

Daily life 721

Chapter 721 Purple Amethyst Vine Card

After the little interlude, Yang Qing enjoyed his soup dishes with great relish. The soups were well worth their high prices. They were each masterfully crafted, with no single ingredient being overwhelmed. Each of their respective flavors and properties was perfectly brought working in a natural symphony with the rest of the ingredients.

Even though Yang Qing wasn't as close with the staff of the Celestial Herb Garden as he was with the Thousands Flavor Restaurant, he did know a few things here and there from the few times he frequented the place over the years and a few gossips provided here and there by the faithful Mao Yunru. Of the soups they ate, some were made by a blue-grade alchemist, and based on the effects of the soup, Yang Qing guessed they were teetering toward the middle grade, which explained the prices.

In terms of ability, in as much as he didn't want to admit it, the soup had a higher quality and impact than the oolong tea made by Jiang Fu, but that gap would likely be bridged after Jiang Fu completes his breakthrough to the palace realm.

Yang Qing savored every soup, along with the spring rolls that were also beautifully made. As for the young inquisitor, at first, he was a little reserved even if he was encouraged to loosen up and enjoy the meal. Even Yang Qing, despite his shamelessness and voracious appetite, those first few minutes he was completely reserved and a little bit afraid if he was being completely honest.

The fear and the reservation came from knowing the prices of those soups. Even if he had been sponsored and was told he could eat all he could, some part of him worried,

What if, what if he was made to pay the bill and it was some ruse? How much would it cost him?

The terror he got by that thought paralyzed him to the point of being wary of the soups, and he had done what the inquisitor had done which was go for the cold leek soup first, which from the array presented, was the most affordable one.

However, that paralyzing thought lasted only up until he finished the cold leek soup. Every time he took a sip, a thought would be planted in his mind, like a bewitching voice trying to enthrall his mind.

If the cold leek soup despite its price is this good, what about the rest? Just try one, just one more, surely you can afford one more..

That one more turned into two more and before he knew it, he had sampled the entire soup dishes of the restaurant, and at that point, it was too late to worry about it.

The same scenario was happening with the young inquisitor. He had been nursing his cold leek soup at the start that it would make one think he was sipping a bowl of lava, but slowly by slowly unbeknownst to him, his pace had been gradually increasing with every sip and before he knew it, he had emptied his bowl and was now in a dilemma and eventually, he fell to the same voice his predecessors had fallen to. Many had fallen to it, and he wouldn't be the last.

Yang Qing bowed his head and said a silent prayer for him. Depending on how deep the addiction becomes, the young inquisitor may end up spending his entire earnings in the place for the foreseeable future and be forever welcomed into the halls of the paupers until he can reach a level where he can comfortably afford the meals without pinching his pockets.

After finishing his prayer, Yang Qing looked at the entrance as if he was expecting someone, but soon shook his head.

"It seems they're not around today.."thought Yang Qing as he took the last sip of his last soup dish which was vermilion phoenix soup, true to its name, it was a fiery one, which was why he saved it for last, and it was also the most expensive as it went for 4 high-grade spirit stones because of the amount of precious ingredients it used, such as the vermilion fruit.

Once done, Yang Qing comfortably paid his bill, which came to a whopping 24 high-grade spirit stones. To the current him, such an amount wasn't even worth consideration, but back then when he was just starting out, earning a mere 80 high-grade spirit stones, 120 if he performed well, paying a bill of 24 high-

grade spirit stones in a single sitting would have left him grieving for weeks, probably even succumb to a few heart demons while he was at it.

But right now, he was unfazed, he was even tempted to pay their membership offer which was for an annual fee of 700 high-grade spirit stones, they would never have to pay for a single meal at the

restaurant, and there were even soups that were not on the regular menu, that were reserved for those members. The regulars like the palace realm employees and the domain judges at the next table over were likely celestial members.

Yang Qing took only a few seconds to debate the whole thing, before vanity, gluttony, and his weak will gave in. After paying for his meal, he informed the staff member of his intention to be a celestial member. The staff joyously and dutifully led him to a secluded room which was the supervisor's room.

The supervisor was in there. It was a middle-aged man, with a slender build, auburn hair tied in a daoist top knot, and pristine black robes with crane and cloud embroidery. His aura was like that of a vivacious but ancient oak tree, and he was in the middle stages of the palace realm.

He courteously greeted Yang Qing, whilst also throwing a few compliments his way on his bearing and presence, which Yang Qing ate up, even if he knew, he was just being softened up for his purse strings. Even if that was so, he still enjoyed the praise, he was a man of simple pleasures after all, and it wasn't like those stones would praise him.

Yang Qing as a seasoned bootlicker, reciprocated in kind, after all, even though he didn't mind losing his spirit stones if bootlicking could give him a discount, he might as well do it. Again he was a simple man, who led a simple life and didn't like any of the extravagance of the nouveau riche.

After their little dance, Yang Qing forked out 3,420 high-grade spirit stones which would cater to his membership for the next five years. He had tried all he could to haggle to 3,400 but the supervisor proved a formidable foe. He was given a card made of purple amethyst vinewood that had golden calligraphy with his name on it, a masterful handiwork of the supervisor.

Yang Qing was grinning from ear to ear as he held the card. All he could think of was of how he would 'humbly and innocently' pull it out in front of Kang Huilang when he came out of his seclusion. He could only imagine the deep sense of satisfaction that would come out of it.

Yang Qing had assumed the card was given for vain purposes since the staff as cultivators were endowed with a sharp memory. There was no need for a card for them to remember who had membership and who didn't or when the membership was expiring. He had assumed the card was given for face and was surprised when the supervisor told him he could use it outside of the Order at various restaurants and even treasure houses they had a cooperative relationship with. With the card, they would receive discounts, and all sorts of special privileges because of it.

Yang Qing's level to which he was ecstatic was through the moon. He refined the card while inserting a sliver of his spiritual sense into it which revealed the names of 17 establishments the card could be used at. His gleeful expression grew wider when he saw that 7 of the establishments were restaurants and one was even from the White Baobab Kingdom.

Yang Qing profusely thanked the supervisor as he was leaving. He had only chosen the membership on a whim to annoy Kang Huilang and he was also curious about the special privilege soup list, but he didn't expect to gain more from it.

Yang Qing whistled a joyous tune as he was leaving while he thought it seemed like his luck had truly shifted for the better.

Chapter 722 True Motives

Once he was out of the Celestial Herb Garden, Yang Qing couldn't help but take out the card once more. It released a resplendent glow as the sun's rays fell on it. Just the physical representation itself without going deeper into what it signified, its look alone gave it a worthwhile appeal.

"Kang Huilang, I have a nice surprise waiting for you when you come out.." thought Yang Qing as he wore a silly smile on his face.

He didn't gloat for too long as he put away the purple amethyst vinewood card with his gaze falling on some distant view.

"Yi Jie, I hope you went through well, old friend.." muttered Yang Qing as his gaze fell on the clouds to the west of him.

Even though the Tribulation Mountain was within a mysterious realm in a non-distinct position, he always felt if it existed in the same space as the headquarters, it would be situated in that direction.

It had already been almost four months since Yi Jie went to the mountain to break through to the palace realm, by his count, four months was already enough time for him to have already broken through, and should be now working on stabilizing his cultivation realm.

Yi Jie had just as much talent as he did, and they would have broken at the same time, had Yi Jie not been conflicted about which dao to use as his foundation for the palace realm. He had the saber dao and wine dao, and he was equally passionate about both, but for his foundation, he could only choose one, while the other served as a subsidiary.

Yi Jie had been conflicted about what to go with. As an inquisitor, his choice was clear, he would have to go with the saber dao as his foundation considering the demands of his occupation, but for Yi Jie, he only became an inquisitor because he saw it as a route for improving his wine brewing skills.

The post would allow him to venture to different places and expand his horizons, and improve his skills as a winemaker as a result of it.

If you were given a chance between your hobby and your work, which would be more important to you?

To Yang Qing, Yi Jie, Feng Xin, and even Zheng Hu, the answer was simple, they worked to support their hobbies. Yang Qing chose to be a judge because it was out of the front lines, but more than that was because the remunerations were better and he would get to buy all sorts of things with the pay. He wouldn't be winning an auction bid anytime soon, but it was enough for him to splurge in restaurants and cultivation open-air markets.

For Yi Jie, the travel as an inquisitor would expose him to different wine brewing techniques, ingredients, and the like as he went from place to place, which would help with his techniques.

Feng Xin was similar in that being an inquisitor would give him access to cuisines all around the world. The difference between him and Yang Qing was in how they approached their gluttony. Yang Qing loved eating, but he would not risk his life for it, ultimately his life came above his food, but for Feng Xin, eating came above his life, which ironically gave him a strong desire to live, as he wanted to eat more and more, and he would do anything to guarantee that.

Then there was the combat maniac Zheng Hu who chose to be an inquisitor because it was the best way he could get all the fights he could ever want. He had designs on being a special inquisitor, it was just that the special inquisitors required one to be a late-stage palace realm expert as a minimum requirement for joining and have substantial amounts of merit points as a regular or roaming inquisitor. From what Yang Qing knew, it was about 20,000.

For them, while they revered the posts they occupied, to them the job itself was a means to an end and not some deep-seated devotion.

"Ultimately, I know what you will choose, we all do.." thought Yang Qing with a smile. Yi Jie was Yi Jie in the end after all.

Yang Qing stared up at the glowing sun as he said,

"It's still early, Mao Mao, Dai Chen, and the rest are probably in their courtrooms... I could check in on Hao Da and see how he is doing...mmh, Ma Yuan's daughter too, and see if she's made some progress and is at least a little more receptive of him and the progress of her memories.."

Yang Qing took out his communication talisman and contacted Deputy valley master Ren Shu to find out if Hao Da was discharged or not and how the progress for the rest of his colleagues was.

Luckily the situation was much better than it was when he had left. The previous branch chief was already mobile along with Hao Da owing to their sturdy physiques, with both being fit enough to attend the funeral of the two deceased inquisitors. As for the surviving inquisitor, even though she was not completely healed, the remaining injuries were no longer fatal, and just needed a little recuperation for a few months before physically she was back, as for the mental part, it was up in the wind. It could only be taken a day at a time for all of them.

"Good.."said Yang Qing with a sigh of relief as he made his way to the transport array that would lead him to the Medicine Valley.

It was on his way there that two people stopped him. One of them was an entrance guard, while the other looked to be an employee from the administration department.

The administrator on seeing Yang Qing, put a polite smile on his face as he cupped his fists in greetings while saying,

"Pardon for the interruption, Judge Yang Qing. My name is Shen Zemin and to my right is Senior Pan Liu, nice to meet you.."

"Nice to meet you too, daoist Shen Zemin, daoist Pan Liu..." said Yang Qing as he cupped his fists in greeting while wondering why the two had approached. From their looks, it looked like they had been deliberately looking for him.

Chapter 723 Guests (1)

It would be a lie if Yang Qing said he didn't feel slightly nervous from seeing them. Meeting unfamiliar figures, one of them from the administration department and the other being a guard, considering his history, Yang Qing on default assumed there might be a reprimand coming his way.

In the past, after his various failed schemes, the Order would usually send some unassuming person at the most inopportune of times to deliver his sentencing which made him forever wary of people he did not know, wearing a polite demeanor.

"What could it be? I haven't done anything the past few months. Is it because of the ingredients I fleeced from them when Shi Hai and I were composing the list for the part? No matter how stingy they are, they wouldn't take me to account for that, would they? They said I could use and ask for anything while I was there, and the ingredients were not even too outlandish. " Yang Qing warily thought as he felt his heart race when he saw Shen Zemin about to open his mouth.

"I am from the reception hall and the reason why I and senior Pan Liu were looking for you is that there were guests who had been looking for you for the past few days, however, we were told you had left the branch for an assignment, and were only just appraised of your arrival.." Shen Zemin courteously said.

"Guests?" asked Yang Qing with a slightly raised brow wondering who they were.

"Yes, one of them is a rogue cultivator named Wen Yingjie. He was initially looking for Chief Inquisitor Yi Jie, but when he was informed that Yi Jie was in seclusion, he opted to wait for you.."

"Wen Yingjie, huh.." Yang Qing muttered as he held his chin with relief that he wasn't being reprimanded.

"Seems like he was successful with the assimilation and in good timing too. The four-month time limit of the soul-binding cultivation art Yi Jie lent to him for the assimilation process should be just about up.." muttered Yang Qing.

Wen Yingjie was a rogue cultivator involved in one of his final cases as a superior core court judge. His complaint was against the Falling Meteor Blacksmith Shop, a pretty famous rank 4 shop within the Thundercrane Kingdom which was a rank 3 kingdom.

The blacksmith shop had been in existence for over 10,000 years being passed down from father to son, in the Tan bloodline. Its current head, Tan Ping, had been approached by Wen Yingjie to have a custom-made saber in which he provided all the materials required to make it, which were all top-tier sky-grade materials.

The blacksmith was able to make a saber that exceeded expectations which ended up with a misunderstanding from Wen Yingjie's end. The saber was born with a pseudo-sentient spirit which kept attracting tribulations in a bid to strengthen itself bringing Wen Yingjie no small amount of troubles that he even thought the saber was cursed, and when he brought it back to the blacksmith shop, the saber's creator, Tan Ping, had already been in seclusion because of the harvests he had gained from making the saber.

It was because of his absence that his son, Tan Delun, decided with Wen Yingjie since his father was unavailable to use the Order as the mediator to help them handle the situation well. None of them knew that the saber's oddities were actually a blessing in disguise.

It was only after they came to the courtroom did they realize that the saber that they thought was a sky-grade saber was actually a saber with the potential of rising to the monarch grade provided its spirit was fully formed.

In the end, Yi Jie, gave Wen Yingjie some alternatives that would help with his saber and he went with one of the options which involved binding a part of his soul to the saber while pouring his saber intent into the pseudo-sentient spirit as a way of feeding it and teaching it at the same time so it would be able to survive the tribulation that would come when its spirit was fully formed.

Yi Jie had given him an incomplete blue-grade art, the three hearts of the radiant octopus cultivation art that would wipe itself from his memory in four months. So he only had four months to master it and execute it. He was also provided an abode that would help ease the process, and all this came at a cost. Wen Yingjie was saddled with a debt of 6,000 high-grade spirit stones, that he would play slowly when he was done.

Yang Qing couldn't help but feel curious about the process Wen Yingjie had made.

"Who is the other guest?" asked Yang Qing.

Administrator Shen Lemin looked towards the guard with silver robes and the emblem of a gold eagle on his robe named Pan Liu. He was a gold eagle guard just like Yen Xu, just that, unlike Yen Xu who was vastly stronger than Yang Qing, he was slightly weaker being in the first stage of the palace realm.

From the silver robes, he was an entrance guard. The 'silver robes' so they liked to call them, were situated in entrances and hallways where outsiders and the staff of the Order mingled, such as the entrance gates, the administration halls such as the external logistics hall where the Order issued commissions and gave payments for the completion of said commissions.

They even roamed around the pathways around the different buildings from the black tower, to the various inns, restaurants, and other facilities within the compound of the Order. While their primary job was to provide security, mostly they were there to provide assistance and guidance to those in need. They were considered administrators and usually worked closely with the reception hall.

After nodding toward Shen Lemin, Pan Liu spoke up,

"The other is an old couple by the name of Wang Siyi and Wang Huiyin. They are both late-stage core formation experts, who reside in the Red Maple Empire, specifically, the Purple City where they operated a restaurant together.

They said they knew you, Judge Yang Qing, and that you had told them to look for you when they came.."

"Where are they?" asked Yang Qing.

"I had them settled at the Gentle Stream Courtyard..." said Pan Liu

"They also asked for the whereabouts of Zou Yi and Zou Liqin.." he added after a momentary pause.

Chapter 724 Guests (2)

"The Zou siblings.." Yang Qing muttered as he held his chin.

"They should be done or just about done with their experience.." he added as his mind wondered about the fate of the two siblings he had met in Purple Grass City.

For failure to complete the test in time, Zou Yi and his team were sent to the region where the gold grade tests were done where they would be pushed to the brink of death by the inquisitors before they could officially be accepted as students of the Institute.

Usually, the ordeal would last for three months, but it has been known to last longer. The instructors were fiends in human skin, after all, they enjoyed breaking the spirits of the young cultivators in every which way. Considering the siblings had not reached out through his family, he figured they should still be on the testing ground.

"Hopefully, they're just about done.." Yang Qing said as he faintly shivered when flashbacks of his purple grade test appeared in his mind briefly before he shook his head to dispel those thoughts.

"What about Wen Yingjie, where is he?" asked Yang Qing.

"He is at the Green Landscape.." answered Shen Zemin.

Yang Qing detected there was something in Shen Zemin's demeanor, he seemed somewhat ambivalent.

"Green landscape, huh.. considering his circumstances, it's understandable why he would want to be frugal..." muttered Yang Qing.

The Green landscape was a tract of land that had nothing but grass in it. It worked like an inn, without any of the amenities such as inns, courtyards, pavilions, and arrays. All it had was grass and nothing but grass. It was owned and operated by the Order, whose purpose was to provide accommodations to those who have come to the headquarters for one reason and don't have a lot in the way of finances to afford any of the other places.

It costs two low-grade spirit stones to book a space in the Green landscape. Even without any sort of amenities, for the price, staying there was a complete steal because of the denseness of the spiritual qi in the area, however, despite the richness, as long as one could help it, most would avoid that place.

It lacked privacy, among other things, and for cultivators who loved face just as much as their own life, most avoided that place like a plague, as only cultivators who were from the unranked frequented that place.

Yang Qing could understand why Administrator Shen Zemin had an incredulous look on his face. Wen Yingjie was a peak stage core formation realm, by all accounts even if he was a rogue cultivator, surely he would have the ability to afford a place better than the Green Landscape as even an early-stage foundation establishment cultivator would be able to reasonably afford a better place than the Landscape.

As for Yang Qing, he could understand Wen Yingjie's frugality. He had likely spent almost everything he had in making the saber and add to that he already had a debt of 6,000 high-grade spirit stones saddled on him. Of course, he would be frugal.

"Could you give me his coordinates, please, administrator Shen Zemin.." said Yang Qing.

Shen Zemin nodded as a jade slip appeared on his hand which he handed to Yang Qing.

"His token has already been marked on it.." said Shen Zemin.

"Thanks.." said Yang Qing as he cupped his fists in gratitude.

"I'll see him first, as for the Wang couple, I don't know if I could trouble you Daoist Pan Liu, and have them sent to the Flaming Goose Restaurant at the Blue Respite in Recluse Valley.

They're Zou Yi's and Zou Liqin's guardians, I was hoping to have them registered but that will have to wait until after I am done with Wen Yingjie.."

"It's no problem, Judge Yang Qing, I will have them sent there.." said the gold eagle guard as he cupped his fists in departure heading towards the courtyard the Wang couple were staying at.

The Blue Respite was a small town within the Recluse Valley that formed as a result of the families of the members of the Order, both the students and the confirmed employees. When those from the Order chose to relocate with their family, the families would be given a place at the Blue Respite.

The families carried with them their different tools of trade, some were alchemists, some herbologists, some blacksmiths, some talisman refiners, others were cooks and tea makers, others skilled painters or players of the instruments, and with that, a town of trade grew.

The Order could only provide support to the member who was in the Order, as for the families, other than giving them a place to stay, which was very generous at that since the area was as rich as the blessed ground of a rank 3 sect, the families were left to provide for themselves using the space provided to them.

They did receive a few special privileges such as discounts on cultivation resources that the Order may have in surplus, but the rest was up to them, they needed to be self-sufficient, which was why the impromptu growth of the town was a welcomed surprise for the Order, which prompted them to have separate departments there to ensure the stability and smooth growth of the town by reducing conflict. Where there were people, conflict was never far behind.

One of the departments located there was the resettlement department which helped new families settle in and acclimate to the region. After he was done with Wen Yingjie, Yang Qing planned to take the old Wang couple to that department and have them registered as the Zou Siblings' guardians, though the Zou siblings were also required to be there in the flesh for the registration process. Yang Qing could only hope they were done with their torture and that they retained some semblance of rationality, after.

With both sides already at an agreement, Yang Qing left for the Green Landscape to meet up with Wen Yingjie while Shen Zemin returned to his other duties, no doubt dealing with other cases similar to the one Yang Qing had, while Pan Liu left to guide the Wang's.

It didn't take long for Yang Qing to arrive at the Green Landscape. It resembled a meadow during summer, full of life, energy, and tranquility, stretching as far as the eye could see.

Once inside, Yang Qing used the jade slip he had been given to locate Wen Yingjie. As he flew over, he made a point to hide his presence lest he cause a commotion in the area. The bulk of the cultivators in the place were in the middle stages of the qi refinement realm going below.

Yang Qing flew for close to three minutes before finally he detected Wen Yingjie's presence. He had been seated in silent meditation with his sheathed saber lying above his thighs.

"Seems like he had tremendous harvests.." muttered Yang Qing when he noticed Wen Yingjie's aura along with that of his saber.

Wen Yingjie was already at the quasi-palace stage, his aura was unassuming while hiding a terrifying sharpness within it, as for his saber, while it wasn't a monarch-grade saber yet, Yang Qing could feel the strength of its spirit. It was inches away from triggering its tribulation and from its strength, it was all but guaranteed to survive it, unlike before.

"It seems congratulations are in order, Daoist Wen Yingjie.." softly said Yang Qing as he casually appeared next to him, who opened his eyes in shock at Yang Qing appearing so close to him without him being aware.

Wen Yingjie was about to get up when Yang Qing placed his hand on him as he said,

"There's no need for that.." as he took a seat next to him and fished out two cups and a wine jar which he poured for them both.

"Will you drink with me?" asked Yang Qing.

"It would be my honor.." said Wen Yingjie with a tone of respect.

Chapter 725 Broken Spear Reformed Into A Free Saber

"I seem to have turned to Yi Jie. How many cups of different wines have i drunk this past month or just even the past few days.." thought Yang Qing with a wry smile as he poured a clear green wine that was the jade bamboo dew wine, which was one of Yi Jie's handiwork.

It had an earthy, mellow and refreshing taste to it, the kind that farmers would enjoy in the evening when the sunset had just set in and their bodies were seeking reprieve and comfort from the day's labors.

Other than the taste, Yang Qing loved the wine for the simplistic feeling it evoked on all who drunk it. Just like the farmers, one would feel like the pressures of all the labors of the day get washed away by the wine. Yang Qing may not know what was going on in Wen Yingjie's mind but over the years he had gotten pretty good at reading the silent emotions. The things the body says without saying anything, and Wen Yingjie's body spoke of a burden, a type of burden Yang Qing was all too familiar with, especially for the past few months. The burden of responsibility and the uncertainty of it on whether you would be able to uphold it.

From the first time the rogue cultivator stepped into his courtroom, he knew he had a story. A rogue cultivator whose background was from a famous clan with a palace realm expert that was held with great repute even with the ruling family, and the rogue cultivator was one of the prized talents of said family, but he up and left one day and became a rogue cultivator, and despite his talents that would make him attractive to most organizations, still chooses to remain a rogue cultivator.

Someone like that had to have a story and his face and body language spoke volumes of it, but Yang Qing wasn't Mao Yunru, he had enough of snooping around people's stories. And if he was being honest, he was slightly terrified of it now, especially from recent events and happenings in his life, they left him a little wary.

"So how does it feel.." Yang Qing asked with a smile after picking up his wine cup which was the excuse Wen Yingjie had been waiting for to pick up his. Even though he was slightly reserved, other than his love for the saber, wines were a close second, and just from what he was picking up, he could tell the jade bamboo wine was a quality brew, the kind that even his grandfather who loved him dearly would never let him take a whiff.

Holding his wine cup with fervent admiration, Wen Yingjie said,

"I thought I was ready for the pain Chief Inquisitor Yi Jie mentioned, but I realized I had severely underestimated how excruciating it would be. It was thanks to the stygian soul bonding spring in the cave that I was able to endure the process and the cultivation he shared with me, made the integration process proceed faster.

I doubt I would have been able to survive without either.."

Wen Yingjie's hand that was holding the wine faintly shivered as the harrowing experience of the past four months flowed through his mind. He had thought with the hardy life he led, what storms hadn't he seen in his time as a general of the Blue Oak Kingdom or as a rogue cultivator, more so the latter.

He felt that no matter how painful the process of splitting his soul would be, he thought he would be able to endure it. The first time he made the attempt, he passed out before completing the process, and it needed several tries before he could even maintain his consciousness.

Then there was also the matter of feeding his saber intent into the embryonic spirit of his saber. The process on a normal day was demanding enough as any slip-up and the fragile spirit would be permanently damaged and he had to do so with the same breath as he was nurturing the spirit with his soul. It was only thanks to the abilities of the three hearts celestial octopus art that helped him split his concentration three ways like he had three clones operating different tasks and the healing powers of the stygian soul bonding spring, which eased the pain of splitting his soul whilst also boosting his concentration.

It was only thanks to the two conditions that he could successfully nurture his saber, and even then he barely made it.

But no matter how painful the ordeal had been, Wen Yingjie couldn't help but smile as he said,

"No matter how painful the ordeal was, what I got at the other end is truly more than I could have ever expected. I would gladly go through it a thousand more times."

His gaze admiringly fell on the saber nestled in his legs.

"My dream of reaching the palace realm isn't just something in the clouds anymore. It's something possible, and I also have a dependable partner. I won't have to weather the storms of life alone.." he added with a faint smile as he turned to face Yang Qing.

"I could never repay what you have given me. The 6,000 high-grade spirit stones terrified me at the time, but now it seems like it doesn't even quite cut it for what I have gained, and for that, I am truly grateful to you all.

I know it doesn't mean much, but should you ever need help with anything, I would be more than happy to offer my services. From the bottom of my heart, thank you, truly.." Wen Yinjie said with his words slightly shaking from his intense emotions.

Only he knew the true impact the past few months had on him. Taking half a step to the palace realm might not be much or having a weapon that was about to be a monarch-grade weapon, yes, the latter could be considered a price-worthy achievement, but to Wen Yingjie, it was much more than that.

The changes that happened to him were like a person almost dying of dehydration in a desert suddenly stumbling onto an oasis. When he left the Blue Oak Kingdom, he was mired in disgrace and all sorts of slander due to the death of the fourth prince he was in charge of protecting. The golden spear became an object of ridicule in the public's eye, a tool used by his family's enemies to besmirch their reputation.

The prince had been a traitor working with the Black Jade Syndicate, as to what ends he didn't know. He ended up dying at the hands of that syndicate, and the royal family could not let it get out that one of their own had been working with a nefarious organization against his kingdom. Such information was bound to create insurrection amongst the masses, which the ambitious would likely take advantage of.

There was only one option, and that was to bury the truth in glory, which was to paint the prince as some hero and not the traitor that he was, while Wen Yingjie, would have to live in shame, the one who let the beloved prince and quite possibly the next king, die. In death, the prince's dishonor was rewarded with glory, while Wen Yingjie, in life, lived with honor and was rewarded with infamy and disgrace.

The Wen family was known for its loyalty to the crown, and if the crown asked, they would willingly fall on the sword for them if it was asked, and they asked, to which Wen Yingjie gladly ran himself through with it. He wasn't sure if it was out of a sense of duty and honor, or regret for failing to notice the prince was a traitor, or letting others be the ones to flog him, but when he was asked if he was willing to bear the weight of the coverup, he gladly took it.

His grandfather, at the time, had told him it would not be easy, that wearing that story would cost him something, but at the time, he didn't understand it. He was blinded by regret, regret for failing in his duties, and regret that his failures had brought shame to his family, something that he held in high regard even more so than his life.

Seeing the toll it was taking on him, his grandfather advised him to leave the kingdom and go travel the world before he was consumed by the voices that had flooded the kingdom. Though the voices that came from his own mind were the loudest. That period had been the darkest period of his life, and it nearly broke him. His mind and his heart were going, and he could feel those heart demons growing in number and strength the longer he lingered around the kingdom.

So when his grandfather made the suggestion, he took it, leaving with only a spear in hand, the one his grandfather had gifted along with a few parting words.

"One of the keys to living is knowing that which needs to be carried and held onto, and that which doesn't.."

He hoped that the journey would help enlighten him on which, and in some part, Wen Yingjie realized some of the wisdom in it as being a rogue cultivator and the countless dangers it brought, he was forced to abandon a spear and pick a saber to keep his life, and it turned out that was where his true talents lay.

He had been using the spear because he idolized his grandfather who had proven his dao with his spear talents alone, and he hoped to replicate the same feats to honor him. However, after he left, every time he used the spear because of the guilt and shame welling within him, he could never use that spear well, and his skills even seemed to regress, and it wasn't long before he decided to switch because he couldn't handle looking at that spear, or using the spear arts his grandfather taught him not after the mess he left them with.

After he left, tales were still being sung about him, the Blue Oak's broken spear, the prince's bane, the blind sentinel, the spear of regret and lamentations, and the like.

The reputation his grandfather had built as the indomitable golden dragon spear of the kingdom had quickly been tarnished by his tales, and it was unbearable for him as he had grown idolizing and relishing with pride of the heroic tales that surrounded his grandfather's exploits. He felt deep pride for being the golden dragon spear's grandson, even though the man in question loved being a grandfather who liked to take his grandson hunting more than the man spoke of in those tales.

But all that changed. After he left, he sneaked back after a few months to see if the stories were dying down, only to find the flames were still burning strong with his trip being called a banishment, among other things, with the crowds calling for reparations from his family for his failures.

He left immediately after, swearing he would never come back until he was a palace realm cultivator, while also bringing to justice the true culprits behind the whole thing, the Black Jade Syndicate. As a palace realm cultivator, he felt he would have the heart to face his grandfather once more, and it was

the only way he could accomplish his second goal, which was the elimination of the Black Jade Syndicate as the head of the syndicate was at the palace realm along with his three deputies.

His naivety fueled by anger and regret blinded him to how difficult it would be to reach the palace realm, and that was when one wasn't plagued by countless heart demons, luckily for him, life as a rogue cultivator had a way of bringing things into perspective and wearing away anything superfluous.

The voices of others were losing their sway on him, everything that was the young scion of the illustrious Wen Clan had been eroded and he became just Wen Yingjie, a rogue cultivator, alone in the world trying to find himself. He no longer tried to imitate his grandfather or held himself to the ambitions of the young Wen Yingjie, he dropped the spear and picked up the saber, and slowly by slowly he cut away the mold that he thought was him and leaving only a skeleton of his former self, and reforged himself, in blood, tears, desperation, all the while trying to grasp at clarity, acceptance, and peace and his place in the new reality.

His grandfather's words rang true, and with time he grew to realize what to carry and hold on to and what to let go. Though he was still figuring it out, he managed to find a bit of what mattered, and what didn't, and for what didn't, glory was on the list. Glory from men was worth nothing in the end. People were capricious in the end, and if you built yourself from it, it was a road to doom. He had been glorified as a genius and later a scourge that had betrayed the heavens. He truly came to understand why his grandfather never cared much for the stories being told about him.

Find yourself, be yourself, and in the end, that's all that matters. For him, it was a few things, his family, his honor, and now his path. He would seek out the Black Jade Syndicate, but not to avenge the prince, or the royal family, or to appease the public to rectify his reputation with them, but to protect his home and family, and if he was being honest, satisfying vengeance too. He no longer wanted to reach the palace realm because he wanted to see the gratifying smile of his grandfather, which he would love, but he was now pursuing it for himself and now the saber that lay in his lap, his new companion and see the wider world that he had been oblivious too all this time. The broken spear had turned into a free saber.

Chapter 726 What Are Your Plans?

Yang Qing smiled slightly as his gaze fell on the pure smiling Wen Yingjie and the saber with the polished black scabbard with gold clouds.

"I am glad you got something out of it. Yi Jie would be pleased too.." said Yang Qing.

Wen Yingjie felt slightly embarrassed by the compliment which left him awkwardly smiling while taking frequent sips in an effort to dispel it.

Seemingly remembering something, Wen Yingjie hurriedly took something out of his storage ring as he said,

"I almost forgot, this is yours, well Yi Jie's, please give him back for me when he comes out. I wanted to thank him in person, but could I entrust you in sending my gratitude, though I plan to tell him later? I still have that 6,000 high-grade spirit stones to pay after all.."

"That you do..." said Yang Qing before he and Wen Yingjie laughed as he put away the artifact Wen Yingjie had handed him.

The artifact was an octopus fashioned from a blue-black gemstone. It had three cyclone markings on its head that had ancient glyph markings on it. It was the artifact that contained the three hearts celestial octopus cultivation art.

"What do you plan on doing next?"

"I'll take a look at the listing of jobs that I can easily accomplish as I make my way toward the Falling Meteor blacksmith shop. I would like to keep the promise I made to Tan Delun to let his father, Tan Ping, see it, especially now that it has made slight improvements, as its creator, he should see it. Hopefully, by the time I reach there, he will be available, if he isn't, I can only postpone the matter to a later date..." Wen Yingjie said as he gently stroked the scabbard of the saber which seemed to let out a low hum to his touch.

Wen Yingjie smiled affectionately at the reaction, but a second later his expression turned somber.

"After that, I intend to work towards righting a few wrongs, removing some knots from my heart, and while I'm at it maybe I could visit my family. It's been too long since I spoke to them let alone see them. With the encumbrances in my mind lessened somewhat, I think it's time I see them.."

"Will you be settling back with them?" asked Yang Qing.

Wen Yingjie went silent for a few seconds as countless things flashed in his mind before he said,

"I am not quite sure..." he paused slightly before he shook his head before his eyes shone with faint clarity.

"I do know... I don't think I can settle back there quite yet. When I left, I hated being a rogue cultivator. Alone in the world, with enemies all around, and no one to rely on or trust. Feeling like an outcast everywhere you go... I had grown up in a close-knit family, where I was doted on not only by family but even by the greater populace of the Blue Oak Kingdom.

It took me quite a bit of time to truly adjust to my circumstances, but once I did, once I accepted it, it was like a whole new world was open to me. A world that only a rogue cultivator who accepted it would be able to see.

I love my family, I miss them, but I am not quite ready to lose that sight. I love my life as a rogue cultivator and I'd like to keep holding onto it and see where it leads.

I am only heading back to my family to reassure them that I am okay, and to settle some things so that my heart can truly be free. After that, there is a whole wide world out there waiting for me to see and experience.." said Wen Yingjie with a carefree smile.

"That's admirable of you.."

"No, it's nothing much.." Wen Yingjie said with an embarrassed smile.

"No, it is...I am even a little envious myself.." Yang Qing said as he gazed at the clear sky with a few clouds drifting across its vast expanse.

"In a different life, I would have liked to venture like you and unravel the mysteries of this world, but as things are it's slightly difficult for me to do so.." Yang Qing said as he stretched one of his hands to the sky.

"But who knows, in the near future, I may decide to step out into that vast world, fulfilling every curiosity I have under the sun.." added Yang Qing with a cheerful smile as he envisioned that life. When or if he reached the late stages of the domain realm, he would be emboldened enough to venture out

without a fear of his life lingering in his mind. But for now, he could only vicariously realize his adventurous ambitions by reading the stories of others, or through treasure hunting at the cultivation markets.

"When that time comes, I would gladly serve as your guide.."

"Hahaha, thanks for that, though there is something you could help me with, if you don't mind.."

"Anything.." Wen Yingjie said with a fervent expression.

Yang Qing took out a jade slip from his storage ring which he handed to Wen Yingjie.

"In there, you'll find a list of ingredients, if you find any, I'd like you to buy it for me, you can use this.."
Yang Qing said as he handed Wen Yingjie a storage ring.

"In there are 5,000 high-grade spirit stones..."

Wen Yingjie involuntary gulped as he took the ring. The amount in there was almost equivalent to the staggering debt he had, which even now, he wasn't sure how long it would take him to clear. He could only hope the jobs were as high paying as Yang Qing had mentioned during his case proceeding.

A moment earlier, when Yang Qing handed him the jade slip, he had wanted to say he would buy it for him from his pocket, after all, he owed them so much, but when he heard the amount mentioned by Yang Qing, he swallowed those words. Those ingredients were unlikely to be cheap, and other than his saber and the storage ring that had 23 low-grade spirit stones, 5 middle-grade spirit stones, his cultivation art, and a few sets of clothes, he had nothing else to his name. Luckily his years as a rogue cultivator had taught him to care little about his face. He would find another way to repay Yang Qing, for now, what he could do was to try and find as many ingredients as he could from the jade slip given.

Out of curiosity, he sent a sliver of his spiritual essence into the slip to read the contents. He had been curious about what ingredients someone from the Order would want when they could just get whatever they needed from the Order with its vast reach and wealth. In his mind, it had to be something unique.

His gaze soon turned into one of confusion. Yes, the ingredients listed were all valuable as he surmised, but when he read them, they weren't quite what he expected to find. At first, he couldn't make sense of what they were for, he assumed they were maybe for a potion or pill recipe or something, but the more ingredients he read, he discovered something, they were all known for their delectable tastes.

He couldn't help but look puzzlingly at Yang Qing in wonder if he had given him the wrong list, but when he saw that knowing smile on his face, he realized it wasn't wrong.

Wen Yingjie quickly composed himself as he said,

"I will endeavor to ensure I find every single item on the list.."

"There's no need for that.." Yang Qing said with a wry smile.

"Just keep an eye out, that will be enough. I have no hurry with it, you can take your time and it's okay if you don't find anything from the list. Your other matters such as the debt, seeing your family, or whatever loose ends you said you want to tie take precedence over it..." Yang Qing solemnly said.

"I will.." Wen Yingjie said as he noticed the seriousness in Yang Qing's tone.

"Here you can have this, think of it as your commission, and don't refuse, it's for your saber.." Yang Qing said as he tossed a milky white stone that was emitting a chilly air toward Wen Yingjie.

"It's a moon essence soul stone. Use it as a whetstone to strengthen the spirit of your saber. Especially immediately after it has passed the tribulation, the effects will be better then.."

"Judge Yang Qing, I don't know what to say.." said Wen Yingjie with complex emotions as he humbly held the stone with both his hands.

"Don't think too much about it, I am doing it for my benefit too.. Daoist Wen Yingjie, I wish you all the best in the endeavors to follow, may it be more than you imagine, and may the fortunes follow you.. Be safe, and be well.." Yang Qing said as he stood up and cupped his fists.

"Thank you, Judge Yang Qing, thank you to you all.." Wen Yingjie emotionally replied as he stood too and cupped his fists.

Yang Qing turned to leave but just as he was leaving, he seemed to have suddenly remembered something as he said,

"Daoist Wen, you have never taken commissions from the Order before, have you?"

"I have not.."

"Well, this applies only to rogue cultivators, but the agreed-

upon payment can be converted to merit points, which you can redeem for a lot of things within the Order, that only merit points can give, such as access to cultivation site for a set period, access to a cultivation art for a set period, and information among other things.

It could help you in whatever it is you're working on. Take care.." Yang Qing said as his silhouette disappeared from the area.

"I couldn't even sense him disappearing.." Wen Yingjie thought with a wry smile. Stepping into the quasi-palace realm, he felt fifty more times powerful than he was, but in front of Yang Qing's displays, he felt he was just as weak as he had been. He couldn't wait to step into the palace realm, but all that would have to wait as he had knots he needed to deal with, otherwise his odds of surviving the tribulation of the palace realm would be terribly low.

Wen Yingjie's eyes shone with firm resolve as he committed Yang Qing's words to heart. He already had a few ideas on what he could possibly use the merit points on, which would definitely increase his odds of success.

"Grey weasel, you will lead me to your nest.." he said as held tightly to his saber.

After a few minutes passed by, he too left the Green Landscape.

Chapter 727 Zou Siblings' State

Just as he arrived outside, Yang Qing received a call from the guard Pan Liu that the Wang couple were already taken to the Flaming Goose Restaurant in Blue Respite town and were waiting for him, with the guard leaving to return to his duties. Yang Qing promised him a few dishes at a restaurant of his choosing, to which Pan Liu mentioned he was a regular frequenter of the Sunset Dew, a quaint little restaurant famed for its wine and seafood.

Yang Qing had visited the place a few times but not as often. It was a place one would go for a little solitude, a good drink, and a view. The Sunset Dew was built next to a lake. If it wasn't for the fact that the best way to enjoy the place was alone, Yang Qing would have been a regular, but when it came to dining, he preferred company and conversation to go along with it which was something the Sunset Dew wasn't known for. For company, they had burning charcoal, the lake view, wine, a few sea dishes, and a skilled guqin player playing tranquil music in the background. It had its audience.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Senior Ye Xun was a regular there.." muttered Yang Qing as he remembered the taciturn gold eagle guard from the Deer Mountain Range.

After getting the confirmation about the Wang couple, Yang Qing made a call to one of the Instructors in charge of the extra training handed down to the Zou siblings and the rest to find out if their 'training retreat' was done.

Luckily for him, they had been done for four days and were in the middle of being reoriented back to reality to help their minds come back from the hellish treatment they had endured for the past four months. It wasn't only them as the participants of the gold grade and the purple grade tests would go through the reorientation process. It worked like a rehabilitation process where their minds were slowly being mended together from the broken pieces they were left with from the test.

During his time, he and the rest of the participants from the purple grade test went through the reorientation phase for a month and a half. It entailed meditation and the use of cultivation resources that would soothe their nerves, and heal their minds and tormented spirits and bodies such as the Elysium Oasis Springs, or the Radiant Reflection Falls. Both were natural treasures that were able to calm even the most frantic of people. No matter in shattered your mind was, meditating in those places made one feel like they were in the safest, most comfortable place in the whole world.

But even then, it took Yang Qing and the rest over a month to escape the tormenting flashbacks of the test long enough to function.

"It's only been a few days since they began the rehabilitation. Are they capable of functioning?" worriedly asked Yang Qing to the Instructor.

"As long as it's nothing complex, they should be able to.. What do you need them for?"

"Their guardians have just arrived. I need them for the settlement procedures..."

"If it's that, I think they should manage, especially if it's around familiar figures. How's their relationship?"

Yang Qing went on to give a brief description of the Zou siblings' relationship with the elderly couple.

"That's even better! It will help them recondition faster.." said the Instructor with clear enthusiasm.

Yang Qing couldn't help but smile wryly at that comment. Someone who didn't know might think the Instructor said that comment from a place of compassion but they would be terribly mistaken if they thought that.

The Instructor's enthusiasm was on a different aspect. The sooner the Zou siblings recondition, the sooner their next meal of torture will come. Putting them through their paces, and leaving them broken was something that brought pure joy to those fiends. You would find a pure smile on their faces as you suffered an overwhelming loss against one of the inmates, but if you defeated them, all you would get was a cold look and a tongue-lashing lecture on the millions of areas you fell short, despite defeating an opponent who had close to over 100 years of experience over you, a renowned killer who had seen it all and lived through it all, and had a cultivation base greater than yours by a major realm and were fighting for their freedom.

After confirming with the instructor to have the siblings delivered to the Flaming Goose Restaurant, Yang Qing made his way there.

It wasn't long before he was at the dividing fork of the Respite Valley, the one on the left led to the abodes that belonged to Order employees, while the one on the right led to the accommodation of their families, both sides were as vast as an entire rank 3 empire. The area did belong to a former Holy Land

after all. Even after the years that had passed by with the Order gaining more and more people, only an eighth of the land had been occupied, leaving large swaths of land unoccupied.

Yang Qing flew on the right path that had the sign 'Talon's Edge' written next to it, and it wasn't long before he arrived at an entrance with the words 'Blue Respite'. The whole area was covered by an invisible protective barrier that was capable of defending even against an early-stage soul formation expert.

Yang Qing took out his gold eagle medallion which served as his entrance token that allowed him entry through the barrier. A vast land of green greeted him. Meadows, forests, grasslands, herbs, and small hills surrounded the area as far as the eye could see, accompanied by a warm tropical climate and fresh air packed full of rich spiritual qi that had condensed into blue dew on the grasses and trees growing around.

Yang Qing flew northwards, in the direction of two hills. Behind it lay the Blue Respite Town, his target for the visit. After several minutes he had already arrived. The town was small but bustling with life.

Chapter 728 The Charm Of The Blue Respite Town

Buildings of different designs, housing different occupations were arranged neatly around the town from tea houses, to inns and pavilions, to general stores, to blacksmith shops, to alchemy and herbal shops that sold all manner of ingredients and potions, to martial dojos.

There were also little roadside stalls that sold sweets, simple dishes, and little trinkets that attracted the interest of the young ones, who pulled their parents and used every trick in the book to get them to buy them something from those stalls. The guardians, parents, or relatives would then pretend to agonize over it before they acquiesced but not before exhorting them to practice hard in their cultivation when they get home in exchange or some other activity that the young one would otherwise grumble over.

Haggling, banter, teasing, laughing, arguing, and all manner of interactions went on all over the place filling it with life and personality. The Blue Respite Town was unlike most towns in that it felt more like a harmonious village where everyone has known each other for years and years, spanning generations and generations that their entire lives have been interwoven together as it indeed was.

Yang Qing could see four elderly grandpas playing go on a terrace outside a teahouse called Lady Ma's House of Tea and Golden Scallion Pancakes. For as long as he could remember ever since he joined the Order and was a student, he always saw them there, playing Go while regaling the young ones with tales of their youths, and from what he had heard, they had been doing the same thing for the past 270 years.

"Little Qing, you're back? Your mom told us you had left.." said one of the elderly men as he waved Yang Qing over with a genial smile.

"How was it? Still terrified of the outside world?"

Yang Qing scratched the back of his head with a bashful smile as he said,

"Grandpa Ma, Grandpa Jin, Grandpa Hu, Grandpa Ling, glad to see you all in good health. I'm even tempted to take you all with me during my next mission outside to see your dragon slaying, and phoenix egg stealing skills in the flesh, or that roar you always talk about Grandpa Ling that is able to scare even tribulation clouds.."

"Ling said that? Hahahaha, how shameless can you be? Where was that roar when sister Fei was tearing you a new one the other day. With how docile you had been that day as you took the lashing, one would have even mistaken you to be deaf, dumb, and blind..."

The elderly man called Grandpa Ling had his face redden in embarrassment as he hurriedly stood up to defend himself.

"You're one to talk Ma, we know you haven't been home in a week, I wonder why is that. I see you're using the skills you used to escape from that phoenix quite well.."

"Could you two please not start.." a voice came from within the restaurant. It was an exasperated female voice, who revealed herself as she walked out of the restaurant. She looked to be in her late forties with auburn hair tied in a bun with loose strands hanging loosely all around. Though one wouldn't call her a city-toppling beauty, she had a beauty that could be described as simple and comforting.

When Yang Qing saw her, he smiled widely as he said,

"Auntie Wei, your beauty gets more and more unmatched every time I see you..."

"Always cheeky..." answered the lady as she shook her head with a smile as she looked at Yang Qing with a gaze one would look at their child.

"Give me a second.." added the lady as she went back into her restaurant and later came out holding three bags filled with golden scallion pancakes releasing piping tantalizing smoke.

Yang Qing couldn't help but gulp when the smell hit him. The reason he was so close to the four elderly men was because of the restaurant. It was owned by Grandpa Ma's daughter, Ma Wei. Her scallion pancakes were the most flavorful Yang Qing had ever had. Even his mom, who was a great cook in her own might, admitted her inferiority to Ma Wei when it came to making golden scallion pancakes.

From the moment he joined the Order and discovered this place, he used every free opportunity he had to visit it and have the scallion pancakes, and when he couldn't afford it, he would trade favors for a few pieces here and there, though half the time he would be given freebies like he was now.

"Here, two are for you because I know your appetite, and the other is for your nephews. Don't eat it, or I won't give you any for a month.."

"Auntie Wei, am I that sort of person.." Yang Qing said feigning an aggrieved as he hurriedly took the bags from her.

Ma Wei didn't even have to respond before the four elderly men answered in unison,

"Yes, yes, you are.." as another round of laughter went around the place.

Hiding his embarrassment, Yang Qing hurriedly thanked Ma Wei as he left the shop lest he give the four elders to bash him some more, and before he knew it more would come and it would devolve into an event.

After a few twists and turns and crossing a clay bridge, he arrived outside the Flaming Goose Restaurant. It was a three-

story restaurant made of citrine elm wood, which provided a refreshing smell that blended perfectly with the scent of roasted meat, causing hunger and want in all who walked close.

The restaurant was another of Yang Qing's favorites in Blue Respite Town. Unlike the previous tea house that was owned solely by Ma Wei, the Flaming Goose Restaurant was owned by four people from different families. The four were all chefs skilled in a particular class of dish, there was the meat and poultry specialist, the vegetable and egg dishes specialist, the tea and wine specialist, and the snacks specialist.

The four united their skills and opened up the Flaming Goose Restaurant, which ironically wasn't famed for its goose dish, nor did it have one, with the name only being chosen that way because it sounded cool and seemed better than calling the restaurant the Golden Goose Restaurant.

Though they didn't have goose, their meat and poultry dishes were exemplary and the restaurant was frequented even by Order employees and not just their families, because of the quality of their dishes.

Yang Qing took a big whiff in with a satisfied smile on his face as he thought to himself, he was finally home. With large steps, he walked into the restaurant and made his way to the third floor which was where he had detected the Wang couple sitted.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting.." Yang Qing said with a soft tone when he reached their table startling the couple who had been admiring the scenery around the restaurant.

Chapter 729 Life Cauldron (1)

The startled couple hurriedly turned around, eyes wide open as they clumsily tried to stand up only to find a gentle force keeping them firmly rooted to their seats.

"There's no need for that here. You'll come to find that out soon enough.." calmly said Yang Qing as he wore a warm smile on his face taking the seat that was opposite them. The duo had conveniently sat in one direction, seemingly in anticipation of his arrival.

"How was the trip over?" asked Yang Qing, trying to defuse the tenseness which he had a feeling had little to do with his presence.

Even while they were admiring the sceneries outside, Yang Qing had detected a bit of tenseness coming from them as he was climbing their stairs.

Their reactions weren't all that surprising really with all things considered. The couple was in an unfamiliar place, and even if they were veterans who had lived quite the life, especially on a battlefield that left them predisposed to have strong wills and mental fortitude, coming to an unfamiliar place to start over would leave anyone shaken. It was the same for Wen Yingjie who left his home as a core formation expert but still was quite shaken and struggled to adjust to his life as a rogue cultivator, and it was the same for the couple who had left all they knew behind at the Red Maple Empire to come start over at the Order.

Yang Qing couldn't help but admire them. They had made such a significant change to their lives all for two children they held no blood relation with. Few would make such a sacrifice even to those they were related with.

Wang Siyi who seemed to have regained his senses earlier answered,

"It wasn't bad. The chief inquisitor of the Yellow Plains County Branch was more than kind to bring us over from Purple City. The journey was fast and smooth thanks to it.."

"That's good, that's good. What about your sons? Will they be coming?" asked Yang Qing when he noticed one of the sons who had served him when he was at their restaurant at Purple City was absent.

The couple looked at each other as they smiled wryly at one another before Wang Siyi's wife, Wang Huiyin answered,

"They said they didn't want to let the restaurant we built together at Purple City fade away like that. They wished to continue running it and our eldest already has someone he is pursuing in the city, making the move impossible.."

"Mmph, Huiyin'er no need to sugarcoat it, we both know they wanted to avoid us. Ever since they were kids they have always been trying to find a way to leave us behind and now they do. Ungrateful brats.." said Wang Siyi as he crossed his arms.

Yang Qing only smiled at the response, hiding his thoughts. Zou Yi had once told him about the relationship between the couple and their sons during his evaluations.

Even though Zou Yi didn't know the complete story, he knew the two sons were always a little reserved almost cowering whenever they were around the couple, and it wasn't hard to guess why considering the fiery temper of Wang Siyi. Even the guests knew well enough not to provoke the old man and his wife, she was even scarier, at least with Wang Siyi you could see the beating coming, but with the wife it was like a cat playing around with a mouse, enjoying the thrill of the torment.

Yang Qing could feel the fiendish spirits of his instructors from the couple. It was only when it came to the Zou siblings did they reveal a soft side.

"What about that other matter?" asked Yang Qing with a serious expression.

The couple straightened up as Wang Huiyin answered,

"With little... with the help of the City Lord of Purple City, we rooted out all the underground organizations in the city, though there were some that no doubt managed to escape we did manage to destroy the major ones, such as the Jade Scorpions where that blood fiend cultivator had belonged to, and the Crimson blades, and the Tiger Claw gang..."

Noticing the pause, Yang Qing asked, "Did something happen?"

"We found two blood fiend cultivators in a few of the underworld organizations, the Crimson Blade, and the Flying Serpent gang respectively. In both, they were unassuming members but when the fight broke out and they became cornered, they both revealed the strengths of core formation experts, with the one found in the Soaring Flying Serpent gang proving especially dangerous.

From the records, her name was Ling Shi, and she had been masquerading as a late-stage foundation establishment member of the Flying Serpent gang. She handled the gang's herbal trade activities along with being one of their alchemists.

She would have made a clear getaway had the leader of the Flying Serpent gang not revealed every escape route and contingencies the gang had if ever things got bad for them. Some of those

contingencies involved using contacts from a few elders of the Chen family that they had a few dealings with over the years..." Wang Huiyin's look darkened as she paused.

"The gang did all sorts of work for them such as hindering the trade of the other families, a few assassinations and kidnappings in there, and including sourcing of young children of about four to five to serve as pill slaves for the alchemists of the Chen family. They used them to test their various recipes, especially the more dangerous ones, with some of them even being used as life cauldrons.."

Yang Qing's eyes couldn't help but narrow when he heard the word 'life cauldron'. Every aspect of the world had its dark side, that was more so in cultivation and its different schools, like talisman makers who use the blood of cultivators with certain physiques to boost the quality of the talismans, blacksmiths, and weapon refiners who imprison the soul of a cultivator and refine it into the artifact or weapon they're making, formation masters who dig out cores of cultivators and use it as treasures for anchoring their arrays, and when it came to alchemy and herbology there were pill slaves and life cauldrons.

Chapter 730 Life Cauldron (2)

Pill slaves were guinea pigs used to test the efficacy, toxicity, and other parameters of a particular potion or pill. All around the world different organizations from sects to clans, to empires, kingdoms, merchant organizations, and alchemical organizations whether they were reputable or not, most had pill slaves within their ranks.

In reputable organizations pill slaves were dressed up pretty in the form of volunteering, gaining merit points, a chance to earn a living, and maybe, even maybe changing their fortunes. Those organizations chose their subjects well, it was those with nothing, down on their luck or desperate, those whose only chance at making anything or just surviving, was to use their bodies as currency. A mortal who hoped maybe those potions and recipes would awaken their talent in cultivation, that shunned outer sect disciple with no talent or background hoping that by selling his /her services as pill slave they could curry favor with their superior and change their fortune, that surviving clan member from a succession dispute who opts to become a pill slave to guarantee their life.

As bad as it was to be a pill slave, half of the pill slaves around the world become that by choice or at least the illusion of it given the circumstances half the time which is why the Order can never do anything about it most of the time whenever pill slaves come to court to file accusations against their employers when their bodies and minds can no longer endure the demands of the occupation. Their hands are tied due to the binding agreement between the two parties, which most nowadays are so thorough that even third-party witnesses and binding scrolls are used in the agreement.

With such rock-solid agreements, the Order's hands get tied, but when it came to life cauldrons, it was a different matter altogether. Using life cauldrons was no different than practicing fiend arts that siphon someone's life force.

A cultivator's body down to its base could be considered a natural treasure, and a special one at that, irrespective if one was in the body refinement realm or the soul formation realm, a cultivator's body was packed full of countless treasures and mysteries some unbeknownst even to the cultivator themselves. It was the exploration of those mysteries that led to the realization of great feats such as the diamond body, the peerless jade physique, the perfect qi circulation stage, the gold and purple pillars, and countless others.

A cultivator's body was considered a world in and of itself, and it was in the spirit of that thought that others sought to exploit it for more, for example with life cauldrons. Life cauldrons were cultivators who just like the name itself, their entire being was to be a cauldron. Their bodies would be packed with specific herbs and they would be provided with a particular cultivation art that would merge their bodies with those herbs to create a unique potion.

Said potions had wondrous benefits that made countless willing enough to risk the infamy that would come from such a venture.

Yang Qing had read about an alchemist who once sacrificed 100 foundation establishment cultivators and used them as life cauldrons. Most were unable to survive the entire process, with some dying while trying to escape, and others unable to survive its demands, in the end, only 12 were able to be converted into potions. The resultant potion was combined and consumed by the alchemist.

At the time he had been a core formation cultivator with an orange core, however, when he consumed the resultant potion from combining the 12 potions, his orange core was elevated to a blue-grade core, and it did not just stop there as he gained two more cores that were at the quasi blue grade giving him a full total of three cores.

Having more than one core though rare, wasn't surprising, as there have been records of cultivators having multiple cores when breaking through to the core formation realm most had something to do with their physique, with others it was as a result of some special cultivation art accompanied with a special ground, and even then the feat couldn't be replicated.

In both these instances, one had been born with it, with the other cultivating bitterly to acquire it, which was why that alchemist replicating such a feat with life cauldron potions took the world by storm. Yang

Qing didn't know what happened to the alchemist, he no doubt died under the banner of ' meting justice on behalf of the heavens and his recipe stolen in the midst of it, but what that alchemist did, lived on as he planted countless seeds on the possibilities of life cauldrons.

To date, the Order handled countless cases on life cauldrons, though Yang Qing had the fortune of never having one come across his desk, up until now.

Pausing on the matter of the blood fiend cultivator aside, Yang Qing asked,

"How long were they dealing in them?"

"From what we were able to gather from the leader of the Flying Serpents gang, they have been providing them for at least 30 years.." answered Wang Siyi.

"30, huh.." Yang Qing muttered as he drummed his finger on the table.

"In your years, of living there, you must have had some interactions, is this something that you could see them do?"

Its benefits aside, dealing in life cauldrons wasn't something that anyone would easily engage in, but then again that was from his judgment, other cultivators might think and see things differently.

Wang Siyi took a sip of the tea he had on the table and sighed after his breath filled with a certain level of heaviness.

"If it was 1,000 years ago, I would have said they would never do something like that, but now.."Wang Siyi paused as he took another sigh.

"I don't know. A human's greed is insatiable, nothing is impossible, and over the years I've seen it in countless eyes from my men to the nobles down to the royal family itself. I don't know maybe I too have fallen to it.." Wang Siyi said with a sorrowful tone.

Back then when he and his wife had successfully assassinated the general of the Five Clover Kingdom, some from within the Red Maple Empire had been tempted to send them over to the Five Clover Kingdom in exchange for a few benefits, it was only thanks to one general, one of the palace realm experts of the Empire, staunchly speaking up for them, to the point that he vowed to desert the kingdom, did the idea die down, but even then, with the amount of assassinations attempts they suffered from the kingdom, there had to be someone feeding them information.

Before Yang Qing made the offer, they had contemplated a few times on whether to move away or not, but their attachment to the Empire they loved so deeply made them stay, and they would have likely continued to stay until their last had the siblings not asked them to move with them.

"Whatever happens, it's up to them, I already gave them everything I could. I have nothing else to give other than hope the rot doesn't destroy it.."thought Wang Siyi.

"The investigations showed that only a few elders of the Chen were involved with the patriarch completely in the dark about the happenings. However, strangely enough, when news about the life cauldron started circulating, those elders all died.. Evidence shows they took their own lives...

As it stands, I honestly can't say the Chen patriarch or any of the other families including the royal family itself wouldn't be involved in such a matter. I truly cannot.." said Wang Siyi as he took another sip.

"I think wine would be better.." he added after the sip.