachs were, yet he actually wanted to eat too.

Qiu Haitang said, "Hmph, what a fake act. Give it to him."

A while later, a long table was brought before Li Qingshan. At the centre was a whole roasted goat and a roasted suckling pig, while around it were roasted chickens, roasted ducks, and cold pork knuckles. Basically all the meat dishes that regular people could think of were there.

Li Qingshan did not bother with chopsticks. He directly grabbed a cold pork trotter and bit down. It was fragrant but not greasy, melting in his mouth. He praised, "Delicious!" Wu Gen had said that the famous chefs of the Clear River prefecture were basically all gathered in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. He really was not lying.

When Li Qingshan formally began to drink, the giant lumberman had already drunk his seventh jar.

So far, Li Qingshan had not glanced over even once. He ate and drank at his own pace, unlike the giant lumberman who downed alcohol jar after jar. Everyone could tell that he was enjoying this process. He would pick up another jar after he finished one. He was not forcing himself to drink quickly, but he just happened to drink extremely quickly.

A while later and a few jars of alcohol later, the roasted suckling pig had vanished into his belly.

The people who were not particularly hungry could not help but smack their lips as they began to drool.

Han Qiongzhi asked Hua Chengzan, "Can he win?" Influenced by Hua Chengzan, she had bet five hundred spiritual stones on Li Qingshan reluctantly, but she felt slightly pained afterwards. Five hundred spiritual stones were enough to buy a slightly worse high grade spiritual artifact.

Hua Chengzan said, "It won't be easy. He has split open his sea of qi and his cultivation is slightly higher, but he won't be able to refine the alcohol away fast enough. He's nowhere near as large as the giant lumberman, so he'll suffer because of that."

Han Qiongzhi said, "Yet you still bet a thousand spiritual stones on him, even making me believe you had confidence in him."

"It's not me who has confidence, but him. Don't you think he's worth a thousand spiritual stones of trust?"

Han Qiongzhi looked at Li Qingshan again. He had unbuttoned his garment, revealing his bronze chest. There was a slight smile on his chiseled face. He was not handsome, but he was brimming with masculinity and boldness. Even for her, she was slightly tempted. She gritted her teeth. "He's worth it!"

This man was worth that much no matter what. To the side, she saw how Xiao An remained composed the entire time. She was entirely unfazed, only watching him silently. There was doubtless and unreserved trust in him.

She began to understand why Li Qingshan would be so protective of her, even bold enough to fight back against Foundation Establishment cultivators.

Ashes fell down and half of the incense had already burned away. Li Qingshan and the giant lumberman's surroundings had already become filled with alcohol jars, while half of all the jars had already been emptied out by them.

The fragrant smell of alcohol wafted everywhere. Even from three floors away, they could smell it clearly.

The entire place had already fallen silent. There were plenty of people who drank heartily by taking advantage of their protective true qi, but even they were unable to drink like this.

"Brother Tian, they're so impressive!"

"They're just two gluttons," said the young man in white, but he was slightly worried about his one thousand spiritual stones. However, he relaxed very soon.

Among the empty jars, the giant lumberman had already drunk thirty-three, while Li Qingshan had only drunk twenty-two. There was still a difference of a dozen jars.

However, Hua Chengzan noticed that the giant lumberman's face had already begun to redden, revealing some tipsiness. He had begun to slow down too.

The true qi within the giant lumbermen circulated rapidly, dispersing the drunk feeling. It was no longer just a competition of drinking now, but cultivation too.

Li Qingshan seemed even drunker, but as he drank and ate, he actually drank faster and faster. He purposefully did not use true qi or daemon qi to refine away the alcohol, as there was absolutely no need to.

He seemed much smaller than the giant lumberman, but his actual size had already exceeded fifty feet. He was truly a huge monster.

During the time he spent in seclusion in Jiaping city, he would eat large handfuls of pills every single day. Regardless of whether they were Qi Gathering pills or Qi Amassing pills, he would refine it all into daemon qi. His height as a daemon rapidly increased too. If he transformed right now, his pair of horns might have been able to touch the ceiling.

If the giant lumberman treated the alcohol jars as large cups to chug, then they were tiny, mouth-sized cups to Li Qingshan. Not only was there no need for him to hurry, but he even wanted to carefully savour the alcohol so that it completely diffused into his body. If he refined away the alcohol as he drank, what would be the point of drinking?

When a third of the incense stick remained, the giant lumberman had drunk another ten jars, but Li Qingshan had drunk fourteen. Only eight jars separated them now.

The giant lumberman's pale yellow skin had already reddened. He began to totter around as he stood there, forcing him to sit down like Li Qingshan.

On the other hand, Li Qingshan sat there firmly. It was quite difficult to see whether his face had become flushed due to his bronze skin, but he did seem even more drunk. However, he drank faster and faster too. This was the drinking style of getting into the groove.

Everyone could see who was winning.

Han Qiongzhi pulled Hua Chengzan's shoulder and said excitedly, "He might be able to win!"

Hua Chengzan smiled. This kid sure was capable. He had almost forgotten that Li Qingshan was a Body Practitioner in the first place. Although drinking and eating at the same time filled up the belly faster, it was harder to get drunk. And, it would strictly control his drinking speed, allowing his true qi to gradually refine away the alcohol.

If he learned that Li Qingshan had not considered that at all, only savouring the taste of the alcohol even without refining it away, who knew what his expression would become.

Despite all of his smarts, he never would have imagined that right before him was a huge daemon.

Hua Chengzan's gaze made contact with Qiu Haitang's. Hua Chengzan bowed slightly, expressing his apologies. Qiu Haitang instead revealed hidden bitterness. Am I just unable to arouse any emotion in you?

The giant lumberman watched as Li Qingshan gradually caught up and panicked inside. He lifted up the alcohol and poured it into his mouth recklessly, but with that, he became even more drunk instead. His true qi was unable to refine it away in time anymore.

When there was still a tiny part of the incense remaining, there was a great boom, and the giant lumberman collapsed on the ground. The alcohol jar in his hand was smashed to pieces, and the remaining alcohol spilled all over the ground.

Li Qingshan stood up and belched. He glugged down the last jar of alcohol and looked around. "Is that all?" It seemed like he was not satisfied yet.

The incense burnt out.

Silence.

"He's won!" Han Qiongzhi raised her fist and broke the silence.

An uproar gradually developed everywhere, causing a racket. A giant lumberman had actually lost to a regular person in drinking. No one had been expecting that.

Many people yelled out, "This is rigged!"

There were not just bets on the overall outcome, but bets on the individual matches too. Many of them who originally wanted to make some quick spiritual stones instead lost all of the spiritual stones that they had laboured so much for.

Li Qingshan laughed aloud. His loud laughter drowned out all the objections. He said to Qiu Haitang, "Sect master Qiu, have I won this match?" The alcohol fueled his desires, so he fearlessly ogled at her body.

Qiu Haitang said, "I'll let you have this one."

Li Qingshan glanced at the drunken giant lumberman. "We might not be able to do the next match now."

Qiu Haitang said frigidly, "Get to your feet!"

The giant lumberman shivered, and he crawled up from the ground in a tottering manner. Using his true qi, he sobered up extremely quickly.

Qiu Haitang took out a small cauldron from her hundred treasures pouch and tossed it into the air.

With a boom, the small cauldron expanded to ten times its size and landed heavily. Li Qingshan found the floor shake violently. The cauldron was already several tonnes in weight.

Qiu Haitang said, "Ancient strongmen are known to possess the strength to lift cauldrons, so the second match will be lifting this cauldron."

Li Qingshan said, "You're the owner of this cauldron. If you work against me secretly, wouldn't I end up losing in absolute confusion?"

Qiu Haitang frowned. "What do you want instead?" She was actually thinking about that. She completely refused to believe that Li Qingshan's physical strength would be even greater than the giant lumberman's.

Giant Lumberfolk were born with extraordinary physiques. After she had purchased him, she even taught him the arts of practising the body. In order to escape, he basically practised it day and night, developing startling strength. When she was not present, she had to shackle him up with chains to keep him from escaping. Even stronger Qi Practitioners would struggle to subdue him.

“Since I’m the eye witness, I’ll provide the cauldron.” As Hua Chengzan said that, he tossed out a three-legged cauldron too.

Qiu Haitang snorted, but she believed that Hua Chengzan would not work against her. She stowed her cauldron away. “There’s nothing that you can say now!

Li Qingshan arrived before the cauldron. The cauldron shone with light. It was a rare spiritual artifact. He extended his arm and grabbed the handle with one hand.

“Idiot! How is one hand enough?!” Han Qiongzhi called out.

Wu Gen sneered even harder. He said to Qian Rongzhi, “Li Qingshan has probably never seen an artifact smithing cauldron. They’re much heavier than cauldrons made of regular metal. Even I can’t lift it with one hand.”

Before he had even finished speaking, Li Qingshan had already lifted the cauldron over his head with a single hand. He casually tossed it at the giant lumberman, “Your turn.”

Wu Gen was speechless.