

Daily life 711

Chapter 711 Leaving The Deer Mountain Range (1)

Ellie hearing the unveiled threat and recognizing the greedy glint flashing in Yang Qing's eyes as he made the threat, quieted down as she turned her body away from Shi Hai to face the pond.

She knew well enough that Yang Qing wasn't bluffing. He really would deny her the sizzling meat, and that greedy glint only someone of his kind could understand told her he was even hoping she would create a fuss so he could eat her share. Were she more powerful, she would have done the same thing too, in fact, she would have taken the entire thing and flown away and eaten it by herself.

Tsk!

Yang Qing clicked his tongue in disappointment as he joined the rest to prepare. At some point, a cheery Meifeng, and a Gu Xing who seemed much more relaxed than she was when they arrived, joined them.

It wasn't long before they were done and started conversing amongst each other with laughs and a jubilant atmosphere spreading all around. Meifeng seemed much more relaxed as time went by, no doubt her conversation with Gu Xing helped, that and the thousand-leaf bamboo rice wine Yang Qing had taken out to tide them over as they waited for Shi Hai to finish, which he didn't seem to be too far from doing.

Luo Meili and Su Jinjing were able to break down Meifeng's walls and soon they were giggling and trading stories with their stories centering around Yang Qing's shenanigans who in typical fashion had a few theatric performances of his own to said stories. It wasn't long before Meifeng was completely comfortable with everyone, even with administrator Mo Guang, whom she said had the same sort of aura as Lady Gild.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh in gratification as he saw Meifeng chatting away. For as old as she was, she was no different than a four-year-old when it came to how innocently pure she was. She couldn't conceal how she felt. Her actions and emotions could easily be read.

Looking at how she was excitedly talking with everyone, one would find it hard to believe that she had been trembling as a twig a few moments earlier. With how scared she had been, it wouldn't have been a stretch to think that she would have even forgotten her name had Yang Qing left it to her to do her introductions.

"For as shy and wary as she is around strangers, she seems most comfortable around people. Hopefully, Gu Xing can keep her company after I'm gone. Maybe I could have Administrator Mo Guang check in on her every now and then.

But with skylark, crescent-winged moth, and diamond around, she shouldn't be too lonely, especially with their spirituality growing at the speeds their growing at. Cultivation-wise, it would be quite some time before they are remotely close to her level, but in terms of spirit, as long as they are able to communicate with her and understand her, it should be more than enough.." thought Yang Qing.

Yang Qing admired the purity of Meifeng and her cheerful spirit, which was something he hoped she would be able to retain for quite a long time, and he would try and do as much as he could to ensure she retained it, as difficult as he was.

His thoughts were soon interrupted by Shi Hai's voice as he announced the goat was done. Yang Qing turned to see a golden brown work of art, that trickled with juices that may have well been dews from heaven itself and an aroma that words couldn't describe. Even his stomach didn't know how quite to respond to the sensory bombardment he was receiving. It was overwhelmed to the point of confusion.

Sensing the gazes falling on him, Yang Qing forcefully sealed his senses, especially smell so he could contain himself and think clearly.

He looked around him with the same carefree goofy smile he liked wearing before sending threatening glares at Ellie, as it should to which she threw one of her own. As fellow gluttons words needed to be said for them to understand what was going through each other's minds.

Meifeng giggled at the exchange between the two which turned infectious as the rest joined in the laughter.

Yang Qing cleared his throat partly in embarrassment and partly to prepare himself to speak.

"I am not particularly good at this, so forgive the simplicity and plainness of it all.." Yang Qing humbly said.

"My time here at the Deer Mountain Range is about to come to an end in the next few hours... "Yang Qing paused when he saw Meifeng suddenly sulk.

"Don't worry Meifeng, we can still keep in touch using the communication talisman I gave you.. You can always call me anytime you want, and if you want, you can also talk with Meili and Jinjing, who I know would also appreciate hearing from you" said Yang Qing in a soft gentle tone.

"We will, in fact, I will be making those calls myself, so make sure you pick up, Meifeng.." said Su Jinjing with a cheerful smile.

"I will too.." said Luo Meili with a gentle smile.

Their demeanors helped improve Meifeng's mood as her sulking face thawed away slightly and a smile slowly bloomed in its place. After a slight hesitation and steeling herself, in a low shy tone, she said,

"You all better answer when I call.." her gaze intently falling on Yang Qing.

"We will.." said Yang Qing with a smile before he resumed his speech. The quicker he finished it the better. He couldn't wait to sink his teeth in every meal around, especially the grilled goat.

"I wonder if senior Ye Xun is coming?"he wondered as the stoic gold eagle guard flashed in his mind.

"As I was saying, my time here would soon be ending with today being the last day. When I came here, I wasn't particularly ecstatic about it... those who know me, know why.."

He wasn't about to openly declare his cowardice in front of everyone, not with Meifeng looking. She already thought he was some unfathomable expert who wouldn't waiver even if the sky were to fall and he wasn't about to destroy that image.

The statement drew smiles from Luo Meili and Su Jinjing who shook their heads, while Ellie threw a mocking look his way which Yang Qing filed away to use later.

"Anyhow, my experience here has been worthwhile and will stay with me for the rest of my life. I gained more than I could ever give, and this place has a special place in my heart because of you. Thank you for your hospitality, friendship, and the memories you helped me create.

I pay grievances and gratitude in kind, should you ever need help please don't hesitate to ask, because I wouldn't hesitate to ask it of you. That's what friends do. So for my last day here...for now, may we make it as memorable as we can transforming it into a treasure that lasts each one of us a lifetime.

To the moments we have and more to come.." Yang Qing said as he lifted his cup of wine in the air which was mirrored by the rest before they simultaneously downed their wines.

Chapter 712 Leaving The Deer Mountain Range (2)

After finishing emptying the wine from his cup, Yang Qing sensed something that prompted him to look to his left where he saw Ye Xun standing like a solitary beauty as she raised her wine cup toward him with a smile that he never thought he would ever have the chance of seeing due to her stoic nature.

Her smile surprisingly wasn't that bad for someone who didn't like to show much emotion on her face. She was already a golden beauty even when wearing her stoic demeanor, and now smiling, though it was a small one elevated that beauty even further.

Yang Qing nodded toward her in gratitude for showing up but also for the help she had provided while he was still within the range. He knew throughout their stay here, despite her not showing herself a lot, she had been monitoring and watching over them, especially when they were outside, which was why she had been alarmed when she couldn't sense Yang Qing the time the mysterious middle-aged man appeared.

Yang Qing looked around and noticed none of the people present seemed to have realized she was present except him, and when he turned to her with a doubtful look, he saw her shake her head with an apologetic look.

Yang Qing nodded coupled with an understanding smile. Ye Xun had isolated her presence from the rest with her domain space, and Yang Qing would not have noticed her had she not specifically revealed herself to him. As for why she'd rather hide herself, Yang Qing had a few guesses one of which she was being considerate.

While he, Luo Meili, Su Jinjing, and Administrator Mo Guang would be comfortable in the presence of a domain expert, the same could not be said about the rest. They would likely act reserved around her, defeating the whole purpose of the party. Ye Xun isolating herself was understandable, besides from the little interactions he had with her, Yang Qing felt she much preferred it this way.

With introductions and speeches out of the way, the next session which both Yang Qing and Ellie agreed was the most important part out of all arrived.

Shi Hai expertly introduced the dishes and even went as far as to give his suggestions on the pairings they could try for maximum flavor. Everyone listened aptly, committing it to their hearts, well except the two, man and spirit beast who had long lost their mind to hear anything else other than the food that was already beckoning them.

With the explanations out of the way, Meifeng and Gu Xing followed the lead of the two inquisitors who decided to start with the soup first as they worked their way up. For the soup dishes, there were only three; the tomato and egg soup, hot and sour soup, and the West Lake beef soup, each packed with flavors and breathtaking aroma.

Meifeng was undecided on which to choose and opted for the hot and sour one because of the golden steam and radiance it released, as Gu Xing chose the tomatoes and egg soup, while Su Jinjing and Luo Meili went for the West Lake beef soup. They paired their soups with the spring rolls that were placed next to them.

Meanwhile, on this other end administrator Mo Guang went for pine nuts and sweet corn which he paired with some green tea. Haishi and Bolin had automatically gone to the table that had the meat and poultry, however, halted their steps when Ellie sent them warning gazes, luckily Yang Qing stepped in with a wallop to the head and a few threats before he threw Ellie to the vegetable section for her behavior.

"Go on, eat your fill, and don't worry about her, she won't dare retaliate or I'll have her sent to the purple forest for a few months.." Yang Qing menacingly said as his gaze fell on the aggrieved cloud-swallowing kite that ate the spicy and sour shredded potato with a pitiful look even though said dish would cost an arm and tooth due to its rich flavors and the dao nourishment that filled it.

As for Yang Qing, he always thought himself to be an equal opportunities person when it came to his meals, he didn't favor one above the other, and his chivalric spirit wouldn't allow him to do so. So staying true to himself with an air of righteousness, he filled his plate with a little bit of everything from

stir-fried bean sprouts with dried tofu to sweet and sour pork fillet to red braised beef, to gold duck roast, to clear noodles soaked in autumn moon chili sauce.

Every single person couldn't help but hum in pleasure at the stupendous taste of the dishes and their wondrous abilities as seen on dao-infused dishes. Each one of them was transported to a different realm from every dish they ate which left them with pleasant and sentimental expressions on their faces. Meifeng had teared up at some point, Gu Xing had this nostalgic smile as she stared at the stars, Bolin had a conflicted look, Haishi, and Ellie were just greedy, and Mo Guang smiled his smile was like that of a parent whenever they remembered their child, Ye Xun who had picked a few dishes without anyone being the wiser had a nod of approval as she shot a casual glance Shi Hai's way who was choked up with emotions when he saw the reactions the rest had toward his meals.

As for Yang Qing, Su Jinjing, and Luo Meili, they were long accustomed to the emotions brought about by dao-infused meals as each surrendered themselves to the journey. It was the best way to both enjoy the meal and harvest greatly from dao-infused meals.

"Shi Hai, you've truly created something special here.." said Yang Qing with deep-felt admiration.

"I don't know about that, but I am glad I took the offer.." Shi Hai said, tears almost falling with a smile of gratification.

The others echoed Yang Qing's sentiments as they complemented Shi Hai on his skills, even Gu Xing wasn't reserved with her compliments.

The atmosphere grew harmonious and the serenity river melody skylark after eating a few lotus roots was pumped full of energy as she flew around the alcove chirping joyous melodies that elevated the mood by renewing and refreshing them. The crystal-winged moth joined it, and a few moments later Meifeng joined them adding notes of her own that blended perfectly with the tune of the serenity river melody skylark.

The diamond beetle was the only one that didn't move as it remained perched on Yang Qing's shoulders eating off his plate. Yang Qing added more spicy dishes when he noticed it seemed to be its favorite.

The mood had already turned full throttle into that of a party, as Yang Qing shamelessly joined despite numerous protests.

It was in the midst of singing off-key that Ye Xun told him,

"Seems like you have another guest.."

Chapter 713 Leaving The Deer Mountain Range (3)

Yang Qing was caught a little off-guard by Ye Xun's statement as his brows raised a little in wonder at who the guest might be.

The fact that Ye Xun called them a guest meant it was someone familiar to him or her. As he made his way outside the alcove to see who it was he went through the possible list of suspects.

At first, the mountain jade serpent appeared in his mind, thinking that maybe he had decided to come after all, but Yang Qing dismissed that idea when he remembered he likely didn't know the area all too well. By his own admission, the mountain jade serpent did admit to never leaving the mountain he lived at ever since he was a rock python.

After the mountain jade serpent, Yang Qing's mind went to Xiang He the special inquisitor put in charge of the investigation. He was the one who seemed to check out all the boxes as both he and Ye Xun knew him. He even entertained the thought that maybe the soul formation expert supervising the kingdom-wide array had decided to visit them.

It wasn't long before Yang Qing made his way out of the alcove in time to see a lady who looked to be in her early twenties looking at the alcove with mesmerization in her eyes. She had a small build, that one would easily mistake her for a young girl. In terms of height, she reached Yang Qing's diaphragm.

She had deep black hair that had shades of silver, blue, and gold mixed with it and it was tied in a bun with loose strands hanging from her forehead which only served to add to her charm. She had a small oval face, supple eyes, soft-looking jade-like skin, and a devastating beauty that made all who looked at her mistake her for an immortal fairy. That fact was only accentuated by the silver butterfly-patterned robe she had been wearing which glistened when the rays of the sun fell on it. The robe looked like it had been fashioned from the wings of a dragonfly.

She had an ethereal air about her that made one feel even though she was standing right in front of them, she was still out of reach.

"You must be Yang Qing. Pardon me for the sudden intrusion. I sensed a few unique auras when I was flying overhead, and I couldn't help myself.. Such pure yin energy, and I sense another lark with a unique constitution.." said the young lady with a melodious tone that would be able to stir the hearts of many.

"Who are you?" Yang Qing politely asked, though he already had an inkling as to her identity, considering a few factors such as her knowing his name, and the air about her and bearing.

"Sorry.." said the young lady as she tore her eyes from the surroundings, back to Yang Qing

"I am Fang Wen, your successor as the next branch chief of the Deer Mountain Branch. Nice to meet you.." she said as she cupped her fists in greeting.

"Thought so.." thought Yang Qing.

"Nice to meet you. I was told you would be arriving tomorrow.."

"I was, but I couldn't help but want to come here early and see what it's like. There's a friend of mine, his mind has nothing else other than combat, but even as the combat maniac he always spoke of this place with fondness.

So I was curious, what made this place so special that even a combat fanatic would spare it some thought despite the time that had passed by since he was last here.."

"The friend you are talking about, is it the metal moon tornado lynx?" tentatively asked Yang Qing.

"Mmh, he goes by Ji Shun now, he always thought his species name was always a mouthful.." Fang Wen said with a light chuckle.

"How is he?" Yang Qing curiously asked.

From what he was told by Meifeng before Lady Gild came into the limelight, the metal moon tornado lynx had been the undisputed overlord of the area whose reputé spread all over the range and later left for the Green Fog Region in search of battle.

"Judging by your look it seems you have heard of him.."

Yang Qing nodded as he said,

"There's a friend of mine who has heard of him from someone called Lady Gild.."

Fang Wen's eyes flickered as she said,

"Is she here? Ji Shun spoke highly of her too. He claimed she was the only one he ever considered his equal and that fact has never changed despite being a domain expert now.."

"A domain expert?" asked Yang Qing in surprise.

"Mmh, it's how we became friends in the first place. By series of coincidence and bad luck, we ended up in a predicament with our lives on the line under the same foe. Ji Shun was close to his breakthrough at the time, so we made a deal, I would buy him enough time to stabilize his injuries in preparation for the breakthrough, and after that, if he made it through successfully, he would take over.

Luckily he did.."Fang Wen said with a wry smile.

Even though she glossed over the details, Yang Qing felt the ordeal was anything but simple. He couldn't help but wonder what or who it was that put them on the ropes like that.

"How is it there?" he asked.

"The Green Fog Region?" asked Fang Wen to which Yang Qing nodded.

Fang Wen held her chin with a soft smile on her face which made it seem like spring had just arrived.

"For those who can survive there, it's paradise, for those who can't, it's hell, and those instances can change in the blink of an eye. Nothing is guaranteed in that place but for those looking to improve themselves like Ji Shun, it's the best place.

It's a vast land of unfathomable mysteries and richness. It's like several grottos and mysterious realms had been stacked into one. You'll find unique environments, unique natural treasures of all kinds, and in no small amount that are capable of transforming dung to gold, countless dao-rich fortunes that are sure to cause a disaster were it to appear any place outside of the Green Fog Region.

I may have not seen what Holy Lands are like, but I doubt they can match the grandeur and opulence of the Green Fog Region. That place is like an immortal's garden. What I saw in the sixth zone already shocked me to my core, I can only imagine what it's like in the fifth zone and above moving toward the core.

But with my paltry strength, there is no way I'd scratch that itch. It's a sure way of dying. I was humbled in that place..I always thought with my speed, even if I couldn't defeat my opponent there was no way they could catch up to me if I decided to flee with all my might. I soon came to realize why that place is dreaded so much, I'm even surprised of how Ji Shun survived that long.." said Fang Wen with a sigh.

"Are you thinking of going?" she added.

"While i don't know what cultivation art you're using, but with your presence, I think you'd blend easily in there, just don't venture too deep if you do decide to go. I was told you have a peerless jade physique, the immunity to various toxins granted to the physique should help you there, though avoid getting poisoned if you can. You never know.."

"No, no,Senior Fang Wen, I have no interest in going there.." hurriedly interrupted Yang Qing with a bitter smile when he saw Fang Wen was about to give him the beginner survival guide into the Green Fog Region.

"I was just curious since I have two spirit beasts in my team who are from there and my friend from here, she's called Meifeng, the owner of this place, a parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree. She

mentioned how most spirit beasts loved going there, so that and my teammates, I was curious of what kind of place it was.."

"Oh.." Fang Wen said with her cheeks slightly reddening in slight embarrassment.

"But, when I do decide to go, I will definitely look for you.." hurriedly added Yang Qing.

Fang Wen instantly perked up as she said,

"Please do, as your senior, I will do all I can to prepare you. It's a terrifying place but it's also one of the most beautiful places I have been to, well to a cultivator who can sense dao that is.. When you visit the place, you'll know.."

Yang Qing nodded with a smile as he said,

"If you don't mind, would you care to join us, administrator Mo Guang is with us, you could take the opportunity to talk, and the food isn't bad, and the company too. I would appreciate it if you could join us.."

"I would be honored.." answered Fang Wen with a polite smile as Yang Qing led her in.

She was just as surprised as Gu Xing was when she sensed the pure yin energy coming from the pond next to the tree.

Yang Qing introduced her to the rest, except Ye Xun who still remained incognito, and from the look she gave him, it seemed that she was just about to leave.

Fang Wen was free-spirited which made her blend easily with the rest, especially Meifeng who was quite taken with her, especially when Fang Wen said she was friends with someone from the range. It wasn't only her, as the serenity melody river skylark flew around her with deep interest. Yang Qing guessed it might have something to do with both of them being larks, as Fang Wen showed the same interest in the skylark, with Shi Hai lurking at the side with a smitten look on his face.

The party continued in full swing with laughs, songs, stories, good food, and wine.

Chapter 714 Leaving The Deer Mountain Range (4)

Yang Qing soon came to realize that the new branch chief of the Deer Mountain Branch was an energetic sort, which he wasn't sure was due to her personality or due to the fact that she was an ethereal swift lark. She and Meifeng bombarded the group with countless tales that were all over the place as she sampled almost every dish there was before finally, she decided to focus all her efforts on the wine Yang Qing had brought.

But thanks to her rambunctious nature, the laughter never stopped because of how hilarious and engaging her stories were.

A couple of hours passed by, and most of the dishes had already been eaten, except for the grilled volcanic crystal horned goat and the golden duck that had been saved up as the closing dishes.

When the moment of truth came, everyone decided to give Shi Hai the honor of carving them up as the creator of the meal itself. Yang Qing was already beside himself with growling hunger as he imagined what that crisp, tender, gold-red, gold-red, gold-brown meat would test if just the look and the smell were that great.

Luckily, he didn't have to wait for too long, as Shi Hai had expertly carved the three goats and the two ducks into thin strips that he spread on different plates with different accompanying sauces. Once he was done he invited the rest to join over, with Ellie and Yang Qing at the front line with Bolin and Haishi not far behind.

Of course, all of them were ultimately too late, as a petite figure could already be seen at the table gnawing onto a drumstick with one hand, while the other held a juicy rib as she groaned in satisfied pleasure. It was none other than Fang Wen.

"This is the best meat dish I've ever had. Shi Hai, you really should stay.." she said in between gorging herself with the different pieces of meat.

Shi Hai scratched the back of his head as he smiled sheepishly with reddened cheeks and neck.

Yang Qing didn't have the time to tease him as he hurriedly reached out for an empty plate and picked a few ribs, some thinly sliced strips, two of the sauces Shi Hai had laid out, and a one drum stick from the golden duck.

Without pause, he took a bite of the grilled meat from the crystallized volcanic goat, which no matter how much he imagined the flavor would be, still managed to shock him to the core. It was crisp and packed full of flavor and juices that the saliva on his tongue didn't stop flowing. He doesn't know when but at some point because of the overwhelming flavor, without notice he started tearing up.

He could feel the natural flavors of the meat blend perfectly with the spices and herbs that Shi Hai had coated them with like the perfect symphony of flavors, and when he dipped it into one of the sauces, the taste only grew further. He realized there were levels to flavors he didn't even know existed.

The rest soon reached the table and sampled the grilled meat from both the golden duck and the volcanic crystallized horn goat. Though their reactions weren't as exaggerated as Yang Qing's, well except Ellie's who became dizzy with a euphoric look on her face after she took a single bite, but the rest, though they didn't have outlandish reactions, all had expressions on their face that spoke of pleasant surprise and deep satisfaction.

For the next few minutes as they gorged themselves on the grilled meat, no one spoke. Only the sounds of satisfaction echoing behind chewing sounds filled the place.

When they were done, almost as if by design, they all let out satisfied sighs with Yang Qing slathering Shi Hai with praises after. That taste was unforgettable. He even had half a mind to tell Mo Guang to have the Order deliver some more and have Shi Hai make them more before he left.

With all the dishes consumed, Yang Qing's wine took over. Yang Qing had underestimated how powerful the wine handed to him by the mysterious figure was, as even after using just a few drops in ten-liter barrels, the energy contained within it still proved too much for those who were below the palace realm that he had to dilute it some more.

But its potency aside, its taste was also unmatched. It made one feel like they were drinking heavenly dew. All its grandness, purity, majesty, unfathomable power, and beauty contained with each sip.

Everyone present, it didn't matter whether it was Fang Wen who was at the quasi-domain stage, or Shi Hai who was at the eighth stage of the core formation realm, they all felt their entire beings being elevated from consuming the wine. It was like they were consuming a potent dao natural treasure that was infused with all kinds of elements that were meant to strengthen every single part of their being, from their minds to their bodies, to their souls and spirits.

Scattered thoughts became clear, flaws in their foundations were slowly being smoothened up, ideas that were no more than ephemeral clouds were condensing, everything from their internal organs to their meridians, to their dantian, to their souls and internal palace realms were slowly solidified and strengthened and it all felt natural and smooth unlike elevations brought by consuming pills and potions.

The changes brought to them by the wine felt like they were being reforged and born again. Of course, all present, were in no mood to sit down and meditate to maximize the benefits, and with how potent it was, they didn't have the self-control and the presence of mind to do so, all they felt like doing was laughing, dance, sing, tell both truthful and exaggerated stories, basically enjoy the moment.

They were soon consumed by that revelry that they didn't notice time quickly pass by and before they knew it, the rays of dawn were already trickling their way into Meifeng's alcove replacing the gentle glow of the moon.

Chapter 715 Leaving The Deer Mountain Range (5)

With its arrival, even though no one said anything, they knew the time to say goodbye had come. Ye Xun had already left at some point, but Yang Qing didn't know when, because after a couple of cups in, a speed competition with Fang Wen and Ellie, and a few off-key songs, he had lost track of his surroundings. Though Ye Xun's silent disappearance wasn't a surprise as it went perfectly in line with the temperament.

Fang Wen was the next to leave along with administrator Mo Guang with the latter leaving to help Fang Wen familiarize herself with the post. Yang Qing would meet them later when the official from the Administration department arrived to formalize and complete the handover to Fang Wen.

Haishi, Bolin, Luo Meili, and Su Jinjing left an hour later after Meifeng made them repetitively promise to keep in touch with her and if they could, to visit her when they could. Finally, only Gu Xing and Yang Qing were left.

"Don't put on that face.." Yang Qing said with a soft smile as he saw Meifeng with a fragile look with tears just about to fall.

"Must you leave? You could stay.." she weakly said with an imploring look though she quickly looked down with a guilty look.

Yang Qing looked to Gu Xing for help who conveniently pretended she was discussing something of importance with the diamond beetle. Yang Qing didn't know why but other than him, the diamond beetle seemed to have struck a connection with Gu Xing, and her with it.

"I can't, Meifeng as much as I would want to stay, there are things I need to do, things that I left, friends and family to check on, promises to keep, and expectations to meet. It would be hard for me to just abandon all that.." Yang Qing softly said as he brushed Meifeng's hair.

"I know..it's just.." Meifeng paused as she used all her willpower to contain the dam of tears that were threatening to break away.

"Ever since Lady Gild went, Adler, the Badger, and now...." she paused slightly as she clutched her robe tightly.

"And now you.. I know I'm being unreasonable but the thought of being alone again after the time we have had... it..it terrifies me. I feel like this dark hand big enough to cover the sky is stretching its hand toward me to steal from me... again..I know it doesn't make any sense.."

"It does.." said Yang Qing which prompted Meifeng to look up.

"It does.." he added.

Gu Xing who seemed slightly hesitant about something, seemed to have steeled herself as she hesitantly said, lacking any of her regal bearing,

"If you don't mind, I could always visit regularly if you want.."

"See you are not alone.. you also have a skylark, diamond, and crescent to keep you company.." added Yang Qing as he beckoned the three creatures over and handed them to Meifeng who received them in her arms.

"And we can always talk on the communication talisman.." he added.

Meifeng alternated her gaze between the two of them before she finally said,

"Thank you.."

"Thank you too, Meifeng. I'll also ask a senior of mine if there is a way to extend the distance which you can send your clone from your main body. If there is, maybe you could visit me, and Meili and Jinjing and see where we work.."

"Really?!" Meifeng excitedly asked as she tightened her hold over the three creatures. The diamond beetle was okay because of its sturdy body but the crescent moon-winged moth, and the serenity river melody skylark were not as sturdy and couldn't help but let out voices of protest toward the excitable Meifeng, who smiled in embarrassment as she tried to appease the duo.

"It's not a guarantee, but I will ask.." answered Yang Qing as he remembered the auspicious wood grove tree that could explore the entire continent with a clone, granted it was already at the soul formation realm, but who knew, maybe he had unfathomable means to help Meifeng.

If it wasn't for the sense he got that Meifeng would likely not agree to leave the area because of her attachment to it, and the memory it holds for her, and also his inability to replicate the effects the mysterious man created on the pond next to her, Yang Qing would have invited her to move to his abode at the Order.

"If senior auspicious wood grove doesn't have a way, I could always just make the offer and see if she agrees.." thought Yang Qing.

He could already imagine how great it would be for her there. She would never fear the loneliness she felt here.

Once he saw Meifeng had settled down, Yang Qing turned his gaze toward Gu Xing as he said,

"I take it you will be staying for a bit.."

Gu Xing looked to Meifeng first who was already humming about all the adventures she would have if she could extend the range of her clone. Sensing Gu Xing's gaze, Meifeng responded.

"I'd love it if you could stay, and tell me more stories, especially about the mountain-shattering squirrel. Lady Gild said other than Adler, that squirrel was the only other spirit beast that was able to get under her skin as Adler.." she said with a hearty laugh.

"I would love to.." Gu Xing said with a smile of her own.

"It seems I'll be staying..." she added as she turned her gaze back to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing couldn't help but admit that Gu Xing had a beauty that crossed and subverted gender and even species.

"What? You thinking of inviting me to be your dao companion?" she asked with a teasing smile.

Yang Qing almost choked, before he reddened with embarrassment when he saw her smile triumphantly.

"You'd make a great match.." Meifeng innocently added at the side with her gaze alternating between the duo.

"See what you're doing. You're already poisoning her young mind.." said Yang Qing with an aggrieved tone.

"Fine, fine.." dismissively said Gu Xing.

"Whoever she is, she is lucky.." she added with a meaningful look that seemed like she could see through Yang Qing.

Yang Qing unwilling to continue with that line of topic said,

"What we agreed on earlier, be careful out there and in case of anything don't forget to reach out to the branch or to me.."

"I will, and don't forget to tell me what you find.."

"I will.."

Yang Qing exchanged a few words with the two before he made his way to the branch for the handover.

By the time he arrived, Fang Wen had already been given a wholesome induction by the seasoned Mo Guang and already knew the ins and outs of the branch, all that was left was the arrival of the administrator who would handle the handover of the rights from Yang Qing to Fang Wen.

As they waited, Yang Qing decided to share all the findings he had made during his stay including his suspicions of the undercurrent brewing within the Deer Mountain Kingdom and the range as a whole. He also informed her of what he told Gu Xing about seeking help from the branch at the slightest sign of trouble, to which Fang Wen readily agreed to. She seemed to know a thing or two about the sacred flame swan's ability to sense trouble.

"I wonder what Ji Shun's reaction would be if he knew all this was brewing in his home. He always felt this place was too peaceful which was why he left in the first place, but in as much as he loved fighting, the peace of this place was one of the things he loved about it. Even his leaving, in part, was to chase after bigger adventures but another, was to preserve the harmonious spirit that was here, which couldn't have been done had he been here.."

I can't help but wonder how things would have played out had he remained..."

Yang Qing sighed as he said,

"Who knows, maybe the Deer Mountain Kingdom wouldn't have existed, or whatever card they have would have likely been forced then, but alas we will never know, all we can do is deal with the here and now.

Hopefully, the array is completed in time.."

Fang Wen nodded as time slowly passed by. It wasn't long before the administrator arrived, and the handover process was completed swiftly with the tokens and control of the branch being completely handed over to Fang Wen.

"No wonder Hao Da didn't want to leave the branches.." thought Yang Qing as he felt a slight heaviness in his heart when the process was complete.

All present including the administrator who had come, shared a meal, before finally, Shi Hai was picked up by Ye Xun who took him back to the White Baobab Kingdom, while he, Luo Meili, and the rest who had joined him over, rode the flying ferry the administrator took to get here. It was both faster and safer than riding back with Ellie as the ferry was a flying fortress capable of providing them protection against early-stage domain experts.

Yang Qing leaned over the starboard with lingering sighs as he saw the Deer Mountain Range fade from sight.

Chapter 716 Ultimately Headquarters Is Still Best

The few memories he made from his short time there flashed in his mind as he was leaving the area, from the nervousness and rage he felt when he had just arrived, to the heaviness that came soon after as he thought of the fate of Hao Da and the rest and how desolate the branch seemed to be. A constant reminder of what had happened.

Immediately after he got to interact with Mo Guang, drinking from his cup of wisdom, and though their interaction wasn't a lot, he had grown to respect and admire the veteran administrator.

Then after, out of a sense of guilt, or responsibility, or the ghosts of the Ice Emerald Sect somehow still haunting him, he was all over the place investigating what exactly happened to Hao Da. He wasn't sure if it was out of vengeance, or was an excuse to not keep his mind idle, or a fear-driven agenda that maybe

if he found out what happened, such a situation would be able to be prevented, but he threw himself into finding out what happened, finding a long thread that only bore more questions.

The longer he pulled at the thread, the more the primary culprits of the case, the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate felt less and less like the primary masterminds of the whole event. The deeper he dug, the more it felt like some massive hand from the past had been pulling strings, as to what end, Yang Qing had no clue, all he knew was they had something to do with the Deer Mountain Kingdom, and they didn't seem to be the only culprits.

The whole thing was a quagmire of unanswered questions that left Yang Qing's stomach churning as he wondered if he kept digging, what would he end up finding. Would he even get a chance to, or was it already too late, and it was only a matter of time before the whole thing exploded with them being none the wiser?

At least, he wasn't tormented by the demons of unanswered questions and foreboding all the time, as he got to enjoy a few good things, the top of which was Shi Hai's meals, followed by the friendships and unique experiences he inadvertently ended up creating such as befriending a rare sacred flame swan in Gu Xing, experiencing the hallowed sense of a graveyard torch, which in no small part helped him gain a general sense of the Deer Mountain Range. Experiencing the world for a day was better than reading a thousand books. He got to learn more about the range than he ever expected and in some sense feel the spirit of the region.

He also got to create a deep friendship with a quirky shy parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree in Meifeng and create memories that would serve as an anchor for him during the heavy days, and he even got to meet a mysterious figure and have one of those lucky encounter chances from it. The same kind he had heard storytellers and bards speak about in tea houses and inns about mystical chance encounters that were able to transform a mortal into a dragon among men.

While all he got was wine and a precious wine gourd made from an empyrean world jade tree, they were worthwhile nonetheless, especially when he felt the effects of the wine during the party. Even without actively trying to refine it, everyone who drank it reaped massive benefits from it, and some of them had even experienced minor breakthroughs because of it such as Shi Hai who leapt from the eighth stage directly to the peak of the tenth stage. Yang Qing felt in his case it was a combination of factors. It was the wine and his recent epiphany and interaction with the cooking dao.

By his estimates within half a year or less, Shi Hai would reach the peak of the core formation realm and to aid him in his efforts Yang Qing gave him a small wine pouch containing a bit of the wine from the

mysterious figure. It was heavily diluted though, while he produced another pouch to give Longming the king of the White Baobab Kingdom.

Other than Shi Hai, Bolin, and Haishi experienced growths with their cultivations leaping to the seventh and sixth stages respectively. The two wanted to keep going, but Yang Qing put a dampener on that as they needed time to reinforce their foundations and stabilize themselves. The two had great combat sense even by the Order's standards owing to their time at the Green Fog Region, but because of how tumultuous the place had been when it came to Bolin, his foundations had a lot of flaws. The urgency to quickly improve himself was evident in his foundations and Yang Qing hoped to rectify that step by step, especially with Luo Meili already at the peak of the core formation realm, it was only a matter of time before she went into closed-door seclusion herself in preparation for the palace realm.

When she does, Yang Qing would have to take over Bolin's training. As for Haishi, strangely enough, she had better foundations than Bolin, despite being weaker in combat awareness. Yang Qing couldn't tell how or why, but Haishi's body was strange, even if he didn't know what, but he always felt some strange power within her which was later confirmed by some of the members of the Beast Hall. It seemed to be something she was born with. Those seniors having deemed it not to be something dangerous to her, didn't pry too deep as they could feel there was something sentient about it and just let it be.

Yang Qing didn't bother to dig too deeply into it after the discovery and revelation that it wasn't something harmful to her. Each person was entitled to their own secrets and trump cards and it wasn't his place to invade upon them, but he would still have to submit Haishi to the same rigorous training as Bolin even with her sturdier foundations and the reason for that was her slothful nature which was evident with her low cultivation base.

Haishi given the choice would just eat and sleep, while Yang Qing wasn't too much different in that regard, at least he was arduous when it came to cultivation and matters relating to it. Not once had he ever slacked off on it, but Haishi was different.

From the observations he made from interacting with her and the reports from Luo Meili and those from the Beast Hall, Yang Qing surmised her present accumulations were as a result of the mysterious force within her and not her efforts. If she had even made a quarter effort, her cultivation base would not have been at the fourth stage of the core formation realm, which was where it was when Feng Xin met her, by Yang Qing's guess, she would have already been at the peak of the core formation realm and possibly even at the palace realm considering how many years she spent languishing in the core formation realm despite her clear advantages.

Both he and the beast hall had already decided they would put her through the wringer. She would likely be thrown into the purple forest soon enough, but the mirage dragonfly in question had no idea as she gingerly used her communication bead stone to excitedly share something with Bolin.

Even though they had long gone past the borders of the Deer Mountain Range and it was already out of sight even within the sight range of a palace realm expert, Yang Qing couldn't help but turn back one last time as he engrained the experiences he had heard in his heart both the pleasant and the unpleasant ones.

"Ultimately, headquarters is still the best.."

Chapter 717 Seems Like You're Back

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh in envy when he saw in just under three hours, they were already within earshot distance of the territory of the Order's headquarters. Were they to use Ellie, it would have taken them close to six and that was with Ellie expending herself without pause as if she was flying for dear life.

Of course, if she broke through to the palace realm it would be a different case, but for now, she couldn't match the speeds of the flying ferry or its comfort either. It had multiple cultivation and meditation chambers fitted with all sorts of arrays and natural treasures to aid in the endeavor, there were refining chambers for those interested. It wasn't filled with monarch-grade ingredients, but anything below that would be found there in plentiful supply ranging from spiritual metals and ores to spiritual herbs and the like.

Every passenger had their own rooms that was fitted with their own meditation and training chamber and there was also a common room that was split into a library and a recreation room where the passengers could gather and enjoy each other's company if they so wished to.

For the latter part of their journey, Yang Qing had been hanging out with Su Jinjing and Bolin in the recreation room as they shared some of the meals Shi Hai had made for them to have during the trip and enough to even share back home. Luo Meili was in her room meditating and cultivating, trying to take advantage of the effects of the wine Yang Qing shared and the insights she had gained into her path in the Dao. She decided to use the short interlude to deepen her understanding of it.

As for Haishi and Ellie, the latter had goaded the former into a flying competition with Ellie promising to use one wing, and restricting her cultivation base to the first stage of the core formation realm. The wager for the competition was their assigned meals. Haishi in her naivety thought she stood a chance and as a growing glutton herself, she felt this was the best opportunity to increase the amount she had.

Her misjudgment of Ellie's capabilities aside, she wasn't completely gullible as she had Yang Qing serve as a witness and officiator to the bet, which Yang Qing readily agreed to for a price of course. He would receive a bit of the winnings for his efforts which both parties readily agreed to.

Haishi had severely underestimated the abilities of a cloud-swallowing kite, a spirit beast touted to have the closest speed to a golden roc. Yang Qing at the fifth stage of the core formation realm could never beat Ellie in speed when she was at the first stage. There was no way Haishi would be able to do that either, even with Ellie flying with one wing. Her loss was destined, and Yang Qing allowed it in part for her growth. The humbling experience brought by the loss would do her some good in the long run in the overestimation of her abilities and the underestimation of others. She would lose her meal and Ellie would mock her endlessly and repeatedly for it, but in the end, if the experience sticks by her, it could very well help her keep her life when the moment came.

Everything went as Yang Qing expected, with her loss as she lost pitifully at that. She cut a sorry look as she tried to have Yang Qing help her but Yang Qing turned a deaf ear to it as he paid careful attention to Ellie to make sure she wouldn't short him on the deal. Knowing her, there was a chance she would eat it at all even at the risk of a beating. Luckily this time, she was much more honorable, though she did try to short him a few pieces of meat, which Yang Qing decided to be magnanimous for once and let it slide. He was already in a chipper mood, with the headquarters already in sight.

...

"We are back..." he said when the black medallion tower came into full view. Every time he left, whether it was for evaluations or even personal errands, every time he came back, the tower that gave him nightmares every time he was here would suddenly transform into a supportive and comforting pillar, reminding him that he was safe.

Yang Qing let out a sigh of relief as he offered a bow of gratitude toward the Silver Eagle members on the flying ferry for transporting them back safely and for their dutiful services during the trip over. Silver Eagles were a detachment within the Gold Eagle guards that handled the security and maintenance of flying ferries. Though they were a lesser version of the Gold Eagles, they were skilled in what they did, and the trip over had been relaxing and enjoyable thanks to them.

After they alighted, the administrator who had handled his handover bid them goodbye and about a minute later, Yang Qing and the rest went their separate ways. Luo Meili went to her abode to continue delving into her dao, and Su Jinjing went to her abode to rest a bit before cultivating. Yang Qing could

tell she was slightly uneasy about it. Everyone else seemed to be making rapid progress aiming for the palace realm, while she was still at the 11th stage of the core formation realm, and though she felt the barrier of the 12th stage was already loose enough for her to make a smooth breakthrough, it was the after that worried her. She still hadn't sensed the traces of her path.

"Jinjing, don't be down, there's no hurry with it, and with things like these, there is no use forcing it. Haste makes waste. Just do as you have been doing, it will come to you. The more natural it is, the easier it will be.." said Yang Qing to the downcast inquisitor.

"Thanks, Qing.." she said trying to put on a brave front as she smiled, however, as she walked away, she cut a desolate image.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh when he saw this but a moment later he cheered himself up as he said,

"Her time will come.."

Su Jinjing may not have had the monstrous talent as Yang Qing, Yi Jie, or Feng Xin, nor did she have a powerful natural physique like Luo Meili, or a tenacious and relentless spirit like Zheng Hu, but she did have her unique strengths with her powerful soul and insightful mind being some of them. Given enough time, she was sure to find her path to the palace realm, it was just a matter of time.

Yang Qing instructed Haishi and Bolin to head to the beast tamer hall who would help them refine the wine that was still in their system as for Ellie, he let her do as she pleased. She had the token to his abode and the abodes of the rest of his team, she would decide whether she wanted to go there or to the beast tamer hall.

As for him, he decided to head to his office to arrange his thoughts and plans for the next month while he was still free. He still intended to follow up on the investigation he had been conducting, following all the clues he had gathered so far, and the Judicial Review Committee and Special Inquisitor Xiang He had promised to provide him with the relevant information to help him in that regard.

He also had the Perpetual Cerulean Weaver's wisdom to a lifeline art to practice, and also try and see if the auspicious wood grove tree had the means to help Meifeng increase the operational distance of her clone, which was among a slew of other things that were on his to-do list.

He couldn't help but smile wryly at the mountain of things on his plate.

"I can't believe I thought when I reached the palace realm things would be easier. Did old man Lei curse me back for all the cursing I've done over the years.."thought Yang Qing as he held his chin in deep contemplation at the entrance hallway of the black medallion tower.

However, he was pulled from his thoughts by a voice that always made his body shake instinctively every time he heard it.

"Seems like you're back, Yang Qing."

Chapter 718 Hallway Of Dreams

Yang Qing could feel his heart race, and a sense of dread wash over him like that of a lamb that suddenly senses a wolf stalking it.

With stiffened muscles, Yang Qing turned around, trying to hide the reflexive fear from his face as he answered,

"I didn't think you'd be waiting for me, head Lei Weiyuan. I am deeply honored and humbled that you would pay me such attention despite the amount of work on your plate. I am both deeply touched and overwhelmed by the attention.."

Yang Qing cupped his fists with an air of politeness and admiration radiating from his entire demeanor. One would not believe he was facing the person who had haunted him and given him nightmares that were even more terrifying than heart demons. His present demeanor made it seem he was talking to his grandfather, whom he so greatly revered.

"Is it because I've been away for quite some time, why does he seem even more intimidating than before.." wondered Yang Qing with extreme worry and fear coursing throughout his body as he felt the palpable pressure coming from Lei Weiyuan as he stood there with his calm face, his body ramrod straight looking like it could pierce through the dome of the heavens above, his hands behind his back exuding a sagely presence, and his silver eyes that seemed like they could pierce through every mysteries in the heavens above and the earth below.

Yang Qing had always been unable to maintain eye contact with him for long because of it. Even when he didn't do anything wrong, on reflex whenever those eyes fell on him, he always felt like he had done something wrong which needed to be hidden and denied aggressively.

Lei Weiyuan remained still for a few seconds before he moved one of his hands which he used to stroke his silver beard that matched his silver eyes. The silence made Yang Qing feel like several mountains had been piled on his back with the scorching sun above him. His knees felt weak, his back sweaty, and his vision almost blurry.

"What am I cowering for, I have not done anything wrong, as a matter of fact, I did exemplary work with no supervision. Old man Lei should be commending me for it and I also have a month's off...Maybe I can rub it on his face even.." thought Yang Qing as he felt himself get emboldened by the second to the point that he had the guts to look at Lei Weiyuan straight in his eyes.

"What?!" Yang Qing fearfully asked as he took an inadvertent step back when he saw Lei Weiyuan smile softly.

The man rarely smiled and whenever he did, nothing good ever came out of it for Yang Qing. Whatever courage Yang Qing had was instantly vaporized by the smile.

"I didn't slack off.." Yang Qing hurriedly said on reflex as he prepared a slew of other excuses.

"I know, I was told.." Lei Weiyuan calmly said as he stroked his beard some more silently staring at Yang Qing.

"What does he want, why does he keep staring at me that way.." thought Yang Qing as he felt the nervousness within him grow by leaps and bounds with every millisecond. Just when he felt his body was about to give out, Lei Weiyuan started walking away toward the mimicry chaos portal that led to the domain courts.

Just when he was just inches away from it, he paused, causing Yang Qing to flinch as he murmured to himself,

"Here it comes.."

"Good job... keep it up.." said Lei Weiyuan as he took the step into the liquid milky way of the chaos mimicry portal, disappearing from the hallway, leaving the dumbstruck Yang Qing whose eyes and mouth were wide open.

"What..what...what does he mean?! good job?! keep it up! what hellish thing is he planning for me?!"

Yang Qing walked like a soulless figure in circles around the hallway with frantic mumblings that grew more rapid, indistinct, and inaudible the longer it went on.

A few of the Order employees came and left through the hallway, staring curiously at Yang Qing, however, none seemed all too worried or disturbed by Yang Qing's odd behavior. They had long grown accustomed to seeing such a sight from Yang Qing over the years ever since he began his duties as a judge, especially in those early years, Yang Qing would circle the hallway with hollow eyes, or this rabid look as he muttered things that seemed like the some ancient curse incantation that was in the language of plants, ancient spirit beasts, and every other species wrapped into one.

After circling the hallway for almost five minutes, Yang Qing regained some clarity and life in his eyes, though one could still see the trepidation lurking deep within the recess of his eyes as his gaze fell on where Lei Weiyuan had just been.

Yang Qing made his way to the portal that made it to the palace courts before he decided against it and turned back. His hands were trembling and his feet refused to move every time he tried to take that step into the portal.

"Let me eat first, it should help me get my mind right.." Yang Qing mumbled to himself as he turned toward the exit.

"Come to think of it, I haven't received my remuneration yet..." he added as he turned back and went to the center of the hallway and took out his gold eagle medallion. The center of the hallway had a black-and-white drawing of a gold eagle that matched his medallion.

Yang Qing poured a bit of his qi into the medallion which triggered a reaction from the eagle below as it lit up and unfurled its wings with countless lights shooting out of it that swallowed Yang Qing's body.

Yang Qing closed his eyes and when he opened them, he was in a different hallway. It was more pristine and orderly than the entrance hallway.

The nervousness and anxiety that had plagued Yang Qing a few seconds ago seemed to instantly vanish the instant he stepped into the hallway. A wide grin appeared on his face when his eyes fell towards a certain entrance with the words 'internal logistical disbursement' on them.

The moment his gaze fell on it, all concerns he had about Lei Weiyuan seemed to instantly vanish.

Yang Qing stood there in silence, his body trembling from excitement and revelry as he stared at that sign. The memories of when he first came in here washed over him. Luckily there was no one there to witness it at the time but he teared a bit and it turned out he wasn't the only one who exhibited such reactions before that sign.

The sign itself wasn't anything special but behind it, the area it designated, it held great significance, especially to those who had nothing.

Yang Qing couldn't help but let out a nostalgic sigh as he remembered his first time in. After the rude awakening, he had on his first month, that last day of the month was a shining light for him amidst the darkness of being worked like a slave. That day was the day he received validation for his slaving efforts, and it was thanks to what lay behind that sign.

That first pay, nothing he has ever experienced since, ever came close to what he felt that day, even his breaking through to the palace realm fell a little short. Of course, at some point, he did end up hate coming here. It was after he had paid a humbling visit to the main auction house of the White Rose Pavilion. Every month he came by after that, the experience and emotion were different.

The place was no longer a paradise that fulfilled his dreams but an abyss that constantly reminded him that he had nothing, he was nothing till it became the birthplace of his rebellious thoughts, but now things were different, the pittance in remuneration he received grew when he became a palace court judge. The basic salary he used to receive as a superior core court judge had quadrupled from 5,000 high-grade spirit stones to 20,000, with the other add-ons growing along with it.

But right now his excitement wasn't because of the 20,000 but of the 80,000 high-grade spirit stones promised to him in his short stint as the branch chief of the Deer Mountain Branch, along with all the other cultivation resources promised to him such as ten blue-grade cultivation arts that he would be given permanently.

He could feel it, that long-forgotten feeling he had when he first stepped into this hallway.

"I might not be cursed after all.." Yang Qing said with an emotional sigh, as he took a deep breath in a bid to control the tears that were threatening to drop. He couldn't help but feel that youthful Yang Qing who had his hopes ruthlessly crushed by the exploitation finally got healed and compensated today. All he endured wasn't in vain.

Filled with emotion, Yang Qing made his way into the internal logistics disbursement hall where he met other members of the Order cueing up with exhilaration potent in the air around them, especially the young members, the senior ones were a bit reserved and contained, but the young ones, Yang Qing could detect the same giddiness he had back then.

"Newbies.." he muttered with feigned composure, pretending that his heart wasn't racing just like theirs. He was about to get his hands on 80,000 high-grade spirit stones from the Order, for just one month of work. There was something deeply satisfying about it, the thought the stingiest organization he knew was about to fork out that amount for just little work.

Impatience and anticipation grew within him with every second as the line drew ever so closer to the remunerations administrator, and before long it was his turn. As usual, he took out his gold eagle medallion which the administrator took and placed on a white jade slab filled with countless runes and inscriptions.

The slab lit up when it made contact with the medallion, with the administrator placing his medallion on the slab as the runes flickered.

"80,000 high-grade spirit stones, 6,000 monarch-grade herbs, potions, and pills; and 10 low tier blue grade cultivation arts.

The cultivation arts have already been firmly set on the kind you'll get and irredeemable as for the 6,000 monarch-grade herbs, potions, and pills, would you like them converted to spirit stones of equivalent

value, a single natural treasure or artifact of equivalent value, or would you like them to remain as is?" asked the administrator.

Chapter 719 News From The Judicial Review Committee

"I won't be redeeming them, let them remain as is..." Yang Qing said after some slight thought.

The 6,000 monarch-grade spiritual herbs, potions, pills, and spiritual ores would be split equally between the four types. While his recent improvements made having potions and pills a bit redundant, especially the spiritual qi rejuvenation and restoration ones, or ones that dealt in healing, he still saw value in keeping them, mostly as a tool for trade both within and outside the Order.

He could trade them for someone who desperately needed them within the Order for favors, while outside he could sell them off or use them to establish positive karma. The quality of the potions and pills was always guaranteed, therefore there would be no shortage of a market for them outside the Order.

If he were to convert it to spirit stones here at the Order, he would only receive it at cost value. It was better to trade it with another employee or sell it outside where it was likely to fetch more. He would only consider trading with the Order if he was converting all of it for a single treasure be it natural or some artifact, or some cultivation art, blueprint, or recipe that the Order has.

In such a case he would reap more by trading with the Order since quality was guaranteed and it would be cheaper too, since the object would be traded at cost. However, Yang Qing didn't have anything he had his eye on at the moment, it was better to accept the disbursement as is, and he also had ideas on what to use those herbs, potions, and pills for.

After confirming his decision, the items were deposited into his gold eagle medallion which also doubled as a storage ring.

Yang Qing profusely thanked the disbursement administrator as he held his medallion with fervent admiration as he imagined what he was going to use those 80,000 high-grade spirit stones on.

Yang Qing gingerly whistled as he made his way to the Celestial Herb Garden for a meal. With the amount he had, he could definitely afford several of their high-end soups there without making a dent in his present finances.

"Was this place always this beautiful?" muttered Yang Qing as he felt the air around the black tower feel different. It was brighter and uplifting, unlike the doom and gloom it exuded all the other times Yang Qing came in. He always felt like he was walking into the belly of a ferocious beast, but today it felt like an immortal's abode where all the wildest of dreams are realized.

Filled with enthusiasm, Yang Qing made his way out of the building making a beeline for the Celestial Herb Garden. However, he had barely taken a step when he felt a change in his communication talisman.

"Is it Meifeng?" he wondered as he took out his communication talisman.

"Yang Qing, could you pass by briefly.."

...

"Glad to see you're back in one piece.."

"It's all thanks to your care.."

Yang Qing was seated in a lotus position as he cupped his fists in gratitude toward the four familiar elder figures that were seated across from him. Two of them were sharing wine, one had a bonsai plant in his hand, while the last one had a pot of green tea and a basket of biscuits on some tray.

"Care for some.." asked the last elder who was holding the pot of tea and biscuits.

Yang Qing got up as he said,

"Please let me, Senior Xi Si.."

"So dutiful.." said Xi Si with a grandmotherly smile on her face.

Yang Qing dutifully poured her some, and the elder next to her with the bonsai plant in his hands. The elder in question was Long Enlai, while the other two who were eyeing each other's cups were Jia Bohai and Jiang Cheng.

After he was done, Yang Qing poured himself last while also picking up a few biscuits. He wasn't shy about it, as he picked enough to fill a full plate. The four elders already knew his reputation and his history with food, Yang Qing felt no need to pretend in front of them and there was also the fact that those biscuits were the finest biscuits he had ever had. He couldn't believe the kind-looking Xi Si made them.

"The reason we called you here is to give you the jade slip containing the history of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, and a bit of the Bi Xie Empire too, and we also received the information you had asked for from Special Inquisitor Xiang He concerning the techniques of the Blue Soul Flame Syndicate.

Your approval for the low-tier gold-grade floor has also been approved for three days, and the countdown starts tomorrow. It can't be altered, so don't miss it. We may not be able to replicate the feat again, plus it was only approved because of the efforts you made toward the case which garnered an endorsement from us, and the special inquisition.

Surprisingly the Gold Eagle was also involved too despite their commander being an absolute stickler for the rules.

Ye Xun must have taken a liking to you, for her to speak up for you.." Long Enlai said with a smile.

"Senior Ye Xun?" asked Yang Qing in surprise.

"Yes, the reason the commander spoke up was because of her input. She's highly valued within the Gold Eagles, both her talent and input, and as you can tell, she's not the most communicative person, but she spoke up for you, which made the approval process smoother and faster.

Make sure to thank her when you get the chance.."

"Ye Xun.." muttered Yang Qing still in slight disbelief that she would speak up for him.

"I will.." added Yang Qing after he had collected himself.

"Also, the grandfather of the king of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, his issue is already being resolved. It turned out to be a curse and an insidious one at that. It remains to be seen if it has anything to do with the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate.

The person we sent, will look into it, in case they discover anything else, you will be appraised.."

"Thank you.."

"Bring out your library token.." said Long Enlai.

Yang Qing nodded as he took out what looked to be a crystalline part of a black shell that had intricate lines that exuded an otherworldly and unfathomable aura.

Long Enlai placed a talisman on it that melted into the shell before handing it back to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing could feel his excitement rapidly grow as he picked up the token. He couldn't wait to see what the gold-level floor was like.

"Don't forget what I told you before, the information you will have access to will be severely limited to the case. All you will have access to are the bare bones nothing else, not the facilities, or the other techniques and information stored in there that is outside your purview.

The restrictions have already been placed in the token.."

Yang Qing nodded in understanding as he thanked them for the opportunity. Even without having access to anything else, just the exposure itself was bound to be worthwhile.

He exchanged a few more words with the committee including being informed that his month-long vacation would begin after the three days of his library had lapsed.

Yang Qing was ecstatic, as those would be three days that he would not have to work. He also informed them of his intention to visit the auspicious wood grove tree for a favor. He already had the blue stone, the wood grove tree gave him, so he could visit him whenever he wanted to. His informing of the committee was out of courtesy and propriety.

Out of worry, they had inquired the reason, to which Yang Qing openly admitted it was a consultation on Meifeng's behalf with respect to expanding the distance her clone could cover.

After that, he didn't stay too long, Yang Qing left for the Celestial Herb Garden.

Chapter 720 First Experience

Yang Qing couldn't help but smile as he left the bamboo courtyard of the Judicial Review Committee. Things had not started well for him, but now, he could feel his fortunes seemed to have turned.

He couldn't help but feel the saying that said fortunes and disaster went hand in hand had some truth to it. It wasn't long before he made his way to the Celestial Herb Garden.

With 80,000 high-grade spirit stones burning a hole in his pocket, he could finally enjoy the ambiance of the Celestial Herb Garden.

As per its name, the restaurant was designed to mimic a garden-like building. It was dimly lit with scarlet carp flowers providing gentle light from above, the wall and the flooring were made of star trail vine wood that coiled from the walls to the floors, with several of its branches, branching out into the tables and seats around.

Ice waterfall lianas were mixing in with the star trail vinewood at the walls. The ice waterfall lianas released a slight foggy gentle blue glow that produced a refreshing coolness around the restaurant whilst also producing the relaxing sounds of a waterfall.

Everything within the restaurant was geared to provide the ultimate comfort and scenery while enjoying good food. Yang Qing had always been unable to appreciate it because of how gorging the prices were, but now, it was like a veil had been removed from his eyes and he could appreciate the beauty of the restaurant.

It was already in the early hours of the morning, but the place was already slightly packed. Even though he didn't recognize any of them, Yang Qing could tell from their robes, that the patrons present were from the palace courts and above, with the majority of the number being those from the inner palace courts, or late-stage palace realm experts, as he had spotted a few who had indistinctive robes that had no markings or designation. Yang Qing guessed they were roaming inquisitors based on how powerful their auras were.

As he was looking around deciding where to sit, he spotted an outer core court inquisitor, wearing the same look he had the first time he stepped in here. He couldn't help but smile to himself when he saw the change in expression running through that inquisitor's face.

There was admiration and excitement at first before slight worry started to sink in when he looked around and realized the rank of the patrons who frequented the place. Yang Qing could detect the panic flare-up when the young inquisitor noticed the two domain court judges at one of the tables.

Yang Qing could tell the panic wasn't out of a sense of fear from the disparity in cultivation base as the Order didn't have such sort of hierarchy-based fears, but it was from the realization that one would get when they look around them and the only people they can see are people above their stations, which insinuated a couple of things, that an insightful inquisitor would definitely think about.

As if on cue, the inquisitor hesitantly asked for the menu and instantly went pale when it was brought to him. Yang Qing couldn't help but smile when he saw this, and he wasn't the only one to smile, as the other patrons did so too, and some of the staff from the Celestial Herb Garden.

The reaction was considered a rite of passage for every new customer, especially if they were as young as the inquisitor. Today was remuneration day and as it always went, most if not some would be excitable about spending it, especially if it was their first pay. They would want to spend it on something good, of course, those who would do something crazy as go to a major auction house like Yang Qing did, were far and few in between, but most would entertain the thought of using it on something worthwhile and the Celestial Herb Garden was one such place.

Visiting the place even once, as a newbie would garner you high reputé amongst your peers. It was like venturing into some mysterious realm, which was why every new employee of the Order regardless of their post would likely visit the place at least once, and their reaction was always the same as the inquisitor in front of him. It was excitement at first before dread kicked in once one saw the prices.

The young inquisitor sensed the smiles and couldn't help but smile awkwardly filled with embarrassment as he tried to hide within the vines on the wall.

Yang Qing took his seat, and a staff member dutifully came to take his order.

"I'll have the celestial phoenix sea food soup, the golden lotus broth, cloud mist herbal soup, and the jade river ginseng soup, with sides of pork dumplings and spring rolls.." said Yang Qing with a salivating mouth.

"We will bring it shortly.." politely said the staff member as he left for the kitchen to give the Order.

After around three minutes, the first of his soups was brought forth with a basket of spring rolls. It was the golden lotus broth. Yang Qing couldn't help but close his eyes as he inhaled the aromatic steam wafting out of the broth and spring rolls.

Unable to hold back, he immediately began digging in, just in time to see the young inquisitor choose his order. Yang Qing had a feeling it would be the cold leek soup which was at the middle of not too expensive and not too cheap. It cost 10 middle-grade spirit stones and came with a basket of pan-fried dumplings. The staff took his order with a smile as she left for the kitchen leaving the antsy inquisitor behind, who no doubt was filled with regret and embarrassment for coming to the restaurant.

A few moments later, the staff came with a whole tray of all kinds of soups, one of which included the cold leek soup ordered, and the golden lotus broth that Yang Qing was having.

Yang Qing along with the other patrons secretly glanced at the inquisitor. The staff member went toward the table of the young inquisitor, and placed the cold leek soup in front of him, followed by the rest of the soups that were on her tray.

"So...rry but I haven't ordered this. I can't afford them.." hesitantly said the inquisitor as he pulled his seat backward with trepidation written all over his face.

The staff member smiled as she said,

"Don't worry, we are not charging you for any of this. This is your first meal, and as tradition, you get to have every single soup on the menu for free of charge."

"Buuut.."

Just as the inquisitor was about to refuse, one of the patrons spoke.

"Accept it, kid, think of it as a gift from your seniors. It's a tradition that has been there for the past 400 years. There's a special fund made by those who come here, and it's meant to cater to the first experience of those from the Order who come here. So enjoy it and work hard, so you can afford to sponsor another person just like yourself.."

The inquisitor who still looked to be hesitant stood up.

"Junior Zou Long thanks you all.." he said with solemnity in his voice.

The other patrons, laughed as they gave their opinions on which soups he should start with first, which turned into a soup debate that slowly relaxed the atmosphere.

Yang Qing took all of this in with a heartfelt smile on his face as he told himself that this was one of the reasons he liked being at the headquarters. That sense of wholesomeness that he had grown so accustomed to.