

Daily life 651

Chapter 651 Price Of Greed (1)

The four people standing beside Luo Meili all turned when they heard Yang Qing's voice.

On seeing Yang Qing, they all had varying reactions but the one commonality among them was surprise. Surprise that such a young man was the temporary Branch Chief of the Deer Mountain Branch.

They quickly came out of their stupors as they said,

"Greetings, Branch Chief.."

"Greetings.." Yang Qing said as he nodded politely at the four cultivators while looking quizzically at Luo Meili with a gaze that seemed to be asking who the four were.

Luo Meili's response was a slightly inclined head that motioned that she would explain everything once they were inside.

Following her lead, the group made its way into the Branch.

The four froze solid immediately after passing through the protective barrier of the branch and got hit by the richness and grandeur of the branch.

Spiritual qi so dense and pure that just by standing there, they could feel a subtle transformation of their bodies.

The eyes of the four cultivators were wide-eyed as they felt like they had been transported to another realm.

Other than the spiritual qi, the place was filled with a sense of majesty and mystique from the colorful mist floating around the branch, the flowing river that seemed to carry a sense of calming effect, the beautifully crafted sculptures that seemed almost lifelike, the garden that was a mix of wild and well structured that was filled with thousands of spiritual plants of which more than half they had never seen, but from the energy waves the plants released, they knew it had to be precious.

"Is this real?!" asked one of the cultivators in stupefaction as his eyes threatened to pop out of their sockets.

"It is.." Yang Qing said as he gently patted the cultivator's back.

He had always been a slightly (more than slightly) vain person. Among the many reasons he joined the Order, other than for safety, was to have bragging rights.

The awe factor evoked by those who were not members when they saw the opulence of a place he was a part of.

He always felt a refreshing sense of smugness about it.

"Yes, Yes, soak in the grandeur of my home. Amazing, isn't it?" he would always think every time a reaction similar to what the four were showing would happen.

Seeing how shocked they were, he was even tempted to give them a tour of the place and destroy their perceptions and imaginations further.

"Would they even remember their names at the end of it.." he wondered with a sense of cheekiness.

Just as he was lost in his gleeful schemes, he felt a gaze on him, and when he looked up it was Luo Meili shaking her head with a wry smile.

She seemed to have guessed his thoughts and Yang Qing instead of showing some modicum of shame or self-reproach, raised his gait slightly and widened his steps with a sense of peacock pompousness within him.

"Meili, oh Meili, you have much to learn. It's criminal not to brag about it. My bragging is my way of showing respect and appreciation to the craftsmen who designed this place.

It's the least I can do.." Yang Qing thought as he waved the flag of righteousness.

Ignoring Yang Qing's deluded tactics that the four guests completely missed because of how out of it they were, as the only sane person in the group, Luo Meili calmly led them to the branch's courtroom.

Once in the courtroom, the four cultivators seemed to have cooled down, albeit slightly as their looks quickly turned from overwhelming shock to sighs of dejection.

Yang Qing wasn't surprised, as it was something that he had seen over and over, especially among cultivators who had some background and some ambition within them.lights

Seeing such a scene was likely an eye-opener giving them insight on what they had to scale to reach those heights they constantly envisioned in their minds.

Some cultivators, for example, a pride of their clan, a generational talent the likes of which their clan hasn't seen in over 1,000 years, said cultivator riding the high of being a standout genius would believe themselves to be sons of destiny and wearing that mantle they would lift their clan to the heavens.

When immortals ascend, even their chickens and dogs ascend with them.

However, those cultivators, truly have no idea how high the heavens are and what it would take to even take a single step toward it. Stepping into a place like the Order gives them a picture of what it is they're chasing after and most eventually lose the drive after and wear the same look of dejection that the four cultivators currently wore.

A newborn calf is unafraid of tigers until it slowly grows and realizes how terrifying they are.

Yang Qing ignoring the shock of the four, walked to his podium with Luo Meili in tow, who took a seat in one of the seats next to the judge's seat.

"I take it's a malpractice case?" asked Yang Qing via a secret voice transmission.

"Yes.." Luo Meili said as she nodded in response.

"Just these ones, or there are others?"

"There may be others, Su Jinjing is following up on that as she follows the trail of the culprit. It shouldn't be long now.."

"Hopefully it isn't more complicated than it seems.." Yang Qing said as he massaged his temples.

Yang Qing straightened his posture as his gaze fell on the four cultivators.

"My name is Yang Qing and I am the temporary Branch Chief of this branch. The fact that you are here before me, should mean you have a grievance against someone.

As per my duties as Branch Chief, it's my job to listen to those grievances and give a fair verdict on them, which I will try to do.

I am sure my colleague, Luo Meili has already explained what is expected of you. For redundancy's sake, i will reiterate what she has likely already informed you.

From the moment you walked through those doors, you became subject to the articles and laws governing the Order.

Whatever judgment, I come to, you will all have to adhere to it, and should you choose not to, you will be subject to the penalties associated with said defiance.

If you want to walk away, the moment is now. If you have any doubts and don't wish to go along with the case, the moment is now.

On my authority, as the leading authority in this case, I will allow it. Does anyone have a change of heart and wish to leave?" Yang Qing solemnly said as he eyed the four cultivators.

A few inadvertently took gulps of fear when they saw Yang Qing's whole demeanor suddenly transform.

"I do not.."

"I wish to go along with it.."

"So do i.."

"Me too.."

"Good, then let the case begin.." Yang Qing said with a gentle smile as he reigned in his presence.

Chapter 652 Price Of Greed (2)

"Okay then, we will start from my left going right. You will give your background and a clear, concise, and true account of events as you experienced them.

Do not deviate from the truth or exaggerate on it. I will know. Now would you please.." Yang Qing said as he pointed at the cultivator at the far left.

The cultivator in question was a lady wearing plain black robes who looked to be in her mid-thirties at the eighth stage of the core formation realm.

She had black hair neatly tied in a ponytail without a strand out of place. She had a presence about her that made one feel like they were looking at a formless sword that would shape itself depending on what was around it.

In terms of beauty, even though, she wasn't close to Luo Meili, or Meifeng, no one would say she wasn't beautiful especially her big limpid black eyes that had a mesmerizing quality to them. It was sometimes sharp, like a sword revealing its edge and it was sometimes gentle.

"My name is Xin Zephyr from the Xin clan in the Deer Mountain Range. I am an elder of my clan.." said the black-robed lady.

Yang Qing knowing he would be sent to the Deer Mountain Range had researched all the organizations that inhabited said place, which he supplemented with the information the previous branch chief had in his office.

The Xin clan was a rank 4 clan and was one of the high-ranking organizations within the Deer Mountain Range but only when it came to human organizations. Their strength didn't amount to much if considered as a greater whole of the Deer Mountain Range, but when pitted against other human organizations, they were definitely up there.

The clan was a clan famed for its swordplay, the fog crane dance mist weave sword art a sword cultivation art blended with the obfuscation of mist. With every swing, a layer of mist and fog would be created which hindered not only the opponent's senses but also their movements.

Cultivators of the Xin clan were able to fight multiple enemies due to its ability to create a veiled fog that not only hindered the opponent's perception but it also hid the presence of the user.

It was because of said technique that the Xin family had been able to gain a foothold within the Deer Mountain Range. The art was greater in defense and containment than its attack prowess, which it sorely lacked.

"About 78 days ago, our clan leader got a missive from the Hua clan leader about sighting the tricolored white-eyed tortoise and a fine pine porcupine about to invade their territory.

We were not the only ones who got the missive as the Hua clan leader sent the same information to the Flowing Fist sect and the Moon Essence Cauldron sect.

Our four organizations have all formed a binding pact with one another. If one of us faces a situation we can't handle, we can request aid from the other three.lights

It's the only way we could survive in a place like this.." said Xin Zephyr with a bitter smile.

The other three cultivators seemed to share her sentiments as they shook their heads too.

From the moment he saw them, he had already discerned the background of the four cultivators, and the previous branch chief's report had notes that corroborated what the elder from the Xin family said about her clan's alliance with the other three organizations.

The four organizations lacked a palace realm to hold the helm and without a palace realm cultivator, surviving the Deer Mountain Range, a place known to have palace realm spirit beasts and countless that were in the core formation realm would prove to be a tall order for them.

They had to choose to settle in locations that were not too rich in resources so as not to draw the eyes of those powerful spirit beasts, and not only that they had to live in constant fear that they may be attacked within their grounds or outside when they went to scout for resources.

As rich as the Deer Mountain Range was in resources, the organizations that settled within the range were always cautious in how they operated and thus could not freely make use of it.

In the way they lived, they were no different than prisoners in the range. They were restricted in the areas they could operate and more often than not that area was restricted within their grounds or if they were to operate outside, it would have to be areas that were close to barren in resources, lest they attract the wrong kind of attention.

Few human-based organizations would want to settle in the Deer Mountain Range not unless they had the strength to survive there like the Deer Mountain Kingdom, or if they had no other option like the Clear Sword River Sect.

For those without the strength to survive in this place, there were only a few ways in which they could survive, one was to settle in a remote barren corner of the range like what the Clear Sword River Sect or they would form alliances like what the Xin clan and the other three organizations.

Through an alliance, they ensure the safety of each other whilst also maintaining autonomy. From what Yang Qing read, the alliance of the organizations of the Deer Mountain Range went much deeper than normal alliances.

They not only answered calls for help when they faced doom like what the Hua clan did, but they traded and shared resources, techniques, and information that may be of value to the other party.

Like for example a certain plant that would help cure a certain ailment that a member of the alliance may have, or a treasure that may help another member break a bottleneck.

They operated as one body comprised of different entities united by the common threat of the Deer Mountain Range towards their existence. That threat kept them loyal to one another and conversely each other's best interests.

Chapter 653 Price Of Greed (3)

Only such a tight bond could make three different organizations rush in support of one another, especially, when one of the foes was a tricolored white-eyed tortoise.

The tricolored white-eyed tortoise was a thorny opponent to deal with considering its abilities. It was skilled in four attributes namely; the poison attribute, the water attribute, the dark attribute, and lastly the yin attribute.

It was called tricolored because its shell had wavy pattern symbols that highlighted the three attributes; poison, water, and dark. Poison was purple, water was blue, and dark was black.

As for its yin attribute, the yin attribute was featured in its white eyes that didn't seem to have pupils. It looked blind but it was the farthest thing from it as those eyes could see the souls and attributes of living creatures, and to some extent even their strength.

This made it difficult to hide from. In addition, its dark attribute made it skilled at concealing itself, its water attribute granted it great defensive and regenerative properties, while it attacked primarily using

its poisonous attribute, though other than the yin attribute which was primarily used for surveillance, the other attributes could also be used in attacks if need be.

With the four attributes working in tandem, it was hard to overwhelm it even when working as a group.

Yang Qing could understand why the Hua clan called for help as just dealing with a tricolored white-eyed tortoise was hard enough let alone when you added another spirit beast in the mix.

Yang Qing's eyes shone inexplicably as his gaze fell on the four cultivators.

The tricolored white-eyed tortoise was a thorny opponent to deal with but its entire body could be considered an alchemical treasure trove, especially with its ability to manipulate four attributes and it didn't stop there.

Tricolored white-eyed tortoises when they reached the core formation realm, formed something at the center of their shell. A plant formed at the center of its shell. The plant was the four-patterned dreamshade luminaria.

The lunaria plant had different colored leaves that matched the coloring pattern of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise, with each color on the leaf corresponding to one of the four attributes the tortoise was familiar with.

The leaves contained a dense and pure energy reflective of the four attributes, and the more powerful the tricolored white-eyed tortoise was, the more leaves it would have.

Yang Qing knew those leaves could help strengthen a cultivator's body and deepen their understanding of the elements they were familiar with provided it matched up with one of the four attributes and if one had a high comprehension, affinity didn't even matter, as the cultivator could still make use of the leaves to gain a deeper understanding of the elements.

The plant was also a versatile and key ingredient in a wide range of potion and pill recipes. It could be used in restorative and detoxification recipes or strengthening recipes, but the one use Yang Qing thought was most tempting, was the Elemental enchanting attunement potion, a low-tier blue-grade potion.

The elemental enchanting attunement potion was a precious resource used by those at the peak of the core formation realm. The potion would help induce an epiphany for those cultivators, though it wasn't always guaranteed, and was dependent on a few factors one of which was the accumulations and foundations of said cultivator.

The key that led to the doors of the palace realm, was dao. A cultivator needed to grasp a form of dao to be able to take that step. lights

Grasping dao, any kind, was usually a function of opportunity, talent, and luck, for one to be able to catch a sighting.

There were those who expended little effort to grasp the Dao they were suited for. For example, Mao Yunru, even though she was in the core formation realm, she had already heard whispers of Dao when she established her pillars in the foundation establishment realm. The same thing happened to Yang Qing too, because of his peerless jade physique he already had insights into his dao before he had reached the core formation realm, it was just that his understanding wasn't at the level yet where he could make sense of it.

Then there were those who no matter how much they bitterly cultivated and sacrificed, to the point of even subjecting themselves to dangerous situations would fail to grasp it, or even if they do, it's insufficient to take them all the way through the door, and are stuck at the entrance and end up being half step palace realm experts all their lives.

Where natural talent isn't enough, external means to contemplate the Dao come into play like visiting areas suffused with the dao such as grottos, natural formations, of spirit veins that are at the rank of lesser dragon spirit veins and above, or other natural treasures of similar rank such as the nature dao stone that the mountain jade serpent was guarding.

A cultivator with wood or earth element affinity would be able to use the nature dao stone to find insights that would guide them into their dao path to the palace realm.

Outside of natural treasures filled with the presence of dao, being preached to by a seasoned domain-level expert with good foundations could help one grasp the fleeting presence of dao, as experts of such a level can draw the force of dao with their words.

Without the talent or the luck to grasp it yourself, what were the chances that you would find a natural treasure infused with the power of dao, or find a seasoned domain expert to preach to you?

Irony was, the places that had those things required talent and luck, to begin with. So for those with neither, their only choice of attempting to reach the palace realm was to use substandard means with a pitifully low success rate and even if by some stroke of luck they manage to reach the palace realm, they would be the weakest palace realm cultivators around, to the point that they would likely lose to a quasi palace realm cultivator with decent foundations.

One of those substandard means was the elemental enchanting attunement potion. The potion is used in the hopes of triggering an epiphany or burst of insight into a dao that touches on the four attributes, however, for the potion to even work, it needs another natural elemental-infused treasure, to be used alongside it. Without it, the potion is just another restorative potion with elemental strengthening properties.

Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder if the tricolored white-eyed tortoise appearing in the territory of the Hua Clan was accidental or deliberate.

He increasingly felt it was likely to be the latter and if it was the latter, were the other three organizations they were in alliance with, privy to said plan?

Even though the alliances within the Deer Mountain Range were stronger than most, there were things that could put a strain on the relationship and one of them was the appearance of a palace realm cultivator in an alliance that didn't have one.

The whole dynamic changes, and the equal partnership and cooperation changes to a subservient and subordinate one.

Would the Xin Clan, the Flowing Fist Sect, or the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect agree to it? The only reason Yang Qing could think of them agreeing to it was if they were facing an existential crisis that risked their survival and they had no option but to support one of them.

Chapter 654 Price Of Greed (4)

When his thoughts reached this point, Yang Qing couldn't help but throw an inquisitive look toward Luo Meili.

"Did something big happen to these four organizations over the past few months?" asked Yang Qing via a secret voiceless transmission.

"Other than the few skirmishes they have against some of the spirit beasts that stumble into their territories, there has been nothing, but I did hear something which Su Jinjing is working on confirming as we speak.

There's a rumor floating around that the Deer Mountain Kingdom will open its doors to any organization around the range that manages to have a palace realm expert at the helm.

The one that does will be given one of the frontier territories within the kingdom and will receive support to settle down and if they want to, an aristocratic title to go with it..."

On hearing Luo Meili's reply, Yang Qing couldn't help but have a small frown.

"Is it confirmed who made the offer?" asked Yang Qing.

The Deer Mountain Kingdom despite not having full control over the range, the territory within their Kingdom was still a substantial amount, so they had a lot of territory to spare. However, in all this while, they never made an offer like the one Luo Meili said.

They did invite talents to settle in their kingdom over the years to boost their numbers and strength but they never invited a whole organization within their lands and for good reason too, one of which was the delicate state of affairs between the royal family and the aristocratic clans.

Neither side could risk adding unknowns to the equation and the only way that stance would change was if they were facing a situation that made them desperate enough that they needed the manpower.

Yang Qing's eyes couldn't help but constrict as the image of the obsidian serpent and the fire adler bear appeared in his mind.

Those two were potent enough to make the kingdom desperate to open its doors to outside organizations and why they set a palace realm entry threshold.

But if it was true, that fact opened up a lot of webs, one of which was someone in the kingdom clearly knew about the existence of the obsidian serpents months in advance, and was making preparations, or which Yang Qing wasn't sure if was just him being paranoid, but when he found out about the state of the king's grandfather, he wondered to himself, if the other major families found out about it, how would they react to said news.

Of the couple of scenarios he thought up, one of the measures was to gather as much help and strength as you can and strike the royal family.

What if the offer, was geared toward that direction? Some part of him hoped it was true because he would now have a thread to follow that may or may not lead him to the person who colluded with the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate.

However, everything was just conjecture at this point and the rumor of the offer circulating had not been verified yet.

But if it was true, then such an offer would be tempting enough to make the four organizations willingly support one of them to reach the palace realm even if it would potentially leave them subordinated to that figure.

Living in Deer Mountain Kingdom, even a frontier territory at that was bound to be a thousand times better than their current state. Whether it be in terms of resources or the sense of safety, belonging, and peace of mind that came with knowing they were within the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

Pushing the thoughts aside, Yang Qing focused back on the rest of Xin Zephyr's testimony.

"On receiving notice of the attack, my clan dispatched me as I was the only senior most figure of the clan that was available on such short notice. Considering who we were dealing with I couldn't risk inviting more people, especially ones who had not reached the late stages of the core formation realm.

Both the tricolored white-eyed tortoise and the red pine flame porcupine were in the sixth stage of the core formation realm. We couldn't risk having anyone weaker than the seventh stage.

I met up with fellow daoist Ling Qi of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect, fellow daoist Wu Shen of the Flowing Fist Sect, and fellow daoist Hua Ying from the Hua Clan, together we encircled the tricolored white-eyed tortoise while the rest of the Hua Clan handled the red pine flamed porcupine.." Elder Xin Zephyr said as he pointed to the other cultivators next to her.lights

Ling Qi was a handsome man with short wavy brown hair and eyes and looked to be in his late thirties. He didn't look like a person who cared much about his appearance as his robe still wreaked of herbs and one could see smudges and singe marks on it. Just like Xin Zephyr, he was at the eighth stage of the core formation realm.

Wu Shen was a middle-aged man with flowing dark blue hair and even though his sect, the Flowing Fist Sect was famous for having powerful bodies to match their fist techniques, he looked more like a weak scholar. He had smooth jade skin and his body was just toned enough not to be called thin.

However, from the four cultivators that stood before him, Yang Qing could tell that Wu Shen was the most powerful of the group. What made him stand out to Yang Qing despite having an eighth-stage core formation cultivation base like the rest, was Yang Qing could sense an embryonic form of fist intent forming within him. It was an ephemeral supple force swirling around his entire body.

Lastly, Hua Ying was a female cultivator who looked to be in her late thirties, with a simple look and long curly hazelnut hair. Her eyes swirled with a nebulous power, it was like staring at the eye of a tornado. There was a gravitational power within them.

Yang Qing could tell the effect had something to do with her bloodline and the cultivation art she cultivated which had dark attributes to them. She had the highest cultivation base, which was at the ninth stage of the core formation realm.

"After meeting up we went after the tricolored white-eyed tortoise and managed to corner it. Even if we were stronger than it, the battle was anything but easy, and it would have made a short work of us if it had not been for the detoxifying measures of fellow daoist Ling Qi.." said Elder Xin Zephyr.

"I hardly contributed much, it was all of you who had to face it straight on while I lurked at the back.." answered the handsome young man with a slovenly appearance.

Xin Zephyr being mindful of where she was continued with her testimony.

"After fighting for five hours, we were close to defeating the tricolored white-eyed tortoise only to find out it had been holding back its cultivation base. It jumped from the sixth stage to the peak of the seventh stage and counter-attacked.

We were caught off guard and suffered heavy injuries from it. We were only lucky that the tortoise decided to be cautious and decided to leave rather than fight us to the death. It used the opportunity it had created with the surprise counter-attack to flee.

We were in no position to chase after it, let alone even protect ourselves. Luckily someone from the Hua Clan came and took us to their clan's grounds.

But unfortunately for us, the injuries we suffered were beyond the means of the healers of the Hua Clan. So, like we always have when we face injuries beyond our means to handle, we went to Daoist Ling Qi's sect for assistance since they are much more skilled in alchemy than the rest of us.

However, even they could not detoxify us as the tricolored white-eyed tortoise went to the extent of sacrificing a bit of its pure blood essence to poison us, making its attack more potent.

Our bodies were slowly being corroded from the inside. The poison invaded our blood, and our internal organs and was slowly making its way into our qi channels and meridians.

The poison seemed to have a life of its own, and any method we used to detoxify it was met with explosive retaliation.

For a month we suffered extreme torment. Our bodies suffered extreme chill while our organs felt like it was liquefying. Any qi we attempted to absorb left us feeling like like our qi channels and meridians had been sliced by a million knives.

Old wounds started reopening, while the new ones didn't close, which leaked black chilly liquid.

Next, we started losing our senses, the first to go was touch, then smell, then hearing, i don't know when taste went, because at the time i was in so much pain, i could barely think straight, but i do know i really panicked when my vision started fading.." Xin Zephyr said with a fearful expression, her hands stretched out with slight tremors appearing on them.

"When our sight started going, I could feel my soul slowly get drained like it was being smothered by an overwhelming darkness.

When the symptoms reached that point, where our deaths were close, our organizations used every and any means they could to try and get us healed, and eventually they managed to find someone, a wandering alchemist by the name of Long Zemin.."

Chapter 655 Price Of Greed (5)

Yang Qing detected a shift in mood in all four cultivators. They all had the same emotion boiling within them the moment Xin Zephyr uttered the name Long Zemin, and it was anger.

Yang Qing didn't find the reaction surprising as the moment he saw them, he could detect what had happened to their bodies.

It was the reason why before the start of the case he had asked Luo Meili if it was a malpractice case.

Xin Zephyr took a deep breath to try and calm herself.

"Long Zemin touted himself as a wandering alchemist. At the time because of our worsening conditions, we were all housed on the sect grounds of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

Even though they couldn't remove the poison of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise, they were better suited than my clan, the Hua Clan, or the Flowing Fist Sect, in containing or slowing down the venom's spread within our bodies.

It was there that Long Zemin found us. He presented himself as an alchemist touring the Deer Mountain Range in search of certain herbs.

During that search, he decided to pass by the doors of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect since it was well known for its alchemy practices within the alchemy circle of the Deer Mountain Range.

Long Zemin came to the sect to seek guidance in the areas he should avoid and which areas might have what he was looking for.

Ideally, considering the state of circumstances we are in, Long Zemin wouldn't have been given the time of day, however, as one of the elders was sending him off, he let it slip about our condition when he was explaining why they could not help him at the moment.

Long Zemin's cultivation was at the peak of the core formation realm. Even if the sect couldn't help him, they could not afford for it to look like they were dismissing him in any way, so the elder told him a bit of the reason why the sect couldn't help.

Long Zemin out of a sense of 'concern' inquired further about our condition.." Xin Zephyr said with her tone rife with mockery and sarcasm.

Wu Shen of the Flowing Fist Sect had a complicated mix of emotions in his eyes.

"The elder was hesitant at first, but Long Zemin managed to convince him to spill it out by mentioning he was a top-tier orange-grade herbologist and alchemist with some skills in poison detoxification, especially with yin-related ones.

The elder was still slightly hesitant at the time. Our states weren't improving and we had run out of ideas. Our skills were incapable of handling the toxin, our connections didn't prove to be much help as there was no one outside of our circle who knew anyone capable of handling the venom.

We had to be careful whom we approached lest we invite disaster because of our situation and with the resources we had on hand, we couldn't afford to get the services of a blue grade alchemist.

Long Zemin's appearance made the elder hesitant, wondering if maybe he could help with our predicament, but what pushed him over the edge was an identifying plaque he produced which showed he was a disciple of Shi Huan from the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion.

The elder may have not known who Shi Huan was but coming from an alchemical sect, he did know the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion.

Seeing the plaque, he hurriedly invited the vice sect master over to see if he could validate the veracity of said plaque..."

During the pause, Xin Zephyr showed an apologetic smile toward Ling Qi, who showed a defeated smile of his own that seemed to say, it's okay, you can say it.

A forlorn look appeared on Xin Zephyr's face as she said,

"Most of those who come to the Deer Mountain Range are usually running from something, or those with nowhere else to go to but here.

We lack the will, strength, connections, or foundations to survive outside of this place. Ironically, a place filled with terrifying powerful spirit beasts that would easily tear us to shreds is the place we feel most safe and comfortable.

At least with them, we know where we stand and their methods are direct, but out there, it's something different.

Sorry, I was rumbling.." Xin Zephyr said with an apologetic smile.

"It's okay.." Yang Qing softly said with a gentle smile.

Xin Zephyr nodded in gratitude as she said,

"We all know the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion, butwe don't really KNOW them..Our levels are too far apart for that both in status and distance.

As skilled as the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect is in alchemy, it's still not to the level that they'd be personally acquainted with someone from the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion.

No one in the sect, including the sect master could possibly verify the plaque did indeed belong to someone from the pavilion or who Shi Huan even was.

So the check was all but useless. All the vice sect master could glean from the plaque was it was made from azure serenity glow elder wood.

The quality of that material and our desperate situation worked together and made the vice sect master think that maybe Long Zemin might be from the pavilion and if he was, then he may very well be in a position to help us of our predicament.."

Xin Zephyr took a brief pause before she continued.

"Long Zemin offered to help in exchange for a few spiritual herbs here and there that were unique to the Deer Mountain Range.

Even though the spiritual herbs were precious, his request wasn't excessive, so all four organizations gave him about 48 spiritual plants that were at the grade of middle tier to the top tier of the sky rank.

Daoist Ling Qi may have the exact figure.

At the time we thought we had hit an enormous bargain because he was able to heal us all in just three weeks. lights

Our states improved drastically in those three weeks and though our bodies were not completely restored from the damage we suffered from the poisoning, the poison was no longer ravaging our insides down to our very soul.

Our organizations were ecstatic and even added some more herbs and even offered to guide him around the range, despite the risks involved.

I could remember how filled with gratitude I was for being delivered from the torment I had endured for a month.

Long Zemin would have told me he wanted to have a guide into the lair of a palace realm spirit beast and I wouldn't have batted an eye. That's how grateful I was.

I've lived 400 years in vain.." Xin Zephyr said as she shook her head.

"We thought he had cured us.. he may very well have, but he did something to our bodies, and we only realized it a month after he had left when our bodies were completely healed up.

The problem started when I started circulating my clan's cultivation art. Usually, it would leave me feeling refreshed and cleansed, and my body lighter and my perception slightly higher.

However, this time, it was barely even a minute in, the circulation left me panting, and light-headed and my body felt like a thousand fire ants were crawling around every qi channel and meridian.

I even vomited blood, when I tried to complete a circulation forcefully.

At the time, I thought maybe it was the remnant effects of being poisoned. So I took a break and decided to recuperate my body with meditation. Even meditation was affected as it left me dizzy and with a slight chill in my bones, which got extreme to the point that I felt that a slight breeze could shatter them within my muscles.

I couldn't cultivate or meditate and it's been three months now, and I still can't do either.

I had thought I was the only one, but I soon found out that Daoist Ling Qi, Daoist Wu Shen, and Daoist Hua Ying had experienced similar setbacks whenever they tried to cultivate, though the symptoms were different, they still experienced the same struggles.."

The other three nodded in support of Xin Zephyr's statement.

"With all of us having similar troubles and the only thing connecting us being the poison from the tricolored white-eyed tortoise, we assumed our troubles had something to do with its poison.

Even though we were rid of its poisons, its fangs were still in us somehow.

I had resigned myself at the time, as I thought to myself other than not being able to cultivate or meditate, I wasn't affected much anywhere, and my body wasn't in the same pain as I was when we got hit with the poison.

I could live without meditating or cultivating. It's not like I held great aspirations of reaching the palace realm anytime soon.

But.."

Xin Zephyr paused as she gnashed her teeth in anger.

"As we were looking into if there was any way to cure the symptoms we were having, one of the elders of the Hua Clan paid a visit to the Red Lilly Sect.

The sect is known for having gems and other minerals that help with meditation and cleansing the body. It doesn't have much effect when dealing with toxins, but when it comes to dealing with maladies of the mind, the Red Lilly Sect is one of the best.

It was when the elder went to consult them that he found out that one of the high elders of the Red Lilly Sect had gotten injured by a ghost blade mantis and got healed by someone called Long Zemin, a few months prior, and wouldn't you know, he experienced the same symptoms as us, and even with the Red Lilly Sect's measures they had been unable to solve it.

Said elder left with a few leading figures of the sect to try and find a solution outside the range.

When the Hua clan elder brought back the information, it brought doubts on whether our current predicament may have not been because of the tricolored white tortoise's poison.

I didn't want it to be true, but it was. We investigated the organizations around the range to try and see if there were cases similar to ours and the High Elder of the Red Lilly Sect, and there were.

We found records of cultivators here and there from the organizations around the Range with symptoms matching ours.

They had severe injuries and then a wandering cultivator healed them but they couldn't meditate or cultivate at all.

At that point, we knew it! Long Zemin did something to us under the guise of healing us.

We looked for him all over but couldn't find him anywhere within the Range, and as for confirming if he was someone from the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion..."

Xin Zephyr paused with a smile of embarrassment coloring her face.

"We couldn't very well go to their doors and ask if they had a member by the name of Long Zemin.... Even if let's say we were gutsy and reckless enough to do it.. if we found out he was a member, we wouldn't be able to confront him on it.

Even when we were searching for him within the Range, we were all hesitant. If we found him, then what?

If he denied it or refused to offer recompense for what he had done to us, how would we even deal with him? His peak core formation stage cultivation base aside, at the back of our minds, we kept asking ourselves if he really was a member of the Ocean Refining Crucible Sect, then we would have no option

but to swallow it and let it go and we would have had it not been suggested we try and seek help from the Order..."

Xin Zephyr clasped her hands together as she slightly bowed her head with a beseeching gaze as she said,

"We are not asking for much. It doesn't matter to me whether Long Zemin is a member of the Ocean Refining Cauldron Pavilion or not. My only request is for the Order to help us find Long Zemin and let him reverse what he has done to us nothing else.

I may have surrendered myself to the thought that I may never reach the palace realm and the core formation realm is as far as it gets, but my not reaching that level needs to be my choice, and Long Zemin has robbed me of that. I hope that the Order can give me that, no matter how silly it sounds. Please help us.."

Chapter 656 Price of greed (6)

"If the facts check, we will do all we can.." answered Yang Qing.

"It's all I ask.."Xin Zephyr said as she raised her head.

Yang Qing exchanged a glance with Luo Meili, who seemed to read the thoughts behind the glance as she nodded.

"Good.." thought Yang Qing.

Su Jinjing's absence meant she was more than likely confirming the story given by Xin Zephyr, especially when it touched on the identity of Long Zemin and whether he was a member of the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion or not.

From what Yang Qing knew about the Pavilion it was a rank 3 organization with five blue grade alchemists who other than being blue grade alchemists were also palace realm experts.

The five blue-grade alchemists started out as wandering alchemists with no backing. They peddled their trade wherever it took them, till finally, it landed them in a mysterious realm that seemed to belong to some long-forgotten alchemists of an unknown rank.

It was rumored that everything the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion was today or will ever be is tied to what they found within that mysterious realm.

From what Yang Qing knew, the name of the pavilion itself was born out of a treasure they found within that mysterious realm. It was said that the five alchemists found an artifact in the form of a crucible within that mysterious realm.

The crucible was rumored to have an effect that enabled alchemists to mix volatile ingredients with ease in the preparation phase before they mixed it in the cauldron. It not only worked with spiritual herbs but spiritual metals and minerals too, reducing the burden on the alchemists when mixing the different ingredients.

The crucible also had an ocean pearl that produced gentle qi that renewed and strengthened the alchemist's soul and spiritual essence, enabling them to brew potions and pills longer. This came in handy when dealing with complex recipes and ingredients.

With the crucible in hand along with other resources they likely harvested from the said mysterious realm, the five alchemists grew in strength and reputation, and in a few short 100 years, they graduated from a ragtag of wandering alchemists into founders of a top-tier alchemy organization with five blue grade alchemists, who were palace realm experts to boot.

Yang Qing did read that occasionally they would don their earlier identities as roaming alchemists. They would offer guidance, heal, or produce potions and pills for those they came across in need. Of course, they did it under disguise.

That tradition was something they continuously upheld and demanded of their members. Every member was required for at least three months every two years, to wander around the continent plying their trade and offering their services to whoever they came across, irrespective of background.

It was a tradition that garnered them a favorable reputation among the masses and other growing organizations, and even aspiring alchemists with a sense of justice and adventure in them

"Come to think of it, one of the instructors of herbology is acquainted with one of their founders, it should be Instructor Lu Bei if my memory serves me well. He was interested in their crucible because of his research into mineralogy and metallurgy of different spiritual minerals and metals.." wondered Yang Qing as he recalled an instructor from his first year at the Institute.

The instructor was a blue-grade herbologist with an interest in metallurgy and spiritual metals and minerals as they relate to herbology. He had the idea of using molten spiritual metals and minerals as fertilizer for his spiritual plants and see the changes that they would bring about.

Yang Qing knew about it because he had been enlisted in said experiments up until he graduated. The reason for his enlistment was his ability to promote the vitality of plants around him.

The pay wasn't bad for a student as he was given 2 merit points per day and he got to take home any leftover materials from the experiment. Yang Qing was able to occasionally afford to dine well at the various restaurants around the Order because of those scraps.

"If Su Jinjing doesn't find anything, maybe I can have him ask their founder if they know Long Zemin or Shi Huang.." thought Yang Qing as he brought his attention back to the case.

"Next should be you.." Yang Qing said, pointing to the middle-aged man next to Xin Zephyr.

"Thank you for the opportunity.." the middle-aged man said as he cupped his fists in both greeting and gratitude.

"My name is Wu Shen and I am the chief instructor and elder of the Flowing Fist Sect. Just like Xin Zephyr has said we met up close to three months ago to help the Hua Clan ward off the tricolored white-eyed tortoise as they dealt with the red pine flame porcupine.

We managed to stop the tricolored white-eyed tortoise, or so we thought before I did something I constantly warned the disciples of not doing, which is dropping your guard before the opponent is truly down.

In our complacency, we celebrated our victory too early which the tricolored white-eyed tortoise took full advantage of and turned the tables on us.

Had it been determined and willing to risk, we would likely not be here today.." said Wu Shen with a sigh of exasperation.

Yang Qing could understand why Wu Shen was hard on himself. The Instructors at the institute advocated for the same ideals when they trained them.

When you see an opponent, evaluate them well and even go as far as to overestimate their abilities even if they're a few levels weaker than you.

After evaluating them, decide what you want, whether is it to restrain them, take their lives, or run. You choose that which has the highest odds and once you decide, do not hesitate or hold back in the slightest because the opponent will not do so.

A blunder like what Wu Shen and the rest did, was something that would land them the worst torture of their lives from the Instructors until the lesson sunk in.

Chapter 657 Price Of Greed (7)

After recollecting himself, Wu Shen continued.

"After we got poisoned, as Daoist Xin explained, we were all transported to the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect for treatment.

Of our four organizations, and even in consideration of the organizations within the range as a whole, they were the only organizations we could trust to have a way to handle the issue.

But we underestimated how vindictive the tricolored white-eyed tortoise was. It may have not wanted to fight us to the death, but that didn't mean it would let things go just like that.

It sacrificed its blood essence ignoring the long period of weakness it would suffer because of it just to ensure we would have the most painful death possible.

The pain was like nothing I had ever experienced. Even getting cut by the ghost blade mantis didn't hurt as much.." Wu Shen said as he smiled bitterly.

"Our sect's core art grants us a certain level of defense against toxins and it also boosts our vitality and regenerative capabilities.

I have survived this long because of those qualities.

There have been moments where those attributes have been overwhelmed but never to this extent.

Whether it was regeneration, vitality, or a slight level of toxin immunity, all of it was rendered useless in front of the venom from the tricolored white-eyed tortoise.

The refined body I was so confident of in its defense and strength, started breaking down like dry cracked clay, and I was too helpless to stop it, and so was the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

The situation was hopeless and none of our organizations could do anything about it...that was until Long Zemin showed up.

I don't know what he did, or how he did it, but when he removed the toxin, it felt like my body had been submerged in a soothing hot pool filled with cleansing herbs that slowly knit my body to full health, washing away the pain and exhaustion I had endured.

A bit of my experience with the toxin was slightly different from what Daoist Xin Zephyr experienced.

For me, I felt like my whole body was submerged in the coldest block of ice that forms in the deepest part of the abyss, where no warmth could ever reach. That block of ice may have well been coated with the chill of death.

That chill seeped into every part of my body like a fog that carried the sharpness of a sword that had been sharpened for 10,000 years. I felt like every part of me was being sliced apart, inch by inch bringing with it a pain I never thought imaginable.

I am ashamed to say this, but I have never been welcoming of death or indifferent to it like other more renowned cultivators are when it comes to life and death, especially in sects just like ours that treat their bodies as refined weapons of slaughter.

Our sect has always been different, we value our lives too much.." Wu Shen said with a rueful smile.

Yang Qing's eyes glittered with a strange glow when he heard that statement.

"Our legacy art focuses on adaptability and endurance, and if you want to master our core art perfectly, your frame of mind needs to be in sync with the art itself and because of that, those who have achieved success with the art loves their lives too much.lights

We would never face death willingly if there was any other choice. However, for the first time in a long time, because of the pain I was in from that venom, I didn't want to adapt and find a way to survive.

I wanted that pain to end, and from the way things were going, my demise seemed like the only viable option to end it.

I broke, my spirit, and everything I grew up believing slowly shattered under that fog of pain, and Long Zemin's appearance was what kept me from the brink.

Removing that poison was like a tether that kept my soul from falling into the abyss.

However, just like Daoist Xin, I noticed changes whenever I cultivated our core art. The circulation of our art is based on movements. We need to move our bodies in a particular motion to be one with our art's movements.

The nimble fluid movements that I could do in a single breath felt laborious. Every movement made me feel like a mountain was tied to my legs, while my muscles had melted into a slimy substance, and if I tried to force it, they would rupture.

Meditation doesn't work either, every time I try, my mind feels foggy and at times it feels like a dam that has been overrun by a flood and is about to burst which results in a sharp piercing pain coming from my mental sea.

Just like Daoist Xin, I can't cultivate or meditate either no matter what means I try, they always end in the same way which is me bleeding from a part of my body accompanied by sharp pains..."

Chief Elder Wu Shen paused as he let out a sigh.

"I do hope the Order can help us find Long Zemin, so I can ask him what he did to me and if he can reverse what he did to my fellow Daoists..

But as for me...truth be told I find it hard to begrudge him for my current state. No matter how much I want to, I just can't seem to find it in myself to blame him, but instead what I have, even after knowing what he did..... is gratitude.." said Chief Elder Wu Shen.

"Wu Shen, how can you say that?! Because of what that bastard did, none of us can ever improve our cultivation base again! What he did is no different than crippling us!! He may have alleviated the torment we went through, but he got compensated for it, more than enough even, especially in helping him collect herbs in those dangerous territories.

Long Zemin cheated us and has essentially destroyed our lives!! He is no different than the tricolored white-eyed tortoise. Just as cunning and vindictive, at least with that damn tortoise, it was an enemy, unlike that bastard!!!" said Hua Ying with a vehement tone filled with displeasure.

Wu Shen sighed again with a sympathetic look as he said,

"That may be true Daoist Ying, but I don't know for me when he removed that toxin just as it was about to completely break me, I can't explain it, but I intrinsically felt like something precious had been protected, which had it broken, I would never get back.

I have no idea why or what that thing is, but intrinsically I feel that Long Zemin's act, no matter his intentions, helped me hold on to something vital to me, something as vital as my own life.

That is why I'm finding it hard to blame him..."

"Settle your nerves, Miss Hua Ying.."

Just as Hua Ying was about to have another outburst, Yang Qing's calm voice shook her soul, silencing her entire body.

Chapter 658 Price Of Greed (8)

"S..sorry.." Hua Ying meekly said with trembling in her pupils after feeling the pressure that had descended on her.

She felt like her entire body had been submerged into an ocean with her bearing its entire weight on her back.

The experience lasted just a millisecond but her heart was beating wildly with her hairs standing on end.

Whatever anger and agitation she had was erased in an instant.

The rest on noticing the sudden change, especially her paling perspiring skin couldn't help but look at Yang Qing warily.

They were reminded they were standing before a palace realm expert, and before a palace realm expert from one of the most powerful organizations in the continent at that.

"It's okay.." Yang Qing said with a soft sigh.

"I understand the agitation and the anger, but as I said earlier, each of you is to give an honest account of yourselves concerning the case, and Chief Elder Wu Shen has done that and so has Elder Xin Zephyr.

In as much as you had an almost similar experience, your thoughts and judgment on it, vary. For me to give a suitable verdict, I need as much information as I can, and your thoughts play a part in it.

Please keep that in mind.." Yang Qing added.

"I will and once again, I am sorry for my poor display.." Hua Ying said as she slightly lowered her head in apology.

Once she saw Yang Qing nod in acknowledgment of her apology, she turned toward Wu Shen.

"I am sorry Daoist Wu Shen for my outburst and taking the anger of my incompetence on you.." she said as she cupped her fists in apology.

"There's nothing to forgive, Daoist Ying. I understand your frustration well. Even if I am unable to blame Long Zemin for what he did, doesn't mean I don't have misgivings about what he did.

It's just what I'm thankful for is higher than what I blame him for. It is not me excusing what we did, and I'm sorry if my statement made it sound that way.." said Chief Elder Wu Shen.

After, the two cultivators slightly nodded their heads to each other as a show of acceptance of each other's apology.

Yang Qing's gaze lingered on Wu Shen slightly before it moved to Hua Ying, who would be the next to give her testimony.lights

Wu Shen didn't understand the true reason why he was grateful to Long Zemin, just an intuition that Long Zemin's interference helped him preserve something vital. But as for what that something vital was, he didn't have a clue.

And from the way Hua Ying reacted, she didn't either. The remaining two cultivators in Xin Zephyr and Ling Qi, were just as livid as Hua Ying when Wu Shen made his statement about being grateful, it's just that they both had the presence of mind to be aware of their setting and thus controlled themselves.

But they too, didn't understand Wu Shen's gratitude, but to Yang Qing, he could understand it perfectly, and should the time come that Wu Shen understands why, Yang Qing knew the level of gratitude he was feeling now would explode exponentially.

The reason for that was, whatever else Long Zemin may have done, his timely intervention helped protect Wu Shen's dao heart, which safeguarded his chance of ever reaching the palace realm and other stages after that.

That important thing that Wu Shen couldn't put a finger on, was his dao heart which had already budded within him, he just had no idea yet. And the torment the poison was causing him, started affecting his heart.

Yang Qing had a feeling his dao heart was tied to the ethos of their core cultivation art, which encourages them to value their lives like an operating fundamental rule, and when Wu Shen started entertaining thoughts that maybe death would be the best option instead of trying to stay alive or trusting in the qualities of his cultivation art, his heart formed cracks.

Whatever foundational beliefs he had built up from the moment he started cultivating the art and all the experiences he had up to that point, were slowly being torn apart, and had he truly given to despair, and his dao heart shattered, then it wouldn't have mattered if he got completely healed of the poison from the tricolored white eyed tortoise, he would never amount to much. His path ahead would be permanently shattered and not only that, even the budding fist intent within him would disappear completely.

Intents were born of one's dao heart and persistence. It was an art's soul living through one's understanding and body.

What Long Zemin did was no different than saving Wu Shen's future and if he ever manages to reach the palace realm, that favor becomes Long Zemin giving Wu Shen, a new lease on life.

"Seems like the core art of the Flowing Fist Sect might be a growing art.. and if it is, provided they get good talents, it wouldn't be long before this range houses another palace realm powerhouse.." muttered Yang Qing as his eyes shone with an unfathomable glitter as his gaze fell on Wu Shen.

Growing cultivation arts were similar to weapon spirits that needed to feed off their wielders to develop.

A growing art was like a big map that was mostly blank except for a few landmarks here and there. It would give you a rough idea of where a place was, but it would need the reader to find the route that led from one landmark to another and fill in the blank spaces in between those places. With every successful step forward more details would appear on the map, which would make plotting the next steps easier.

Growing arts were not limitless, they had a ceiling, but as far as Yang Qing knew, at the very least that ceiling was at the blue grade as every growing art had the essence of the dao in its framework for it to be one.

If the Flowing Fist Sect had one, then their potential was a notch above the rest. What Yang Qing didn't know was if they knew they had a growing art. He had his doubts.

"Maybe I should tell them and muddy the waters a bit. I could have them check in on the purifying light sparrow, the restoration oak tree, and the aurora azalea from time to time, lest someone absconds with them.."

Chapter 659 Price Of Greed (9)

"Miss Hua Ying, you can start whenever you're ready.." said Yang Qing as he motioned for Hua Ying who had already calmed down, though one could still see she was slightly unnerved by Yang Qing, despite Yang Qing's attempt to seem as unassuming as possible.

"I am a supreme elder of my clan, and when the red pine flame porcupine and the tricolored white-eyed tortoise made an appearance, I was the one deployed to handle the tricolored white-eyed tortoise.."

"Pardon me for a moment, but how many supreme elders do you have?" asked Yang Qing as he raised his palm in interjection.

"Four.." answered Hua Ying slightly baffled on why she was the one interrupted during her testimony.

Yang Qing as if reading her thoughts, smiled slightly as he said,

"The account of the fight with the tricolored white-eyed tortoise would be the same for all of you. The differences show up in the symptoms of the poisoning, and your accounts before you met up.

Since the attack happened within your territory and not theirs, I do have a few questions for you, that I would not have for them."

Hua Ying nodded as she said,

"If there is anything you wish to know, I will gladly provide the details.."

"Thank you for your cooperation..." Yang Qing said as he clasped his hands together and leaned forward in his podium.

"So of the four supreme elders, how do you rank against them?" he added.

"I am the second strongest. The highest is at the eleventh stage of the core formation realm, and the third and the fourth are both at the eighth and seventh stages respectively..." answered Hua Ying.

"Why were you the only one sent then? You're attacked by two spirit beasts and one of them despite being weaker than all of you, is notorious for its steady defenses and thorny abilities.

How come you were the only one sent, instead of sharing the burden with another supreme elder?

It is your territory being infringed upon after all.." asked Yang Qing.

"The first and third supreme elder went to deal with the red pine flame porcupine. It may not have the same level of defense as the tricolored white-eyed tortoise, but it was a dangerous opponent nonetheless and at the time we judged it to be a more dangerous opponent in comparison to the tricolored white-eyed tortoise.

It was in the eighth stage of the core formation realm and as you well know, fire pine flame porcupines are highly destructive, with a volatile temper. Once triggered, they would fight to the death, destroying everything in sight with its hardy flamed quills filled with flame poison.

Considering its abilities, we deemed it safer for me and my fellow daoist to handle the tricolored white-eyed tortoise while the first and third supreme elders handled the red pine flamed porcupine..." answered Hua Ying.

"What about the fourth supreme elder?"

"The fourth supreme elder was in charge of guarding our clan leader who is still in seclusion at the moment.

Whenever he is in seclusion, one supreme elder is in charge of protecting him. Ordinarily, when the two spirit beasts attacked, it should have been me guarding him, but considering the strength of the two spirit beasts, I was deployed while the fourth supreme elder took my place.."lights

"Okay...You can continue with your testimony.." Yang Qing said as he leaned back in his seat with an inscrutable expression.

"O..okay.." Hua Ying said with a slight unease as her pupils flickered slightly when she saw Yang Qing smile lightly as he leaned back comfortably in his seat.

Hua Ying went on to recount the events from her perspective. Her details on the clash against the tricolored white-eyed tortoise matched Xin Zephyr's and Wu Shen's statement on it. Which was mostly how they thought they were about to win and the tortoise revealed its hidden fangs by suddenly breaking through a minor realm and borrowing the momentum and surprise of that breakthrough to strike at the four of them, injuring them gravely.

Just as she was about to continue, to the events that happened after, Yang Qing interrupted.

"You don't have to answer this as it's purely curiosity on my part, but what happened to the red pine-flamed porcupine?"

"The first and third supreme elders managed to kill it. We used the contents of its body to fund the resources needed for our treatment.." answered Hua Ying.

Yang Qing nodded as he motioned for her to resume her testimony.

"Contents, huh...clever way to answer and be vague at the same time.." thought Yang Qing as he lightly drummed his index finger on the table with a playful smile on his face.

"After we got injured, my clan spared no resource to try and help us, but the venom was beyond our abilities to handle it.

We deferred to the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect, to see if they could come up with better means as they were more suited to it than us.

While they focused on trying to contain the poison, my clan, the Xin clan, and the Flowing Fist Sect, tried to find outside help from other organizations within the Range, and when that proved futile we expanded outwards, selling whatever valuables our organizations had in exchange for any information that may help us with the predicament we had..

But we grossly underestimated how terrifying the venom of a tricolored tortoise that had used its blood essence, truly is.

All the information and help we collected failed. None of it worked, and we were only left with one option, which was to hire a blue-grade alchemist, but we didn't have the connections or the resources that would enable us to hire one.

It was when we were at the end of our ropes, that Long Zemin appeared.."

Hua Ying paused as she took a deep breath to try and calm her emotions.

"By the time he arrived, my body and mind were in a mess. I felt like my whole body was submerged in never-ending darkness. However, this darkness wasn't like normal darkness that had silence and an abyssal chill to it.

This one made me feel like I was at the center of the earth's core, where all the heat was gathered. That heat burned every part of my body and I even felt my soul was slowly being melted away in the process. Most of my limbs had already started melting away leaving only bone, and even that was slowly disintegrating.

Thanks to Long Zemin, I got my body back.." Hua Ying said, her bitterness not hidden, despite the thanks.

"But in exchange for gaining my body back, I am unable to use my clan's bloodline abilities. I am thankful he restored my body, but I can't forgive him for stripping me of my abilities. It is no different from tearing me away from my entire lineage.

I feel a hollowness within me, that is even worse than the boiling pain I was subjected to. I don't care if Long Zemin gets punished or not, I just want him to give me back what he stole.." Hua Ying said with a weak, distraught and desperate tone.

Chapter 660 Price Of Greed (10)

"As I said to the rest, when the details are confirmed to be true, we will do all we can to find your recompense.." said Yang Qing with a comforting smile.

Hua Ying nodded, half hopeful half distraught. Despite the heights of the Order, some part of her couldn't help but worry.

What if Long Zemin isn't found?

They searched for him all over the range for two months with the maddened desperation of four organizations working together and they still didn't find him.

She couldn't help but fear that he had either escaped for parts unknown, or worse, he had ended up in the stomach of some spirit beast.

If he did, then she could forget about having her situation healed, not unless, the Order decided to step in the gap and handle it themselves.

If worse came to worst and Long Zemin couldn't be found because he had disappeared or was dead, their four organizations had decided unanimously to empty out all their resources and get the Order to heal them.

The healing rates of the Order were known to be cheaper than other organizations but not by much lest they incur discontentment from the populace by ruining the market.

The four organizations had already decided if they couldn't find any other solution, then they would sell off all the resources they had to be able to afford treatment from the Order, no matter the cost.

Hua Ying hoped it wouldn't come to that as it would hollow out their foundations which would take hundreds of years to recover from. The Deer Mountain Range wasn't such a forgiving place that it would let them slowly recover. That damage to their foundations would leave their organizations further exposed to the dangers of the range, making the already hard situation even harder.

As Hua Ying was lost in her calculations, Ling Qi the remaining member of the group took the floor and began his testimony at Yang Qing's behest.

"Thank you for the opportunity," Ling Qi said as he cupped his fists in greeting.

"My name is Ling Qi and I am an elder of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect. I am also an orange-grade herbologist and healer. Top tier at both.." he said, though his tone was absent of pride but more of self-mockery.

"While my sect knows a bit of self-defense to preserve our own lives, we are not combatants.

My sect was invited in the subjugation of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise because of its poison. Our role was to contain its poisoning abilities.

My abilities and interest lie in detoxification, thus the sect sent me to help in dealing with the tricolored white-eyed tortoise.

Daoist Hua Ying, Daoist Xin Zephyr, and Daoist Wu Shen would deal with the frontal assault while I would handle whatever injuries they may receive during the attack.

Before going in, I thought I knew everything there was to know about the tricolored white-eyed tortoise, and the preparations I made, I thought would be more than enough to handle what it would throw at us.

But I was grossly mistaken... I didn't know what I didn't know and I went there thinking to myself about how prepared I was, and all that I knew, the tricolored white-eyed tortoise may as well call me its ancestor because of how much detail I thought I knew about it.." Ling Qi said as he shook his head with a wry smile appearing on his face.lights

"My hubris almost got us killed. Daoist Xin and the rest did their jobs well..they pushed the tortoise to the brink whilst also protecting me while I failed to do the one job that was expected of me, which was to prevent them from getting poisoned..."

Ling Qi paused with his hands shaking and guilt showing in his eyes as he turned to face the three cultivators.

"It fills me with great shame to even ask considering that you all almost died, please forgive me for my incompetence.." Ling Qi said as he performed a deep bow to the three which caught them by surprise.

"W..what do you mean incompetence.." Xin Zephyr said with a flustered expression as she hurried to Ling Qi's side to help him up.

"We were the ones who were negligent and when the tricolored white-eyed tortoise dealt its blow, it was your sudden lunar petal water that saved us from being instantly poisoned to death.

If it wasn't for that, the rest would not have reached us in time to render first aid.

We are the ones who should be apologizing.." she added.

"Daoist Xin is right, Daoist Ling.. you handled your role perfectly to the end, we were the ones who left a gap for the tortoise to exploit.." said Wu Shen.

"What you did, and what your sect did, is the reason we are alive today, Daoist Ling.." added Hua Ying in support.

Yang Qing didn't put a stop to what was happening. From the moment the case started, even though Ling Qi looked calm on the outside, Yang Qing could feel the magnitude of the turmoil boiling within him.

It was to the extent that Yang Qing was worried that a heart demon might rupture from within him, throwing his whole state out of balance just like the emerald leaf cow from the Green Fog Swamp Sect, who experienced a mental breakdown in the middle of a deposition when she realized the people she thought were friends, were, in fact, traitors to the sect.

Ling Qi seemed close to that edge.

Ling Qi raised his head, at a loss for words on what to say as his gaze fell on Xin Zephyr's large limpid black eyes. The duo instantly blushed with Xin Zephyr hurriedly pulling away as she nervously looked toward Yang Qing only to find him smiling knowingly as his gaze fell on both her and Ling Qi.

"Sorry.." she said in a low soft tone as she lowered her head to hide her embarrassment.

Wu Shen and Hua Ying lightly smiled as they shook their heads at Xin Zephyr's embarrassed display while Ling Qi shyly scratched the back of his head awkwardly wondering how to proceed.

"I knew something was going on between these two....dammit, Mao Mao's nature is rubbing off on me.."

Yang Qing hurriedly dispelled those thoughts as he said,

"What happened next?"