

Daily life 151

Chapter 151 Opening An Investigation

The golden-haired man screamed and yelled as spittle flew everywhere as he watched the black swallowing vortex inch closer and closer.

"Just kidding," Yang Qing teasingly said as he made the black vortex disappear when he was just a few inches away from the golden-haired man's face.

Thud!!

The golden-haired man collapsed on the floor like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

The whites of his eyes were showing. He had fainted before Yang Qing put away his fist.

"His mental fortitude is even weaker than the first-year students at the Institute.

Fellow daoist make sure you work on some spirit training exercises. You have a solid cultivation base but it doesn't mean a thing if you don't have the mind to make the most out of it," Yang Qing leisurely said.

Though it seemed like he was talking to himself since the golden-haired man wasn't in a state to hear or answer anything, him being unconscious and all.

"Hehehe I can't believe he really thought I'd kill him. I don't want to get sent to the Requiem to serve time plus I'm not sure I would have been able to, even if I decided to go through with it," Yang Qing meaningfully said as a wary and curious glint flashed in his eyes.

He could faintly feel a threat to his life the closer his fist got to the golden-haired man. If he really went through with the punch, he had no doubt some life protection mechanism within the golden-haired man would have retaliated in response to the threat.

Based on the intuition he was getting, he had no doubt it was a domain-level protection most likely left there by the golden-haired man's father.

"His father must be pretty powerful in the Golden Bamboo Pavilion ranks," Yang Qing said as dryly smiled at his mildly trembling hands.

Despite one-sidedly defeating three palace stage experts, he couldn't handle the threatening aura of a domain's intent.

"Well if he came, I can always run to the Order and bring old man Lei Weiyuan with me or ask for backup from the Order branch in Yellow Plain County. They should have a domain expert stationed there," Yang Qing thought as he went on to seal the cultivation base and the acupoints of the three palace realm cultivators.

He was just done sealing the base of the elderly man, who was the last person when he saw Ellie swoop in as she bashed her beak against the golden-haired man's already injured face.

Yang Qing could have sworn he heard something break.

"ELLIE!!! What are you doing? This isn't the time to act petty and cause trouble," Yang Qing angrily said as he punched her in the head.

"Luckily it's just a few fractures," Yang Qing silently muttered as he examined the fresh injuries caused by Ellie conveniently forgetting the mental blow and physical blows he had left on the golden-haired man.

Ellie screeched with an aggrieved expression at Yang Qing's hypocrisy as she rubbed her head with her wings.

"If you want payback, do it yourself. Breakthrough to the palace stage and seek him out. Don't beat him when he is unconscious. I have nothing against using unscrupulous means in a battle but not when he is like this.

Just who do you learn these petty habits of yours from? I think you need to undergo reeducation from the beast hall again, better yet, I will have Luo Meili do it," said Yang Qing as he chastised Ellie.

Ellie immediately flinched upon hearing Luo Meili's name that she kept making whimpering noises. But Yang Qing heard none of it. Since Ellie was part of his team whatever troubles she caused, he would be the one to incur it. He already had troublesome members and habits as it is, he didn't want to add more.

Yang Qing shook his head as he decided to push the matter to the back of his head until he got back to the Order. At the moment there were a few things he had to do which couldn't wait.

He took out two different talismans. One was the white jade recording talisman and the other was the communication talisman.

He quickly activated both of them.

The communication talisman quickly connected through.

"Yang Qing what do you want? Shouldn't you already be doing the evaluations? Are you slacking off?" Lei Weiyan's voice sounded from the other end.

"I'm not, I promise, I'm not," Yang Qing hurriedly said trying to mask his guilt.

"So what's wrong?"

"I encountered three palace stage experts trying to steal Ellie so I gave them a beating. One of them is royalty from the Red Maple Empire while the other two are from the Golden Bamboo pavilion. I suspect one of them might be the son of one of the founders of the pavilion. He was also the prime instigator of all this," Yang Qing patiently explained the circumstances.

"What's their state? Are they dead, crippled, or..?"

"They are alive, though barely, but I haven't crippled them. They just have a few serious injuries that would take a few years to heal, that's all. Though I think the time will be shorter for the royalty from the Red Maple Empire. I wonder what kind of special physique they have...,"

"Yang Qing..." Lei Weiyuan interrupted.

"Hehehe sorry about that. I wanted to send a recording with my judgment. I deem the beating to be sufficient punishment for their actions with no further actions needed but that only applies to them trying to steal Ellie.

I would like to open an official investigation into the Red Maple Empire and also the member who I suspect is the son of one of the founders. They acted wantonly despite knowing Ellie was mine and my cultivation base. I have a feeling it's not the first time something like this has happened, especially with that scion of the Golden Bamboo Pavillion.

I would like the case and procedural investigation to be placed under my docket. But I don't know how that would work since even though that person is a palace stage expert, the Golden Bamboo pavilion is a rank 2 organization. I can't handle their cases yet," said Yang Qing.

He had a nagging feeling that the blood on the golden-haired man might not be small but his relationship with a potential domain expert father, complicated matters.

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Chapter 153 Zhi Da Opens Up

Yang Qing noted the hesitation and awkwardness written all over their faces. He wryly smiled as he expected this sort of reaction more or less.

"You don't have to be so on edge, we can act just like before though if you want to worship my awesomeness I don't mind," Yang Qing teasingly said as he tried to lighten the mood.

"I can keep calling you big brother Yang Qing?!" Zhi Luoran asked as she almost tipped over on the table in all the excitement.

"You better," Yang Qing said as he smiled.

"Who knew big brother Yang Qing is even more shameless than I am," Zhi Da muttered in shock at how thick-skinned one must be to act for praise so openly. He may have pulled a few shameless stunts himself but even he had to admit he fell a little short when he compared himself to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing didn't waste any time as he hurriedly started sampling all the dishes sprawled out on the table. In addition to the scallion pancakes, the tomato egg soup, and the spring rolls that were already on the table there were large bowls of red braised pork, dry fried shredded beef, potato in caramel, and lastly chili pork.

Yang Qing ravaged the meals like someone who hadn't eaten in a year which left the two siblings gawking in wonder at how someone could eat so much and in so little time at that.

They gazed at each other before they burst out laughing. Yang Qing was too engrossed in eating to give any thought to their sudden laughter.

"So did you two give much thought to what I said before? I can help you if you want to train up your skills in blending in or gathering information or if you want to start over someplace else.

Though I know it's not an easy choice to up and leave especially with the connections you have built with the people in the city," Yang Qing said as he paused from eating to look up at the two siblings.

After the little scare with Lei Weiyuan threatening to supervise him and the potential retaliation from a domain-level expert, the quicker he was done with his evaluations the better.

When he was done with his food he would be leaving for the first evaluation point in Green Pine County still within the Red Maple Empire before he made his way to the other points.

"Big brother Yang Qing are you sure you can help us start over?" Zhi Da hesitantly asked.

Even though he had steeled himself to ask for help he was still afraid to. During the past three years, he and Zhi Luoran had gone through so much that they had to extinguish the embers of hope in their lives if they hoped to keep surviving. They got their hopes ruthlessly smashed so much that it was safer for them to be as pragmatic as possible.

"I can," Yang Qing softly answered.

"Big brother helping us may end up potentially inviting a calamity to your doorstep. I know you are powerful but even palace realm strength isn't enough," Zhi Da solemnly said.

Yang Qing dusted off his hands as he interlocked them and rested his chin on them looking interestingly at the two siblings.

"My promise still stands. It's not like it would be the first time I bring trouble back either. As a matter of fact, I invited some trouble a few minutes ago and I'm not the only one who does so. The organization I'm from is skilled at handling problems, especially calamitous ones.

They welcome it even," said Yang Qing as he put on a silly grin thinking of the tired face the branch head of Yellow Plains County was showing right about now. He always felt joyful whenever he saw someone else being run ragged by the Order more than he was. It always came as some sort of therapeutic relief to him.

Zhi Da and Zhi Luoran exchanged glances then they both nodded. A worn-out sigh came from Zhi Da immediately after.

"Big brother Yang Qing we humbly accept your offer to help us start over. My sister and I owe you our lives," Zhi Da said as he and Zhi Luoran woke up and gave deep bows.

"There's no need for that. I just helped you because.... well let's just chalk it up to fate and you two were interesting. You remind me of some of my colleagues and friends," Yang Qing said as he raised them up with a gentle force that sat them back in their seats.

Even though the two siblings already knew Yang Qing was powerful being exposed to it in person still caused shockwaves in their hearts.

However Zhi Da immediately calmed down as he went silent, he seemed to be collecting his thoughts as a look of sorrow flashed in his eyes.

Yang Qing didn't say anything and just gave him the space he needed. Based on their reaction he guessed they wanted to open up on the reason why they were on the run in the first place.

"My name is not Zhi Da. Both my name and Zhi Luoran's are fakes. Our names are Zou Yi and Zou Liqin respectively and we are from the Zou clan," Zhi Da now Zou Yi solemnly said.

Both siblings cautiously gauged Yang Qing's reaction to their reveal however they were shocked to find there was no look of surprise, shock, fear, or any of the normal reactions they expected one would get from getting such a reveal. Instead, Yang Qing was playfully dipping a piece of the stir-fried beef into a small bowl of sesame sauce next to him.

"So you're from the Zou family the rank 2 clan skilled in formation arrays? Is it then you are hiding from?" Yang Qing quizzically asked.

If they were hiding from the Zou clan by all accounts they should have already been found out or dead even incase their relationship was less than cordial which it seemed to be if he took their current circumstances into account. He had no idea how two body-refining children could hide from such a colossal family.

From what Yang Qing knew about the Zou clan they were an old clan even among rank 2 organizations. They had a history spanning atleast 50,000 years. This was a history and foundation most couldn't compare to, especially with how chaotic times were from the past millennia going back much less 50,000 years ago. For the Zou clan to survive that long was a testament to their abilities.

The clan was known for their all-around skills in different types of formation arrays and inscriptions. Their range run from deadly killing arrays down to day-to-day arrays and inscriptions like the ones used on robes.

"No wonder they could identify my robe. If they are from the Zou clan they should have been exposed to these things from birth since the clan is among the top producers of quality robes with utility arrays inscribed on them," thought Yang Qing.

"Yes we are from that Zou clan," Zou Yi confirmed as he painfully sighed.

"The Zou clan has always had a long-standing tradition when choosing its next head and my father was one of the candidates in consideration but he lost..." Zou Yi paused to hold back the trembling that was in his voice along with the tears that were millimeters away from dropping.

The same however couldn't be said of Zou Liqin who was already sniffing with tears streaming down her face.

"You don't have to say anything. I will still help you either way," Yang Qing hurriedly said when he saw their reactions.

"No, it's the least we can do. Since you may potentially be risking your life by helping us, you knowing is as it should be," Zou Yi firmly said which made Yang Qing hold back the words he was about to say once he saw his solemn look.

"Fine," Yang Qing gently said as he motioned for him to continue.

"Our clan's root and foundation lay in formation arrays so the person who gets chosen to be the next family head has to be unequivocally gifted in this regard.

Unlike other organizations, the Zou clan doesn't choose the person with the highest cultivation base as its next leader or any attainments in that regard all that matters in the eyes of the Zou clan is your skills with formation arrays.

It is because of this that over the years since its founding occasionally we would have a clan head who had a palace realm cultivation base despite there being domain-level members who could take up the mantle.

Our heads usually stay in their posts for about 500 years then they retire to focus on their cultivation leaving it to someone else. The next head is chosen via a special artifact that was brought back by the third ancestor and also one of the most powerful ancestors we have had. I heard he was a top-tier soul formation expert," Zou Yi said in reverence.

Zou Yi's current look came as a surprise to Yang Qing since based on their pained reactions he would have expected them to have bitterness and resentment against their clan, not reverence.

"The tradition of choosing the next head via their skills in formation arrays was started by him and has become a clan decree since.

The selection process is done by the special artifact he came with from an ancient ruin. I don't know much about the artifact other than it's the cornerstone of our clan. It has raised countless geniuses but it has also killed countless of them, two of them being my father and mother."

Chapter 154 Zou Sibling's Past (1)

Yang Qing's curiosity was drawn to what grade the artifact was seeing how it was instrumental to the growth and survival of the Zou clan.

However, it would remain just that, a curiosity. He doubted if Zou Yi knew much about it due to the restrictions of his age and the level of access that came along with it and the importance of the artifact to the clan. Even if by some slim chance Zou Yi did know enough about the artifact based on the reverence in his tone, it was in doubt whether he would reveal much about it and to someone he just met no less even if said person would be helping them start over.

"From what my father told me, the artifact creates a separate realm with different levels. Each level has different kinds of arrays that the user has to break through before they move to the next level.

The degree of difficulty, sophistication, and quality increases with each level. The arrays one deals with are never the same during each test. So you cannot prepare yourself for them by drawing from the experiences of the previous challengers," Zou Yi paused as he took a drink of the ginkgo tea before he resumed.

"The next head of the Zou clan falls on the person who reaches the highest level. And if there are ties they look at the time taken. There is no restriction on who can apply for the seat as there are many side-branch descendants who occasionally apply for it.

The test is a chance to shoot for glory in one fell swoop and from what I heard from our seniors every level you clear there are harvests that come along with it. The rewards vary but they all center on the dao of formation arrays. So there is never a shortage of people who apply for it since even if they fail at gaining the clan head seat they could still reap various rewards as long as they cleared a few levels.

However, despite how glamorous it seems, it is also a death trap. The lethality of the arrays used in the test increase with each level. There is no talisman or protection mechanism to protect the challengers. If you fail to decrypt an array you may end up paying for that failure with your life depending on how lethal it is.

Other than the danger of the test produced by the artifact there is also another rule that is imposed by the clan when it comes to vying for the seat of the family head, and that is the challenger is not only risking their own lives but their immediate families too.

If the challenger dies in there, their immediate family gets banished from the main clan. They can join the side branches if they wish to but they can never remain at the main family. You even have your names removed from the clan registry.

This method was employed to ensure the new clan head would have an easy transition into power without having to worry about potential backstabbing from those who hold resentment for their dead family members. Thus reducing infighting. Those who choose to vie for the family head seat don't do so lightly since it's not only their lives that they risk.

'You have to be willing to risk your life and your families before you have the right to shoulder the fate of tens of thousands of Zou clan members' is what my grandfather used to say," said Zou Yi as his tone turned heavier.

Zou Liqin had managed to calm down by the time the tale reached this point, albeit just barely, as the waterworks being held at bay in her eyes didn't seem like they would need much effort to drop again.

"Every participant and their families prepare themselves mentally in case the worst happened. Our father did the same with us when he decided to vie for the position.

Even though he did, we were all perfunctory with it as we never thought he would fail. He was touted as a genius, one can only see in ten thousand years.

Many within the clan expected he would be the next head once the test began since there were very few who matched him when it came to formation arrays. At just thirty-three, he was already a blue-grade formation master.

Looking at our current appearance one wouldn't guess we were constantly fawned over by people stronger than even the emperor of this nation as they tried to curry favor with my father.

Right now it takes enormous effort just to earn a few pieces of silver when back then I used to throw around middle-grade spirit stones in the water as if they were rocks," said Zou Yi as he smiled in self-deprecation.

"I never thought my father would lose. It's been three years since then and I still can't believe it. No one did.

In fact, if it wasn't for the clan decree set by the third ancestor my father would have already been handed the seat," Zou Yi paused as he tried to forcefully hold back his tears but that was a battle he lost within seconds as tears kept dropping no matter how much he tried to stop them.

"When the day for the selection came, we all expected our father would win. This was a sentiment shared by even some of the participants who were only there to be seen and reap a few harvests while they were at it. Most of them didn't think they would outdo my father.

When the competition started, it all went as expected at the earlier levels, with our father breezing through them easily.

His momentum only slowed down when he was at the thirtieth level and by that time most of the competitors had either given up, died, or got too injured to continue.

I think there were about twenty people left who were able to keep up with him but the higher he moved the lower the number got. By the time he reached the forty-seventh level only four people were left."

Zou Liqin had decided to take over for her brother who was still struggling to hold back his tears. She could sympathize since just like him, she worshipped their father too and that day that should have been the greatest day of their lives turned into the worst day of their lives.

She could remember how wildly they were cheering every time a display stone attached to the artifact would light up as their father moved up a level.

The stone was an accessory to the artifact. Participants would have their names automatically recorded the moment they started the tests in the separate realm created by the artifact. The stone showed the levels they reached and their state, whether they were dead or alive, and those that forfeited their names would be greyed out on the level they reached.

You could only forfeit when you cleared a level and then forfeit the chance to move on to the next level or if you survived the attack of the array. The chances of the latter happening were always low and mostly depended on luck since you can't bring any artifact with you while taking the test.

"The number only got smaller the higher they moved till by the time they reached the sixtieth level only two people were left. One was my father and the other was someone we all didn't expect.

It was someone from the side branches who no one knew much about even the members from the side branch he belonged to. If it wasn't for the test no one would even know someone like him existed.

Those from the side branch typically never do well from these things since even though they are called that, the main family barely offers them any support other than the Zou family name. Everything else they have to depend on themselves, so their starting point and that of those from the main family are different.

However, despite the disadvantage, someone we knew nothing about kept up with our father, one of the greatest prodigies our clan has ever seen.

While competitors can't see each other within that realm they can track each other's progress.

My father and the other person from the branch went head to head till the 63rd level where a gap started forming. My father was in the 64th level while the person from the branch made it to the 67th level.

I was told by the seniors from our clan that the increase in difficulty between each level once you reach the 60th level threshold is as big as the stars and the earth.

The gap between them may have only been three levels apart but in there the person from the side branch may well have been half a continent apart from my father.

The irony of the situation is that even while lagging behind at the 64th level, my father had already gone past the level the previous clan head had reached which was at the 62nd level," Zou Liqing said as she painfully sighed.

"As for the 67th level, the number of previous clan heads who reached that far is not more than ten. Everyone that day young or old were all in disbelief by what we were seeing.

My father someone dubbed as a genius whose talents may one day rival that of the famous third ancestor was being completely overshadowed by someone unknown and younger than him. If we were that shocked, I can only imagine how stupefying it was for him.

But he still went on and managed to reach the 67th level too but by that time the person from the side branch had set an even more absurd record. He was already at the 70th level.

Only four people have ever made it that far and one of them is the third ancestor. As for the other three, each one of them left a legendary reputation during their time both within the clan and outside."

Chapter 155 Zou Siblings' Past (2)

"At that point even though we didn't want to admit it, the chances of our dad becoming the next clan head were very slim. The final nail in the coffin was when the person from the side branch made it to the 71st level.

It has been 20,000 years since anyone made it that far and at that point, he became the third person in the whole history of the Zou clan to make it that far.

By that point, all we could hope for was for our father to concede and make it out alive. As long as he made it out alive, we would still get to remain with the Main branch since the banishment stipulation only takes effect when the competitor dies or ends up with fatal injuries that can never be recovered.

If father forfeited everything would have been okay. But things didn't go as we expected.

Even though it took long, our father managed to reach the 67th level, becoming the sixth person in the whole of the clan's history to reach that far. We thought with such an achievement he would feel okay forfeiting because based on how long it took for him to clear the two levels, it seemed like it was getting harder and harder for him.

He went on to challenge the 68th level and died five minutes later..." Zou Liqin went silent as her gaze became unfocused and cloudy.

"I wonder what he was thinking at the time," she slowly and painfully uttered as tears streamed down her face.

Yang Qing sighed at their story. There was nothing he could do or say to make the loss and confusion they felt make sense or hurt any less. He chose just to be silent. He even felt awkward grabbing the red sweet and sour pork fillet that was calling at him.

"The moment his status showed deceased on the stone tablet, our mother charged into the artifact...

She died on the 48th level. We didn't even get to see their bodies...Because my mother recklessly charged in while the test was still going on, she broke clan rules of the clan head selection with her interference even though our father was dead at that time.

Since she died in there, the punishment fell on us but our grandfather stood up for us and took the punishment upon himself. The top leaders accepted the suggestion though I think it had a little bit to do with the lingering sentiments and respect they had for our father.

Our grandfather got sentenced for 5,000 years. He was to be locked up in one of the forbidden locations of the clan for those years. It's a horrendous place that anyone below the palace realm would die within a week if they were sent there.

We must have done horrible things in our past lives to deserve such an ending. We lost three family members in just a day," Zou Yi had decided to take over with the ending. His voice was still trembling with sorrow and anger as his eyes flashed with confusion.

"Liqin and I got banished from the main branch with a few things to go start over at the other side branches.

However, none of those branches wanted anything to do with us because of optics. To them, it would not look too good in the clan head's eyes if they were seen harboring the children of his competitor. Also with both our parents dead and grandfather locked up, we essentially had no backing to rely on that would make these branches reconsider.

So my sister and I decided to start off someplace new away from the eyes of the Zou clan. Even though the present clan head might not have anything against us but the same can't be said about those trying to curry favor with him or the other countless members that were overshadowed by father and had long grown resentful about it.

There have been cases of exiled members dying under 'mysterious circumstances' before they arrived at the branches.

We got shunned completely both within and outside the clan. The fawning expressions we used to get turned to open hostility and mockery. It's only due to the clan rules, my grandfather, and a few elders who thought favorably about my father that we were not secretly murdered within the clan grounds.

After the burial of our parents, we used every treasure we had on hand to secure safe passage out of the clan's territory.

It's only later that we learned the 'merchant' we happened to stumble onto to help us leave was someone arranged for by my father before the test. He was a failsafe he had arranged in case things didn't go as planned.

Even beyond the grave, he was still looking out for us," Zou Yi said as he smiled with sadness.

"He always worried a lot and liked to over plan things. His arrangement shouldn't have been a surprise," Zou Liqin softly said as she smiled.

"Yes, he was always like that," Zou Yi as he lightly chuckled.

"I miss them,"

"Me too,"

....

Yang Qing decided to give them a few minutes. Based on his interaction with the Zou siblings he expected them to have a tragic tale behind them he didn't expect it to be so tragic to that extent.

The Order couldn't intervene in their matter since everything that just happened was within their clan rules and the Order couldn't interfere with them, it would be overstepping their bounds. Plus he had a feeling the two siblings wouldn't want it either.

"Thank you for trusting me with your past," Yang Qing said as he woke up and gave them a daoist salute, drawing shocked looks from the two siblings. Removing the background that they no longer had now, they were basically body-refining ants compared to Yang Qing's realm. It was unheard of for a palace realm expert to give a daoist salute to those weaker than themselves even when they were close relatives, it was something unimaginable.

This world was a place where hierarchy and how you were treated mostly depended on strength or background and they both had neither.

"You deserve it. Where I'm from it's pretty normal to do so. We don't give cultivation realms much thought but instead do so to the person's spirit. Even if a domain expert was here, if they had a rotten spirit I wouldn't give them a daoist salute.

The salute was for both of you, your parents and grandfather. From what I can tell they seem like really admirable people deserving of my respect. Strength or power has nothing to do with it," Yang Qing gently said as he smiled.

"By the way big brother you didn't tell us where you are from," Zou Liqin suddenly asked with a curious look. Zou Yi seemed curious too as he leaned over the table almost tipping over the table filled with spring rolls luckily Yang Qing swiftly reacted to put the plate back in place but not before snagging one for his troubles.

"Well, my name is Yang Qing and I'm a judge from the Order," Yang Qing said closely monitoring their expressions with a teasing smile.

Zou Yi had his eyes and mouth wide open as Zou Liqin was frozen like a million-year-old block of abyssal ice.

It took a few minutes before they reacted.

"Wait, big brother, you're really from the Order? The same Order, Order, and not some other organization that happens to share the same name?" Zou Yi shockingly asked as his spittle flew everywhere.

A formless barrier formed in front of Yang Qing evaporating all spit that flew his way. Zou Liqin wasn't lucky as she caught some on her hair, face, and even her eye.

"ZOU YI?!!!!!!" she venomously said with a murderous expression which made Zou Yi flinch as he nervously laughed.

"Sorry about that Liqin," Zou Yi said as he awkwardly scratched the back of his head and calmly sat down.

"Yes I'm from the Order," Yang Qing succinctly said as he made his robes change to his official look when he was in the courtroom before swiftly changing them back to the grey robes.

During the transformation, the two siblings had at some point left their seats and sandwiched Yang Qing to the left and right as they admired the robes up close with glittering eyes.

"Cool," Zou Yi said. Luckily this time he was careful enough not to throw spittle everywhere in his excitement though Zou Liqin wasn't in any headspace to notice anything as her eyes were solidly glued to the robes.

"You can touch it if you want," Yang Qing said once he saw her hesitation every time she brought her hands forward.

"It's really soft, softer than even the ones we saw from the clan," Zou Liqin said admiringly.

"Big brother, are you some old monster?" Zou Yi suddenly asked when he remembered Yang Qing's strength. Most palace stage experts even at his clan were old, like his grandfather looked like a 50-year-old man but was in fact 1,200 years old.

When he saw Yang Qing up close with his youngish look, questions about his age flashed in his head. As kids, they used to play a guessing game on the age of some of their seniors. It never ended well for them when one of those seniors found out but it was a fun game to play nonetheless.

"Liqin should we?" Zou Yi asked with a competitive spirit.

"We should..the bet?" Zou Liqin said not shrinking back.

"The loser drinks all the remaining ginkgo tea in one go," Zou Yi fearlessly said as he grinned.

"Fine, no making excuses when you lose. The same rules apply. Plus or minus 100," Zou Liqin said.

Yang Qing was surprised to see the shy girl he had been interacting with transforming into a fearless dragon.

"Deal," They both said as they firmly shook hands.

"On the count of three then....One...Two...Three...

700"

"200"

Yang Qing was still puzzled at what they were doing.

"Big brother what's your age?" Zou Yi eagerly asked with a look of victory.

"So that's what is going on. I can't believe you guys think I'm that old," Yang Qing said as he dryly laughed.

"I'm only 23 years old," Yang Qing said as he shook his head.

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEH!!!!!!!!!! The two siblings loudly yelled. Luckily the sound barrier was still there so their voices were enclosed within the barrier.

Chapter 156 Zou Siblings' Resolve

They both looked at Yang Qing with disbelief showing in their eyes.

"Big brother you're not just saying this to look cool?" Zou Yi asked with a suspicious look.

"I'm not...it's not exactly strange, is it? There are palace stage experts who are younger than me at the Order while others around the same age as me and I know for a fact there are some like me in some of the rank 1 sects much less the holy lands.," Yang Qing offhandedly said.

He would have added their father to the mix since he was a 33-year-old blue-grade formation master. He could be considered a talent even by the Order's standards. But he decided against it, for fear of souring their moods.

The tale behind the clan head selection made him more curious about their current head who was seemingly younger and showed so much talent to eclipse a 33-year-old blue-grade formation master.

"If nothing unexpected happens, the Zou family may soon rise into a rank 1 family," Yang Qing mused as the two siblings eyed him like some rare artifact.

"Big brother with our talent...?" Zou Yi hesitantly asked. When the rush of excitement had worn off, he couldn't help but notice their current predicament.

They were just at the bronze realm of the body refining stage. In the three years they were making their way out of the Zou family territory, they didn't have time to cultivate and they were forbidden to use the Main clan's techniques the moment they were banished.

With no cultivation arts and resources, their cultivation had stagnated in those three years.

They would be heading into the Order, a place known to be the stomping grounds of world-defying geniuses, he couldn't help but feel self-conscious about his current realm along with if he had the talent to actually get in. Even if Yang Qing spoke up for them, the Order was known for its impartiality when it came to these things.

Zou Liqin seemed to be sharing the same fears too as she too went silent as worry showed on her face.

"You don't have to worry too much about not having the talent to get in, as long as you give it your all the rest will work itself out. The Order doesn't only take gifted geniuses in cultivation. The Order needs talent in many different areas and cultivation is just one part amongst a long list of other parts. You both may have talents in those other parts.

You're both conscientious people, I'm sure the Order will have a place for you. So don't sell yourself short. Just do the best you can down to the last second," Yang Qing said as he rubbed their heads.

Zou Yi and Zou Liqin clenched their fists with fire blazing in their eyes.

"If you do manage to get in we could help you relocate your parent's graves back to the Order if you want. Even bringing back your grandfather may not be an issue though it would be a little troublesome but as long as you become a member of the Order it is doable," Yang Qing softly said a bit cautious about whether the question will lead them back to their despondent looks.

"No, they're fine where they are. Our parents would want it that way. Despite how things turned out in the end, it doesn't change the reverence and pride they held as members of the Zou family.

They were buried with honors at the Zou ancestral burial grounds. I know they are at peace while keeping each other company. As for grandfather, I know he wouldn't agree to leave the clan. His entire being is anchored there. It would be unfair of us to ask him to leave all he has ever known behind. He has lost too much and sacrificed so much for us already, we can't possibly ask any more of him," Zou Yi said as he sadly smiled.

"We don't bear any resentment against the Zou clan for what happened. That's not to say we didn't at some point.

During the first year after losing our parents and our grandfather imprisoned, the pain brought by that loss led us down a pit of bitterness, rage, resentment, and never-ending blame. We blamed the Zou clan for using such a dangerous test as a method for selecting the clan head, our father for not knowing when to give up, our mother for forgetting about us as she recklessly charged in after our father, our grandfather for taking our punishment denying us a chance at death which would have been a welcomed relief since we could join our parents instead of the endless torment we had to endure as the living.

The list of blame was pretty long..." Zou Yi said as his gaze became distant.

"But we don't blame them anymore. We may not be over their deaths and sacrifices but moving on is the burden we have to bear as their children so they don't worry and also it's our responsibility as children of the Zou family.

Our circumstances are not unique within the clan. Actually that's one of the things that has helped us in continuously trying to move on. At the clan, there's no shortage of those who went through the same thing we are going through now when their loved ones failed and died in the selection process. But they continued on and the side branches that came up as a result of it are proof of that.

Liqin and I promised we would live our fullest lives though as you can see we are not doing a good job of that with our pitiful looks but we are improving and learning to.

We want to be brave and charge through to our last breaths like our father who kept on charging through to his last breath or our mother who went in after him and our grandfather who showed no hesitation in taking the sword of punishment that was meant for us.

We want to live and grow then if we are able to, we can go back and show him, his sacrifice wasn't for nothing," Zou Yi said as he cheerfully smiled whilst holding Zou Liqin's hand.

"I commend your resolve. I'm sure the Order if anything will help you live the lives you envisioned and I'll also be there to support you in any way I can," Yang Qing said with a heartfelt sigh.

Chapter 157 Dealing With The Black Viper

"We will be leaving in a few minutes so eat up. Once we are done here we will go together to one of my evaluation sites and later I'll have you picked up by someone from one of the branches who will arrange for your transportation back to the Order," said Yang Qing as he went about wolfing down his share.

Ideally, the best and fastest option would have been to have them sent to the Yellow plains county branch which was the closest and also the only branch within his quadrant with a domain expert. However, after his potential little problem with the Golden bamboo pavilion that he left them with, he didn't have the cheek to also dump the two siblings on them.

"Mmh the Deer Mountain Kingdom branch is the closest one from here I can have them pick them up at the evaluation point close by," muttered Yang Qing as he recalled the map he had been going through on the flight over.

"By the way do you two know the black viper gang?" Yang Qing suddenly asked when he remembered the shady hawk-nosed person who was tailing them on their walk over.

Both Zou Yi and Zou Liqin flinched once they heard that name.

"Big brother, why do you ask?" Zou Yi shakily asked.

"I discovered one of their members tailing us earlier, him," said Yang Qing as he used a mystical art to reproduce an image of the hawk-nosed person.

"It's Shu Wei," said Zou Yi as he gritted his teeth. Zou Liqin had a deep frown and a look of disgust when she saw that image.

"No wonder I've been feeling uneasy all day like trouble was lurking right around the corner. Why is he following us though? It can't be for anything good," Zou Yi as he pensively bit his nails deep in thought.

"Most of the members of the black viper are scary people but I always get a slimy dangerous feeling from him every now and then when there's no one around," said Zou Liqin as her frown grew deeper. She never liked anyone from the black viper due to their ruthless personalities but Shu Wei was the one who made her skin crawl even deeper than the rest.

"He has always felt off like the Shu Wei we see is a mask hiding a hideous monster underneath. There are times he scares me more than even Lei He despite his subservient attitude when in the black viper's lair," Zou Yi fearfully added.

"Luckily we are leaving, so their plans don't matter anymore but what about grandpa and grandma Wang. They may get targeted after we leave. With their foundation-level cultivation base they won't be able to stand against even some of the upper members like iron tooth who has a peak foundation-level cultivation base let alone Lei He who I heard may be at the fourth stage of the core formation realm," Zou Yi worriedly muttered as he bit his nails with greater intensity.

"Big brother can you help Grandpa and grandma Wang. They are good people maybe they can even be cooks at the Order. Their food is delicious right?" said Zou Liqin as she made a hopeful plea for them.

"If only they knew the people they are worried about are peak core formation experts who would defeat a hundred people like Lei He easily. The black viper is nothing more than a fly to them. But these kids are

something, they managed to notice something off about that hawk-nosed person or did he purposely let his guard down when in their presence?

Considering the aura surrounding him, it wouldn't be strange," thought Yang Qing as his eyes narrowed toward a figure hiding within the shadows of a building.

"A blood fiend cultivator. He must have an impressive artifact on him to hide his true look and maintain his sanity," Yang Qing playfully mused before he turned his gaze back to the two siblings.

"The leader of the black viper gang is the one who sent him after you. He is to continuously monitor your movement throughout the day until later when someone else is sent to come pick you both up. The person in charge of collecting you is called Iron teeth if I'm getting the name right. You will then later be delivered to someone from the Mo family. who seems to be the commissioner of the whole thing," Yang Qing calmly explained the situation to them.

"This?!!!" the Zou siblings faintly shivered as their pupils froze when they heard all that.

"It would have been over for us had we landed in the Mo family's clutches. There have been appalling stories floating around about the fate of those who end up in the Mo family crosshairs within the city. At the capital, they may be reserved but here they lord it over like kings. And that bastard Lei He!! Even after all the money and information we gave him over the years, he sold us out," said Zou Yi as he ground his teeth.

"It seems I need to add the Mo family into my investigations along with the royal family of the Red Maple Empire. Just to cover the bases I think placing all the major families under investigation would be more prudent," muttered Yang Qing.

"As for the black viper gang...", Yang Qing's eyes narrowed before they glowed with an idea.

...

Kitchen of Wang's restaurant.

"I'm sorry to disturb you but can you come over for a second, please? I have something to discuss with you, it concerns the Zhi siblings."

The old couple was hard at work preparing the meals when they suddenly froze from hearing a voice sound in their minds.

They stared at each other and they both could see the fear in each other's eyes.

"What do we do?" fearfully asked grandma Wang as she tightly clenched the knife in her hands.

"What can we do other than go," Grandpa Wang bitterly said as he undid his apron and fixed his robes. He glanced at the ladle for a second before he decided to leave it.

Grandma Wang noted his actions but didn't say anything as she too undid her apron and fixed her hair up a bit before they made their way out together.

"If he asks about our background, I have no intention of hiding it. We have already sacrificed too much including our sons' cultivation life. This time I'm putting our family first," Grandpa Wang solemnly said as he made his way out the door.

"It's good you're sensible. I planned on doing the same though it's surprising hearing that from an old dog like you. I expected you to bleed for the empire to your dying breath," Grandma Wang said as she chuckled.

"What do you know? I'm already old, these old bones stopped producing blood ages ago," grandpa Wang said as he harrumphed.

"This is it," said Grandpa Wang.

"Are you scared?"

"Of course,"

"Me too"

The old couple smiled at each other as stepped on the last step up the stairs. Their eyes focused on the green-haired youth waving them over with a calm smile while by his feet laid a pale-faced person who was currently kneeling with the most fearful expression they have ever seen.

Chapter 158 Crimson Wave

"Greetings mystic master," the two both offered daoist salutes as they bent their backs in greeting.

Zou Yi was puzzled at the couple's reaction. They seemed to be fearful of Yang Qing. He found it strange since if it wasn't for Yang Qing disappearing before their faces they would have never guessed his cultivation realm. From their clan records he knew that the greater the disparity in cultivation realms the harder it is for the weaker party to detect anything different with the stronger party.

Only those who were at the same level or close would be able to realize each other's cultivation base. But based on the couple's reaction it seemed like they were aware of Yang Qing's cultivation realm despite only being in the middle stages of the foundation establishment realm.

"You don't have to do that, you can just call me Yang Qing. Age-wise you can even be considered my seniors," Yang Qing said as he lifted them up with an invisible force.

The couple looked up in confusion because in their eyes despite Yang Qing looking young they had gone down the typical assumptive route, which they assumed he was just an old monster donning a young look.

It was common practice and most palace realm experts were usually over 1,000 years old as for the younger ones they were prodigies of rank 1 organizations and holy lands who rarely made appearances.

Yang Qing next words interrupted their speculative thoughts.

"The reason I called you just like I said earlier is because of them and our little friend here," Yang Qing said as he pointed towards the Zou siblings and the man kneeling down respectively.

Zou Liqin had a happy expression on her face since she assumed Yang Qing was about to suggest they relocate with them. As for the old couple they were surprised at what a palace realm big shot needed their help with when he could handle the matter easily.

"A blood fiend cultivator?!" Grandpa Wang said in surprise when he got a clear look at the man kneeling.

Grandma Wang took notice a few seconds after he did due to his sudden exclamation. When they came in they were so tense that they blocked out everything else except Yang Qing.

Only when Yang Qing pointed at the kneeling person did they have the time to notice a few distinctive features on that person that sent waves of fear coursing through their bodies.

The kneeling person had pale white skin, thin red fibrous patterns on his skin, bone-like nails, and purple-red pupils along with a baleful aura surrounding him that had the accompaniment of the metallic smell of blood.

These were the signs of a blood-fiend cultivator. These were cultivators who cultivated through draining other cultivators' blood essence. In simpler terms, they literally devoured someone's cultivation realm.

One could rapidly improve their cultivation realm as long as they successfully devoured someone's blood essence however despite the fast progress it came with its inherent risks. One of them was mental corrosion that turned the blood-fiend users into nothing more than murderous bloodthirsty beasts who couldn't restrain themselves.

This was commonly observed in those who just started using the art. They would be quickly swallowed up in the thrill of the rapid increase in strength which then devolves into the thrill of slaughter and blood consumption very soon their sense of self and reason disappears till all they are is a puppet for their cravings.

Villages, towns, cities, and even some weaker kingdoms have been decimated because of an out-of-control blood fiend cultivator. Normal orthodoxies be they sects, empires, clans, other organizations, or rogue cultivators, as long as they are not blood fiend cultivators themselves, would put all enmity aside to eliminate a spotted blood fiend cultivator or cult.

The whole continent has a shared distaste for them due to the damage they cause.

The reaction isn't unwarranted since there was once an organization called the Crimson wave close to ten thousand years ago that was composed solely of blood-fiend cultivators.

The founder of the Crimson wave was a former prodigy of a rank 1 sect who fell out with it when it was discovered he conducted taboo arts on his fellow disciples.

He lived constantly on the run from the sect as he slowly formed the group. He kept improving on the blood fiend cultivation arts highlighting its major weaknesses, the mental corrosion. After close to a thousand years he finally created an art called the crimson resurrection tide which in terms of the quality of grade was just inches away from becoming a purple-grade art. It was a bonafide top-rank gold-grade cultivation art.

With it, he transformed the Crimson wave from a rootless organization made of runaways into a behemoth that shook the entire continent. With the rapid increase in strength and the mental corrosion issue being reduced, they had a burst increase in strength.

After the creation of the art within a few centuries, they had more than twenty domain experts while the founder stepped into the soul formation realm. He bided his time for a few more centuries till he finally bared his fangs on his former sect and decimated it within a week.

The sect had two soul formation experts and over a dozen domain realm experts but even they couldn't handle the onslaught of the Crimson wave.

After its destruction, the organization added three more soul formation experts to its ranks along with a wider increase in the numbers of those in the domain realm and below. With their surging numbers, they plunged the continent into a never-ending blood bath with the organization growing stronger after every successive battle.

With the reputation it had of rapid increase in strength with no setbacks whatsoever even some orthodox sects and organizations joined the Crimson wave. Their numbers continued to increase to such an astronomical degree that you'd find a crimson wave member all over the continent, there was not a single place that lacked them they had even encroached the lands of the holy lands.

The holy lands at the time were just calm observers detached from the whole thing. They only made a move when one of the disciples from the radiant sword sect became a victim of one of the members of the Crimson wave.

The continent finally got to see a glimpse of what it meant to be a Holy land.

From the records Yang Qing read, the radiant sword sect dispatched four inner core elders and a hundred core disciples against the Crimson wave.

It was an impressive lineup since the inner core elders were all in the soul formation realm as for the hundred core disciples, a third of them were in the domain realm while the rest were in the palace realm.

Yang Qing remembered how shocked he was when he read about it since he knew as far as the internal structure of the radiant sword sect went, above the inner core elders were the core elders and after that, he heard there were the supreme elders who in terms of status were even superior to the sect master.

As for the disciples' hierarchy, he heard there was one rank above the core disciples that was left for the best of the best. Its numbers were few but all who made it to that rank could no longer be described as geniuses. Those who made it to that rank were called the sword heart disciples.

Even though the four inner core elders and hundred core disciples were not weak by any measure, their presence made a lot of people more fearful and awed especially those old organizations who were in the know about their internal structure.

A cleansing tsunami ensued with the radiant sword sect team hunting down every crimson wave member they came across as they destroyed stronghold after stronghold. Other organizations who hadn't thrown their lot with the crimson wave joined in on the momentum as a continent-wide battle front swarmed together under the banner of the Radiant sword sect.

The purge and hunt went on for almost a century with most of the Crimson wave stronghold decimated, the clans and other organizations who had joined them tried to defect but they were destroyed along with them leading to the astronomical loss of many long-standing heritages. However, there were also

innocent victims in the purge who got falsely accused due to some enmity with a few parties. No one had been in the mood to verify the veracity of whether a certain party was a true collaborator or not.

As long as suspicion was cast on them, they would soon be swarmed. The carnage was worse than even when the Crimson wave rose to prominence.

About two hundred years later, the upper echelon along with the founder of the Crimson wave was besieged by the inner core elders of the radiant sword sect along with some of the domain realm core disciples along with a few other domain experts and soul formation experts from other organizations who had tagged along.

A fearsome battle ensued between the two groups which ended in the decimation of the crimson wave members however things didn't go as easily as they expected. The crimson wave had hidden itself well not even counting the founder, they had nine soul formation experts hidden within their ranks.

Two of the inner core elders of the radiant sword sect died in the siege but not before triggering a secret technique that summoned one of the supreme elders from the radiant sword sect. But by that time the team had suffered enormous losses.

The supreme elder single-handedly decimated the remaining sources while the founder of the Crimson wave held on until the last minute till he exploded into a rain of blood.

His blood turned into a literal lake that continuously corrodes the land the battle took place in and the battleground turned into a perilous place filled with sword qi that would shred a palace realm cultivator to pieces and a blood mist that would easily corrode their minds.

However, despite the battle ending over 10,000 years ago, the echoes of that period still remain. It was an extremely dark period even by the standards of a war-prone area such as the southern continent. A monster in the name of the crimson wave had risen to feed on the very nature of the continent till it threatened its very survival.

To date, blood fiend cultivators are constantly hunted and purged with major organizations around the continent such as the Order even offering rich bounties for every proven blood fiend cultivator caught or information that may lead to their lair. The radiant sword sect even occasionally sends its outer core disciples for training missions to purge blood-fiend cultivators.

However, despite the constant attacks, blood-fiend cultivators never stop appearing. Worse still, the art created by the founder of the Crimson wave, the crimson resurrection tide went missing during the attack on their main stronghold. The rumor floating around is that it's with the founder who didn't really die in the attack by the supreme elder of the Radian sword sect and is instead biding his time for a second wave.

It's not known whether there is any truth to the statement but what is known is the art is indeed missing and frequently among the blood fiend cultivators caught there would be those who exhibit the signature characteristics of the crimson resurrection tide cultivation art, such as the member by Yang Qing's feet who had some rationality to him despite only having an early stage core formation cultivation level.

This in and of itself was proof the inherent teachings of the Crimson wave are still being passed on even 10,000 years later.

Chapter 159 Old Couple's Connections

"Myst...I mean master Yang Qing what can we help you with? If it's within our means we would be more than glad to do so," firmly said grandpa Wang.

Though occasionally the eyes of the odd couple would dart toward the kneeling blood fiend cultivator.

Some part of them seemed a tad bit apprehensive since they assumed the matter might have to do with blood fiend cultivators and if it did that would be a huge headache.

The constant hunt and purge of blood-fiend cultivators have made them the thorniest opponents one can ever deal with.

They have abnormally high vitality and due to constant threats to their lives, they always risk it all out with their opponents even to the extent of perishing together since if they're caught they will end up with a fate far worse than death.

Their sturdiness and reckless fighting methods has made most to be wary when confronting a blood-fiend cultivator. Rarely would one do so alone, it would usually be a team so the risk can be collectively shared.

"It's nothing big really, especially to people of your caliber. I would have handled it myself but it's just that I'm a little short on time and I want to avoid drawing too much attention to myself if I can. Don't worry it has nothing to do with blood-fiend cultivators. He will be leaving with me," Yang Qing said seemingly reading their thoughts.

Even though the old couple didn't show it, inwardly they were sighing in relief.

"How well do you know Purple city?" asked Yang Qing.

The old couple being seasoned foxes understood the hidden meaning behind Yang Qing's question.

They knew what he was really asking was how deep their connections went in the Red maple empire.

"I won't lie to you, if we invited the City lord for a meal in our humble abode he would be all too glad to oblige," grandma Wang was the one who replied with a bit of enthusiasm and life in her.

It seemed the execution they had expected for may infact turn into an opportunity to sow a connection with a palace realm expert.

"Mmh figures," Yang Qing inwardly thought.

Zou Yi and Zou Liqin were thoroughly shocked at Grandma Wang's statement as they kept throwing strange looks her way.

They also kept feeling the communication between Yang Qing and the Wang couple seemed a bit off.

"Grandma Wang you know the city lord?" Zou Yi couldn't help but ask.

"We took care of him when he was a scrawny youth afraid of even his own shadow," Grandpa Wang said as he lightly chuckled while stroking his beard.

"But you're just in the foundation stage and the city lord may be older than you even if you both look older than him," Zou Yi innocently asked in confusion trying to do the math before he suddenly flinched in fear when he saw the dangerous look grandma Wang was giving him.

"Little Zhi we seem to have another barrel of ginkgo tea lying around specially prepared for you. You won't be leaving until you finish it all," grandma Wang said as she gave the most gentle smile she could give as her eyes turned crescent-shaped.

Zou Yi awkwardly laughed as he kept throwing help signs to Zou Liqin who purposely ignored them as she took a bite from the blueberry cake while humming.

"It would be good for the two of them if they came along. With the losses they have endured it would be a pity to separate them," Yang Qing thought as he took in the interaction between the couple and the Zou siblings.

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"This makes things easier. The black viper is after the two of them and it's at the behest of someone from the Mo family. The thing I needed help with is taking care of the black viper and the person from the Mo family.

With your strength and connections to the city lord it should be an easy thing, no?" said Yang Qing.

"Big brother, grandpa, and grandma Wang are just in the foundation establishment there's no way they can handle a dangerous organization like the black viper that has a middle-stage core formation expert not to mention the Mo family that has numerous experts.

"They'll die!!!" Zou Liqin suddenly said as she dropped the spoon in her hand. Her eyes widened as her body trembled in fear and dread.

It seemed like Zou Yi wanted to throw a few words in but Yang Qing interjected before he got a chance to.

"There seems to be a misunderstanding about something," Yang Qing said as he bitterly smiled at the reproachful gazes the two siblings were currently throwing his way.

"Should you or can I?" Yang Qing politely asked the old couple.

"We will do it," Grandpa Wang said as he sighed. There was a gentle appreciative gaze in his eyes as he looked at the two Zou siblings who were speaking back against a palace stage expert on their behalf.

"Truly young calves are not even afraid of lions," grandma Wang muttered as she chuckled.

They both removed matching silver amulets that looked to be two halves of each other. The moment they did the pressure of core formation experts was brought to bear even if their physical looks didn't change they no longer looked like they had one foot in the coffin.

"This?!!!!" Zou Yi shockingly got up from his seat along with Zou Liqin as they looked at the old couple who were still smiling at them with the same kind gaze their grandfather used to give them.

"It's even stronger than the pressure given off by Lei He," said Zou Liqin.

"You're both core formation experts?" asked Zou Yi still in disbelief.

"We are. We didn't mean to deceive you both but our current circumstances don't permit us to reveal our true selves. If we did that then we would not be able to do the job we were given in Purple city.

It's why we couldn't outwardly help you with the black viper since most of the underground organizations within the Purple city are supported in some way shape or form by the noble families around and a few of the peak organizations around.

Intervening would inadvertently blow our covers.

We are truly sorry for not helping you despite being able to," grandpa Wang softly said.

One could see the regret in both his and grandma Wang's eyes.

Chapter 160 [Bonus]Yang Qing Makes An Offer To The Old Couple

"What are you talking about? It's not your fault, you helped us plenty!!" Zou Yi hurriedly said as he skipped over the table to hold their hands with Zou Liqin already beating him to it.

"If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't be alive today like when you used that precious herb to help Yi when he was sick or the numerous times you gave us shelter and support.

It's because of you being there that we started looking forward to living each day. It was because of you and the rest of the customers that the days seemed bearable.

We can never repay you all for the gift you gave us but you saved us more than you know. For that, I thank you grandpa Wang, grandma Wang," Zou Liqin tearfully said as she tightly held their hands.

"There's no need to beat yourselves up besides we were stubbornly stupid and prideful to have accepted your help then even if you offered," Zou Yi added with a foolish grin.

"It's true you are pretty stupid Zhi Da, unlike Luoran'er. If it wasn't for her you'd be rotting in the city lord dungeons," grandma Wang teasingly said as she used a bit of her cultivation to destroy the tears that were about to fall.

"It seems you two hid something too, Yi'er," said Grandpa Wang as he noted the slip-up when Zou Liqin was talking earlier.

"Well, we have a few things to share," Zou Yi awkwardly laughed as he scratched the back of his head.

Yang Qing didn't interrupt them as he went about finishing up his meals with relish before they went cold. As for the kneeling blood fiend cultivator at the side, he was conveniently forgotten. If it wasn't for his incessant trembling one wouldn't even have known he was there.

After a couple of minutes, the Zou siblings had already filled in the old couple about their past.

"You've been through too much," Grandpa Wang sighed as he gently patted their heads.

"Master Yang Qing you can rest assured we will handle the black viper and the Mo family too. The Mo family has gotten too arrogant. Just because they have a palace realm expert they think they have the same authority as the royal family.

These old bones of mine have been itching for a fight for some time now," Grandpa Wang viciously said as a thick killing intent flashed in his eyes.

"After this, we can be true restaurant owners," added grandma Wang with an equally cold malevolent look.

"I actually enjoy working in the restaurant more than I thought I would," grandpa Wang said as he chuckled.

The moment they acted they would essentially be blowing their covers in Purple city. After hearing about the two siblings' past they would regret it if they didn't do anything at all for the sake of doing their duties.

They had tacitly decided to throw all caution to the wind.

When Yang Qing asked if they would suffer any backlash from their employers they smugly answered that they had a lot of merit points and deep connections, with one of them being one of the palace realm experts of the empire. The worst punishment they would get was getting an earful of how negligent and reckless their actions were and nothing more.

They had even decided they would retire after and become true restaurant owners and it would no longer just be a cover.

The Zou siblings congratulated them as Zou Liqin threw pointing pleading looks at Yang Qing.

"There is also another matter I would like to discuss with you." Yang Qing decided to make the offer before Zou Liqin snapped her neck with her not-so-subtle pointing.

"What is it, master Yang Qing?"

"Once I'm done here I will be leaving in a few minutes and the Zou siblings will be leaving with me.

With their ties to the Zou family and the inherent dangers it may bring, it's safer for them to be as far away from the Zou clan as much as possible.

Even if we assume the clan may not necessarily pay them any attention the same cannot be said of the Zou clan's enemies who would have no qualms about harming or using them for their own gains.

Leaving is the safest option and a fresh start would not be a bad thing for them. However, they would like you both to come with them. I would too, your food is good and I know it would be just as appreciated where I'm from," Yang Qing calmly said.

"So you're leaving huh? I think it's a smart decision," grandpa Wang said with a sad expression as Grandma Wang echoed his sentiments.

Based on their past experience and the entanglements of these big organizations they knew how messy it could get and the thin rope the two siblings were currently walking on.

Even though they had essentially escaped the Zou clan territory they had not run that far. The five clover kingdom that bordered the Red maple empire was a subordinate kingdom of the Zou clan and they had numerous spies spread about in the Red maple empire, especially in an important place such as the Purple city.

Even with their connections, they knew it would be hard to ensure the kids' safety.

"Where will you be taking them?" asked grandma Wang.

"To the Order," Yang Qing calmly said as he took the last bite of his last scallion pancake. In that brief moment the Zou siblings were sharing their past he had already cleared all the meals that were on his table.

He was currently dangerously eyeing the leftover blueberry cake the Zou siblings had left. The Zou siblings quickly reacted as they split the remaining piece between themselves and downed it with the ginkgo tea.

Tsk.

Yang clicked in disappointment.

The old couple in the meanwhile had blanked out with their eyes wide open and they were not alone in this as the kneeling blood fiend cultivator had stopped shivering and was still like a frozen corpse.

"So what do you say? Do you want to come with us?" Yang Qing asked the dumbfounded couple.

Their reactions were more exaggerated than the siblings' because the higher your horizons were the more you know. With the experience from their past occupation, they intimately knew how fearsome the Order was as opposed to two kids who based their perception from bard tales.

It was a different case to those who had actually seen them work and it was never a glory tale half the time especially if you were the one in wrong. Individual, clan, kingdom, empire, sect, rogue cultivator it didn't matter what group you fell under, as long as the gaze of the Order fell on you, their massive hammer was sure to find you.

It was only benevolent if you were the aggrieved party but if you were on the other side then it was an all-engulfing flame that was ruthless, unforgiving, and unyielding.