

Daily life 821

Chapter 821 Case Against Chen Family (2)

Yang Qing gave it a few seconds before he opened his mouth to speak.

"Good morning, I will try to keep this as brief and clear as I can for all of you here, so please make sure to commit every word that I say to heart and I hope you have done so with the words my colleague Yu Gen has likely shared with you before coming here on how you should conduct yourself whilst here, and the procedures of this courtroom..."

Yang Qing took a brief pause as he eyed each and every single member present.

"My name is Yang Qing, and I am an outer palace court judge of the Order. I will be in charge of the deliberation and the passing of the sentence on all matters concerning the case put forth against you.

May the head of the Chen family, Chen Zian, please step forward.." Yang Qing said as he addressed the group.

"Greetings Judge Yang Qing, I am Chen Zian.." answered a middle-aged man walking forward to the center of the courtroom, the fidgety crowd summoning whatever strength they had to let him through.

The middle-aged man had on black robes with no adornments on it, but even plain, anyone could tell the robes were made of quality material. The robes looked to have been made of a gem-like silk which gave it a certain quality that made it seem like it was dancing with the lights of the courtroom.

That robe seemed to complement the air around the middle-aged man which was one of elegance and composure. One look at him and you could already tell, he was someone important. Unlike most of his group, he was one of the few who was composed in the courtroom, almost as if he was nothing but a spectator to the whole thing.

Once he was at the center, Chen Zian respectfully cupped his fists to Yang Qing in greeting and acknowledgment of where he was.

"Yu Gen has filled you in on why you are here?" asked Yang Qing.

"He has.." Chen Zian succinctly answered.

"Good, but for the sake of procedure, I will need to reiterate it..." Yang Qing said as he brought his palms together.

"Your clan stands accused of breaking a couple of rules from the agreed-upon southern continent cultivator base cultivator conduct charter.

These are the charges brought forth against your clan;

Your clan stands accused of using pill slaves and human cauldrons in the nourishment and growth of your spiritual plants. The specifics will be made after when I bring the charges against the specific individuals involved. Also regarding this matter, your clan has been shown to be in collusion with another organization, the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion.."

No sooner had Yang Qing mentioned that name than a disturbance occurred from within the crowd.

"Your excellency, judge, we are innocent! my pavilion is innocent! we have been slandered!!" frantically yelled one of the cultivators who had on dark orange robe that was embroidered with the symbol of a flaming red lotus on the chest

That cultivator was thin, with black hair tied in a daoist top knot, and a well-maintained short mustache. He looked like someone who took great care on his appearance and he was the owner of the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion. His name was Song Bo, and of those present, he could be said to be the only one who was at the same station as Chen Zian be it in terms of status or even cultivation bases. Though in terms of demeanor, he showed to be clearly inferior to the clan patriarch of the Chen family.

Just like Chen Zian, he had a cultivation base that was at the peak stage of the core formation realm, and when it came to status, the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion was a subsidiary of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion just like the Earthvine Restaurant was.

After the outburst, Yang Qing narrowed his gaze on Song Ba as a formless pressure was released from his body stifling everyone present, even Chen Zian who looked like a still boulder that would not flinch

even if the world collapsed, looked visibly daunted by the fearsome pressure Yang Qing was releasing, let alone Song Ba who was the target. His knees looked just about ready to give in.

"Owner Song Ba, on account that you're clearly agitated, as you should be in this situation, I will allow the outburst just this once, there will not be a second time, and this warning goes to the rest of you.

To those directly related to the case, you will have the chance to defend yourself, but that is only if I have permitted you to do so. Each of you will have a chance to state your case as is your right but there is an order to things which I am sure my colleague must have explained to you.

Any more sporadic outbursts and you will immediately be subjected to the penalties associated with it. Do we have an understanding, Owner Song Ba.."

"WwWe dOo, pARdon my outburst.." said Owner Song Ba, stammering as he did so, still visibly shaken.

"Good," Yang Qing said as he dispelled his pressure bringing a much-welcomed relief to the group.

"Now where were we?... Yes, certain members of the Chen family stand accused of using human cauldrons in the growth and nurturing of specific spiritual herbs, and the evidence also shows the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion to be involved in the matter..." Yang Qing paused slightly as his gaze lingered on Song Ba briefly, who did well to control himself, which was more out of fear with how pale he looked.

Once Yang Qing was sure there would be no interruption, he continued,

"I will give out the specifics of the matter which includes the collected evidence once I am done mentioning the charges..."

Chen Zian nodded in understanding.

"The second charge is your clan has been found to have deep ties with the Black Scorpion Gang, which records show to have received a lot of support in funding and resources to help it grow to the level it is today.

While your clan backing a gang is none of the Order's business and should fall under the purview of your kingdom, it does fall under our purview when there are a lot of deaths of innocents.

Evidence shows your clan using the gang to murder, kidnap, and do all sorts of atrocities for you.
Evidence shows the human cauldrons and pill slaves you have been using have been sourced by them.

This is but one of the things they have done for you. Just like the previous charge, I will be bringing up the specifics momentarily..

Your presence here, Clan Patriarch, is to bear witness to the charges against your members, and should you wish to speak on their behalf, as the clan patriarch, you will be allowed to do so, but if they wish to speak for themselves, they will be allowed that too, as is their right.

Is everything clear, Patriarch Chen Zian?"

"It is.."

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"Good, you can step back now.." Yang Qing said as he straightened himself up.

Chen Zian acknowledged with a polite cupping of his fists as he stepped back to the crowd to where his anxious clan members were.

Some of them seemed to want to say something to him but held off when their nervous glances fell on Yang Qing and the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion proprietor.

"Now, let's begin with the proceedings..." Yang Qing said, plunging the courtroom into an even more desperate atmosphere.

"Like I said earlier, each of you who stands accused will have a chance to defend yourself, and should you wish to, your clan patriarch can speak on your behalf. Of course, whether he does it is entirely up to him. Patriarch Chen Zian, you're not obligated to do that, if you do not wish to, there will be no penalties

for refusal, and should you wish to speak up at their behest, what you choose to say is also entirely up to you.

Is it clear to everybody present?" asked Yang Qing to which everyone nodded solemnly in agreement.

"Okay.. Now let's go to the two charges brought forth against you. Usually with the cases that we deal with, someone files the complaint while the other defends themselves against the complaint, and we act as the arbiter between the two sides, but your case is different..."

Yang Qing paused as his gaze narrowed on everyone present causing a few to take nervous gulps.

"The one serving the complaint this time is us. About two months ago I passed through Purple City and noticed a few things that prompted me to have a thorough investigation conducted in Purple City and the Red Maple Empire as a whole.

The impetus for that investigation was a couple of things but the primary one was the presence of a blood refinement cultivator in Purple City and from what I have learned more were unearthed in the last month.

The investigation was conducted by my two colleagues here in Yu Gen and Xia Ting and also the staff at Yellow Plains County who you should all be familiar with more or less.."

There were a few startled looks from the crowd, more startled than before when Yang Qing mentioned Yellow Plains County Branch.

"Now, let's move to the specifics of the charges brought against you. The Chen family is harboring pill slaves and human cauldrons. Possessing even one of them is a violation of the Southern Continent Cultivator Baseline Conduct Charter.

As a long-standing cultivation clan, I doubt there's any need for me to waste time defining what a pill slave or a human cauldron is, is there?"

Yang Qing paused as he awaited an answer from the group. The response given was as he expected, muteness and awkward nervousness from most of the crowd as they avoided eye contact with him.

Their reaction was expected considering what they were accused of. Having pill slaves and human cauldrons was just as vile as practicing fiendish cultivation arts that required harvesting lives to cultivate it. Practicing such arts, and having pill slaves and human cauldrons was no different because at their roots, both practices needed life force as a catalyst for progress.

Pill slaves were humans be they mortals or cultivators, whose part or entire bodies were used as an ingredient in the crafting of a pill or a recipe. It did not matter whether they functioned as a primary or a secondary ingredient, they were pill slaves nonetheless.

Cultivators were usually preferred to mortals when it came to choosing a pill slave. Those who had perfected their craft in using pill slaves would rear those cultivators like how a person rears cattle whose sole purpose is to provide high-quality beef. Those organizations were very specific in the way they nurtured their pill slaves. Everything from what they ate, where they lived, the cultivation art they practiced, the elemental balance of their bodies, all of it would be micromanaged and controlled to suit the needs of the potion that required said cultivator.

A whole thorough regimen was built around it. It wasn't all who were as thorough about it. Some would use the cultivators as is. But for those using complex recipes, a carefully laid out nurturing plan for their pill slaves was needed, and the Chen family was shown to be one of them.

When it came to human cauldrons, they differed from their counterparts, the pill slaves, in that they were not an ingredient, but were instead the furnace through which all of the ingredients were brewed, in place of a cauldron. Other than concocting potions, they would also be used to nurture spiritual herbs.

One could be careless with pill slaves but the same could not be said about human cauldrons. Nurturing one required considerable effort and resources which was an investment that would be repaid several times over provided you were successful in nurturing one.

The investigation showed that the Chen family had already nurtured twenty-three of them.

"The investigations unearthed the following in regards to the charges. Your farms in Cherry Blossom County, Spiritwood County, Blacktear County, and Misty Caldera County were found to have pill slaves and human cauldrons.

The total number of pill slaves and human cauldrons was 78 to 23 respectively. Inquisitor Yu Gen please inform the Medical Valley to have them delivered.." Yang Qing said to Yu Gen, who nodded as he took out his communication talisman.

"He seems surprised?"thought Yang Qing as his gaze fell on Chen Zian who quickly tried to conceal the shock in his eyes as Yang Qing mentioned the four counties.

It came as no surprise that all counties were in the territory owned by the Chen family, and of those counties, Cherry Blossom County and Spiritwood County were the largest spiritual herb-producing territories under their control and the reason for that was the two counties fell under the territory the red maple spirit controlled and had thus been baptized by its aura, unlike the other places which they gained when they expanded the kingdom.

Yang Qing could only guess the reason for his surprise was the presence of pill slaves and human cauldrons in those two locations. Considering the significance of those two locations, it would be a given for the Clan Patriarch to monitor them closely.

Why wouldn't Chen Zian have the look of someone who had just eaten a fly when he discovered that someone had pulled one over him and he was none the wiser about it?

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Yang Qing's guess was validated when he saw Chen Zian get so overwhelmed by his emotions that a bit of killing intent leaked out. The target of that intent was two elders, one of them looked well on in his years, and the other was relatively young, he looked to be in his mid-thirties and could be considered to have a decent cultivation base too, as he was in the eighth stage of the core formation realm.

Of those two elders, the older one was called Chen Gutian, while the younger one was called Chen Zholan. Chen Gutian's cultivation base was in the eleventh stage of the core formation realm, but he was well along in his years, and from what Yang Qing could tell he had at most three hundred years left in his lifespan. He was Chen Zian's uncle by blood which Yang Qing guessed was the reason Chen Zian entrusted him with the supervision of Misty Caldera County. He was one of his people, and he was getting on in his years, there was no better retirement than the environment in one of their precious territories.

As for Chen Zholan, from what was gathered, he was one of the talented youngsters of his generation who had gained the admiration of Chen Zian. Giving him the supervisory role at Cherry Blossom County, was no different than announcing to the rest that Chen Zholan was his chosen successor.

However, both had betrayed him, which was why Chen Zian looked like he was struggling to keep his emotions in check every time his eyes fell on them. Both Chen Zholan and Chen Gutian made sure to avoid his gaze with the former occasionally looking up, with nervousness, regret, and repentance in his eyes which Chen Zian didn't look like he was in the mood to accommodate.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh when he saw their interaction, especially with his gaze falling on Chen Zian. The investigation showed him to be uninvolved in the charges brought against his clan. He had no ties and seemed largely unaware of it until the moment he was appraised of it by Yu Gen when they were about to be brought over.

His clan members had hoodwinked him, and the damage they would leave behind would cause significant damage to his clan and their foundations.

The evidence showed he didn't know what they were up to or the dealings they had with the Black Scorpion Gang or the Red Lotus Alchemy Pavilion, or the pill slaves and human cauldron's business. His lack of knowledge or involvement in those affairs could be true, but then again it could be false. Short of using karma to deduce it, it would be next to impossible to prove that he knew whatever his clan members were involved.

Yang Qing could think of about a hundred different methods the Chen clan patriarch could use to isolate himself from the whole thing despite being involved and each one of those methods would make it impossible to trace the whole thing back to him.

Of course, they could always use karma and verify the whole thing, but those proficient in karma were all in the soul formation realm or a saint-grade treasure like the one handed to him during his ceremony, and from what Yang Qing knew deducing karma was a long tedious yet delicate process even if the person under deduction was a core formation realm.

Reading someone's past, present, and future was not as easy as turning the pages of a book, it was more like untangling a million threads that had intertwined together into a convoluted mess and to try and make sense of it by undoing one string after another.

With how overwhelmed the Order was, it was in doubt whether they would have any karma specialist to spare and handle the case concerning a core formation expert and deduce whether he was lying about knowing his clan was engaged in pills slaves and human cauldrons or not.

If their normal but extensive investigation means didn't reveal anything, then Yang Qing would have to accept either Chen Zian was truly innocent, or his means of covering up his tracks were much more defined than the Order's means of uncovering them.

Whichever side the coin fell on, whether he was innocent of all of this, or a skilled manipulator, at the end of this case, the Chen family would never engage in pill slave or human cauldron trade again. The Order would ensure that now that they had fallen under their eyes. Surveillance puppets would be permanently deployed to monitor every single thing happening within their territory.

Yang Qing had seen one, and though in terms of attack, they were not powerful, when it came to evading detection and observation, they were masters of their craft and had been made with mimicry chaos metal which gave them the ability to transmorph into anything and even hide themselves with void energy because of the attributes of the metal.

If Chen Zian was involved provided he wasn't reckless, he would stop all activities for which they were about to be sentenced, but if he couldn't help himself, those puppets would be the first to catch him. While they were weak against palace realm cultivators, surveilling and apprehending a core formation expert was more than doable for them.

Yang Qing twitched as he detected something that prompted him to take out his medallion and use it to expand the courtroom once more, catching those present by surprise. A moment later, a flash of golden runes and light appeared at the center of the courtroom.

The light flashed for a second and disappeared and in its place was a new group of people who looked to be around the ages of ten to twenty wearing the same robes, which were dull grey robes. Outwardly, they looked vibrant and full of life, with their lustrous skin, and healthy bodies that eluded strong vitality, but within them, Yang Qing could feel the hollowness that lay within.

They were all young with the oldest being the same age as Yang Qing who was twenty-three and was even in the middle stages of the foundation establishment stage, about half of them were, with the rest being in the late stages of the qi refinement realm.

At face value, such a young lineup which had about thirty foundation establishment cultivators and seventy late-stage qi refinement cultivators, considering how young they were, it was bound to leave countless cultivating organizations salivating over them.

A seventeen-year-old foundation establishment cultivator would be treated as a genius seedling in a rank three organization and even some rank two organizations would gladly receive them as a regular disciple, and there were already seven of them here, but Yang Qing's gaze couldn't help but turn cold when he saw them.

The cultivation base he saw within them, was all manufactured and came at a price, a steep price at that. None of them would be able to live past one hundred years even those in the foundation establishment realm. They were nothing more than fragile porcelain with countless cracks that were hidden behind beautiful layers of engraving and ornaments, but soon enough those porcelains would break without fail.

Such were the lives of pill slaves and human cauldrons.

Chapter 824 Sentence Given (1)

The moment that group made an appearance, there was a reaction from all sides. The new group of young cultivators shivered inadvertently as their gazes fell on the group that was already there which was made up of the Chen family and members of the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavillion, while those from these two groups froze in disbelief when they saw those children make an appearance.

Countless complex emotions flashed in the eyes of both sides, though one emotion was clearly reflected from both sides, and that was fear. Albeit the cause was different for both sides.

The reaction from both sides was undoubted proof that both sides knew each other.

"Thank you, Senior Xu Yuan for bringing them.." Yang Qing said as he addressed one of the newcomers.

The newcomer had a white and yellow robe that had the words 'Medical Valley' on it. He looked to be in his early thirties, light yellow that was edging closer to green, and had a genial-looking face.

The group of youths next to him who bore the identity of pill slaves and human cauldrons were under his care. He could be considered Tan Jue's senior, though he wasn't much older than her and just like her, was also one of the rising healers in the medical valley.

He had the spring rejuvenation golden sunflower physique whose innate features and abilities coupled with his efforts, made him an absolutely gifted healer which was why the group youths were put under his care.

To most, the fates of those children were effectively set in stone, especially when it came to those who had been converted to human cauldrons. If they were anywhere else, the chances of them living past the age of a hundred years would be slim to none, with the damage done to their bodies classified as irreversible.

However, they were here. There were organizations out there, like the Medical Saint Garden, and a few others that knew how to reverse the damages borne out of transforming someone into a human cauldron or a pill slave, and the Order was one such organization.

The person Yang Qing called Xu Yuan was one of those at the Order trained in that treatment owing to his physique which was excellent at replenishing lifeforce by tapping on what was available like potions, pills, spiritual qi in the air, or grass, and even the energy of the sun and the moon. His physique's ability to draw upon these energies and maximize its efficiency to the last drop for those who needed it was the reason he was suited to their care.

"It's no problem, brother Yang Qing. Though, we can't stay for too long. Thanks to the assistance of Daoist Mei Xiling, I have already completed the setup. We can begin their treatment regimen any moment now and the sooner we begin, the better.." Xu Yuan kindly said.

"I know. I won't delay you both longer than I have to. Also, I'd like to thank you daoist Mei Xiling for sparing your time to assist us in this.." Yang Qing said as he addressed the beautiful young lady with black hair tied in a simple bun, wearing simple white robes, and had a graceful tranquil beauty about her.

The lady cupped her fists politely as she softly said,

"It's what I should do as a disciple of the Medical Saint Garden. I am merely adhering to the precepts our founder set, which I also happen to believe in.."

Her announcement drew looks of shock from the Chen family group, with some even muttering,

"we are doomed.."

Their clan patriarch, Chen Zian, didn't look too good either. The Medical Saint Garden may not be a holy land but it commanded the same respect as them when one considered its reputation.

Chen Zian never expected this case would draw the attention of such a monolithic figure like them. Falling under the gaze of the Order was already bad enough, and now adding the Medical Saint Garden? He couldn't help but fear for his clan's future. No matter what sentence Yang Qing gave out in the end, there were bound to be even more repercussions with the involvement of the Medical Saint Garden.

He could already guess a few of them off the top of his head. Once word got out, almost every single merchant organization they had a deal with when it came to the sales of their herbs would cancel all deals with them and that was only the start.

"We are truly and utterly doomed.." he grimly thought as he felt his strength leave his body and barely managed to keep himself standing through sheer willpower alone.

"I would still like to thank you nonetheless for your help.." Yang Qing said with Mei Xiling nodding her head.

"As you have heard, her name is Mei Xiling and she is a disciple of the Medical Saint Garden. The reason she's here is for transparency. A third party is needed so you don't think the accusations against you were unfair or biased on our part.

She is extremely knowledgeable in all things pill slaves and human cauldrons, and her insights will prove invaluable to the case.

Other than her..." Yang Qing paused as his gaze fell on the children who still looked like frightened lambs thrown in a wolf's den.

"I know this is asking a lot, but I need four from your group to speak on behalf of the rest if you can. I don't need much, just your name, how you ended up as either a pill slave or a human cauldron, and what you did in those farms. It doesn't have to be detailed, just a few words will do.

Would any of you care to step forward? I need two who were taken as pill slaves and two from the human cauldron side.." Yang Qing gently said infusing his tone with a charm that would help calm those children who looked inches away from fainting, especially when Yang Qing asked for volunteers.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh seeing how frightened and on edge they were. If he could, he would rather not use them, but for the absolute transparency of the case and ensuring everything was brought in the open it had to be done.

If he didn't, they would be slandered for being careless in the way they handled their cases, after all the conclusions of these cases were not only shared with the higher-ups of the Order but also the Society Review Council.

The Society Review Council was made up of members outside of the Order. It consisted of 40 members. 1 member came from a rank one organization, 4 members from a rank two organization, 7 members from a rank three organization, 12 members from a rank four organization, 12 members from a rank five organization, and the remaining 4 members came from the rogue community. Together they made up the Society Review Council.

In every case, the recorded proceedings would be shared with them. Though they had no authority to overturn a ruling they made, they were there to serve as witnesses for the others that the Order was 'behaving' and was not abusing its powers.

The members would be swapped out every ten years, with the succeeding members coming from different organizations than their predecessors. The Order did not choose those members, and they were instead voted in by their peers, those coming from rank one organizations would be decided by rank one organizations, and those coming from rank two organizations would be chosen from rank two organizations and so forth.

The Order had no hand in the matter. The only restriction it had in place was the organizations chosen could not be those that had at one point been on the wrong side of the Order. Any organization that had one of its members sentenced by the Order was ineligible for consideration in the council.

Chapter 825 Sentence Given (2)

After Yang Qing's statement, all the youths kept staring at each other almost as if they were imploring one another.

"You do it!"

"No, you do it!"

"I don't want to do it. You seem braver!"

"I am a coward just like you. How could I be the one to do it? You do it, your legs are not even shaking that bad, surely you can do it?"

"My legs aren't shaking because I'm frozen solid. I've lost control of every part of my body.."

"Why are your eyes moving? I can see you blinking. Why do your pupils look funny almost like a wormhole? You bastard, are you trying to mind control me?!"

"Someone, please step up. Junior brother Kai has lost his mind again. Please step up before he does something crazy and then we will all be in trouble.."

Yang Qing couldn't tell what was running in their minds, but he could sense the agitation flowing through them. He was almost about to say forget about it, when four people weakly raised their hands halfway, doubt and trepidation evident in their body language. It almost looked like they would have pulled them down had Yang Qing not been looking at them as they raised them.

"Thank you all for your bravery.." Yang Qing said with a gratified smile as Xu Yuan, and Mei Xiling smiled along with him in a bid to encourage and comfort the four who had stepped up.

Of the four who had stepped up, were three boys and one girl. It came as no surprise to Yang Qing on one of the boys who had stepped up. He was the oldest of the group and the records showed he was just about the same age as Yang Qing, being a year younger. He was twenty years old and the oldest of the group and was also one of the twenty-three human cauldrons.

Closer to him in age was the young girl who was nineteen years old, and a pill slave, while the remaining two boys, both were sixteen years old, one a pill slave and the other a human cauldron.

The smiles from Yang Qing, Xu Yuan, and Mei Xiling and the comforting back pats and looks from the other children, worked well enough to embolden the four of them as they stepped out from the crowd. They could still be seen shaking, but they seemed less rattled than they had been a few seconds earlier.

"Once again thank you for stepping up, and I will try to keep this as simple and short as I can for you. As the oldest, I would like to start with you. I hope it's okay with you?" Yang Qing said as he addressed the oldest of the group.

"Yyyyes, iTtTt ISss.." the oldest youth clumsily said as he lowered his head slightly before finally gathering the courage to look up.

"What's your name?" asked Yang Qing infusing more soul-soothing qi into his words to help settle the nerves.

The qi seemed to work as the youth felt like the vine of fear and anxiety that had been constricting him, leaving him with no room to breathe, think, let alone talk, suddenly ease up, giving him enough relief to string a few words together without feeling like he was about to vomit his heart out of his chest.

"My name is Xie Rong..." Xie Rong suddenly paused with a sense of nervousness which Yang Qing easily guessed as to the reason why.

"My name is Yang Qing, you can just address me as Judge Yang Qing.."

The youth nodded, relief clearly showing on his face.

"Okay, Xie Rong, you're doing good. Now for the next question, do you remember where you are from?"

"I do.." answered Xie Rong, a mixture of melancholy, hope, and regret flashing in his eyes as he did so.

"Where are you from?"

"I am ... I was from a little village, called the Glitter Clam Village in Crystal Vale Kingdom.."

Xie Rong tried to reign in his flood of emotions before he answered. While he wasn't completely successful at it, it was not a complete failure either, as he managed to answer with some clarity, though his voice and body showed he was slightly agitated as he did so.

"I am not sure that village remains though, or its people.." Xie Rong said with a sad smile that openly showed his guess on the matter.

Yang Qing did well to hide the touch of sadness and sympathy in his eyes. Xie Rong was right on the mark. His village had long been looted and destroyed by bandits. At least that was what it was made to look like.

"When we found you, you were at one of the spiritual herb farms in Blacktear County. How did you end up there?"

Xie Rong hesitated, almost as if he had an internal struggle like he did not want to revisit those memories. After a short but fierce struggle, his willpower eventually won.

"I was eleven. Life in the village was always slow. Other than harvesting clams and cleaning them, nothing much ever happened there. Back then all I had in my head was what a great cultivator I would be if I just had the chance.

We had a few cultivators who were in the qi refinement stage, but most were in the body refinement realm. After an entire day of harvesting clams, my friends and I would go to the nearby woods and pretend we were powerful cultivators sailing the skies with nothing but our swords like all the legends of all the stories we hear about.

Slowly those daydreaming moments changed into frustration. Something that used to give me joy now produced anger and resentment. I resented the Glowing Clam Village, as I felt it was stealing my future away every second I was there and it wasn't long before it finally reached its breaking point and exploded..."

Xie Rong paused as he rubbed his eyes trying to hide and control the tears that were threatening to trickle down.

"I don't even remember what the argument was about back then.. We had so many arguments, my petulant anger being the creator and driving force all the time. I argued with my parents and it got heated and.....

I struck my father.."

Chapter 826 Sentence Given (3)

Xie Rong's eyes turned cloudy and his vision seemed to change along with it. He was no longer in the courtroom but in a different place. He was inside a modest home made of azure hearth clay, which gave the house a beautiful blue and orange glow, giving the illusion that one was seeing the formation of a rainbow.

However, as aesthetically pleasing and homey as the house seemed on the outside, inside was a different mood. The inside was permeated with a stifling atmosphere. It was tense and rife with strife, which resonated perfectly with the gloomy weather outside. Rain was already pouring heavily and thunder crackled with venom every few seconds, and inside the house wasn't any different.

Xie Rong and his father were arguing, each trying to outdo the other, and the thunder rumbling outside. Their faces were all beet red, veined, fury clear in their eyes. However, there was also something in there, something Xie Rong was only now discovering as he was watching the whole thing play out.

Did he just discover it, or had he always known, but had been unwilling to admit it up until this moment?

He and his father were arguing, and they were getting heated by the second as their voices trembled, their words blazing like an unquenchable inferno that burned them up with every syllable uttered, scattering their rationality an inch at a time, with every word they spoke.

This wasn't the first time they had argued but they could already feel it, deep within, they could already tell this one was different. This was why behind the fury-filled eyes there was another emotion hanging on to dear life within the tumultuous tempest. That emotion was fear, and it grew stronger with every rise in their voices.

"Stop"

"We need to stop."

"Please don't say it.."

"Dad, I don't mean it.."

"Son, I don't mean it.."

"I take it back.."

Xie Rong had a pained look in his eyes as he placed his hand over his chest and mouth, being flooded with the raw emotions he felt that night. Even the words he kept in his heart before everything exploded, came full force to the front.

"Xie Rong, stop, stop saying those words, apologize, stop it, look at mom, she's crying, look at dad. Stop, Xie Rong.."

Xie Rong wholly absorbed in those memories did not realize he was mumbling those same words outwardly at the center of the courtroom, drawing curious looks that were full of pity. However, no one moved to interrupt him.

Tears started tricking down Xie Rong's face as his lips quivered when the scene he dreaded most drew near.

"It's here.." he muttered with a cracked and trembling voice.

He wanted to close his eyes for the scene to come, but he had already opened that door and it was already past the point of being closed again.

His mother, just like them, could already feel it, something was different this time. Just like how birds and other animals could feel an earthquake or some natural calamity was about to erupt in their habitat, his mother could already feel something dangerous was about to happen to her family, which made her agitated and desperate as the two at the center of that storm.

She tried to use words of reason, but her words were no more useful than trying to use a spit to quench a wildfire that had already claimed acres of space, and whose flames were growing in magnitude. When her words failed her, she did the next thing that came to mind which was to try and pull one of them aside, as long as one element was removed, the danger would be averted.

The person closest to her was Xie Rong's father. Out of a sense of urgency and desperation, she couldn't control her strength and pulled Xie Rong's father like a predator lunging on prey.

With how extremely on-edge Xie Rong was at the time, someone gripping his arm like a snake, he reacted by shoving whatever danger had assaulted him as far away from him as possible which resulted in Xie Rong's mother tripping over the table that was next to them.

That was the trigger. Xie Rong despite telling himself to stop, his very soul yelling, his body refused to listen. Chaos and fury took over, especially when he saw the befuddled look in his mother's eyes which at the time he misinterpreted to be because of what his father had done. However, now he could see it clearly, with his view as a spectator, he could see her eyes filled with worry were centered on him as she mumbled something which back then he was too heated to hear or listen.

"Don't do it, Rong'er, please don't do it.."

Deluding himself that he was fighting for his mother, vanquishing an unforgivable foe, in his father, he threw a righteous punch and hit his father squarely.

Despite being only eleven, Xie Rong had already taken a small step in his cultivation. He was in the iron body stage of his cultivation, his father languishing at the same stage too, which was yet another reason he always argued with his father.

He always felt every time his father stopped him from leaving, or told him to be diligent in the small things first before dreaming of the big things, he always believed his father didn't say those words out of kindness but a heart filled with envy born out of his mediocre talent. His father was already in his mid-thirties and he was eleven, yet they had the same cultivation base.

What right did his father have to speak about his cultivation journey when he was clearly inept at it?

Somewhere along the way, his father was no longer the hero he admired and idolized as a child, swinging on his powerful shoulders, but had instead turned into the very picture of mediocrity. A mediocre person blocking his path to greatness.

All that pent-up frustration exploded forth as he rained punch after punch on his father, who clearly showed even if they were at the same level, experience still mattered. He retaliated in kind, instantly overwhelming Xie Rong who decided to rely on boiling rage rather than technique to pull him through.

It wasn't long before the fight just wasn't a brawl between a heated father and son, but it was approaching something dangerous, the danger that the depths of their soul had warned them all about. Luckily their mother in the end managed to pull them both from the brink by risking her life along with theirs.

She threatened to take her life if they didn't stop which was the cold water both needed to regain their sanity. They stopped instantly after her threat as if all that happened before was nothing but a play but the bloody faces and the wariness and shock in their eyes showed that it wasn't.

They exchanged a look both knowing what would have happened had it been just the two of them, and just the idea of that thought sent shockwaves throughout their body and made them unable to even look each other in the eye for long.

As if his body was possessed, Xie Rong couldn't even hear what his mother was telling him, he just turned, his bloodied hand shaking as he reached out to the door. It felt heavy, heavier than it had ever been.

Were his hands heavy from being worn from the fight, or was it because he knew once he opened those doors, he would never come back?

He could remember what he told himself that night, at that door, as he lied to himself that he was leaving to really live so he would have no regrets, but now, seeing and reliving it all again, he knew guilt was what drove him out the door that night and it continued to guide him every day since, and now here he was, a human cauldron with less than a hundred years to live.

While he was glad the Order was helping him, some part of him felt dejected at the thought. He felt like the Order was denying him the chance to pay back the debt he owed for what he did that night and the days of bitterness, resentment, and foolishness that led to it.

The memory cloud of that night disappeared and the courtroom regained its true form to Xie Rong.

"I punched my father that night, and everything went downhill from there. Out of my cowardice, which I didn't realize was what guided me at the time, I left home and never looked back.

With my paperweight determination, I was determined to be a renowned cultivator which I deceived myself would validate and vindicate my actions that night. How naive I was.." Xie Rong said as he smiled bitterly.

"As for what happened next, well.. things happened exactly as what was expected to happen to an eleven-year-old too wet behind the ears to know of the ways of the world. I realized how unforgiving this world was to the weak. I starved, got beaten, sinking deeper and deeper into the mud with my list of fears growing along with it.

I wandered for months, drowning in despair as I did. I was tempted to go back home, but, with the way I left things, I couldn't bring myself to and I still held out the hope that my talent would shine through and I would make something of myself.

I tried joining some sects for those months, but none would have me. The reason.. same for all of them, which was I had no talent for it. Not even rank five sects were willing to accept me.

I on the other hand didn't want to believe it and just kept telling myself those sects were the blind ones, they didn't know what they were saying but despite what I told myself, I became more desperate with the growing rejections and in the end, I ended up joining some unranked sect called Silver Severing Dagger Sect.

That sect accepted me, but..... only as a servant.." Xie Rong said as he lowered his head in shame.

"Determined to prove myself, I secretly tried to cultivate their techniques despite being forbidden to do so, and eventually I was caught, got beaten within an inch of my life and then was cast away.

A few weeks down the line when I was teetering between life and death, some cultivator approached me and said he admired my tenacity, which is something that those who wish to scale the great heights of cultivation need. He offered me a chance to cultivate and change my fate and show up those who rejected and laughed at me. A chance to be a dragon among men.

With how broken and desperate I was, I accepted without a second thought. That man led me to Blacktear County. I couldn't believe it when I saw those farms, rich in spiritual qi, flooded with spiritual herbs that evoked a sense of grandeur.

I honestly thought I was at some immortal's lair which is why I didn't even question them when they handed me some cultivation art and a strict diet to follow. I felt lucky, especially when my cultivation base started rapidly improving. Not once did I question it, even when I was dizzy and growing weak, I attributed it to my own incompetence with the art. Only when a few of my colleagues started disappearing after long periods of weakness, and the moon starcap mushrooms grew even more resplendent after their disappearance, did I suspect something was off going on..."

Chapter 827 Sentence Given (4)

As for what happened next, it wasn't all too surprising. Illusions worked perfectly as long as someone didn't know they were illusions but once that illusion was broken, even if a new much stronger, and perfectly seamless illusion was put in, it would still be imperfect, reality in the end would win through and that was what happened with Xie Rong

With his growing doubts, the little things he had overlooked before turned into large warning signs and one of them was how despite having the cultivation base of a foundation establishment cultivator he wasn't much stronger than he had been when he was in the body refinement stage, and with time he even seemed to be getting weaker by the day.

His identity and background, having come from some outskirt village whose strongest expert was someone in the qi refinement realm meant there was a lot he didn't know about the different cultivation realms, especially the intrinsic details, but he had seen the strongest expert of the village, the sole qi refinement expert, bitterly fight a black rock bear to a draw.

Before that qi refinement expert stepped in, that bear had managed to tear through an encirclement of over a dozen hunters from the village. That group was comprised solely of the best fighters the village had to offer and every single one of them was multiple levels higher in skill and ability if compared to his father.

Despite that, even working collectively as a group, they were still played with by that black rock bear as it easily tore through their encirclement forcing its way to their village.

It was during that incident that his desire to be a powerful cultivator truly took root. The black bear playing around with the hunters he admired so greatly that he blindly believed there was no beast they could not hunt. Seeing the looks of fear on their faces as that bear mockingly tore them apart left quite the impression on him, but the greatest impact was what happened when the village chief finally stepped in.

The village chief had always been unassuming to the point that back then Xie Rong often wondered why he was even the village chief or why all the elders in the village including his father, always treated him with such respect.

To him, the village chief was just an old man who liked sitting in his wicker chair all day long, soaking in the sun, sipping rice wine at whatever time of day it was while munching on some garlic-salted fish as he smiled genially at the youngsters hard at work. It always irked him whenever he saw that smile. He would be knee-deep in clams which though looked aesthetically pleasing, produced the worst stench he had ever come across.

Every time he saw the village chief smile at them, he would get this urge to throw one of those stinky clams at him. When he witnessed his fight against the black rock bear, he was glad he didn't go through with the impulse.

Their chief, this old man who looked like he would be toppled over by even their tiniest gust of wind with how bony he was, managed to go toe to toe with that beast of carnage that was the black rock bear. The village chief seemed like a titanic general of slaughter as he traded punch for punch with the

bear, till the bear eventually cowered when it saw the frenzied smile look the village chief had on as the fight went on.

While he had been too awed, too weak, too ignorant to notice a lot back in the fight back then, he was at least certain of one thing. The village chief was the village chief for a reason. He was the most powerful person in the entire village and it was by no small margin at that, and as he grew up and started cultivating, that was then he knew of the chief's cultivation base as a late-stage qi refinement cultivator.

That fight back then had been imprinted on him, especially the strength displayed by the village chief, and even with his lacking knowledge in matters related to cultivation, he could at the very least gauge his strength, and it was miles away from what was displayed by the village chief and that was even after he broke through to the foundation establishment realm.

Before he had reasons to suspect his surroundings, he always bought on what his supervisor and teacher at the time told him. His lacking in strength and growing weakness were a result of the demands of the cultivation art and lacking talent. To make up this gap, the art placed demands on the cultivator's body but that would all change once one broke through to the core formation realm.

That reason was more than enough to convince Xie Rong who was severely lacking in confidence after all the rejections he had faced in the years prior.

In his mind, what was there to doubt? He may not have had the strength he had envisioned he would have when he had the cultivation base he had but strength aside, there was no denying he was a foundation establishment cultivator, and the foundation pillars were there as proof of it. As for the diminishing strength, and the growing lethargy, they would all be forgotten as soon as he broke through to the core formation.

The excitement of reaching the core formation realm blinded him to everything else around him including his odd-looking pillars. It was only when close companions started disappearing with time, all looking sallow and drained before they disappeared, did he start to suspect there was something afoot.

As those suspicions grew, the farm that he had thought was an immortal's paradise transformed into a devil's lair, but at that time it was too late for him. His body was already weak, just like his companions, and he knew it wasn't too long before he met the same fate as them. Luckily for him, the Order stepped in before his fate was set.

The other human cauldron, a sixteen-year-old by the name of Li Fie, described having the same symptoms as Xie Rong. They both cultivated the same cultivation art which was called the stellar energy glass funnel art, and despite both working in different counties, with Xie Rong working in Blacktear County and Li Fei working in Spiritwood County, they were both involved in the care of the same herbal plant, the moon starcap mushrooms.

Everything except age, was similar when it came to the two human cauldrons, but when it came to the pill slaves, there were differences to one another. The older pill slave, who was the young lady who was closest to Xie Rong in age, practiced a water-based cultivation art while soaking in a solution of frost spider lilies. After, her blood and qi would be drawn out as ingredients for the ripple aqua sap potion which helped improve a cultivator's understanding in water-based cultivation arts.

Her conditions were different from the other pill slave who practiced an earth-based cultivation art and would then have an elemental leech attached to drain their earth essence when the sun was at its peak. The elemental leech would then be removed at dusk and used for the magma vein insight potion which improved a cultivator's understanding of cultivation arts and techniques that were related to the fire and earth element.

With all of them having given their accounts, they joined the rest, seeming all too glad to do so. Even with Yang Qing's calm-

infused qi to aid, giving their testimony in front of their captors had been an all too draining task.

"Thank you all for the testimonies. I thank you for your bravery.." Yang Qing said once the four were with the rest.

The four nodded back as they were given smiles of endearment and gratitude all around, moreso by their compatriots for speaking on their behalf. Some couldn't help but cry as the four were giving their accounts.

They may have been in different places, but the things they endured were all the same, with the only difference being in how they got there. Most of them were hoodwinked with the promise of a better life, while others had more pitiful fates having been sold off to the Black Scorpion gang for various reasons such as offsetting a gambling debt or funding a new one.

After giving his thanks, Yang Qing waved his sleeve and an ancient-looking weathered stone appeared at the center of the courtroom.

"What you see before you is the heart stone steele. It's part of a saint-grade treasure that can tell the makeup of a cultivator's body, from their cultivation base to their age, and lifespan, down to their race and any bloodlines they may have or deformity.

Some of you may have already seen it work as this is what we used during ranking evaluations.

Its purpose today isn't for a ranking evaluation but to give a clear indication as to the state of their bodies.." Yang Qing said as he pointed to the steele and to the group of youths who were curiously and warily eyeing the steele. They became startled when they saw Yang Qing suddenly reappear next to the steele in a flash.

With a gentle tone accompanied by an encouraging smile, Yang Qing said, as he had said countless times before,

"All you need to do is pour a drop of blood on the stone, and nothing else, just a single drop and that's it. .. "

"Could I go first?" politely asked Xie Rong.

"You're more than welcome to.."

Xie Rong, although seemed nervous, he was less nervous than he had been before when he was giving his version of accounts.

Feigning a look of calmness, with his trembling hands, he tried to make a tiny prick on his index finger only for his nail to slide off from all the sweat that had built up on his hands. Quickly hiding his embarrassment, he made another attempt, heaving a sigh of relief, when he saw it succeed.

His nervousness showing, he poured a drop on the stone, which prompted the rest to hold their breaths as they eagerly awaited what would happen next.

Chapter 828 Sentence Given (5)

With held breaths, the crowd saw the stone flash with a gentle azure light that had released an ancient aura. A second later, the light dimmed as writings appeared on the weathered stone Steele.

Xie Rong couldn't make sense of what the writing was as it was in the form of a language he had never seen. Still, the confusion disappeared an instant later when the writing stopped. Another light flashed once more which seemed to have rotated the syllables, reforming them into something Xie Rong could finally understand.

Cultivation realm: true realm: bronze body refinement stage, Pseudo realm; fifth stage of the pseudo foundation establishment stage.

Status: Unstable and brittle from the pseudo pillars that are absorbing the host's life essence into yin energy.

The maximum capacity of pseudo pillars has been reached, addition will result in the death of the host.

Lifespan: 3 years, 28 days.

Bloodline affinity: Original (metal and fire), Pseudo (water and wood).

"Do I have two cultivation bases?" Xie Rong muttered in confusion as he read the first part as he moved downwards his eyes widened at the report given before finally smiling in defeat when he reached the last line.

"Figures," he said with a bitter smile.

Even though he expected his body to have problems and he had also been informed of the dangers of being a human cauldron one of which was a decreasing lifespan the more pillars he formed.

He couldn't help but feel dejected when he saw the actual value showing what was left of his lifespan.

Three years, three years that was what he had left. Some foundation establishment cultivator he was. He was weaker than mortals in every sense of the word, whether it came to strength or even lifespan.

He couldn't help but laugh at the irony of it all. Even though he had left home to escape his guilt, it was still true that he wanted to grow stronger but instead, he became weaker than he was when he left home. There was never a crueler joke.

"I deserve this I guess.." he said as he turned to walk back, his dejection affecting the rest.

The display of Xie Rong's lifespan left the group severely on edge as they hesitated to come forward, luckily Xu Yuan stepped in.

"Yang Qing, may I?

Yang Qing nodded to Xu Yuan with a grateful look.

Xu Yuan clapped his hands, creating a subtle gentle rhythm that managed to calm the worrying youths.

Pulled out of their stupor, they couldn't help but look to the source of the clap.

"The promise we made to you at the valley still stands. Regardless of what your lifespan shows, we will ensure you get more than what you have lost..

Know this, whatever you see on the heart stone, that is not how things will end for you. Me, my fellow daoist here, and all the rest at Medical Valley will ensure you get to live your lives.." Xu Yuan solemnly said with certainty in his tone.

His confidence and matter-of-fact tone influenced the youths enough to calm them down. Yang Qing took advantage of the sense of calm around to resume the evaluations. To help reduce the pressure of

who would be next, he made a unilateral decision as he made the evaluations start from the left to the right.

One by one they made their way to the heart steele, each wearing the same expression when they saw their lifespans. Luckily they had Xu Yuan's words to fall back on to steady themselves.

Whether it was those who were pill slaves or human cauldrons, they all had less lifespan than they should have had. The one with the highest lifespan had 68 years left and said person, was 10 years old and was among the newest recruits as a pill slave. The human cauldrons were the ones who had it worse, as even their newest members had lifespans that were less than 30 years.

Once the last person was tested, Yang Qing turned to the group from the Chen family.

"To prove the veracity of the heart stone steele, Patriarch Chen Zian I would like to invite you over as the final person to be tested..."

Patriarch Chen Zian calmly nodded as he calmly walked over to the heart stone steele. With one fluid motion, a single drop of blood fell on the stone, and his results were shown.

Cultivation realm: 12th stage of the core formation realm

Status: Stable

Lifespan: 4,012 years

Bloodline: Earth attribute

"Patriarch Chen Zian, can you confirm the results to be a true representation of your state?"

"They are..." Chen Zian curtly said, though his eyes couldn't hide the mild surprise he had when he saw the results.

"Thank you for your assistance, you can step back now.."

"The heart stone steele's functionality has been proven. We can now move to the next stage, which is the evaluation of the spiritual herbs and potions that were produced from harvesting them.." Yang Qing said as he pointed to the former pill slaves and human cauldrons.

"The evaluation will be done by daoist Mei Xiling from the Medical Saint Garden. Daoist Mei Xiling, the floor is now yours.." added Yang Qing as he made a welcoming gesture towards the female disciple of the Medical Saint Garden.

As she made her way to the center of the courtroom, seemingly appearing out of thin air, a white jade table appeared, and on top of it were about a dozen mushrooms that had nebulous caps that had stars on them that glowed with a hazy almost misty white hue. These mushrooms were moon starcap mushrooms, sky-grade herbs that had excellent properties for cleansing and strengthening the soul.

A lot of alchemists or those doing jobs or practicing techniques that put huge demands on their souls usually chewed on the mushrooms to stave off mental exhaustion and extend the duration of time they can remain concentrated.

Other than the moon starcap mushrooms, the jade table also had over a dozen vials filled with different colored potions. Some of the vials had the symbol of a flaming red lotus on them. The Owner of the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion nervously clenched the sleeves of his robes when he saw those vials.

Mei Xiling walked over to the jade table and neatly separated the vials of potion, before finally going for the mushrooms and dividing them into four groups. After she was done, four more moon starcap mushrooms appeared in her hands, likely coming from the storage ring on her left hand. She placed the new group of mushrooms at the farthest end of the table, separate from the rest.

Only when she was done, did she finally speak.

"Except those four.." she said as she pointed to the four mushrooms that came from her storage rings.

"Except for those four, the rest of these moon starcap mushrooms were produced in Red Maple Empire, specifically the farms in Black Tear County, Cherry Blossom County, Spiritwood County, and Misty Caldera County.

They have all matured and for clarity, I was the one who personally harvested them in those mentioned locations at the request of the Order.

I used a harvesting technique exclusive to the Medical Saint Garden so any of my peers or elders from the sect could easily verify it should you wish to do so..." Mei Xiling paused slightly before moving to the potions.

"I bought some of these potions from the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion. I recorded the whole purchase in this recording jade talisman.." she added as a grey talisman appeared on her palm.

She inserted a bit of qi into the talisman lighting up the runes on it which then produced a grey light curtain that was blank at first before it was colored with images that transformed into a video.

In the video, Mei Xiling could be seen walking into a pavilion that had an eye-catching red flaming lotus sculpture crafted out of sunfire topaz.

Once inside, she asked for a few potions and their prices, which the attendant attentively provided as he added a few sentences meant to impress upon her how their wares were a cut above the rest, he was especially wordy when he was handing her the ripple aqua sap potion and the magma vein insight potion, exhorting how both potions could help trigger insights and epiphanies into the water, earth and fire elements that were deep enough to lay the foundations for the palace realm.

Mei Xiling was already a palace realm expert and in the fourth stage at that. It could thus be assumed she had hidden it as she made that purchase. The owner, Song Ba could also be seen in the recording. He looked to be in heavy discussion with someone on the counter over, only throwing an acknowledging nod to the attendant after he had completed the sale for Mei Xiling.

Once she had bought the potions she wanted, Mei Xiling left the store and the recording ended immediately after.

"The talisman is a silver void talisman which is able to record soul signatures. The persons in the recording can easily be confirmed.

With that out of the way, the next part is the evaluation. I will be using a few simple known methods to bring to light the key ingredient used in said potions and moon starcap mushrooms. Said key ingredient is life essence as whole, human life essence..."

Mei Xiling throughout her whole conduct was cool, composed, direct, and sharp, cutting directly to the core of the matter.

With a flick of her hand, two things appeared, one living and the other unliving. The living thing was a fly that looked to have been sculptured from a clear block of ice, while the unliving object was a stick, that looked like any other mundane stick out there. It was brown and dried.

"I will start with the moon starcap mushrooms.." Mei Xiling said as she used the stick to point toward them. A look at her and one would think they were in a classroom instead of a courtroom session.

"Moon starcap mushrooms require impure yin for growth. This is yin that has a touch of something that doesn't go well with it, in most cases its yang energy, but as a substitute earth or lightning energies can do as well, but yang is the most preferable.

Yin is dominant, yang is minuscule in amount, creating an impure yin energy. The moon starcap mushrooms are dubbed so, one is because of how they look and the other, the name itself shows how it grows.

Clear skies, full moon, cluster of stars. It draws upon the energy of the moon and the stars to grow, and it's most effective during clear skies. Because of these three simple conditions, it is one of the easiest sky-grade herbs to grow, as you don't even need to do anything. The only problem with using this method is it takes too long for them to mature which is why substitutes were found to fill in the place of the energy they get from the moon and stars which brings us to why we are all here today.

One of those substitutes that perfectly replaces the two celestial bodies is the human body which is rich in yin and yang energy. Provided one can control the release of both energies perfectly to meet the needs of the moon starcap mushroom, human life essence is considered to be one of the best substitutes for nurturing them.

Human life essence shortens the growth period considerably, from needing sixty years and above to nurture it, to just needing five years and it's almost always guaranteed that the quality of moon starcap mushrooms nurtured from human life essence will always be high.

But nothing is free of course. The cost for such quality and speed is the loss of the human life used to nurture those moon starcap mushrooms.."

Even though her tone remained the same which was calm and direct, there was a coldness seeping in there as she made the last statement.

Chapter 829 Sentence Given (6)

Moving on with a collected coolness about her, Mei Xiling's attention moved from the potions and the moon starcap mushrooms to the stick and the glass build fly.

"What I have on my left is the branch of a soul incendiary cedar tree, and to my right is the yin torch bug. I will be using both to confirm the makeup of these sixteen moon starcap mushrooms.

As you know, or maybe you might not, soul-incendiary cedar trees are highly sensitive to the yin energy a living soul produces. The essence or energy produced by a living soul is capable of causing it to ignite in a bright orange flame similar to the sun's rays.

The more the yin essence, the brighter the flames become. Then there is the yin torch bug. Like the soul incendiary cedar, the yin torch bug is sensitive to yin energy. But it does have some differences to the soul incendiary cedar tree in that the latter needs yin energy produced from the soul of a living being to trigger a reaction but when it comes to the yin torch bug it doesn't have such restrictions. It will react to anything that has yin energy in it, be it a living soul, yin energy that is naturally occurring from let's say a yin spirit vein, or some natural treasure of yin origin, or even artifacts and weapons of yin attributes, down to even corpse energy, whatever it is, as long as it has yin energy within it, the yin torch bug will react to it.

However, just like the soul incendiary cedar tree, it produces light in the presence of yin energy but has some variations to the light it produces that is a reflection of the nature of the yin energy it has come into contact with.

Yin energy from a living soul produces a pure white light with golden hues, yin energy from a corpse produces dull grey light, yin energy from naturally occurring objects like spirit veins and natural treasures produces a pale blue light, while yin energy from artificial objects like artifacts and weapons produces a light brown color that turns darker with the increasing grade of the artifact.

A sky-grade artifact will produce a brown color that is on the lighter side when compared to one that is at the monarch grade.

It's easier if I just show you.."

With a wave of her sleeves, three objects appeared on the jade table. Of the three objects, one was a fang about four inches in length and half that in girth. It looked intangible like it was made of grey smoke.

Next to the fang was a brooch that was azure blue. One look at the brooch made one feel like they were meditating next to a tranquil sea and completing the trio was a ceramic jar that contained pure white liquid, almost like milk except this one had some ethereal almost pure shine to it. It released a refreshing coolness.

"This is the fang of a dead moonshadow cobra, this brooch is a monarch-grade artifact made from 10,000-year-old azure sangfroid crystal, and this liquid is yin jade spirit liquid.." explained Mei Xiling as she pointed to the three objects.

Once she was done, she poked the crystal torch bug almost as if she was nudging it awake, which seemed to be indeed so. It was inanimate the whole time, but after being poked, it came alive as it excitedly flew around Mei Xiling who for the first time showed a touch of emotion on her face as she gently requested the torch bug to fly to the three objects.

The torch bug brushed its head against her index finger one more time before it nodded with a human-like expression as it flew toward the three objects.

It went for the yin jade spirit liquid first, and a second later it was clear why as it dipped its head in and took a sip, showing a clear look of ecstasy and satisfaction as it did so. A light was instantly produced in its abdomen. The light was pale blue.

The torch bug seemed to have forgotten Mei Xiling's request. A few seconds passed and it was still intoxicatingly slurping the yin jade spirit liquid showing no signs of stopping.

It took a few 'ahems' from Mei Xiling, to grab its attention, showing yet another expression as she did so when her neck reddened slightly in embarrassment with her eyes flashing in anger in the process.

Sensing the unveiled threat thrown its way, the torch bug used its wings to quickly apologize before moving on to the next object, the monarch-grade brooch. It brushed up against the brooch, the light in its abdomen switching from pale blue to light brown which grew darker in shade before finally settling in moderately brown.

Only when the color had fully settled did it move to the next object, the fang of the moonshadow cobra. It seemed averse to going toward the fang, showing a look of disgust even, but eventually, it used one of its limbs to make contact with the fang, still begrudgingly at that, and its torchlight changed colors from brown to dull grey. It did not waste a second longer than it had to, quickly removing its limb from the fang, quickly flying back to Mei Xiling to curry favor with her. Its reason? Everyone in the courtroom knew.

"Not now, maybe after. There's still something I need you to do.." Mei Xiling said with a sigh of exasperation. The torchbug deflated at not getting the response it wanted, stared longingly at the yin jade spirit liquid eventually tearing its eyes away to avoid the temptation and torture.

"With that, I think the demonstration should be more than satisfactory, we can now begin the tests.." Mei Xiling said as she took out more branches of the soul-incendiary cedar tree, sixteen to be exact.

With one fluid motion, she used the branch she already had in hand and made contact with one of the moon starcap mushrooms that was picked from the farms of the Chen family. The branch which was no different than a dried stick instantly burst into life as it ignited with an intense blue-white flame.

The stick burned for almost fifteen seconds before the flame died out, leaving white ashes in the aftermath.

Mei Xiling repeated the same process fifteen more times, and the results were the same at every turn. Sixteen soul-

incendiary cedar branches all ignited with blue-white flames every time the branch made contact with the moon starcap mushrooms from the farms owned by the Chen family.

After the last stick had burned out, Mei Xiling motioned for the torchbug to take over. Upon coming into contact with those mushrooms, the light produced by the torchbug was white with motes of gold, an indicator that the yin energy within those mushrooms were from living souls.

Once it was done, Mei Xiling motioned for it to remain where it was as she moved toward the group of moon starcap mushrooms that she had taken out from her storage ring.

"These moon starcap mushrooms, two are from the Medical Saint Garden, and two are from the Order. Now let's test with the stick once more, but for transparency let's do this.."

Mei Xiling brushed up the soul incendiary stick against the last mushroom from the Chen Clan's farms, and as expected it ignited, however, this time she didn't let it burn through the entire stick as she effortlessly separated the part that had caught flames from the rest of the stick, leaving half the stick unburnt.

"With this, you can be assured it is still the same stick.." she added as she moved to the remaining four mushrooms belonging to the Order and the Medical Saint Garden.

She prodded each mushroom with the stick, one by one, but there was no reaction. The branch maintained its mundane state where it looked no different than ordinary dead twigs.

"There's no reaction because yin energy from the soul essence of a living being wasn't used in their care.

Torch would you please?" she said as she beckoned the torchbug over.

The torchbug with familiarity went over each of the mushrooms, producing a pale blue light in the process unlike the white light with gold motes it produced with the previous sixteen mushrooms from the Chen Clan farms.

"With this, we can confirm these sixteen mushrooms were cultivated with the soul essence of living beings.

Now we move to the potions.."

Chapter 830 Sentence Given (7)

With its role completed, the torchbug was dismissed but not before it sought guidance on its earlier request. With reluctance, Mei Xiling nodded to which the torchbug buzzed around her with excitement before flying over to the ceramic jar containing yin jade spirit liquid. As a fellow lover of food, Yang Qing couldn't help but nod in approval at the torch bug's firmness in its endeavor.

One must never forget what it is they labor so hard for. It is what makes the whole thing seem worthwhile and to him, food was one of those things that stirred him on in his endeavors, well that and petty vengeance, though food still held an edge over petty vengeance.

Pushing his motivations for working aside, Yang Qing brought his attention back to the case, inwardly feeling glad to have gotten Mei Xiling's help with the case. The way she handled it was just stellar, leaving no room for doubt. Yang Qing couldn't have done it any better himself.

...

Mei Xiling took out two flowers from two earth jade boxes. One of the flowers was a sunflower that released a sacred golden white light that had a cleansing, pure, and divine aura to it. Anyone with even a slight impure thought would feel insecure and ashamed when their gazes fell on it, and it was evident when the majority of the group from the Chen family and the owner of the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion all looked down when Mei Xiling removed the flower from the earth jade case.

The flower in question was the sacred cleansing sunflower. It was a rare spiritual herb that had purifying properties. It had unique properties which was why it went by another name, 'the flower of natural balance' it was called.

With its purifying or cleansing nature, it could detoxify a lot of toxins, but that was only if the toxin was manufactured. It had zero effects on naturally occurring poisons.

To anything artificial, it was a divine medicine, but to things that are naturally occurring, it was utterly useless and was no different than a useless herb by the roadside. Its cleansing abilities only worked on things that it deemed impure, and what it deemed impure was what the natural dao classified as unnatural.

Yang Qing nodded his head in approval when he saw the flower. It was perfect for the case. Of its purifying abilities was its ability to break down a potion into its constituent components, which was perfect for using on the potions Mei Xiling had collected from the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion and the Chen family.

The other flower was a pristine white flower whose petals had closed shut. It exuded an air of grace, elegance, and fragility, almost as if it would disintegrate at the slightest touch.

The flower's current docile look was heavily misleading which was why despite how it looked, Song Ba, Chen Zian, and a couple of other elders from the Chen all showed looks of fear and apprehension when the flower was revealed. The fear they felt was one that a prey felt whenever they felt they were in the presence of a predator as it indeed they were.

The flower in question was the bleeding petal devouring venus flower and it devoured just about anything. Its essence and nature resembled that of a taotie, except unlike the latter it didn't have an unsatiable appetite, but just like the taotie it could extract nourishment from just about anything, be it living or non-living.

It could eat a rock and extract its nutrients the same way as it could when it consumed a spirit stone. What they called food was long. A lot of alchemists and blacksmiths liked keeping one around as they were the best decomposers. Any failed products they produced could be fed to the bleeding petal-

devouring venus flower for decomposition which would then produce condensed and refined essence of whatever was fed to it in the form of crystals. Most were just pure elemental crystals.

However, the reason it was called the bleeding petal devouring venus flower wasn't that it could decompose things, the reason Chen Zian and the rest all looked nervous around was that as much as it could devour anything, it had certain things that it liked to devour more than the rest and one of those things were cultivators be it human, beast, plants or even artifacts that had budding spirits.

As long as it could cultivate, that thing would be at the top of the flower's must-devour list, and the flower Mei Xiling had brought out was at the palace realm. Even though Mei Xiling had sealed every part of it except its awareness and its desire to consume cultivators, some part of it still leaked out, which left those weaker than it in an alarmed state especially, the 'more powerful preys' in Chen Zian, Song Ba and the Chen elders present.

Whenever it devoured said cultivators the pristine white petals would turn color and start bleeding out red droplets hence the name bleeding petal devouring venus flower.

"Quit it or else.." coldly said Mei Xiling, reigning in the flower's unruly behavior bringing a much-welcomed relief to Chen Zian and the rest.

Ignoring the discomfort the rest felt as she carried that 'flower fiend' and the sacred cleansing sunflower, Mei Xiling went to the jade table, and produced four potions.

"These four potions match some of these potions here like the ripple aqua drip and the magma vein insight potion. I brewed them myself..."

She uncorked one of the potions and poured half its content onto the sacred cleansing sunflower, and the remaining half was poured onto the bleeding petals devouring venus flower which opened its petals as if it was opening its mouth as it gulped down the potion. In the end, it even burped as its petals curled up in a human-like satisfied grin.

The light released by the sacred cleansing sunflower instantly disintegrated the potion into different colored liquids, the colors being blue, green, earth orange, and a touch of silver which was a reflection of the elemental nature of the ingredients used in the potion.

When it came to the bleeding petals devouring venus flower, small finger-sized crystals that matched the same colors as that of the sacred cleansing sunflower were produced.

"If blood or human essence was used in the production of this potion, the petals of the bleeding petals devouring venus flower would have dripped with bloodline liquid and when it comes to the sacred cleansing sunflower, its light would have vaporized the entire potion deeming it impure, and the impurity would be all that is left behind in the aftermath.."