

Daily life 201

Chapter 201 The Odd Disciple

"I'm sorry young friend it would be hard for us to let you through since there was no information about the sect expecting any visitors today.

It's not that we want to slight a palace realm cultivator like yourself by refusing you entry, it's just that those are the rules of the sect. We can't let anyone through not unless we have express permission to do so...I hope you understand."

A slow unperturbed voice of an old man sounded from inside the courtyard. It had a calming seemingly undetached sensation to it.

"Then can you pass on a message from me?"

"I can," the old man succinctly answered.

"I'm a judge from the Order and someone from the Dark Helminth Ghost sect attacked while I was conducting evaluations in Summerfield Kingdom.

I've already taken care of the attacker but members of the Dark Helminth Ghost sect are notoriously crafty and meticulous. They would not have planned the attack without months if not years, of planning.

By my guess, the fact that an attack happened during the evaluation of the organizations within your territory should mean that they have established a temporary base within your region and they may not be the only dark organization to do so.

While you may not care about what happens outside your sect grounds, the same can't be said about them.

I just wanted to warn you to keep an eye out."

Yang Qing took out a white jade talisman that had a recording of the events that happened in the hall room during the evaluation. He already had another recording that he would hand to the Order, while the copy he had on hand, he had made for the purposes of proving the veracity of his statement to the Spiritual temperance sect.

"You can have this as proof," Yang Qing said as he tossed the talisman over the entrance gate. The talisman went on a perfect trajectory and landed in the hands of the person Yang Qing was talking with.

"I'll be off then, please do inform your higher-ups. If the Dark Helminth Ghost sect is comfortable enough to operate in your territory, I shudder to think what other organizations are lurking in there.

Your nest may already be swarming with hidden vipers all over."

Yang Qing didn't wait for their response as he flew back up to Ellie and continued on with his journey to the Blue Lotus kingdom.

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Inside the courtyard,

The three cultivators stood dumbfounded at the quick conclusion of their whole interaction. Of the many scenarios they expected for it to play out, this was not one of them.

"Is he really from the Order?" asked the only lady among the three cultivators and also the one with the weakest cultivation base, which was at the first stage of the core formation realm.

She was young, seemingly looking to be about twenty years old. She had round deep black eyes that shone with a light of curiosity. She had on white robes and a crystal butterfly hairpin tying her hair.

She was leaning over as she tried to scrutinize the white jade talisman in the hands of an elderly-looking man who also had pure white robes, a long flowing beard that reached his chest, and hair that was tied in a half bun.

Even though his skin was wrinkled and his frame bent, his eyes had a sense of clarity in them that would give one the sensation that he was ageless.

The last member of the group was a young man who seemed to be in his early 30s. He too had worn white robes and had black hair tied in a daoist topknot. He had an easy-going and carefree aura to him, like a blade of grass freely moving with the springtime winds.

"Elder Shi, is he really from the Order?" the young lady asked again when she saw she had not gotten any response at her earlier question.

"The Dark Helminth Ghost sect....things may get troublesome if they really have a base here," the elderly man said as he breathed out a worried sigh.

"Yes, he is from the Order...Not many places can churn out a young palace realm cultivator like him and the fact that he was able to throw this talisman over, completely ignoring the barrier we had already erected up, is proof his strength isn't low either.

There's the recording too...Luckily I don't think he minded much when we refused him entry," said the elderly man with another sigh.

"I wonder if the array would even have done much against him?" he wondered before he shook his head free of those thoughts.

"The Order is that powerful?!!!" the young lady said in shock.

"He didn't seem that older than me..." she continued on with disbelief.

"Or maybe he is just some old person maintaining his youthful looks," she muttered with a seriously pondering expression.

"Junior sister Ya, is senior sister Yu Mei an old person maintaining her youthful looks?" the young man gently asked as he lightly smiled at the young lady's train of thought.

"Senior brother Lifen why are you slandering Senior Mei like that? Elder Shi, did you hear what he said?..how can Senior sister Mei be an old person? She is recorded to be the youngest palace realm expert in the sect since its founding. She is just 32 years old and she is already a palace realm expert...

Senior brother Lifen you shouldn't slander people like that just because you're envious, older, have worse talent or are not as good-looking.

Just this once I won't tell her what you said, but senior brother you need to evaluate your own dao heart if you hope to make any progress.

If you keep harboring those slanderous thoughts, you're liable to end up with a horrible mental demon. As spiritual cultivators, our mental strength should be our forte.

Elder Shi, I think senior brother Lifen needs more guidance in his cultivation lest an accident happens," the young lady said as she cast a worried look toward the young man who was in complete disbelief at the moment as to what just happened.

How did his question end up with him disparaging his senior sister and being slanderous and envious? Even his looks were thrown into the mix.

He was just trying to be a cool senior brother and guide her and all he got back was inner demon-inducing jabs and a pity-filled look that made him feel like he was the biggest scum of the continent.

Chapter 202 Three Potential Rank 3 Organizations

"I can't believe I will have to stand guard with her at this base for the next five years," the young man thought as he lamented his future.

"No I won't be alone, luckily Elder Shi is here with me. He knows how to reign her in," Lifen thought in relief as he eyed the elderly man with a look of worship.

"Lifen, I'll be heading back to the sect to inform them of the news we just got. Information as pertinent as this needs to be delivered in person.

You will be in charge of the place until I come back. Considering the gravity of the situation, you and Ya'er will be here alone for a while.

I'll be handing control of the array to you.

Make sure not to leave the courtyard no matter what, and at the slightest sign of trouble you are to trigger the array instantly.

Don't hesitate, you hear me?" the elderly man said as his solemn gaze fell on the two disciples.

"We will do as Elder Shi says," they simultaneously said as they cupped their fists in acceptance of the orders.

The elderly man changed a few seals on the formation disc he had in his hand and then handed it to the young man.

The young man formed a few seals of his own on the formation disc so he could have temporary control of it.

Once he had confirmed everything was in order, the elderly man poured his qi into a small pebble-sized blue pearl which transformed him into a streak of blue light that charged in the direction of the dome that was two hundred meters away from the courtyard.

Lifen had a heavy expression appear on his face when he saw the blue streak disappear into the dome.

The source of his heavy expression was unknown.

Was it because the responsibility of maintaining the security of the sect's outpost weighed heavily on him or was it because of another graver matter? No one knew, except him.

"Senior brother Lifan, how old are you by the way? I heard someone in the sect say you were about 178 years old. Mmmh, would that make you my senior brother or elder first? Elder senior brother, grandfather senior brother, I wonder which one works best?"

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50 kilometers away from the Spiritual temperance sect

Yang Qing was leisurely seated on top of Ellie with a snow blossom peach in one hand, and a communication talisman in the other.

"I've already informed them of the matter and given them a recording of the events, but given their way of doing things, I think it would be more prudent if a branch was established there.

The region is already chaotic enough, the Order's presence is needed to monitor things and also to deter other organizations like the Dark Helminth Ghost sect, from setting up base there.

Also, I feel the region may experience a change in dynamics in the near future. It wouldn't be impossible for three more rank 3 organizations from sprouting in there,"

"Which ones?"

"The Summerfield kingdom is one. I saw something in one of their fields that made me reevaluate them,

Then there is the Broken Peak sect. I evaluated their sect master and vice sect master. They are brothers who have the treefolk bloodline. The bloodline itself is thin but if they use their quota from the Order well, it wouldn't be an impossibility for them to reach the palace realm.

As for the last one," Yang Qing paused as he lightly chuckled when he remembered the young man who kept nagging him to escort him back to his clan or for techniques that could lower the ranks of his pillars.

"There was someone by the name of Lin Mu. He has quite the personality. Even though he is from a small cultivation clan, he managed to form blue-grade pillars.

If he had better resources, I have no doubt he would have probably gotten a quasi-gold-grade pillar at the very least.

Of the three organizations, the Lin family is the one I think has the highest odds of becoming a rank 3 organization, barring any unfortunate circumstances.

I think we should put them in the nurturing program."

"You think highly of him that much?"

"I do," Yang Qing firmly replied.

"Well, I'll pass on your thoughts. But they will still have to be vetted first to pass the preliminary review before they can be considered for nomination along with the other candidates.

But with your recommendation, their odds should be better.

When you get back you'll have to give an exposition on everything, moreso on the situation regarding the Spiritual temperance sect's territory, especially if you want to make a case for a branch to be established there.

You know very well with how tight our resources are, branch placements are not done lightly. For one to be placed in the Spiritual temperance sect's region, it would have to be at the expense of one of the new proposed branches.

For such a case, you will be making the report to the Spirit Council when you get back, so prepare yourself....and make sure to finish the evaluations on time. Don't bother coming back until they are all completed."

Before Yang Qing could reply, the connection had already been cut off like usual, leaving him with a belly full of anger.

Shrrieeeeeeek!!!

Yang Qing had accidentally pulled on some of Ellie's feathers with nowhere to vent his frustration.

"I'm sorry Ellie," he said as he smiled in embarrassment. Unbeknownst to him, Ellie had a cunning glint flash in her eyes in the midst of her painful shriek.

The place Yang Qing had pulled on, suddenly started bleeding like a geyser as Ellie shrieked in even more pain, even her qi became slightly erratic.

"If you're going to exaggerate, atleast make it believable," Yang Qing said as he tiredly sighed at her theatrics.

As a spirit beast with a powerful bloodline, she had enough vitality to rival some palace realm cultivators but here she was pretending that a feather pull was enough to make her bleed so profusely when even the sharpest top-tier sky-rank weapon couldn't leave a dent on her nails.

Ellie still stubbornly continued her theatrics as she ruptured a few other blood vessels.

"Fine' I'll share some of my spirit lake basses with you," Yang Qing said in defeat as he removed a few from his storage ring.

Ellie screeched in joy as her wounds closed in an instant, and the feathers Yang Qing had pulled off were regrowing at an astronomical speed. In just a minute and a half, all the missing feathers had been fully regrown.

"How can one be this shameless?"

Chapter 203 Blue Lotus Kingdom

It didn't take too long for Yang Qing to make his way to the Blue Lotus kingdom. Ellie managed to reach in good time, most likely the silver basses she schemed off Yang Qing had something to do with it.

The Blue Lotus kingdom, just like the Summerfield kingdom, was also a rank 4 kingdom. However, unlike the Summerfield kingdom, it was not a subsidiary of a larger power.

The Blue Lotus kingdom had a much deeper and longer history than the Summerfield kingdom. It has been in existence for almost 100,000 years. Such a history is enough to rival some rank 2 organizations.

In those 100,000 years, it has experienced uprise and downfalls. It was originally a small province of some long-forgotten empire. It built its prestige slowly over time, till it grew strong enough to split from the Empire it was a part of, and become independent.

Lucky for them, at the time of their independence, there was a wide world mutiny in the empire, and they were not the only province to break away from it and announce their cessation from it.

From there, they clawed their way up to becoming a semi-renowned kingdom when their then-king reached the palace realm. With every generation, they seemed to be growing and improving at a steady rate.

They always seemed to make the right move; they formed alliances when the circumstances called for it, they attacked when the circumstances demanded it, and they conceded or held their ground depending on the situation.

This was why after ten thousand years since they were established, they had managed to swallow almost a third of the territory of the Empire they belonged to. Immediately soon after, they halted all their expansion projects and consolidated all their gains for 30,000 years.

When the 30,000 years lapsed, they came out once more with the goal of increasing their territory by half.

It didn't take too long for the others to realize, the Blue Lotus kingdom had the grand ambitions of swallowing all the territory belonging to the former Empire.

The provinces of the former Empire, which just like them had become independent kingdoms, banded together to resist them. Those provinces even collaborated with the royal family of the broken Empire.

When mutiny broke out and some of the provinces broke away, the empire managed to maintain its control over one territory, this was the capital where the royal palace was located. They consolidated all their power there, as they bided their time while also guarding themselves against all these provinces that were eyeing them on all sides. However, the threat from the Blue Lotus Kingdom gave them the reprieve they needed, as they formed temporary alliances with the other provinces to confront a common foe, the Blue Lotus Kingdom.

A five thousand-year battle ensued, with the Blue Lotus kingdom emerging as the victor. They managed to conquer the capital which was the last bastion of the Empire, while also fending off the other provinces.

Despite being alone, their victory was made possible due to the overwhelming firepower they revealed. They revealed four quasi-domain experts from within their ranks, who helped them hold their own against the ancestor of the empire who was also a quasi-domain expert while also fending off the alliance of the other provinces.

Despite their victory, they still paid an enormous price for it, which was the devastating injuries to two of the four quasi-domain experts who got critically injured when the ancestor of the empire used a secret art to try and perish with them.

The Blue Lotus kingdom thus halted any expansion activities for the next 15,000 years to heal from the damage the 5,000-year battle caused.

In that time, the other kingdoms couldn't attack either, since even they had paid a terrible price in that war. They could only watch in trepidation as the Blue Lotus kingdom bided its time, knowing full well the next time it made a move, it would be to conquer the remaining half of the former Empire's territory.

Some of the kingdoms found the wait unbearable and decided to give up their own autonomy and join the Blue Lotus kingdom as their subordinates. The moment that door was opened, others soon followed.

After 15,000 years, the Blue Lotus kingdom went on for its third expedition with even more fervor, since they had fewer enemies to fight and one of their quasi-domain experts had become a full-fledged domain expert.

None of the remaining kingdoms was their match, since they only had palace realm experts at the helm. The Blue Lotus kingdom managed to bring the whole territory of the former Empire under their control in just under 100 years.

Soon a period of peace and stability returned to the region now under a new name, the Blue Lotus Kingdom. As a tribute to remember their beginnings, they decided to retain their name as a kingdom instead of dubbing themselves an empire.

However, after 15,000 years, that peace got destroyed when a sworn brother of the ancestor of the former Empire came out of seclusion. That sworn brother was a rogue cultivator who had managed to reach the middle stage of the domain realm. When he heard his brother's Empire had fallen and him along with it, he charged alone, sword in hand, and brought havoc to the Blue Lotus kingdom, decimating everything in his path.

At that time, the kingdom had added another domain expert to their ranks, but they were still only in the early stages of the domain realm while the attacker was in the sixth stage close to reaching the seventh stage of the domain realm. Every jump in minor rank from the palace realm going forward was a huge gulf, which only got more distinctive the higher up the realms, one moved. Therefore, even though the attacker was facing two domain realm experts, he was not the one at the disadvantage and it was instead the two early-stage domain experts of the Blue Lotus kingdom, who were on the struggling end.

Their battle destroyed the capital and everyone and everything in between as it escalated in intensity and destruction.

The two domain experts on seeing the severity of the situation decided to risk their lives by detonating their cultivation to fuel a special ascendant-grade artifact they had, which they used to strike the enemy with. That artifact was one of the defining trump cards of the kingdom.

Their plan succeeded but three domain experts fell that day and three-quarters of the kingdom the Blue Lotus kingdom had worked so hard to conquer, got destroyed along with them.

Luckily the kingdom still had a bit of manpower saved up in the original location, the first province where they declared themselves a kingdom before they expanded and move their headquarters.

As fate would have it, the location of the Blue Lotus kingdom of today is situated within that province where they started from.

The reserves left behind from over 20,000 years ago are what have sustained them till today and luckily for them, when the war between the three domain experts destroyed three-quarters of the kingdom, it also destroyed those who could have potentially attacked the original members of the Blue Lotus kingdom in their weakened state.

To date, the kingdom has not once expanded beyond the confines of its original province, even though the territory that was once wrecked by the domain-level war, has already restored itself naturally, in the 20,000 years that have passed by since the battle.

The territory, lacking any owners over the years. soon got occupied by others when they saw the Blue Lotus kingdom not showing any intention or interest in laying claim over their former territory.

It was already common knowledge that one of the reasons why the Blue Lotus kingdom was passive to the whole thing, was they didn't have the manpower to reclaim that territory, either in terms of quality or quantity. Almost all of their strongest powerhouses died the day the middle-stage domain expert attacked the kingdom. Some got killed as he was making his way over, while others died as collateral damage in the fight that took place in the capital.

Of those who were left, none had reached the palace realm. Trying to lay claim over that territory with just the strength of core formation experts was sure to invite another calamity to their doorstep.

The Blue Lotus Kingdom thus decided to turn a blind eye to everything as it focused on its own recovery. As for whether they would reclaim that territory, no one knew but them. But with such a tragic history behind them, one would wonder if they would be willing to tempt fate again.

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Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh when he reached the air space of the Blue Lotus kingdom. Its story made him remember the sect master of the Clear sword river sect, who he had met earlier today for the demotion of his sect.

The Clear sword river sect had also been prominent in its heyday and suffered a tragedy. However, unlike the Blue Lotus kingdom, they couldn't bounce back from their misfortune, and in three months when the sect master died, it would more than likely disappear from the continent.

Two organizations suffered an almost similar tragic event, but one was well on its way to regaining back its former glory while the other was about to be buried and soon to be forgotten. Its only hope of being remembered is as a cautionary tale and a lesson to warn against the folly of arrogance and irresponsible leadership.

Chapter 204 Special Physiques Appear

Yang Qing pulled his thoughts back when he saw a huge congregation of people below him in one of the towns below him. The town was located in one of the counties of the Blue Lotus Kingdom, it was the White Clay County and was situated on the outskirts of the kingdom next to its border with its former territory.

During his discussion with the King of the Blue Lotus Kingdom, White Clay County was thought to be the ideal location to conduct the joint evaluation since it was at the border thus making it easier for the organizations in the other region to come over for their evaluations.

Yang Qing smiled wryly when he saw the congregation below. Among those present, one group consisted of the king and his entourage which more than likely consisted of his most loyal vassals, while the other group was the organizations he was going to evaluate.

Even though everything seemed harmonious, one could detect a bit of awkwardness between the two groups more so the latter. It wasn't lost on Yang Qing on the weird dynamics of the whole thing, especially in regard to the relationship between the two groups. One of them had settled in the other's territory without their express permission, while the other has to act nonchalant about it because they are not in a position to lay claim over it, notwithstanding how they got it and later lost it in the first place.

But what could Yang Qing do about it? He was short on time, the region outside of the Blue Lotus Kingdom was unruly and despite the awkwardness of the relationship between the two sides, the Blue Lotus Kingdom actually had a rather good reputation with most of the organizations within that territory.

They had regular trades with some of the organizations within that region. On occasion they have played the part of a mediator between two sides that were in deep conflict, they've served as witnesses. Even though the territory wasn't in their hands, one could detect the presence of their 'soft authority' showing itself in the area.

Maybe they were just being good neighbors or they were using a different approach to bring that territory under their control. Whatever the case, their current reputation was what mattered to Yang Qing. With their reputation, it would be easier for him to hold a joint evaluation within their kingdom than in any other place. Those three hundred organizations he was to evaluate, would feel more open and safer coming to the Blue Lotus Kingdom than any other place, even with the awkwardness that came with it.

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Once Yang Qing landed, he exchanged a few pleasantries with the King and his people after which he was then directed to a small town square that had been evacuated of its residents.

Yang Qing was given free rein of use over the administrative buildings in there by the king, and a few of his royal guards including the commander-general, were left behind to be his aids.

"The Blue Lotus Kingdom seems to be well on its way to a resurgence," Yang Qing thought as his gaze fell on the commander-general.

The commander had the ocean blue hair typical of the royal bloodline of the Blue Lotus Kingdom. His name was Guan Yenshu.

What stood out to Yang Qing about him was his age and cultivation base. At 37 years old, he was already a quasi-palace realm cultivator and from what Yang Qing could tell, he has been there for quite some time, based on the stability of his fluctuations. It didn't seem like it would be too long before an opportune moment came for him to break through.

As for why he was not the king with his talent, Yang Qing could only assume it was due to his personality. He was a person of very few words, even with his men. He was the polar opposite of Prince

Wenyan of the Summerfield Kingdom, who wasn't exactly gifted in cultivation but was a natural at interactions whether it was with a servant, or with someone at Yang Qing's level.

But whatever the commander lacked in communication, he more than made up for it, in terms of cultivation and his intuition. He was the only one in the whole convoy of the king to notice Yang Qing's realm was in the palace stage. His pupils trembled in shock when Yang Qing landed with Ellie to meet them.

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With time not on his side and a lot to do, Yang Qing quickly went through the motions. He explained the rules and guidelines of the evaluation procedure and what is to be expected of those who are to be evaluated.

He only had to do the explanation once since all the organizations scheduled for the evaluation had already arrived even before he came. Close to eight hours had lapsed since he informed the king of the Blue Lotus Kingdom of his intentions, which was more than enough time for them to arrange everything, including getting the word out to those organizations.

The moment Yang Qing started the evaluations, he went on with it nonstop without taking a single break. After 11 hours he was already done with all the evaluations.

Their results had a bit of disparity in comparison to the one he did in Summerfield Kingdom. One of them was, the evaluations in the Blue Lotus Kingdom had more failures from organizations trying to pull something as compared to the ones in the Summerfield Kingdom.

From the list of organizations that came to the Summerfield Kingdom only seven had failed the evaluation and that was inclusive of the sect Su Liwei had used to infiltrate the evaluation. While from the list of organizations that came to the Blue Lotus Kingdom, 104 had failed. Even Yang Qing was shocked by this figure as it was close to half the organizations that he came to evaluate.

Another disparity was in the quality. It was ironic that while the organizations that came to the Blue Lotus Kingdom had the largest number of failures, they also had the highest quality in comparison to the Summerfield Kingdom.

Yang Qing didn't uncover any ancient race bloodline from their lot, like the treefolk bloodline from the Feng siblings, but the heart stone steele did record over a dozen special physiques from within that group. From those physiques there were even a few good ones that could guarantee the owner would atleast reach the palace realm barring any unexpected circumstances and one of them even had domain potential. That physique was the Golden Revolution Cicada physique.

From what Yang Qing knew about it, it granted the user the ability to create clones of him or herself even without stepping into the soul formation realm which was the stage in which someone could attempt something like that and the practitioner would have to be gifted in different kinds of dao such as vitality dao or soul dao.

The physique didn't just stop at creating clones. Those clones had independent thinking from the main body, even if they were still linked to it. The independence even went down to their personalities and they would not inherit the user's cultivation base. They had to cultivate from scratch and they came with different levels of talent that differed from the main body. They could therefore cultivate arts that the main body didn't necessarily have an aptitude for and their insights would be fed back to the main body.

Chapter 205 [Bonus]Unexpected Ending

The physique also had various other variations to it such as the number of clones one could create. The number of clones one could form was dependent on the talent of the user in excavating the mysteries of their physique.

From the Order's records, the highest number of clones someone with that physique has had was, nine clones, and at the time, he along with the clones were all at the peak of the domain realm. That person became a monstrous powerhouse in the Southern Continent because of it but he hasn't been heard from in over 50,000 years since he left to explore the Sea of Dreams.

However, he left behind a sect, the Nine Cicada sect which is currently a rank 2 sect with a renowned reputation around the continent.

In terms of practicality, Yang Qing felt like the Golden Revolution Cicada was much more important than the Treefolk bloodline to a cultivator, especially in the early stages of cultivation more so if that cultivator doesn't have a strong background. They could use their clones to explore mysterious realms, as the main body hid somewhere even though the main body would suffer some damage if the clone died. The gains far outweighed the risks since the insights gained by that clone would be transmitted back to the main body regardless of its death in the mysterious realm.

With the different degrees of talent the physique offered, one could also test out different theories, and different schools of cultivation arts which was especially useful to rogue cultivators who bought cultivation arts of dubious origins. They could test the veracity of that art with their clones or they could increase their knowledge of different cultivation arts such as; ones related to combat, formation, alchemy, and talismans, since they had clones to spread out the burden of learning different things.

With this type of physique, atleast it guaranteed even without backing, you'd be able to survive and etch out a living using its specialty. Having such a physique was the envy of many, luckily Yang Qing learned from his earlier experience with the Feng brothers, he hid all the results of the heart stone steele and only revealed them to the owner.

The owner of the Golden Revolution Cicada physique was a young lady, about 17 years old. She was the daughter of the owner of an upstarting merchant organization that had chosen to establish itself within the former territory of the Blue Lotus Kingdom.

Other than the special physique, she also had blue-grade pillars to boot. She had no idea about the physique and was in utter shock when Yang Qing revealed it to her.

Yang Qing on discovering her physique, had her stay behind as he wanted to issue her a special pass to gain direct entry to the institute. Judges, Inquisitors, and other members of the Order who were in the field alot, were issued special pass privileges. With that pass they could nominate any talent they met for an immediate entry to the institute without having to pass an examination. There were set standards for those who could qualify for a special pass. Someone like the Feng brothers who had an ancient race bloodline could qualify for one but Yang Qing opted against it, since he only had one special pass and their bloodline was thin at that.

But when he saw the young lady he immediately decided to use it on her. The reason for that was, the Order also had someone with the same physique as her and he was a dean at the institute. He had seven clones, four of them were instructors while the other three were in different departments of the Order. No one could be a better guide for her than him. Her parents who she came to the evaluation with, were mad with joy when Yang Qing made the offer.

Other than her, there were also about ten other participants with blue grade pillars, and most of the remaining organizations either had someone with orange grade pillars or red grade pillars. White grade pillars were the least, with only 4 of the remaining 196 organizations having it.

Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder if the fact that the region was once a battleground for domain-level experts, had something to do with the quality of the present occupants. Domain-level experts could invoke dao into their attacks, whose remnants still remain even after they have long left the area. Maybe those remnants may have had an effect on the current occupants. Yang Qing correlated that thought with the experience he had at the dark valley, where all the domain experts of the Order resided.

The area constantly exhibited different domains due to the saint-grade treasure there. The effects created not only helped the domain experts living there, but even young strugglers like Yang Qing who were briefly exposed to it.

He still firmly remembered the experience he had with the paragon domain that was in the form of a gigantic book. The moment his eyes fell on it, it bombarded his head with a million ideas about his cultivation, to the point he felt like his head would explode from the excess information. Even though the experience was horrific, he could tell he had gained an enormous harvest from it. His first stage palace realm cultivation was firmer than before, despite having only broken through in less than a year.

Yang Qing soon pushed those thoughts away as he decided to make his way to the next location. He gave his goodbyes to the king and his people as he prepared to leave.

The commander-general who was silent all this time, made a sudden request of him when he was about to leave. Even without asking, Yang Qing could guess what it was, from the unconcealed battle intent the commander had been throwing at him when he was doing his evaluations. The commander-general wanted to battle him.

Since Yang Qing still had a few moments to spare and he owed the Blue Lotus Kingdom a favor for their studious efforts, he agreed to the request.

The duel was held in secret, having only a few spectators which consisted of only the king and a few higher-ups. They were all buzzing in excitement to see how it would all play out.

However, things didn't pan out as they expected it to. Yang Qing defeated the commander in four breaths. The battle ended so fast that both the victim and the spectators didn't know how to react.

Yang Qing couldn't help with the way things panned out. The institute had always drilled into them about not holding back, whether they are facing an ant or a lion, the reaction should always be the same, go all out. No giving handicaps or incense stick worth of time to the opponent. If you are striking, strike like you've met your greatest foe.

Such a habit has become second nature to them, which was why even if it was a friendly duel or against someone a level lower than him, he still went at it with the same level of intensity as he did when he faced the three palace realm experts above Purple City. The only thing he held back on, was the extent of the damage of his attack, as it would be awkward if he accidentally punched him into a meaty paste.

Though the commander wasn't injured that badly, he still got knocked out. Yang Qing noticing the awkward looks, feeling awkward himself, slowly disappeared into a grey cloud of smoke and asked Ellie to fly as fast as she could away from the Blue Lotus Kingdom.

Chapter 206 Distraught Man By The Lake

"I've already completed 500 evaluations and now I'm left with only 900 more...Old Lei, you're really insidious with your means," Yang Qing chuckled bitterly as he took a swig of spring water rice wine.

It was close to 2 am in the morning, the moon was still out, the breeze was bone chilling and the scene was foggy.

The night had a sense of loneliness to it which seemed to magnify his current mood as an overworked worker of a black-hearted organization whose unforgiving hours leave him a broken solace.

Other cultivators were probably exchanging a few laughs over a hot pot and a cup of wine while he was in the skies moving from place to place, doing evaluations nonstop.

"I wish I was a poet," thought Yang Qing as he felt his current circumstances and the somber view were perfect ingredients for a breathtaking poem but alas he had no talent for it. All he could settle for was a poetical sigh at the moon as he swirled his wine making sure it grabbed the moon's reflection perfectly.

"This is what I've been reduced to..," Yang Qing shook his head as he continued on with the swirling. He realized while he may not have a talent for poetry, he had a gift for posturing as one. His moon reflection capturing swirl was getting more picturesque with every swirl. But you can only swirl for so long, before the woes of reality kick in.

That's what happened to Yang Qing, as at some point the wine lost its flavor and appeal to him when all he could think about was the 900 evaluations that were still waiting for him.

As per his scheduled route, his next evaluation would be in the territory of the Diamond body sect which just like the Spiritual temperance sect was a long-established rank 3 sect but unlike them they had a firm hold over their territory.

Just like its name, it was a sect that specialized in body refining techniques, more specifically it specialized in achieving the diamond body stage of the body refining realm.

While they could not guarantee that they could help every sect member achieve a diamond body due to the demands and constraints of reaching such a stage, especially in regard to talent, they have made sufficient progress in it, which in quantitative terms is enough to rival the achievements of some rank 1 organizations in that regard.

Due to the resource demands of reaching the diamond body stage, the sect allows other organizations to establish themselves within their territory in exchange for a fee that is either paid in spirit stones or herbs. They even give preferential treatment to organizations that have an alchemical background or foundations in spiritual herb growth.

This is why its territory has some of the largest herb producers in the northern part of the Southern continent.

As per Yang Qing's scheduled planning for his joint evaluations, just like the Blue Lotus Kingdom and the Summerfield Kingdom before it, the Diamond Body sect had also been chosen as a joint evaluation point.

There were 270 organizations within its territory that had filed for an evaluation.

After the Diamond Body sect, he would make his way further north to the territory of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort which was another rank 3 organization that had 250 unranked organizations being evaluated, before he finally finished with 150 organizations within the White Baobab Kingdom which was a rank 4 kingdom.

The remaining 500 evaluations were down south of his assigned quadrant. He opted to finish them last since the headquarters of the Order were closer to them.

The thought of how much he still had left to do, kept draining all his energy by the second and the gloomy weather accompanied by a deathly silence didn't help either.

"No, I definitely need a break before the next evaluations," Yang Qing firmly decided as he scanned the grounds below for a suitable place to take a much-needed rest.

Yang Qing's search lasted almost twenty minutes before he finally found a place that seemed like a suitable location to rest at.

His criteria was simple, he wanted a secluded place that was absent of people and one that wasn't part of anybody's territory. It took some time before he finally locked onto a place that fulfilled those requirements. The area was a ten-acre forest that had a lake in the middle of it.

The forest didn't seem to have anything special to it, it had a garden variety of mortal-rank herbs and a few earth-rank herbs that were generally useless. The area had a dangerously low temperature and an accompanying fog, which served as an excellent deterrent for people.

In terms of spirit beasts, there were not that many, just a few critters here and there, of which the strongest had an early stage foundation establishment realm, cultivation base.

Its layout suited Yang Qing's needs perfectly, and the only downside to him was, the spirit beasts present none of them were particularly meal worthy. But that could be remedied since he had detected a few fish in the lake in the middle of the forest.

Just as Yang Qing was fantasizing about the smoked fish he would be having when they landed, his pupils froze in surprise.

"Now this is an interesting surprise. A yin mist form Hornwort, and a Starlight crab..what are these two doing in the same place?..."

Mmmh, is that a yin spirit meridian?....no wonder," Yang Qing thought as an interested smile flashed on his face.

"Ellie drop down there," Yang Qing's voice suddenly turned urgent when he gave the order, as he disappeared off Ellie's back and rapidly dropped to the lake's location.

Ellie was surprised at Yang Qing's drastic reaction but even in her surprised state, her speed didn't falter as she faithfully followed Yang Qing's instructions by rapidly descending to the lake's location.

By the time she landed, she spotted Yang Qing pulling what looked to be a corpse out of the lake.

The body seemed to be a male's and was frigidly pale white to the point it released a faint white mist when Yang Qing pulled it out of the water.

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"Luckily he still has a faint breath on him," Yang Qing muttered as he rapidly jabbed a couple of acupuncture needles into the man.

The man's face was indistinctive due to how pale he looked. His muscles seemed like they had contracted and congealed together making identification difficult. About the only thing of color on him, were the purple veins that were protruding from his arms and legs, and the ragged blue robes he had on.

"Yin Yang reversal," Yang Qing calmly said once he placed the final needle in the man's chest.

He quickly formed a seal with his hands that transformed into a circle that was made up of the black and white YinYang symbol.

The circle began rotating in a clockwise manner as soon as it was formed.

At first, the speed was slow, but with every complete rotation, the speed would double till it reached a point only a blur of black and white could be seen as black scripts spread from that circle to the rest of the pale man's body.

After a few seconds, a change started to happen to the man's body. The black scripts seemed to be draining the fog from his body and then transporting them back to the rotating circle. The rapidly rotating circle created a small whirlpool of fog as it kept absorbing the fog that was being drained by the black scripts. The circle had transformed into a bottomless pit that swallowed every fog that was produced from the man's body.

In five minutes, the man's appearance started turning normal. His skin looked like it finally had normal blood flow from the light brown texture it regained.

It didn't take long for Yang Qing to cancel the technique after it seemed like whatever had been affecting the man, had been completely removed from his body.

Yang Qing still wasn't done with the treatment. He proceeded on to use the man's wrist as a conduit for pouring his qi into him, so he could use it to heal whatever internal injuries the man may have had.

"A core formation expert with a broken dantian?..this ..." the more Yang Qing learned of the man's situation, the deeper his frown became.

"Mmmh the cold yin poison in him, some of it doesn't seem to have originated from this lake.

Is it from the same person who crippled him?

Was he thrown here?"

An endless stream of questions continued to flood Yang Qing's mind the more he examined the man.

The man's dantian seemed like it had been cleanly shattered. This showed that the person who did it, vastly outpowered him and could have easily killed him if they wished to but they purposely left him alive.

The shattered dantian still had traces left of the cultivation art used on it, which was more than enough for Yang Qing to use to glean a few clues from it, such as the attribute of the art. That trace showed that the art used on the man was mostly a cold-related cultivation art that was strong in its yin nature.

This was why Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder if the man was thrown into the lake. If you had a cold yin injury and were thrown into a place filled with dense yin energy like the lake before him, it would exacerbate the injuries you had, bringing with it an enormous level of torment to the person.

Without Yang Qing's intervention, the man would have undergone an unimaginably painful death. Even in his unconscious state, the pain still struck him since Yin-based attacks not only affected the body but the soul too.

"What could he have done to warrant such a ruthless action to be taken on him," Yang Qing wondered as he finished the last of his treatment. Based on how much of the lake's yin energy he had on him, it seemed like the man had been submerged in the lake for almost a month.

He couldn't do much about the broken dantian since even the Order didn't have means of restoring a completely shattered one, but his qi had dense vitality which was more than enough to heal all the other internal injuries he had on him.

Yang Qing also didn't have to expend much since the man's natural vitality took care of the rest.

Even though his cultivation got crippled, he still had the body of a core formation expert, which was majorly the main reason he survived this long even after being plunged into the Yin-rich lake and having a cold yin injury himself.

"W..h..y d...l.....d y..o..u s...a...v...e me? You..... should ...have..... let.... me die?" a weary cracked emotionally devoid voice came from the man who had at some point opened his eyes that seemed just as soulless as his voice.

Chapter 207 Sudden Attack

"Seeing that you can talk, it seems you're feeling better," Yang Qing said as he used his palace sense to monitor his internal structure. His breathing though weak had a stable rhythm to it and some vitality was being restored throughout his body with every breath.

Yang Qing had managed to eliminate all existing sequela in his body, including the one that was left behind by the technique that shattered his dantian. With everything cleared up, it would only take a few hours before the man's body was restored to complete health.

Even if he would still have a crippled cultivation base, his body had already been cleansed and strengthened by the lightning tribulation he faced during his breakthrough to the core formation realm. The benefits that cleansing brought, were still there.

Other than losing all his ability to manipulate or store qi in his body and losing all chances of achieving a breakthrough in his realm, he still enjoyed some privileges of being a core formation expert like a strengthened body that still had the vitality and conditioning of a core formation expert.

Everything from his skin down to his internal organs had the sturdiness of a sky-grade artifact and his body's own reflexes guaranteed he could still hold his own against a peak-stage foundation establishment expert and even some first-stage core formation experts that had weak foundations and accumulations.

In addition to the body's base strength, he still had a core formation expert's life expectancy since the life expectancy of a cultivator was tied to the world's fundamental dao rules and not whether his dantian was intact or not. The only reason those with broken dantian usually lived shorter lives was because of the internal injuries that came with the dantian getting shattered. As long as one resolved them, even with a shattered dantian, one could live to the end of the lifespan they had when they still had their dantian intact.

The man Yang Qing just saved, based on his preliminary estimates, was someone who had reached the middle stages of the core formation realm. While Yang Qing couldn't tell what type of core he had, with the knowledge pool he built from his clan's specialty on the body refining stage, he could tell that the man had achieved a gold body in his body refining stage. That coupled together with his cultivation base, gave the man a base lifespan of 4,000 years. Even without using the heart stone steele, Yang Qing could tell that the man had atleast 3,000 years left in his lifespan.

He couldn't help but wonder what pushed a person like him to this point. With the effort he clearly put to reach where he was, taking his life and in the most gruesome of manners at that, couldn't have been done lightly.

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"Are you hungry?" Yang Qing politely asked.

The man gave no response and didn't seem like he had any intention of conversing with Yang Qing as he closed his eyes.

Yang Qing only smiled at his actions and decided to focus his attention elsewhere. With the man's life out of danger, he could now place his attention on the lake before him that had dense yin energy, a yin mist form Hornwort, a starlight crab that was at the core formation realm, and schools of redears and bluegills that had a white luster like the moon's radiance.

The lustre was most likely as a result of longtime exposure to the yin energy coming from the yin spirit meridian at the bottom of the lake. Any single one of them could freeze a qi formation expert solid, within three breaths if they tried to catch them, let alone eat them, but to Yang Qing they were delicious delights that would pair well with his spring water rice wine.

Yang Qing being honest to his needs waved his sleeves and a third of them were pulled out of the lake unaware their lives were about to be cut short. Yang Qing regretfully looked at the remaining redears and bluegills that were still in the lake as he shook his head in resolve against taking more.

He spared them out of a false sense of altruism though deluded, it was part of his maxim to always leave behind a few seedlings for continuity.

He always told himself it was his way of respecting nature, but in the real sense he only did what he did, because he never wanted to lack food to eat when he was on the road. It was always comforting to know one had food nests stashed all over the continent.

Yang Qing gingerly whistled as he carefully stored his catch in a bucket filled with blue-green water. He had left the bucket unattended as he swaggered into the lake but seemingly realizing something, he went back, grabbed the bucket, and threw a look of disdain, Ellie's way.

"No one can be trusted," Yang Qing mumbled in reproach as he calmly made his way into the middle of the lake where the yin mist form hornwort was located along with the starlight crab.

"Ellie, make sure to keep a close eye on him," Yang Qing coldly said, halting Ellie in her steps who was well on her way to grab the remaining redears and bluegills in the water.

Seeing Yang Qing's threatening look, she could only begrudgingly agree as she lowered her head in defeat.

"Mmph, how dare you have designs on what I Yang Qing have decided to spare," Yang Qing righteously thought as he widened his gait sauntering off into the depths of the lake. The lake's water seemed like it was giving way to him with every step he took.

It didn't take him long to reach the yin mist form Hawthorne's location. The starlight crab that was right next to it, menacingly raised its claws the moment it sensed Yang Qing's presence.

It was small in stature, about palm-sized, and had a blindingly white carapace that had a faint golden radiance to it. The source of that golden radiance was minuscule golden motes of light spread all around its body. Those motes of light resembled stars.

"There, there, little one. I'm not here to steal your treasure, I just want to take a look at the ground below it," Yang Qing gently transmitted his thoughts to the starlight crab in an attempt to coax it. However his attempt seemed to have fallen on deaf ears because the starlight crab immediately attacked him the moment he crossed the hundred-meter mark to the yin mist form Hawthorne.

It charged with fierce momentum as it swung its claw in an upward motion. Dozens of thin wavelike golden streaks were produced from its swinging motion. The streaks had a ferocious sharpness to them, that they even seemed to cleave the water into pin sized droplets as they made their way to Yang Qing. Its speed was nothing to scoff at either, as they crossed the hundred-meter gap between Yang Qing and the starlight crab in milliseconds, to the point it seemed like they had been teleported from the starlight crab to Yang Qing's position.

Chapter 208 Scheming With Starlight

"I just can't seem to catch a break today," Yang Qing tiredly muttered. Even in the face of the attack, his demeanor was still as nonchalant as it was, when he stepped into the place.

Boom!

Yang Qing casually flicked his finger at the incoming golden streaks, causing an explosion as every streak was simultaneously blown apart by the single flick. The flick's momentum didn't wane as it charged toward the starlight crab, barreling it into the lake's bedrock causing a massive shockwave that spread all around the lake.

When the dust cleared, the starlight crab could be seen deeply entrenched into the bedrock that had caved in from its point of impact creating a 500-meter small weblike crater with the starlight crab at the center of it.

Its golden radiance was dimly flickering almost as if it would go out any minute and it had minute cracks all over its carapace down to its claws.

"I'll get to you in a minute," Yang Qing calmly said as he made his way to the yin mist form hawthorne. Yang Qing had shielded it from the aftermath of his attack but even without his intervention it would have survived albeit with a few cuts here and there.

The yin mist form hawthorne was light green with a luster that made it seem almost lightly crystal-like. There was a hazy white mist surrounding it almost like a cloak. Even though the mist seemed harmless at a glance, it had the ability to freeze a core formation expert to their death.

Those who could survive contact with it were those whose bodies had yin attributes like the starlight crab or those with strong pure yang attribute and could forcefully negate the properties of the mist.

Yang Qing casually waved the mist away as he placed his hand on the soil beneath it with crystal white particles and blue-white mist attached. Even though the yin mist form hawthorne was a valuable herb especially when it came to strengthening those with yin-based physiques, which was more likely what the starlight crab needed it for, Yang Qing had zero interest in it.

His true interests lay in the spirit meridian below it.

"Mmmh, it seems to be right below, the eyeless ash finch is perfect for this," Yang Qing muttered as he formed a seal that created a pebble-sized grey finch that had feathers that looked to be cinderling with a dark grey flame around it. The place where its eyes should have been was hollow with a glyph gently floating in the cavity.

The moment the finch was fully formed it flew through the ground as a formless smoke. Yang Qing sat in a lotus position as he closed his eyes. A still silence ensued for the next five minutes with a half-conscious starlight crab fighting for dear life, a grieving Ellie up top, a man with a story, and Yang Qing whose eyes finally opened up with disappointment after the five minutes passed by.

"No jade yin liquid in this one...well that's a waste, it seems I beat up the crab for nothing," Yang Qing thought as he threw a look of pity in the direction of the crab.

Yang Qing full of remorse made his way to the starlight crab and dislodged it from the crack it was entrenched in. He used a bit of his qi to restore its injuries and carried it back to its favorite spot beneath the yin mist form hawthorne.

As if feeling that wasn't enough he took out a small violet oval-shaped object from his storage ring. The object was about the size of a thumb and one inch in diameter.

The starlight crab that had been making its peace with death a few seconds ago jumped in greedy delight as it charged toward the violet-colored object in Yang Qing's hands.

It seemed like it had forgotten its earlier lesson as it seemed to be charging up its golden streaks from before as it aimed at Yang Qing's hands.

"How are you this temperamental?" said Yang Qing as he chuckled. He caught the crab mid-attack and pinched it between his fingers dispelling the attack along with the carriage it had just brewed up.

Yang Qing wasn't sure but he could have sworn he heard an embarrassed chuckle coming from it that had a hint of fawning, which made him resize the starlight crab in a different light.

"I didn't imagine it," Yang Qing muttered as he noticed a glint in the starlight crab's eye which he was all too familiar with, how could he not when he had shown that same look countless times when Lei Weiyuan caught him in the midst of a scheme.

"Mmmh maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to take you with me, you could keep an eye on Ellie for me," Yang Qing said as he brought the starlight crab up to his eye level. The crab seemed like it had understood him as it repetitively nodded its head as it theatrically moved its claws.

"You're sure?" Yang Qing asked in surprise. The crab seemed to nod with even more enthusiasm as its gaze inadvertently fell on the violet egg-like object in Yang Qing's hands.

"So that's why?" Yang Qing thought as he dryly laughed at the crab's real motive showing.

"The yin mist form hawthorne isn't any worse compared to this," Yang Qing said to it as he pointed at the hawthorne.

The starlight crab threw Yang Qing a supercilious look filled with disdain almost as if to say

"What do you know, how can a mere herb be compared to that thing, I may be a crab but I'm no fool. I know the good stuff."

"Fine," Yang Qing chuckled as he threw the violet egg-shaped object to the starlight crab which joyously grabbed the object and pressed it against its mandibles with unconcealed greed.

Yang Qing wasn't too surprised with its reaction since the object was a wisdom pearl from a cyclone arc prawn that had just broken through to the palace realm. The insights contained in that pearl would save the starlight crab years of cultivation while also strengthening its foundations, once it started digesting all the information contained in that wisdom pearl.

As for the yin mist form hawthorne he had no use for it, so he decided to leave it there. Maybe it might gain spirituality or it may be a lucky encounter for some cultivator who stumbled onto the place like he did.

"Your name will be Starlight from now on and you'll be the caretaker of my pond. I have a thief that I need you to keep a regular eye on," said Yang Qing to the crab as he placed it on his shoulder. The crab nodded but Yang Qing had doubts if it even heard what he said.

"Doesn't matter, I have a new guard. As long as I train it up a bit, with the pearl and its bloodline it should be able to fend off Ellie in a couple of years.

Maybe this will push that gluttonous bird to pay more attention to her cultivation," Yang Qing thought as a scheming look flashed in his eyes.

Chapter 209 Ma Yuan

Ellie had a look of surprise when she saw the Starlight crab parched up on Yang Qing's shoulder. Despite its tiny size, its white shiny lustre coupled with its golden radiance made it eye-catching. Its look soon turned from surprise to unveiled greed.

The Starlight crab was pulled out of its euphoric state when it suddenly sensed a dangerous aura locking on to it. On reflex, it shielded the wisdom pearl of the cyclone arc prawn using one of its claws, as it used the other in preparation for an attack.

On seeing Ellie's unconcealed greed, it firmly clasped the wisdom pearl in between its claws as the other claw grew with a deep golden glow surrounding it as if charging up for an attack. The starlight crab seemed to have misunderstood Ellie's target and thought she was after the wisdom pearl in its possession.

Even if Ellie was multiple levels stronger than it, it was determined to fight back. It had suffered a ruthless beating for the pearl, there was no way it was going to hand it out without a fight. It was determined to fight to the bitter end.

"Is it brave or just recklessly stupid?" Yang Qing wondered as his gaze fell on the starlight crab that was just at the brink of charging a preemptive strike on Ellie.

"I think rather than increasing its strength, based on how it does things, I should help it increase its ability to take a beating. Otherwise, with its strike-first personality, it will definitely die prematurely before it's even able to be a competent pond guard.

Though if it does die, it's meat..slurp..no no no, starlight is my guard, a comrade...slurpbut what if....no , no ...Yang Qing focus, focus...Ellie getting beaten, Ellie getting beaten...Your pond being full....Ellie getting beaten..."

Yang Qing repetitively muttered 'Ellie getting beaten' like a mantra for almost a minute before he finally stopped when some clarity returned to his eyes. It was in good time too because Starlight had already leaped off his shoulders, charging straight at Ellie who had a mocking eager gaze on her.

"Stop it you two," Yang Qing said as he pulled back the Starlight crab that was already in midair. The crab was still reeling its claws but it didn't take long for it to recover from its combative state. As for Ellie, she did what she did best, which was lower her head in fake submission and remorse whilst cooking up something in her head that she will definitely pull at a later time.

Yang Qing could only sigh at this. Before the starlight crab grew strong, he would have to protect it from Ellie which would be another added chore in addition to ensuring Ellie didn't steal from him.

"Maybe I should have her stay at Yi Jie's abode in the meantime. She is always well-behaved around him for some reason," Yang Qing tentatively thought, increasingly feeling that this was his best play. Otherwise, with his upcoming schedules, he would barely have any time to rest, let alone play mediator between two reckless spirit beasts.

Yang Qing decided to push the matter to the back of his head and focus on the most important task, grilling the redeclars and bluegills that he had caught from the lake.

He quickly got to work as he expertly gutted them, cleaned their innards with the spring water rice wine, and then stuffed some herbs, onions, and other condiments in that space. He then proceeded to slowly roast them over a gentle white flame he had produced.

Due to their nature as yin-based spirit beasts, they were extremely sensitive to flames. Any misstep in temperature control and the whole meat would disintegrate into ash. Yang Qing used his palace sense to make sure he smoothly controlled the flames as he evenly spread it around the fish's body. After twenty minutes of slow, gentle, all-around burn, all the fish he had on hand were beautifully roasted.

They had a golden hue to their skins and produced a waft of smoke that was mouthwatering. All party members present, except for Starlight, were affected by the smell. Yang Qing and Ellie had glittering eyes with an accompaniment of drool, while the man who had firmed himself to continue acting like a corpse, had his nose involuntary move a few times before he finally opened his eyes and directed it towards the perfectly roasted fish Yang Qing had lined up over a few large plates.

As for Starlight, the fish might have well-been dung compared to the pearl it was currently making crab noises to. Everything else seemed to pale in comparison to the pearl.

"I may not be a match for the chefs at the Thousand Flavors restaurant and the like but this isn't too shabby If I do say so myself," said Yang Qing as he smugly admired his work.

He sprinkled a few more condiments on it that produced a sizzling sound as they burned from the heat coming from the roasted fish.

"Now it's done," Yang Qing said with a smile as he poured himself a cup of the spring water rice wine.

"Ellie you get five, Starlight you get...well forget about it."

Yang Qing decided against giving Starlight anything when he saw the look of disdain he got from it before it hurriedly returned its gaze to the pearl.

"Ellie you get seven then.... and wipe that 'you're unfair' look off your face or I will reduce it to two."

Yang Qing calmly berated Ellie once he noticed she was about to complain about the distribution. If Starlight had accepted Yang Qing's offer, he would have received five just like Ellie. Ellie in typical Ellie fashion had expected to get the lion's share of Starlight's bit. She expected to receive three or four with Yang Qing getting one or two.

She thought it was only fair, since she was the kite here and fish was like the primary food for any kite. Out of principle, she deserved the biggest share and she also had those fake wounds to heal. In her mind she had every justification to get more but all that was shelved the moment Yang Qing threw a threatening look at her.

"Just you wait, Yang. A thousand years isn't too long for a kite to get its revenge," Ellie vengefully thought as she did her best to conceal her true thoughts. Too bad she never how horrible she was at it. Her internal thoughts were as clear as day to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing decided to ignore her as he would deal with her like he always did. Nothing a swift punch to the head couldn't fix. When the time came, he would give her a generous helping of it.

"What about you? Still going to pretend to be dead or are you going to join me? They are really good and I have good wine to go along with it. If you still want to take your life, you can do so after you've filled your stomach," Yang Qing said as he placed aside a plate that had seven roasted fish in it.

The man was still silent as he cast a gaze in Yang Qing's direction. He still didn't say anything as he had this forlorn look to him. Even though he seemed to be looking at Yang Qing, his mind seemed to be elsewhere.

A few minutes elapsed like that without him saying anything and his gaze fixed on the area Yang Qing stood.

Yang Qing sighed at this as he set aside his plate and placed a wine urn filled with spring water rice wine, next to it.

He gave Ellie her share who swiftly grabbed it and disappeared off to the other side of the lake as if afraid Yang Qing would steal from her.

Yang Qing calmly sat down and picked a roasted fish from his share. As the chef and the fisherman, it was only reasonable for him to have a bit more compared to the rest. He had ten, no eleven... since he took the extra fish left over when he evenly split Starlight's share between Ellie and the man stuck in a gaze.

A tranquil silence engulfed the place as Yang Qing and Ellie enjoyed their fish in separate corners, while Starlight had finally gotten over its earlier excitement and had begun refining the wisdom pearl.

As for the crippled core formation expert, he had at some gotten up and was seated in a lotus position with his gaze still trained on where Yang Qing stood when he made his offer to him.

"Ruo'er would have loved this," the man suddenly said as he got up and walked towards Yang Qing in slow weak steps.

Yang Qing didn't say anything as he continued to calmly enjoy his drink and meal.

"Fellow daoist, forgive me for my earlier rudeness, I would like to thank you for saving my life. Despite my intent, it was rude of me to make that statement when you showed me kindness.

For that, I Ma Yuan I'm deeply sorry for my shameful behavior and thankful for the concern and help you showed to a complete stranger such as myself. I have nothing else to offer other than my bow, I hope you don't take offense," the man said in a gentle stable tone that didn't seem to match his weakened state.

Though he struggled with it, he was still able to give Yang Qing a ninety-degree bow. Yang Qing made no move to stop him, as any interference by him would have likely had a negative effect. The bow may not seem like much but to that man, that bow seemed like it was his entire possession and self-worth. The only thing he had on him worth giving, and denying him that, would be shattering whatever little he had left to him.

Yang Qing cupped his fists in acknowledgment as he slid over the plate he had set aside for him along with the wine urn.

"Many thanks for the offer," Ma Yuan said as he slowly sat down and grabbed one of the fish on his plate. He gave it a long stare before he took a bite of it.

Chapter 210 Yang Qing's Offer

Ma Yuan and Yang Qing didn't exchange any other words from the moment Ma Yuan sat down. They sat there, eating and drinking in silence. Close to half an hour passed by like that, with not a peep out of the two. They seemed to meld into the silence of the place. Even their eating seemed muffled.

The only person or creature out of place was Ellie. She had finished all her fish at some point and flew over to try and score some from Ma Yuan using the most pitiful look she could muster. She didn't try to pull the move on Yang Qing as she knew the person all too well. All she'd get for her efforts was a good painful flick to the head.

Her analysis and efforts paid off because Ma Yuan gave her three of his fish and kept three for himself. Yang Qing played a bystander in all these as his entire being was focused on eating. The taste was just as he expected, if not more. The meat was packed with flavor from the herbs and spices he used, while its texture was so tender that it broke down by itself the moment he took a simple bite.

There was also a mellow refreshing coolness to the meat which, Yang Qing attributed to the Yin nature of the meat.

He had planned to save some for next time, but with every bite, that plan seemed like an impossible task to him. The pairing of the rears, bluegills, and the spring water rice wine was just too good to stop midway. In thirty minutes, he had eaten through all his share. The only thing that remained unfinished was the wine, which even if he devoted himself to drinking nonstop for a week, he would still not be able to finish.

Even though the gourd he used to store the spring water rice wine in, looked normal sized, about a few inches tall and wide, its internal size was completely different. If he wanted to, he could store all the water within his 1-acre pond and still leave some room in it. He had a few barrels worth of spring water rice wine stored in it. His casual drinking on the flight over barely made a dent in it.

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When they had all finished their meals, another awkward silence ensued. The awkwardness was mostly on Ma Yuan's part. He had been grumbling about dying half an hour ago and Yang Qing even told him he could do it after his meal. With the meal finished, he felt a bit embarrassed about what to do next. The statement he made earlier felt like a noose to him now.

He was still tormented by the demons that pushed him into attempting to take his life over a month ago, but now he felt if he still went through with it, it would be a slap in the face, to Yang Qing.

The brief moment of silence when they were eating also gave him a rare opportunity to have a clear mind, free of the torment and nightmare he had been enduring for the past few years. Even though he was still as hopeless as before, some part of him still wanted to keep going. At some point during his torment-filled years, without even realizing it, he got swallowed whole by his grief and regrets to the point it made him forget himself along with the promise he made. The brief clarity he got during the meal helped him remember the promise he made seven years ago.

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"Fellow daoist..." just as Ma Yuan was about to give his thanks and find the right words to break the awkwardness he felt, Yang Qing interrupted him mid-sentence.

"Just call me Yang Qing." Yang Qing said as he smiled.

"Thank you, brother Yang Qing, once more for saving my life and for sharing your meal with me.

That brief respite helped me more than you know. It pulled me out of a fog. It's been a while since I haven't felt like I'm drowning. Thank you truly and about before..." said Ma Yuan as he scratched the back of his head with a smile of embarrassment showing on his face.

"Ma Yuan, how about you join me in my travels?" Yang Qing suddenly asked as he downed the remaining wine in his urn.

Ma Yuan was caught off guard by the suggestion that he didn't know how to respond.

"Excuse me?" he asked, still baffled by Yang Qing's sudden suggestion.

"From your eyes, I can tell, you don't have as much intent to take your life now as you did before. There's nothing much you're doing here, why not join me on my travels? It's just for two days and the change of scenery could do you some good.

After the two days are up, we can go our separate ways. Think of it as me easing my conscience. I would feel uneasy if I left you by yourself considering the situation I found you in. Having you with me for a few days will at the very least help assuage my worries when we go our separate ways, after." Yang Qing patiently explained as he cast a solemn gaze at Ma Yuan.

"We don't need to talk about anything, we can just do what we did before and enjoy the silence but if you feel the need to unburden yourself, I'm willing to lend an ear but it's also okay if you don't. You can treat this as a spontaneous trip around the continent," Yang Qing added when he saw Ma Yuan show a hesitant look.

His statement seemed to have had an effect, as Ma Yuan's expression seemed to ease a bit though not by much. After a few minutes of wrestling with the suggestion, Ma Yuan finally came to a decision.

"I'll come only if you promise to share more of that wine we had," Ma Yuan said, trying to make a joke to ease his awkwardness.

"There's more than enough to spare, brother Ma Yuan," Yang Qing said as he smiled.

Yang Qing internally had a sigh of relief from being spared the chance to enact his worst-case scenario. He had every intention of bringing Ma Yuan with him either willingly or through force. With the effort he put into saving him, despite Ma Yuan's current look, Yang Qing wouldn't be at ease leaving him by himself. He also had a rather good impression of him.