

## Daily life 671

Chapter 671 He Is...

"She really is a kind person.." muttered Yang Qing with a sigh.

Back at the entrance, Su Jinjing had a slightly sorrowful look on her face as she tightly clenched her spear.

"Jinjing, you know what he is saying is true. Yang Qing may be unreliable in many things but not when it comes to his cases.

You know how selfish he is, there is no way he would do something that would take away his ability to sleep or eat his meals.

It's why he is so terrified of guilt or regret, even more so than Senior Lei Weiyuan.." Luo Meili said with a gentle smile.

"He really is the biggest coward I know.." Su Jinjing added with a chuckle.

"He is.." Luo Meili said in support as both burst into light peals of laughter.

"I know he is right. The only reason I suggested it, is because of him.." Su Jinjing softly said, with her gaze trailing to where Yang Qing had disappeared off to.

"We saw what the last case did to him, and it's not been that long since it happened. What if something happens to those four organizations? I can't help but worry how he would take it if the worst were to happen.." she added with worry rife in her tone.

"Like he said, we are each responsible for our own choices. He must have already prepared himself for that.

It was why he went out of his way to warn them of how dangerous this place is and I am sure he said something else to that elder of the Flowing Fist Sect.

You know how resilient he is, otherwise, he would not continually keep trying to scam the Order, despite the number of failures he has had.." said Luo Meili, her gaze flickering slightly.

Even though she said that some part of her couldn't help but worry for her shameless boss. If it wasn't for Yang Qing she would have opted to go to the beast tamer division. The reason she chose to be on his team, was because for some reason her physique, the Mandala prana green nebulae jellyfish physique seemed to quiet down every time she was around him.

Usually despite the numerous seals placed on her meant to contain it, she always had this foreboding like her body was about to be snatched away, or this feeling welling deep within her of being observed by a terrifying entity, waiting, waiting for her to show the slightest weakness and it would pounce on her.

That feeling was intense when she was younger and in the qi refinement realm. She was always afraid all the time, with never-ending lapses of what was real, and what was fiction. She always saw herself in the deepest part of space facing a monstrous jellyfish that was the size of the planet. The cosmos swirled around it almost as if it was birthed by it.

Facing that terrifying creature was always the most terrifying experience she ever had. She always felt like she stood there for thousands and thousands of years her body being destroyed and reformed by that entity. I

t didn't matter whether she was asleep or awake, those visions would strike her at any time, and every time she woke up her body would be filled with these green sigils that would continue to subject her body to agonizing pain for a few days to even a month depending on how long she spent in the realm with that jellyfish.

Those sigils would erode the hands of those who tried to touch her. It was the reason she was kicked out by her parents, who said she was cursed when her father lost his entire hand when trying to wake her. The maddening screams she made every time she was dragged into that realm and got tortured didn't help either.

Kicked out and those tortures finally broke her as she wondered aimlessly with her mind half gone. The only reason she even survived back then was the corrosive side effect of those sigils acting as a protection for her, though she wasn't thankful for it.

Eventually, she wandered around until she found a certain cave which she made her home. That cave contained the remains of some spirit beast and survived on bone soup for quite some time until she was forced to move again and was somehow found by someone belonging to the Order who took her for the assessment.

It was only when she got in did she find out what was going on with her. She believed she was cursed, but it turned out she endured what she did because of her physique and the immense power it contained which was too much for her body to handle that it was forcibly altering her body so she could contain it.

Had she not been admitted into the Order and received their help, her physique would have eaten away at her body with the forcible improvements. In five years or less, she would have been consumed by it and disintegrated out of existence.

When they broke the news to her, she couldn't help but think that she really had been cursed. Her own physique sentencing her to death, how absurd was that? There were countless other dangers out there that would threaten her life but it was her physique that was the greatest danger of them all. Something that was meant to protect, and give her a fighting chance, was the one tying a noose around her neck and quickly strangling her.

The dean of the beast tamer division had experiences with such physiques and quickly created a seal that halted the terrifying experiences she had. She was no longer abducted to some unknown realm to get tortured, but the feeling, that fear that came from knowing that beast was watching her, it never went away, but it became manageable the higher her cultivation base, grew.

Of course, that was until she met Yang Qing, this goofy kid who was a few years ahead of her at the institute, and already had a reputation for getting into trouble with the fiendish instructors.

It was when he was running away from doing something nefarious no doubt that he ran into her, almost knocking her over. That brief contact, though it didn't completely erase the fear that wrapped around her body like chains, she felt something she never thought possible, a glimpse at what respite was.

She wasn't sure at first, but after seeking out Yang Qing a couple of times and striking a friendship with him so she could be around him, she felt it. Every time she was around him, that suffocating fear that she had known all her life would ebb away. Yang Qing's presence seemed to affect the jellyfish within. It

was almost as if his presence would turn the jellyfish into a gentle docile being and that gentleness radiated even to her.

That effect became more and more pronounced the longer she stayed around him, and the stronger Yang Qing was for some reason.

When she graduated, despite the beast hall vying for her because of the latent gifts her physique afforded her, she decided to be an inquisitor and specifically asked to be stationed with Yang Qing.

That sense of ease she felt around him was something she would never trade anything else for.

The other day when she and Su Jinjing went to check on him to see if he was okay after missing breakfast, when Yang Qing opened his eyes, she felt something stir deep within her, a feeling of elation that ended up making her body feel lighter, like some shackle had been removed.

I hope you'll be okay. If I could, I would gladly carry the weight of the things you experienced at the Ice Emerald Sect and now. For what you have given me, I can never repay.."she thought, hiding the worry she heard in the deepest recess of her eyes.

Yang Qing always felt like a sanctuary for her. It wasn't in a romantic sense as she didn't see him in a romantic light and neither did he, but they had an inexplicable bond. Despite being slightly older than him, Luo Meili always felt like Yang Qing was her older brother, sheltering her from that monstrous jellyfish.

She would do anything to reciprocate what Yang Qing gave her, but alas, the things she could offer were limited, other than maybe keeping him company and bringing him rare dishes.

"Jinjing maybe we can have the chef prepare him red braised pork using that radiant star anise we found and the empyrean bee honey we collected is sure to improve the flavors in the hands of a skilled chef.

We can bring it to Yang Qing. Nothing cheers him more than food.."

Luo Meili paused as she held her chin in deep contemplation.

"Which do you think would rank at the top, Jinjing? Pulling one over senior Lei Weiyuan or food? I feel the former has a slight edge over the latter, with how petty he is.."

Su Jinjing mirrored Luo Meili's look as she held her chin, tilting her head slightly.

"This is a tough one... When I met him I would have said food, but over the years, I don't know... One thing I know for sure is he is greedy, he would likely choose both.." she said with a serious look on her face.

She and Luo Meili looked at each other in silence before they burst out laughing as they headed to the kitchen.

"He would.."

Chapter 672 King Zhou Luan's Worries

"Even if I know the one who made the offer was an impostor, I might as well confirm it with them for good measure.." muttered Yang Qing as he took out his communication talisman.

"I wonder if the king's grandfather has already been healed? Might as well confirm that too...Who do I call first.." said Yang Qing as he touched his chin in contemplation.

"The king it is.." he added after coming to a decision.

"Branch Chief Yang Qing.."

Yang Qing's eyebrows raised slightly as he detected the excitement in the king's tone.

"King Zhou Luan, it seems like your grandfather's situation has been dealt with."

"Hahaha, not yet, but I got a call that someone will be coming today. I can't thank you enough for your intervention. If there is anything me and my kingdom can do to assist, we would not hesitate to offer it.." King Zhou Luan passionately said.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh at the level of enthusiasm being shown by the king. The mountain of pressure that King Zhou Luan had been dealing with was perfectly evident given how he had rid himself of his calm persona and outrightly revealed his emotions.

"If they are sending someone today that is good. It should give you some breathing room.." Yang Qing said with a teasing tone..."

"More than you can imagine.." answered King Zhou Luan with a mirthful tone.

"How can I help you, Branch Chief? I have a feeling you didn't call just to check up on the situation of my grandfather?" asked King Zhou Luan with his tone turning solemn, absent of the earlier enthusiasm.

Even with his grandfather potentially making a complete recovery, the situation still wasn't looking good for his kingdom.

King Zhou Luan knew his grandfather's presence could maybe quell the internal situation of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, but the matter outside of their kingdom was another matter altogether.

No matter how skilled his grandfather was, handling a spirit beast that was already at the peak of the palace realm wasn't something he thought his grandfather could easily solve, especially considering that spirit beast was about to breakthrough into the palace realm. And if you added the domain-level master of said spirit beast, then the situation was untenable.

Other than that, there were also the remnants of the previous war to consider. As people who had built their foundations from fighting against spirit beasts, everyone from the Deer Mountain Kingdom knew how resilient they were. It was that resilience that prompted the people of the kingdom to be just as resilient if they were going to survive them.

Though the citizens may know tidbits and rumors here and there, King Zhou Luan knew for a fact that there were survivors from the war back then, and with their huge lifespans and vitality, they would likely heal from those injuries given enough time, despite how severe they may have been.

His biggest worry was the volcanic stone ape. That spirit beast had been the trigger of that war and the reason for the failure of the expansion attempt by the Deer Mountain Kingdom back then, though with the recent discovery, King Zhou Luan knew they were doomed to fail, they were even lucky that they never made it into the territory of the fire adler bear or his master.

The fire adler bear and his master aside, the volcanic stone ape was worthy of worry from him as it had been the one that personally killed the king back then and his royal guard. Despite being surrounded by over a dozen palace realm experts and only being at the sixth stage, it thoroughly decimated their ranks. It had an almost perverted affinity to the earth and fire element which gave it extraordinary defenses, great regenerative abilities, and powerful attacking capabilities and speed.

After encountering it, the king and his chief royal guard were the only ones who managed to escape it, but not completely as they both succumbed to their injuries months later and their escape cost the lives of 23 palace realm experts and the destruction of a top-tier monarch grade artifact.

That beast filled with vengeance and anger relentlessly followed them back and singlehandedly attacked the array for four days without stopping. Its actions drew the attention of other spirit beasts who joined and in just a week they were swarmed with other terrifying spirit beasts aiming to tear their kingdom apart.

The energy powering the array was so rapidly drained that the kingdom sacrificed the outer territories to concentrate it in the core regions, and eventually, even that got difficult to sustain as they were forced to give up a few core regions. When things got extremely dire they eventually pulled the array and used it to trap the volcano stone ape and threw everything they could at it including the self-detonation of a few cultivators.

It sustained heavy injuries from the onslaught and looked to be at hair's breadth away from death's door, but it managed to escape, and they never heard from it since.

Most assumed it died with the injuries it sustained, but his grandfather who had seen what that beast was capable of, always operated on the wary notion that it was still alive.

He wasn't the only one, as every king since then, including Zhou Luan always operated under that notion and thus continually kept scouting the area around the range for any signs of its existence. It was from that prudence that they discovered the trail of the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate by accident.

Recent information from the Order brought a few ideas into King Zhou Luan's mind. The fire adler bear's master had left for parts unknown, the badger who had monthly duels with the previous Zhang family head also left the range. Who is to say that the same didn't happen to the volcanic stone ape?

It may have left to go strengthen itself out there. While the fire adler bear attacking them wasn't necessarily guaranteed, King Zhou Luan did not doubt in his mind if his guess was proven true that the volcanic stone ape had gone to strengthen itself in the wider continent, it would definitely attack the moment it decided its strength was sufficient.

Who knew how powerful it would be when it came back? The kingdom wasn't as powerful as it was then. It had single-

handedly pulled them down during their golden age, what would it do now that they were nothing but a husk of their former selves, and unlike then, they were not as united as back then.

Would the kingdom as it was now, fight to the last man, woman, and child if asked for it as it was back then? or would they jump ship the moment they saw things were about to take a turn for the worst?

While he didn't want to believe it, he increasingly felt the odds of the latter happening were much higher. He had already seen traces of the Song family and a few other minor aristocratic families crafting their exit strategies.

"No need to overthink it now, at least Grandpa will be there to share the burden. With his connections, we might be able to weather through this.." King Zhou Luan thought with a sigh as he tried to raise his spirits.

He had spent centuries being pessimistic and flooded with worry that it had slowly become second nature to him.

"King Zhou Luan? King Zhou Luan? Are you there?"

Hurriedly composing himself King Zhou Luan answered,



"Sorry Branch Chief Yang Qing, my mind had wandered slightly."

"It's okay, so the thing I was calling was in regards to something I stumbled onto from a case I was handling today.."

Yang Qing went on to describe the arrangement made to the Xin Clan, Hua Clan, Flowing Fist Sect, and the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect, by the person who Yang Qing guessed had probably been impersonating the imperial secretary and wasn't the person himself.

He also didn't leave out the part about the suspected impostor telling the four organizations about using blood crystals from the graveyard torch as a viable option for them to grow their strength.

"Whhhhat?! How could something like that happen?!..." King Zhou Luan suddenly said with clear agitation in his tone.

"Sorry for my outburst, please give me a second to call He Shan.." added the king.

Barely a second passed by before a frantic-sounding He Shan sounded over the communication talisman.

"Brrrranch Ccchief Yang Qing! I swear I made no such offer. I admit I do roam about the range to source for potential talents to poach for the Kingdom but I would NEVER suggest them using the graveyard.

I would not do it, your Majesty. That is no different than sending the kingdom to an early grave which is something I would never do.

Please believe me!"

Yang Qing heard King Zhou Luan's calm voice saying he believed him before he decided to add his comments too.

"I believe you too, Imperial Secretary. But clearly, there is someone out there using your name to do these things and they are likely within your walls and no doubt a palace realm expert.

They must have known your routine of regularly recruiting people and likely even the terms you offer.

If it all went to plan, you likely wouldn't question a palace realm offering to join your kingdom. With the dire straits you're in, you'd likely receive them with open arms and not wonder too much how they were able to reach the threshold of the palace realm.

A planted bomb.. as for the reasons, I wonder about that..considering the reputation you built with the spirit beasts of this place, if they learned someone within your ranks had desecrated their hallowed grounds what would be their reaction?

Earlier I had been operating under the notion that someone within your midst was working with the Blue Soul Flame Syndicate to gain some power so that they could gain the seat. You were a suspect too, King Zhou Luan, but with what I know now, I don't believe that is the case.

Whoever it is, they are not interested in the throne, they more than likely wish for the destruction of your kingdom.

Why they would do that, I have no idea. Be careful a dangerous element lurks within your kingdom.." Yang Qing solemnly said.

Chapter 673 Vision On The Blade Of Grass

It was only noon, and the sun was up, but the stifling silence and gravity of the information Yang Qing had shared created a somber gloomy atmosphere.

The rustling of the grass by the warm breeze, and the gentle flowing river all seemed to combine to form a melody for a funeral dirge.

After a long overdrawn silence, King Zhou Luan finally spoke,

"Thank you Branch Chief Yang Qing for the warning. It seems we have a lot of things to consider, and those four organizations?"

"What happens next is ultimately up to them. I did advise them to vacate the area sooner rather than later whilst they still have time.

The Order will not be intervening past that. Whatever happens...is ultimately up to them. You're not planning to evacuate them are you?" asked Yang Qing.

"I did entertain the thought but it's likely to lead to a misunderstanding, especially if they get swarmed while we are evacuating them.

The spirit beasts already hate our guts, they are more likely to assume we were involved in the matter, or maybe they would not care at all.

I would rather not risk agitating them. We already have too many things on our plate and to think I thought the spirit beasts were our greatest threat.." King Zhou Luan said with a tone of dejection.

"We will also investigate on our end. Triggering a spirit beast tide isn't something we can overlook.." Yang Qing said.

After exchanging a few words with the king of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, the call ended with Yang Qing using his communication to call Xiang He, the special inquisitor in charge of the case.

"Hey, Yang Qing?" answered Xiang He after the call connected.

"Hello, senior Xiang He.."

"Let me guess, you have new information to share.." said Xiang He with a teasing tone.

"I do and things might be more complicated than we thought.." Yang Qing austere answered.

"What is it?"

Yang Qing went on to explain his findings on the impostor and his suspicions that they may have had plans to destroy the Deer Mountain Kingdom with their ploy of using the graveyard torch of spirit beasts.

After he finished his explanation, there was a momentary silence before Xiang He finally spoke.

"This does complicate matters.." Xiang He said with a sigh.

"If your guess is true, then this opens up a lot of nefarious doors. If they had been after the throne, then it would have been easier to sniff them out, but if their target is to induce a massacre of a whole kingdom...what we are dealing with is anything but easy.

Whatever they are after, they require a lot of lives to do it, and not just any lives, but the lives of a rank 3 kingdom filled with palace realm cultivators.

But how do they intend to pull it off? Ye Xun and I scanned that place bar the royal palace where the twilight sanctuary array interfered with our senses, but even then, we could have detected if there was a sacrificial conduit.

How would they do it..."

Xiang He mumbles grew inaudible as he quickly got immersed in his thoughts for a few minutes before he finally collected himself.

"Yang Qing, sorry to cut your call short, but I need to quickly confer with a few colleagues from the Special Inquisitors, the assistant director will need to be informed too, and Ye Xun too, she should be with the elder from the spirit council, maybe she could take a look at the area once more and see if there is anything we have missed.

Yang Qing, later.."

Before Yang Qing had a chance to respond, Xiang He's communication had already disconnected.

"Glad to see I didn't overthink it.."Yang Qing muttered with a wry smile.

When the case revealed the matter of the impostor and the blood crystals, his mind immediately jumped to some sacrificial art that required the lives of an entire kingdom to run.

When those ideas jumped at him, some part of him thought it was a result of the effects of the Ice Emerald Sect still haunting him and giving him an alarmist outlook on things.

But even if that were so, he had heard and seen things in the dark underbelly of the cultivation world.

Large-scale bloodshed was not a foreign concept from village-

level massacres to kingdom-wide massacres, such things happened. An example of such an incident happening was 70 years ago when a leading figure of Scarlet Blood Ghost Hands Syndicate sacrificed a whole city filled with millions to elevate his cultivation art slaughtering two palace realm cultivators in the process.

If a rank 2 sect like the crystal palm jade sect could be schemed against and destroyed, then something similar happening to the Deer Mountain Kingdom wasn't an impossibility.

What Yang Qing found disturbing in the case of the Deer Mountain Kingdom was unlike the Crystal Jade Palm Sect where they were targeting their leader and his ties to the jade turtle, when it came to the Deer Mountain Kingdom, they didn't seem to have anything valuable that would warrant their entire destruction.

About the only thing they had of worth was their lives and if that was what the culprit was after, then whatever their plans were, it was way worse than just hunting a semi-evolved flood dragon.

"Whoever they are, they must have the confidence of pulling it off under our noses considering they have hidden themselves well even against Senior Xiang He's and Senior Ye Xun's eyes..

What could they be after that they need so many lives. Are they only after the lives of the kingdom? or maybe they're targeting both the kingdom and the spirit beasts that would come after them.

Why this kingdom? Is there some they are targeting specifically in the Kingdom or is it some random coincidence?

Maybe it's not even about the kingdom itself and could be about the range. We did find a lot of weird things in this range, who's to say underneath the grounds of the kingdom there isn't something similar?

Or maybe it has nothing to do with the kingdom or this place but something to do with the culprit..

Things have been getting chaotic off late.."Yang Qing said as he aimlessly threw a blade of grass into the river next to him and watched it peacefully go along with the flow of the stream.

As it moved, Yang Qing could see a trail of blood forming on the blade's edges followed by screams denoting all kinds of emotions from wails of grief, to yells of anger, to screams of victory to those of indignation.

Yang Qing saw countless faces form beneath the blade of grass. The images were at first of people he had randomly met over the course of his life, then they became specific to those he had altercations with. The faces were that of those he gave harsh sentences to, the inmates he fought to the death against when he was at the Institute, to cultivators he slaughtered when he was doing his evaluations.

The young master of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion along with the former Emperor of the Red Maple Empire appeared, then the founder of the Ice Emerald Sect along with the sect master and the elders appeared soon after, followed by the other sect members. Their group ended with the ominous blood-red abyssal thorn tree whose bark dripped with hundreds of blood drops.

When Yang Qing looked closer into those drops, he saw that they contained the faces of people he had a good relationship with. It went from casual ones like the fallen sect master of the Clear Sword River Sect to the Imperial Secretary. Then Ma Yuan, his wife, and their daughter appeared in those droplets, Zhu Yi and his sister along with the old Wang couple appeared in other droplets with the number continually increasing, and before long his instructors appeared, Ren Shu and other staff members appeared, his clan appeared, his family appeared, then Dai Chen and the rest appeared, his team appeared from Yi Jie,

Feng Xin down to Bolin, Haishi, Starlight, his black dragon horses and the insufferable celestial nesting weaver.

Yang Qing's pupils trembled when he saw the last two images in the remaining droplets. One of them was a young lady with purple hair, a breathtaking beauty with big round eyes that were filled with curiosity, while the last droplet had the image of a middle-aged man with a stern expression, silver eyes, and matching hair. It looked like the world would crumble and he would remain unperturbed.

Yang Qing's gaze lingered slightly on the two before it moved back to the gently gliding blade of grass that had a trail of bodies on its backside.

Yang Qing lifted his finger and placed it at the tip of the bleeding blade of grass.

A burst of radiant light was produced from the tip of his fingers which created a crystal pure jade tree containing ethereal light with its leaves containing entire worlds.

"I have been called petty, greedy, shameless, lazy, and selfish, and it is the truth, so you can be sure no one takes anything away from me easily, not even death itself.."

Luo Meili and Su Jinjing who had been carrying baskets of food with them paused when they felt a pure aura of life suddenly burst a few hundred meters in the direction they were headed to.

#### Chapter 674 Unexpected Benefits

They were not the only ones who noticed the burst of pure life energy that suddenly pervaded the area. Administrator Mo Guang who had been checking the inventory of herbs, gems, potions, pills, talismans, and spirit liquids provided for the running of the branch, suddenly paused as he felt his body get washed by a gentle and pure energy.

His body felt lighter and rejuvenated. He lifted his palm and pulled back the sleeves of his robes which revealed his skin that was getting rosier with a healthy lustre. When he looked around him he saw the spirit glow lianas that were used as a preservation tool for the storage room suddenly glow with a radiant light as if they were excited about something.

They grew rapidly and the white-blue light that was constantly released from their leaves grew a deeper shade of blue which resulted in the atmosphere of the area dropping slightly with an increase in its renewing and refreshing properties.

Administrator Mo Guang could feel his mind clearing and unencumbered while his soul felt like it was being gently massaged and refreshed with every breath he took.

"Such dense life energy.." he muttered as his gaze trailed to where he detected to be the source.

"It's the branch chief?.." he muttered once he detected the presence of Luo Meili and Su Jinjing in the area.

"Figures.." he said with an amused smile.

"Only someone of his caliber would have the reputation he does at the Order.." he added as he went about with his work.

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"I thought he would relax once he reached the palace realm, but the changes happening to him are more rapid than it was when he was at the core formation realm..." Su Jinjing said as she felt the life energy wash over her stirring her soul in the process.

"Mmh.." Luo Meili absentmindedly nodded as she felt the changes happening in her body. She felt like a few more shackles had been shattered. She felt like the burden her physique put on her had been alleviated significantly.

Her bones no longer felt as brittle as they had been, her internal structure didn't feel like it was about to crumble from an overwhelming force and her head didn't seem as heavy as it normally was. All this relief created a movement in her cultivation base as she felt her spiritual qi filling with excitement and vigor, pushing the barrier of the 12th stage of the core formation realm.



Not hesitating, she quickly sat down in a lotus position, cleared her mind of needless thoughts, and circulated her cultivation art.

Su Jinjing on seeing this, moved slightly away while still maintaining a safe distance where she could act as her protector in case something went wrong with part of her attention focused on the radiant white light that was still being produced about a few hundred meters ahead.

After half an hour Luo Meili opened her eyes with an excited expression on her face after going through one of the smoothest breakthroughs she ever had. Usually, it always felt like she was smashing away at a barrier with her fists repetitively before it gave way, but this time, it felt like the gates had been opened and all she had to do was comfortably walk through.

She took a breath to calm herself as she sensed the changes within her body. Even though it was just a slight improvement from the eleventh stage to the twelfth stage of the core formation realm, she felt like her strength had experienced an astronomical leap.

Because of her physique, she had a variant core. Unlike the typical red, orange, blue, gold, and purple core, hers was dark green and had tentacle protrusions. When she went to observe her core, she found another addition to it, an illusory swirling cosmos that wasn't quite distinctive. She had to focus her whole attention on the core for her to notice it.

Even though the cosmos was almost undetectable, Luo Meili could tell it had brought immense changes to her core and her body and cultivation by association. The swirling brought about an increase in the speed with which she absorbed and converted spiritual qi from the outside into a form that was most suitable for her body.

The speed of absorption and conversion had doubled, and not only that, but she could tell the converted spiritual qi was slightly different from before. Her spiritual qi matched her core and was a dark shade of green, but now she could detect a sliver of light grey mixed within it that matched the color of the cosmos swirling within her core.

The grey light was scantily mixed in with her dark green qi, but Luo Mieli could tell, because of the grey light, her qi felt purer and denser than before, by at least two times. She felt that if she executed her cultivation spells, the consumption cost would be two levels lower than it was before while the power would be two levels higher than before.

She felt that when her entire body was suffused with that light grey color those values would only continue to increase. Currently, only a speck of the grey light was being produced for every 500 swirls. It would take a considerable time before her entire spiritual qi was converted considering the amount within her body was about the size of a river.

The changes didn't only stop there, as she could fairly feel the grey light carried a sense of mystique within, like some underlying truth. Because of her physique, she was sensitive to the response of living organisms to external stimuli which was why she was good at spirit beast training as she could find what conditions suited them most.

Before she never knew how she could do what she did and the details she saw even though were sufficient, she needed to supplement it with knowledge from the books the Beast Hall division had on rearing spirit beasts. But now, the amount of information she could sense had exploded and she could feel the intrinsic properties of things she hadn't even known before and within those properties, she could sense a guiding principle like how it was all connected. However, that principle was ephemeral, she couldn't quite grasp it. It felt like it was hidden behind a veil of fog that would disappear at the slightest disturbance.

Luo Meili quickly lost herself in the dance of trying to sense what lay behind the fog. It was only when she felt an overwhelming sense of fatigue wash over accompanied by a faint headache, did she finally open her eyes.

Her eyes widened when she saw the starry sky and the moon above her.

"Seems like someone had a fruitful session.."

A teasing sound quickly pulled her from her reverie state. She turned to the source of the voice, who by no surprise was the cheekily smiling Yang Qing holding a chicken wing with one hand and a wine cup with the other.

"How long was I out?" asked Luo Meili as she unceremoniously took the wine cup of Yang Qing's hand and took a sip.

Her eyes narrowed into a crescent shape as she sensed the smoothness and slight chill of the snow ginseng wine. For some reason, it felt even better than she remembered it, to the point she couldn't help but mutter,

"I wonder when Yi Jie will come out..."

"Probably not long, he would have made the breakthrough a long while back had he not been conflicted in the dao to pursue. The overachiever stumbled onto two paths.." Yang Qing said as he refilled Luo Meili's cup.

"You seem different, Meili.." Su Jinjing suddenly chimed in

"Well, i am now a peak core formation stage expert now.." Luo Meili said as she tried to mimic Yang Qing's pompousness, who couldn't help but rub his nose when he realized he was being teased.

"Not that way.." Su Jinjing said with mirthful laughter.

"You seem lighter like unburdened somewhat.." she added as her gaze focused on Luo Meili.

"Jinjing, the level of your intuition is really one of the highest I've ever seen.." said Luo Meilie with a sigh.

"It can't be that high considering how our boss here constantly swindles me.." Su Jinjing said with a snort.

"What do you mean swindle? I am the picture of integrity and purity. You will be hard-pressed to find someone as honest and above board as I am.." said Yang Qing with an air of righteousness.

Seeing that Yang Qing was about to go on his fake endless tirade, Su Jinjing hurriedly lifted her hands in fake defeat as she humorously said,

"Yes, yes, boss, you are the most honest.."

Which drew a hearty laugh from the two inquisitors, before Yang Qing joined in.

"It seems you have felt your path now, Meili?" Yang Qing said with a sideway glance as he poured forth more dishes from the basket next to him and split them unevenly among the three of them.

The two inquisitors knew enough not to say anything.

"I did but only slightly, every time I tried to grasp it, it would disappear.." Luo Meili said with a slightly frustrated tone.

With her team rapidly improving and her strong desire to help Yang Qing, she had longed to reach the palace realm as fast as she could, but with how volatile her physique was, her every step had to be careful.

She never knew how long it would take before she could reach it. Today was the first time she finally had a sight on it, but she couldn't even take a glimpse of it.

"Don't be in a hurry. When it comes to finding your dao into the palace realm, going with the flow is the best thing you can do.

Your dao is a reflection of your heart. The more natural you are, the easier you are to grasp it. No need to brute force it. Just take your time, float along, and ease yourself into it.." said Yang Qing.

"Mmmh.." Luo Meili nodded taking Yang Qing's words to heart.

Yang Qing poured wine into the three cups next to him and distributed it amongst themselves.

"I am not good with speeches.."

"I would not have expected it, considering how skilled you are in bootlicking.." Su Jinjing snidely remarked.

"Jinjing who poisoned you? Can you let me finish, please.." said Yang Qing as he glared at Su Jinjing who laughed cheekily.

"Anyhow, Meili congratulations on your breakthrough and I wish you smooth tidings ahead.." Yang Qing said as he clanked his cups with the two, followed by them drawing their heads back and downing the entire cup.

Laughter, banter, good food, and wine were exchanged amongst the three, with Yang Qing calling over Mo Guang to share in the festivities which continued till dawn, after which they went their ways to resume their duties.

#### Chapter 675 Transformation Of Yang Qing's Internal Realm

As the others went their way, Yang Qing went back to his regular lotus platform by the river bank.

"I am glad the strain on Luo Meili's body seems to have lightened.." Yang Qing muttered in relief as his eyes fell on her retreating figure.

Yang Qing could always tell of the anguish Luo Meili always had, even the tremors she tried to hide. He felt it distinctly the first time they met and every day ever since.

He had even once consulted Ren Shu about it, in fear that something was happening to her only to be told it was her constitution. Without her permission, Ren Shu didn't divulge much and only told him that she would be okay and her situation was continuously being monitored and under control.

Later, when she joined his team, she divulged a bit about her physique, though she downplayed the pain it caused, she did say that being around Yang Qing somehow made it easier for her.

Ren Shu did tell him the effect may have had something to do with the nature of his physique that may have a synchronicity effect with her physique.

Ren Shu's guess was proved to be true, as he could feel the tenseness in Luo Meili's soul and body lessen the more she was around him, especially more recently since the advances he made concerning his physique. Whatever effects it had, they seemed more pronounced now.

"Hopefully when she reaches the palace realm, it will get easier for her or I make more improvements in unearthing the secrets of my physique.." Yang Qing said as he stared at his hands which shone with a faint white lustre with a dark shade beneath it.

It wasn't only Luo Meili who had experienced an unexpected harvest. Earlier he had ended up in a trance-like state. The trail of death he saw from the blade of grass seemed to have unknowingly triggered something within him. He wasn't sure if it was his yin-yang jade nature bones, his own Dao, or an amalgamation of both, but something reacted to the scene and a countering force was produced filled with a dense aura of life.

When Yang Qing came to, he found his cultivation had made a skip to the third stage of the palace realm. His internal palace realm had also experienced a change. Before it had the moon, the sun, the ocean, and the green flame tree, but now the ocean had another component within it.

Inside the ocean was an illusory fish that was surrounded by universal light associated with his cultivation art. It was sluggishly swimming about like it didn't have control of its body. The fish had a few peculiarities to it, one of them being even though it was illusory, Yang Qing had this intrinsic feeling that its scales were made from the ethereal jade tree that existed deep within his body.

Another was it didn't seem to have eyes, and the feeling Yang Qing got was it wasn't developed enough yet to form them. But despite its peculiarities, even in its incomplete state, Yang Qing could feel how it was constantly transforming his internal world. The green flame tree had doubled in size, the sun and the moon above felt more real rather than static objects that were hanging above him and as a result of it, the grass growing beneath his green flame tree had increased in number and size, and a few other plants were slowly developing.

Yang Qing spotted the bud of an azalea and oak tree buried in the grass field. He couldn't help but think of the aurora azalea and the restoration oak tree from the former grounds of the Clear Sword River Sect that had accidentally evolved from absorbing his universal qi.

Even the ocean had been affected as a result of the liveliness of the sun and the moon. Its movements were not static. It didn't seem like something preprogrammed, the ebbs and flows had a more natural feel to them, and it finally had a temperature which alternated between cool and warm, as result of the glow of the sun and moon above it.

Yang Qing could even see two pearl-sized clouds forming in the skies above the ocean. One was blue-green, and the other was golden-red.

All these transformations had an effect on Yang Qing. His already absurd quantity of spiritual qi had increased slightly. That slight increase was the equivalent to the maximum quantity of qi a late-stage core formation cultivator with a blue core could have stored within their body.

The intrinsic qualities of his spiritual qi had also been strengthened such as its restorative, regenerative, healing, calming, and purification properties. In addition, he felt somewhat in tune with his physique. He could now feel one of the seals the two illusory figures beneath the jade tree had mentioned and he even knew at what stage it would unlock. It would be when he stepped into the late stage of the palace realm.

The biggest boon to him, however, was his increasing understanding of his own dao, the Vitality Dao. The countless scattered ideas he had were slowly being strung together into something he could use.

Yang Qing rubbed his fingers together dispelling the white light from his palms.

He quickly emptied his mind as he began his meditation. When he finally got up from the meditation, four hours had quickly passed by.

Yang Qing got up and stretched his hands with a satisfied smile on his face. He felt completely refreshed and renewed like he had the most comfortable and peaceful sleep ever.

"I can see why cultivators the more powerful they become choose to replace sleep with meditation.." muttered Yang Qing as he felt how relaxed his whole body felt.

"Though it still falls short of sleeping in the nest.." muttered Yang Qing with a sigh of defeat when the image of the fluffy ostentatiously colored foul-mouthed celestial nesting weaver appeared in his mind.

Clearing his thoughts of the ulcer-inducing bird, he gingerly made his way to the kitchen. However, his trip was cut short when he saw the grim looks of Su Jinjing and Mo Guang.

"What happened?" softly asked Yang Qing, though deep down he had a feeling he knew the answer to that question.

## Chapter 676 Aftermath (1)

"I think you should hear it from them.." said Su Jinjing as she pointed behind her towards the hallway that led to the reception area.

Yang Qing nodded as he started making his way. Yang Qing's steps felt heavier than usual as he was walking there and it felt like he was scaling up a mountain filled with thin air rather than a flat smooth surface with great ventilation.

Some part of him did not want to see what was at the other end of that hallway but alas he had no choice in the matter. In just a few seconds he had already made that dreaded turn and was already in the reception area where the guests were usually hosted.

In the area, he saw two figures holding each other so tightly that one could easily confuse them to be one figure. There were whimpering and muffled cries coming from the two figures and their bodies seemed to be shaking tremendously, their qi wave along with their breathing were erratic and their robes were filled with tear marks.

The two figures looked a little worse for wear.

"I knew it.." Yang Qing somberly thought when he saw them.

After a slight momentary pause in his steps, he slowly made his way to them. The two figures didn't notice his arrival up until he was just a few steps away from them.

"Branch Chief, sorry for coming here, we just didn't know anywhere else to go.." said one of the figures with a trembling and cracking voice.

When the figure looked up, it revealed the face of a young man with scholarly handsome features which was hidden beneath a grime of dirt, blood, and overwhelming fear.

Yang Qing recognized that face. How could he not when he had seen that face almost eight hours ago?



"It's okay Elder Ling Qi..." Yang Qing said as he placed his hand over his shoulders in a bid to comfort him and also heal him.

Yang Qing stretched out his other hand which he placed on the person seated next to the elder of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

The person flinched slightly when Yang Qing made contact with her, but she relaxed slightly when she felt the soothing gentleness of Yang Qing's qi.

Her injuries seemed worse off than Ling Qi's though with a few broken ribs and tearing marks on her shoulders, arms, and legs. Her spiritual qi was also expended and her blood essence seemed dangerously low.

Yang Qing guessed she must have burned her essence to get through whatever it was they had just come from.

It took but just an instant for Yang Qing to completely restore both their bodies and spiritual qi to full capacity.

Once he saw they were slightly calm, Yang Qing asked,

"What happened?"

The two flinched slightly as the lady who was still crying whilst still burying her head in Ling Qi's shoulder finally looked up. It was Xin Zephyr but she lacked the demeanor of the seasoned sword expert she exhibited earlier when the case was starting. She now looked like a wounded bird, unnerved and terrified by anything around her.

Her eyes and face were a picture of a myriad of emotions constantly bombarding her. There was disbelief, shock, overwhelming fear, a sense of distraught, confusion, regret and finally despair.

Her whole body despite having been healed completely by Yang Qing was still trembling from head to toe.

Ling Qi gently placed his hand on her back which seemed to have triggered tears to start trickling down her face.

Ling Qi himself despite being relatively well off between the two, didn't seem to be doing that great either. His hands and legs couldn't stop shaking, and his pupils constantly darted around him as if he were expecting something to attack them.

"You are safe here.." Yang Qing softly said, imbuing his tone with the abilities of his soul which helped calm the duo.

"Thhanks..." Ling Qi said with slight stammering as he felt a sense of calmness wash over his body.

He closed his eyes for a second, seemingly to collect his thoughts together before he opened them again.

"After we left here, we all rushed to our respective organizations to inform them of the information you had just shared with us about the inheritance blood crystals, the graveyard torch, and the dangers it posed to us to decide what to do next..."

Ling Qi paused slightly to regulate his breathing in a bid to force down the nausea that was clawing up his throat.

"When we left here, the four of us had already decided we would immediately convince our respective organizations to leave this place with immediate effect.

We took what you told us to heart. As hard as it was, we knew we could not continue staying here if what you said was to come to pass.

So I went to my sect, Xin Zephyr to her clan..."

Ling Qi's mouth halted almost as if it was refusing to utter the next words.

"Hua Ying to hers, and Wu Shen.." said Ling Qi after much difficulty.

"On reaching the sect, I relayed the information to the vice sect master, who then called an emergency meeting among the elders to discuss our next steps. With the way the discussions were going, all signs were pointing to us evacuating and starting afresh somewhere.

With our professions, as long as we give concessions and sacrifice our autonomy, it would not be that difficult to find someone willing to take us in. We already had a good working relationship with some of the leading figures of the Summerfield Kingdom.

Over the years, since we settled here, we have cooperated on a few recipes with them. The lunar wave shield I used to defend against the tricolored white-eyed tortoise was completed through a joint partnership between us and them.

It didn't take long for us all to unanimously agree on packing out bags and relocating to the Summerfield Kingdom, especially after we received approval from their end.

We were set to leave, but we could not do so without first contacting our sect master who was still at the Hua Clan at the time and was still helping their clan leader assimilate the inheritance blood crystals.

The vice sect master presented everything I had shared with him from you, along with our decision.

I expected him to agree. Even if he didn't outright believe the dangers of the blood crystals, I expected the information about us being tricked by someone impersonating the Imperial Secretary to at least sway his decision on the side of caution.

However, he told us to wait as the clan master of the Hua Clan was already at a critical junction and was not long from reaching the palace realm.

Per his admission, he told us, they had already received the information we were sharing from the Xin family's head whom Zephyr had already told..."

On reaching here, Ling Qi paused as his gaze fell on Xin Zephyr who was still crying softly.

"Having already fallen to the allure of the palace realm, they decided to make a dangerous gamble..." Ling Qi said with a sigh.

"They decided..." he said while clenching the fist of his free hand.

"The Hua Clan leader seemed to be a few steps away from reaching the palace realm and just needed a small push. That small push was the inheritance blood crystals.." Ling Qi said with an exhaustive sigh.

Yang Qing who had remained silent all this while couldn't help but frown at the statement.

"How reckless can they get?" he wondered in stupefaction.

"The Hua Clan leader needed just a few more blood crystals to complete the breakthrough but they had already exhausted the supply they had on hand, so they needed more.

They argued that even if the offer made by the Deer Mountain Kingdom was a fake one, it still did not take away the importance of having one of us reach the palace realm.

As long as we had a palace realm expert, it would make it easier for us to resettle outside of the Range, and with our four organizations sticking together, it would only be a matter of time before we were as powerful as the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

Even under such circumstances, that was all they could think about.." Ling Qi said with a bitter chuckle.

"The Xin clan bought into it as for the Flowing Fist Sect," Ling Qi paused as he shook his head for a bit.

"Their sect master had agreed to the plan at first, but immediately changed their mind after Wu Shen arrived.

Later, Wu Shen did call me to inform me that they were already leaving the Range. He ended up clashing with their sect master, which quickly turned from exchanging words to exchanging blows.

The fight was equal at first but something ended up happening to Wu Shen and he ended up making quick work of their sect master. With their sect master beaten up, he ordered the sect's evacuation.

He told me they only carried whatever could fit in their storage rings and left everything else behind.

He said he'd wait for us in Violet Hickory town in case we decided to escape without our organizations.."

#### Chapter 677 Aftermath (2)

Ling Qi rubbed his face slightly in an attempt to wash away the heaviness he felt.

"When Wu Shen made the offer, though I appreciated it, I didn't think it would come to that. I thought despite everything else that happened when it came right down to it, our collective safety and well-being would take priority over everything else.

It was from such naive thinking that I thought I could change our sect master's mind so I left my sect and rushed toward the Hua Clan.

I did try to contact Hua Ying as I was heading there but she didn't pick up.."

Ling Qi paused as his gaze fell on the sobbing Xin Zephyr.

"Zephyr called me to tell me that most of the hierarchy of the Xin clan had already left to join up with the leading figures of the Hua Clan to pick some more blood crystals.

We agreed that we would both meet up at the Hua Clan and maybe with Hua Ying's help we could convince our respective leaders to order an immediate evacuation.

But when we finally arrived at the edge of the Hua Clan's territory, it was already too late.." Ling Qi said as his gaze darkened.

I met Zephyr, half a ways away from the territory of the Hua Clan. But even at such a distance, we could hear the terrified wails mixed in with roars filled with anger and the clash of attacks.

The closer we were the thicker the stench of the blood became. I applied a few sensory masking ointments on me and Zephyr, who also used her clan's obscuring spell to add to its effect.

We were able to cover some distance thanks to it, but we still couldn't reach the gates of the Hua Clan. We stopped about a kilometer away from the place, and the scene.."

Ling Qi's pupils trembled along with his hands.

"It was pure carnage. Thousands of bodies ripped to shreds were strewn all over the place and a river of blood flowed from the hilltop where their grounds were located and it had even trickled down to where we were.

The whole place looked like a meteor had descended on the area bearing heaven's fury. Nothing was left unscathed, neither the people, nor the buildings, nor the trees, even the hill itself had given way to the terror that befell.

Just four..." Ling Qi said as he smiled in despair and disbelief.

"It took just four spirit beasts to wreck the foundation of the Hua Clan to bits and with our luck we arrived just in time to see my sect master and the Hua Clan leader being shredded to pieces and their bodies devoured by a black lighting metal tiger

It toyed around with them before dismembering them and eating their limbs one by one while they watched before it finally devoured their torsos and heads.

We decided to leave the area and warn our respective organizations lest we draw attention and with our conditions, we would be lambs waiting for slaughter.

Zephyr and I agreed we would first go to her clan since it was the closest to us before making our way to mine.

When we reached there...it was just the same as the Hua Clan. The stench of blood filled with the roars of beasts covered every inch of their territory.

Zephyr wanted to go and save her clansmen, but..." Ling Qi paused with guilt washing over his face.

"I am sorry Zephyr.." he weakly said.

Xin Zephyr's body trembled slightly before she looked up with reddened eyes. Her gaze paused slightly on Ling Qi before she said,

"I don't blame you. If I did things my way..." she paused as she bit her lip in pain.

"Then I would have implicated you too.." she softly said before burying herself in his chest while tightly clutching his robes.

Ling Qi lowered his head as he stared at her for a brief moment with countless emotions washing over him before he looked up and continued with the tale.

"We left the area and made our way to my sect. From what we had seen, some part of me expected to see the same scenario of horrid devastation happening at my sect, and my guess proved to be true.

Over a dozen spirit beasts had already flooded the area and flattened my sect. My home for the past 400 years had been converted into a ravine overflowing with dismembered corpses and blood.

The spirit herb farms we cultivated dearly, the alchemy halls where we spent the better part of our days in, toiling, discovering, screaming in frustration when a brewing failed, jumping in joy when we succeeded. The place where we discovered the romance of alchemy.." Ling Qi said with a sad smile as tears slowly trickled down his cheeks.

"It is all gone now. Nothing of the Hua Clan, Xin Clan, and the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect remains now.." he said with dejection.

"With nowhere else to go, we decided it would be better to meet up with Wu Shen and take him up on his offer.

But with our horrible luck, it turns out the tricolored white-eyed tortoise had been among those spirit beasts that attacked my sect. It somehow managed to sense our presence, even with all we had done to mask ourselves.

Upon realizing it had noticed us, we made a break for it... with all our bases destroyed, the only place we thought was safe, was here, but because of our conditions, the trip was harder than normal with us not being at a hundred percent because of the curse.

We both had to burn our blood essence to get away from the tortoise and its cohorts. We managed to escape with a few injuries, as they headed back when we reached about five kilometers from this place.."

When he reached this point, Ling Qi paused as he bowed his head.

"I am sorry Branch Chief Yang Qing for imposing on you like this. I know what has happened is because of our greed and recklessness and we do deserve what has happened to us, but....

please help us, I know it's shameless of me to even ask, but I don't want Zephyr to end up torn apart and devoured by some spirit beast, and I don't want to die either.

Please help us, any help will be welcomed, even if it's just to escort us to the border. Please!!" Ling Qi pleaded.

"Please help us.." weakly said Xin Zephyr who tore herself from Ling Qi to bow her head in plea.

Yang Qing sighed when he saw this as he said,

"Fine.. I will escort you to the town Wu Shen said he would wait for you.."



"Thank you.." the duo said with relief in their tone.

#### Chapter 678 Setting Things Up (1)

"Jinjing, can you bring Ellie over, we will be leaving with her. I'd rather not delay this matter.." Yang Qing said as he addressed Su Jinjing who nodded as she headed to some peak ahead in search of the cloud swallowing kite.

"Administrator Mo Guang, I will be out for a bit. In case any pressing matter arrives before I'm back you and Meili can handle it.

Though I won't be out for long.."

"Don't worry, Branch Chief, I will handle it. I'll also have the chef prepare something when you get back..." said the elderly administrator.

"Thank you.." Yang Qing said with a warm smile at the administrator's kind intentions.

"Have you tried communicating with the rest of your members?" asked Yang Qing as he turned his attention to Ling Qi and Xin Zehyr.

Their expressions suddenly shifted to a dumbfounded look before they hurriedly took out their communication talismans with desperation.

Even though Ling Qi had seen his sect get destroyed, he hoped that there may have been some who had decided to join the expedition into the graveyard torch to harvest the inheritance enlightenment blood crystals.

But after a few seconds, their excited expressions turned to dejection when their communication talismans produced a dull glow every time they tried to make a call.

A dull glow was indicative that the talisman that was on the other end had been destroyed.

"Once I'm back, I will try and look for them.." Yang Qing softly said.

"Thank you, Branch Chief.." Ling Qi said with an air of hopelessness.

Everyone present knew that it was more than likely that they were all dead. If the spirit beasts were planned enough to attack their home bases, then they more than likely had a few dispatched around the graveyard torch in case the humans came back for more of the compatriots' blood crystals, and it was more than likely they would be stronger in comparison to those that attacked their bases considering the importance of the graveyard torch to them.

It didn't take long before Su Jinjing arrived with Ellie in tow.

"Ellie, there is a place I need you to take us.." Yang Qing said as he placed his hands on her forehead which he used as a conduit to transmit the coordinates of Violet Hickory Town.

The two cultivators were quickly jolted from their depressive state the moment Ellie made an appearance. Even though Ellie had reigned in her presence, her thieving nature aside, she had a regal presence that was able to draw the eyes of all who saw her, from her humongous build, the silky gold feathers, and eyes that shone with boundless wisdom.

Her entire presence evoked dread and awe in all who saw especially if they were moderately weaker than her, her presence was intimidating, to say the least.

Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr having had a first-hand experience of their respective organizations getting slaughtered to the last man couldn't help but flinch in deep trepidation when they saw Ellie.

With just a glance, they could tell Ellie was multiple levels stronger even than the black lightning metal tiger that had made short work of the Hua Clan leader and the sect master of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

Even though Ellie had reigned her presence, at an intrinsic level, the two cultivators knew Ellie could slaughter them in an instant should she wish to.

"Don't be afraid, she's a friend.." Yang Qing softly said as he laced his voice with the power of his soul to ease their tension.

"Sorry about that. I hope you don't take offense.." Ling Qi said with an embarrassed tone as he bowed to both Yang Qing and Ellie in apology with Xin Zephyr following suit.

"It's okay.." said Yang Qing.

"Will you be staying?" Yang Qing asked directing the question toward Su Jinjing.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to come.."

Yang Qing nodded with a smile as he ushered them atop Ellie's back. Yang Qing opted to use his qi to drag Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr atop Ellie, who stood rooted to the ground with apprehension written all over their faces.

Even though they knew Ellie would not attack them, they still felt ill at ease at mounting a spirit beast that was many times stronger than them. Fearing and revering strength was the way of the world after all, as it transcended even race.

Their hesitation to mount Ellie was to be expected considering how prideful spirit beasts were known to be towards such a thing. They only agreed to those whose strength they respected, of which Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr were lacking.

Once they were all on top, Ellie immediately darted off into the sky as she sped in the direction of the Violet Hickory Town. It was one of the towns that was close to the borders of the unmanned territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect, where the Summerfield Kingdom and countless other organizations had called home.

Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr were immediately left wide-eyed at Ellie's speed. In just a few seconds, the branch was already but a small dot in the wide forest. They had to focus their eyesight and even employ the use of their spiritual senses for them to be able to capture the images of the objects they flew by past.

Her speed left them gobsmacked. A distance that would have taken them half an hour of full-blown speed to cover was covered by Ellie in just under ten minutes.

But soon, the shock wore off and was replaced by melancholy, the further in they flew. As he was giving Ellie the coordinates, he had purposefully told her to avoid passing close to the territories of the Hua Clan, Xin Clan, or the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

Despite avoiding it, Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by sadness the further in they flew.

Everything had happened too fast. A few weeks ago their biggest worry was that something had been done to them during their treatment from the venom of the tricolored white-

eyed tortoise, and a few months before that the worry was dying to said venom, and the months before that was excitement about potentially joining the Deer Mountain Kingdom if a palace realm expert appeared from within their alliance.

They were full of expectation and excitement back then, but now, all that they knew was gone, brutally at that, and now they were about to leave a place which though terrifying had been all they had ever known. They were about to start over somewhere else, alone. The weight of the suddenness of it all and what had transpired was too overwhelming and suffocating for them.

A few times Ling Qi looked like he was about to vomit and Xin Zephyr, had this listless broken look as tears streamed down her face. Ling Qi managed to pull a bit of himself together long enough to hold her hand in comfort in the suffocating silence and overwhelming grief.

#### Chapter 679 Setting Things Up (2)

After half an hour, the borders of the Deer Mountain Range were already in sight, though technically it wasn't a real border but a deep ravine that separated the range from the next place.

Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr held each other's hands tightly when they saw the ravine. They couldn't help but turn their heads backward, taking in the expansive range filled with trees, terror, and memories, both good and bad.

Yang Qing's gaze lingered on them for a moment as they were turning. The complex emotions running through were evident for all to see.

Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder if they would ever be able to get over the mark the events left on them. What they saw was likely to follow them for quite some time.

"Hopefully it doesn't end up growing into heart demons for them. Luckily they have each other and time to sort through whatever they are going through.." he thought to himself as he saw how close they were to each other.

His earlier suspicions of something going on between the two had already been proven. If one were to go through a storm, having someone you cared for deeply to go through with it, helped.

The two were already in the late stages of the core formation realm and from a rough scan of their bone age, Yang Qing could tell none of them had reached 1,000 years. The 5,000 years afforded to them as core formation experts would give them enough to process everything and maybe get their life back. At least that was what Yang Qing hoped.

Their greed aside, Yang Qing couldn't help but feel sympathetic.

In a few minutes, they had already crossed the ravine and were in unclaimed territory, making their way to the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect.

The town that they were headed to, the Violet Hickory Town could be considered one of the many hubs of the territory.

Many organizations around the area, especially the weaker ones, liked to head to the town for trade. It was one of the safer areas where they could trade their wares or buy something without fear of being robbed after the deal was done.

The town had been created by three sworn brothers, both rogue cultivators. One of them was a seasoned saber cultivator, the other a spear user, and the last one a weapon refiner. Other than the Summerfield Kingdom, they could be considered one of the earliest settlers within that territory and

unlike the rest, they were one of the few who had tacit approval from the sect itself to settle within their territory.

One of their inner disciples had been saved by the three brothers when he was out roaming the continent for tempering. They helped bring the disciple back to his sect for treatment and in exchange for their efforts, the Spiritual Temperance Sect gave them a piece of land within their territory that they could use for themselves without paying tribute.

In addition, they were also given the sapling of a violet hickory tree. The tree could improve a cultivator's meditative abilities while strengthening their souls, and the stronger it became, it could even help in preventing heart demons from gaining ground within a cultivator.

The three cultivators decided to settle down in the territory abandoning their rogue days. The area was rich in resources and spiritual qi capable of supporting their cultivation and they had the friendship of the Spiritual Temperance Sect which was the best form of protection they had.

The organizations that came after, knew of their relationship with the sect, they therefore avoided them, though even without the sect's backing, the three sworn brothers had some skill. When Yang Qing went there to do his evaluations, the report handed to him indicated that the spear user was already a quasi-palace realm expert while the sword user and the weapon refiner were already at the peak stage of the core formation realm.

Such a lineup was capable of inspiring fear and awe among the inhabitants of that territory. The only one who came close to them was the Summerfield Kingdom.

Because of their respectable reputation, strength, and connection to the Spiritual Temperance Sect, most organizations within the area had a feud with each other usually came to them to serve as mediators in their conflicts or witnesses, and through that, the Violet Hickory Town came to be. A town of fairness and Impartiality. Every deal would be upheld from start to finish by all parties as long as it was done within the town.

With its growing reputation, the town grew into a hub where all goods and services were traded without worry of being cheated. Yang Qing had frequented its market once or twice and was exactly as advertised. Even though it didn't have goods that would catch the eye of someone of his level, what the town provided was enough to support an up-and-starting cultivator.

It wasn't long before they finally crossed over into the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect and after twenty minutes they were already above the Violet Hickory Town.

When they were close to the town, Ling Qi had already made a call to Wu Shen to find out if he was still there and where they would find him.

Luckily for them, Wu Shen hadn't left and was still in the town, settling in the Bamboo grove courtyard, which was the area they had agreed to meet.

"Let's go...Jinjing stay with Ellie here, I'll be right back after I'm done.." Yang Qing said as he gently lept off Ellie's back while covering Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr in his qi.

Since they couldn't yet execute their cultivation arts, Yang Qing decided to help them with the journey downward. With their cultivation base, along with the height they were in, leaping off Ellie's back wouldn't hurt them, but the force of their fall would create a disruption to those below, which Yang Qing would rather avoid.

They landed about a few hundred meters away from the entrance of the town and made the rest of the journey on foot. Though Yang Qing did so to avoid drawing eyes, some cultivators already caught sight of them, both those leaving or coming into the town. Their gazes were a mixture of curiosity, wariness, and awe, especially when they felt the auras of Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr.

Because of how superior Yang Qing's cultivation base was to them, they saw him as an unassuming youth, which was scary in and of itself since they saw him float from the sky which was something someone with seemingly no cultivation base couldn't do, which only meant one thing, Yang Qing had an unfathomable cultivation base that they couldn't even perceive.

This led to most of them avoiding eye contact with him and throwing clumsy, fear-filled, and awkward nods as greeting whenever Yang Qing smiled at them in greeting.

Yang Qing, Ling Qi, and Xin Zephyr were soon swallowed in the bustling atmosphere of Violet Hickory Town.

There was no guard at the gate and none on the bustling streets but everything seemed orderly and lively. The streets were swarmed with stalls, storied buildings, and cultivators of all genders, ages, and cultivation bases moving from shop to shop with excitement in their eyes as they browsed the goods put on sale.

A cacophony of different noises and sounds filled the area adding to the beauty and life of the town. There was haggling, arguments, exaggerated advertising of wares, and laughter blending in together.

Yang Qing expertly guided Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr through the boisterous crowd. It seemed like a formless force was parting the crowd, allowing smooth passage for the trio, and for some reason, none of the cultivators seemed to notice the oddness.

Before long they were standing before the entrance made of blue star bamboo poles that released a pleasant refreshing bamboo scent.

There was a signboard above it with the words 'Bamboo Grove Courtyard'.

Yang Qing spread his palace sense and covered the entirety of the courtyard and sensed about 700 individuals.

The courtyard wasn't the most luxurious, but it was one of the largest ones in the town, and one of the few known to be owned by the three sworn brothers.

Yang Qing instantly spotted Wu Shen in the midst of the 700, and he seemed to be talking with two other figures. One of those figures had the same qi aura as him and a cultivation base that was at the 11th stage of the core formation realm, while the other figure was a quasi-palace realm expert with a vigorous qi, the kind you'd find on someone who has weathered countless life and death battles.

"Elder Wu Shen, we have arrived.." Yang Qing said as he transmitted his voice to Wu Shen via his palace sense causing him and the two figures to hurriedly stand up in shock.

### Chapter 680 Setting Things Up (3)

Yang Qing couldn't help but chuckle to himself when he saw Wu Shen madly get up from his seat as he hurriedly made his way toward them. From the way he was running, one would think he was running away from something, which was what the other two figures seated next to him assumed, as the quasi-



palace realm expert took out his defensive treasures along with a talisman which Yang Qing detected contained the aura of a palace realm expert.

"I brought Wu Shen's friends.." Yang Qing said to the expert in a bid to reduce his tenseness.

His response seemed to have worked as the expert's qi movements seemed to ease up a little before he decided to follow Wu Shen out of the room they had been meeting at, leaving only the last figure who seemed hesitant on whether to get up or stay before he finally got up and followed up after the quasi palace realm expert.

Wu Shen reduced his speed once he was outside of the building.

"Branch Chief Yang Qing, welcome.." he said with a slightly embarrassed smile as he made his way to the entrance.

"Thank you.." Yang Qing said as he walked in with Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr in tow.

Behind Wu Shen came the quasi-palace stage expert. It was a man who looked to be in his late thirties. He had donned a black robe that matched his black mane-like hair and beard. He had an air of a valiant general about him.

However, whatever presence he had on him was reigned in at the presence of Yang Qing.

The last to come out was an elderly man with a willowy white beard and robes that matched the ones Wu Shen had on, which were pure white.

Based on his demeanor and the fact that he had the highest cultivation base apart from the quasi-palace stage expert, it wasn't hard for Yang Qing to guess his identity. It was likely the sect master of the Flowing Fist Sect, who Ling Qi said ended up getting beat up by Wu Shen.

Yang Qing could see evidence of that, as the elderly man had a complicated look when his gaze fell on Wu Shen. Yang Qing detected mild fear, envy, and respect in them with the latter being the strongest.

"No wonder he lost.." Yang Qing thought as he detected the massive change in Wu Shen. His fist intent had improved significantly from how it was when he last saw him. It was on the verge of a complete formation. Its embryonic form was already complete and needed just one last push for it to evolve.

"Brother Ling Qi, Sister Xin Zephyr.." Wu Shen said as he cupped his fists at them.

The duo cupped their fists in return and even though they tried to hide their grief, Wu Shen was able to pick up something from their forced smiles.

"Let's talk inside.." he said as he welcomed them to the room they had just come from.

It was a quaint room filled with all kinds of anti-scrying and noise-cancellation arrays.

Once they had all settled down, as a dutiful host, Wu Shen began the introductions.

"This is senior Li Tian, he is one of the chief escorts of the Wind Gliding Mercenaries and will be escorting us to the territory of the Diamond Body Sect.." Wu Shen said as he respectfully pointed to the black-robed man.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Branch Chief.." Li Tian respectfully said as he rose to cup his fists at Yang Qing.

"The pleasure is mine, how is head Yun Wei doing?" said Yang Qing.

"Leader Yun Wei is doing well.."

"That's good, you can tell him I remember his favor, and whenever he wants to collect, I would be more than happy to oblige.." said Yang Qing.

Li Tian's eyes sparkled with surprise and something else as Yang Qing said that.

"I will.." he said as he took his seat.

Wu Shen, the elderly person whom Yang Qing assumed to be the sect master, all looked at Li Tian with envy. Having someone from the Order owe you a favor was like having a life-saving trump card.

Xin Zephyr and Ling Qi couldn't help but feel envious too especially with their circumstances. If they had such a favor, maybe whatever befell them could have been avoided.

Pushing his envy aside, Wu Shen went on to introduce the elderly man next to him, with slight embarrassment in his tone.

"This is sect master Cheng Chao, the leader of our sect.."

The sect master got up in greeting as he said,

"Nice to meet you, Branch Chief Yang Qing, Elder Ling Qi, and Elder Xin Zephyr.."

"He is the sect master alright.." Yang Qing thought in admiration of the sect master's display.

Wu Shen couldn't hide his discomfort as he made the introduction, but the sect master was as natural and composed as he could be. One couldn't even imagine he had taken a beating from Wu Shen a few hours before with how at ease he was.

With introductions out of the way, Wu Shen who was slightly hesitant in asking finally asked,

"Is it just the two of you?"

His question was directed at the two grief-stricken elders seated behind Yang Qing.

"Yes, it's just us, brother Wu Shen.." Ling Qi said with a bitter smile.

The pupils of Wen Shu and Sect Master Cheng Chao trembled when they saw Ling Qi's expression and Xin Zephyr who looked to be struggling to keep her tumultuous emotions in check.

Yang Qing sighed as he stepped in to retell the tale as told to him by Ling Qi. By the end of the tale, Wu Shen and Sect Master Cheng Chao were completely shaken, more so the latter who looked like he was about to fall off his seat completely lacking in the demeanor of a sect master.

"I would have doomed my sect.." he said in disbelief with eyes wide open, tongue drying, and voice cracking.

"Wu Shen, if it wasn't for you..."he weakly added, not daring to complete his sentence, but his implication was clear.

Wu Shen didn't answer as he too was in shock, his mind no likely wandering in the same place as the sect master. It took a bit of time before he regained his senses.

Yang Qing's attention was on Li Tian who had a deep frown as his gaze fell on Wu Shen. On feeling Yang Qing's undisguised attention on him, he hurriedly looked up to find Yang Qing looking at him with eyes that made it seem like they could see right through the thoughts he was having.

His body instantly froze from the stare, with a sudden wetness appearing on his back. He inadvertently gulped before he averted his gaze, his thoughts only known to himself.

Sometime after the deafening silence was broken by Wu Shen, who got up with a solemn expression as he said,

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"If you don't mind it, Brother Ling, Sister Xin, would you like to join the Flowing Fist as our elders?"

The duo were dazed for a moment before Ling Qi absentmindedly asked,

"Are you sure?"

"I am. We would be lucky to have a top-tier alchemist and top-

tier swordswoman join us, especially ones that I can trust. It would be our blessing to have you.." said Wu Shen with a warm smile.

Sect Master Cheng Chao looked like he wanted to say something but held himself back when his gaze fell on both Wu Shen and Yang Qing.

"If you don't mind, then I would be glad too... What about you, Zephyr?" asked Ling Qi.

"Wherever you go, I go.." she softly said before she added,

"I would be honored to join you, though I am not sure I will ever be the swordswoman I once was.."

"Who knows... the future isn't set in stone, it always has a way of surprising you... You may not be the swordswoman you used to be, but that's okay, life is the sum of our experiences.. you might yet turn into another type that suits what you have experienced.." Wu Shen softly said.

"Well said.." Yang Qing said as he stood up.

"I wish you safe travels on your journey ahead. My work here is done.."added Yang Qing as his gaze fell on Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr.

"Might as well help you all the way.." Yang Qing muttered as he stretched his hands.

His hair transformed into a mix of green blue and white as an ethereal and majestic radiance was released from his hands.

## Spring of resplendence

Three droplets that were a mix of green, blue, and with a celestial white glow were instantly produced from his stretched-out hand, carrying with them a dense life aura that made every plant in the area leap in joy as the bamboo immediately started overgrowing just from the remnant aura that was leaking from the droplets.

Li Tian's pupils trembled as he sensed the dense life aura permeating every inch of the area breathing life essence into anything and everything it touched. He felt a gentle embrace wash over him, washing away every strain in his body, spreading to his spirit. He felt an overwhelming profoundness within that warm energy.

In all his life, this was the first time he had ever felt this much life essence. It was like a kingdom-sized forest had been birthed in a wasteland in but a moment, which in essence was proving to be true as the bamboo and the other vegetation had already grown past the height of the courtyard walls filled with vibrancy and strength.

Sect Master Cheng Chao couldn't help but groan in pleasure as he felt the aches he had suffered in the fight against Wu Shen, get healed. Wu Shen experienced the same sensation too.

When the three droplets were formed, Yang Qing gently waved his hand and the three droplets disappeared into the bodies of Wu Shen, Ling Qi, and Xin Zephyr.

Before they could register what had happened, a huge pulse of vital energy immediately exploded from within their bodies and they could feel the hollowness that they had felt after their treatment, get filled up rapidly.

After just a few minutes they were brimming with life. Everything within them from their body to their souls felt renewed, refreshed, and strengthened, Wu Shen could even feel the membrane leading to the peak stage of the core formation realm was paper thin, just a thought and he would breakthrough, but the biggest surprise to him and Ling Qi and Xin Zephyr was regaining their ability to manipulate and absorb qi. Something they had been told would take 3 years before they could regain their abilities.

They were all gobsmacked, especially when they remembered the founder of the Ocean Crucible Refining Pavilion saying they could hasten the process with an ascendant-grade treasure, yet Yang Qing had done it in an instant, without a treasure at that.

Earlier Yang Qing felt that his abilities had leaped, especially in regards to healing, even before his breakthrough, he knew he could resolve their situation thanks to his art and physique, he just chose not to, but with how things were, he decided to do it as a farewell. With this, he would not have anything hanging over his conscience.

"Take care of yourselves and take the lessons you gained from this to heart.." Yang Qing said to the trio as he disappeared from the room.

He could already feel the presence of three figures approaching the courtyard. One of them was a quasi-palace stage expert, and the other two were at the peak stage of the core formation realm. From such a lineup, he could already guess their identities. As much as he was a vain person, he wasn't much for too much fanfare and he still had to go investigate the whereabouts of the Xin clan members and see if there were any survivors.

Without wasting time, he used a phantom void gliding step, and in a few seconds, he had already reached Ellie, leaving the shocked Ling Qi, Xin Zephyr, Wu Shen, Cheng Chao, and Li Tao, who were too shocked even to notice he had left.

When they came to, they cupped their fists in gratitude even though Yang Qing wasn't there to receive it.