

Gourmet 201

Chapter 201: Last Night I Might Have... Gotten Drunk

In the dark of the night, two crescent moons intertwined and fulfilled each other, emitting a brilliant glow. Thousands of stars shone near the crescent moons.

The brightness of the crescent moons spilled down, as if masking the earth with a gossamer veil.

Imperial City, in a luxurious mansion.

Zhao Musheng stood in the courtyard, with a cloak of moonlight draped over his shoulders. With a gentle complexion and kind eyes, he peered at the serpent girl within the courtyard, who looked back at him timidly.

"You said you came to the Imperial City in search of Owner Bu?" Zhao Musheng's eyes squinted into a wink, giving him a mild, benevolent countenance. His body emitted a golden layer of gleam, which momentarily helped ease Yu Fu's sense of unrest.

"Yes..." Yu Fu's serpent tail swayed, and her entire body slightly shrank back.

Zhao Musheng suddenly curled the corners of his lips and enhanced the compassionate, tender look on his face, "Don't be afraid. Owner Bu and I are quite close, perhaps... I can take you to him."

Yu Fu was taken back, but her beautiful eyes suddenly lit up. She was unfamiliar with the Imperial City, and did not even know where was this store Bu Fang had mentioned... If the human before her eyes was speaking the truth, then it would be such a relief.

If she could find Owner Bu, her father could be cured.

"The serpent-men's tribe is located in the Illusory Spirit Swamp, right? That is quite far from here. You trekked over a great distance and came all the way to the Imperial City just to find Owner Bu. What for?" Zhao Musheng asked.

Yu Fu's heart shivered as she looked at him in alarm.

Her sharp vigilance prompted Zhao Musheng's complexion to slightly freeze. His eyes became gradually colder, and the layer of soft golden glow on his body, as well as the warmheartedness, had all evaporated into thin air.

Zhao Musheng's eyes dimmed, as if a queer glow circulated beneath his eyes. With that, Yu Fu zoned out and involuntarily spilled out everything...

"Someone come, take the serpent-woman down, and guard her well... Who would have thought that this serpent-woman has actually had contact with Bu Fang. What a pleasant surprise," Zhao Musheng said coolly, after which a couple of shadows dashed into the mansion, dragged down the serpent-woman Yu Fu, and locked her up.

Serpent-men were very rare in the Light Wind Empire. Zhao Musheng originally took in the three serpent-men purely out of curiosity. Little did he know that he could end up gaining extra information on Bu Fang.

Bu Fang had associations with the serpent-men? Could it be that Bu Fang came from the Illusory Spirit Swamp himself?

"The enigmatic White Cloud Villa is the only powerful force in the Illusory Spirit Swamp... could it be that Bu Fang is a disciple of the White Cloud Villa? But if that is the case, why would he come open a restaurant in the Imperial City?" Zhao Musheng instantly sank into deep thoughts.

Among the ten greatest sects, the Mahayana Island was the most powerful sect, only next to the Wuliang Mountain's Celestial Arcanum Sect, and so he knew plenty of secrets himself. The White Cloud Villa was a mysterious force of power, and only the equally secretive Celestial Arcanum Sect could compare with it...

With hands behind his back, Zhao Musheng walked around the mansion immersed in meditation for a long time. Finally, his lips curled up.

He clicked his fingers, and a shadow swiftly emerged from the darkness.

This was a bald young monk dressed in a black linen garment. On his head, there were two streaks of scars, one of them was like a ferocious centipede extending from this person's brow all the way to his nape.

"Elder." This young monk smiled in a way that made him look harmless. If it weren't for that centipede-like scar, he could come off as rather simple and honest.

"Shang De, amongst all my disciples of the Mahayana Island, you have the highest cultivation level. I have arranged a task for you tomorrow, go complete it..." Zhao Musheng held his hands behind his back and announced to this young monk with a grin.

The young monk Shang De beamed: "Go ahead, my elder. If Shang De can accomplish it, I would go through fire and boiling water, die ten thousand deaths for you."

Zhao Musheng curled the corners of his mouth. Even though this young monk was from the Mahayana Island's Buddhist Sect, he was actually full of lies. He could easily lie through his teeth without a second thought.

"Pay a visit to Fang Fang's Little Store tomorrow. Subtly bring up the topic of serpent-men to Owner Bu, and observe Bu Fang's reactions." Zhao Musheng instructed.

The young monk Shang De was taken back, "Fang Fang's Little Store? That recently hyped store in ownership of a Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree?"

Zhao Musheng nodded his head. The young monk's eyes instantly lit up. That gleam was extremely devious.

"Hehe, elder, you can wait and see. Tomorrow, Shang De will stop by the store. I've been meaning to visit it myself. The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree is truly a precious treasure!"

"Remember, don't fight recklessly. You only need to detect Bu Fang's reactions." Zhao Musheng cautioned.

The young monk nodded smilingly, then turned around and left the courtyard.

Zhang Musheng watched as the young monk Shang De's shadow disappeared. One couldn't tell what exactly was on his mind.

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"Miss, that group of Battle-Saints have all returned... It's pretty obvious they didn't get to drink that wine."

In the room of an inn, Wu Yunbai sat cross-legged as she underwent cultivation. Master Ah Wu sat by the window, and as he witnessed the flock of Battle-Saints fleeing under the moonlight, he couldn't help but inform Wu Yunbai.

Wu Yunbai did not respond to him, but merely nodded lightly.

She naturally detected the wine fragrance, but she couldn't be bothered to contend with the Battle-Saints. The Imperial City nowadays was changing rapidly and was filled with powerful warriors. She didn't bring many people from the White Cloud Villa, which meant her sphere of influence was limited, and that explained why she didn't want to risk anything.

She had plans to go seek out Bu Fang the next day, ask him for the Monarch Lotus, and then use it to help her break through to seventh grade Battle-Saint. That way she might have a bigger voice of influence in the Imperial City.

By then... she would have the opportunity to join the fight that determined the fate of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree.

"Oh gosh! Miss, there's actually a Battle-Saint streaking under the moonlight! Goodness heavens, are the Battle-Saints in this Imperial City all so brash and forward?" Master Ah Wu exclaimed in surprise.

Wu Yunbai shut her eyes even firmer, with her face turning green... "I am undergoing cultivation, can we please stop being so jumpy and jittery? I almost got a cramp..."

"It's only Battle-Saints streaking..." Wu Yunbai envisioned it in her head, tsk the image was too beautiful, it must have been eye blinding.

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Light Wind Empire Palace, the main halls.

A light shone faintly as Ji Chengxue sat on the throne with knitted eyebrows. He naturally knew about the massive flood of Battle-Saints into the Imperial City, but he was rendered helpless and couldn't do anything about it.

As he listened to the eunuch's reporting from beneath, his lips suddenly curled.

"Owner Bu's strategy is not bad. Awing and frightening the already restless Battle-Saints provided the Imperial City with a breathing space. These Battle-Saints have been incredibly overbearing, making it difficult to maintain order in the Imperial City.

"But I really look forward to Owner Bu's new wine tomorrow, which has evidently surpassed the Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine. It makes this monarch's heart tickle." Ji Chengxue exclaimed with a long face.

With a sigh, Ji Chengxue stood up from the throne, took a few strides, and asked the eunuch besides him:

"How is the Ghost Chef doing lately? Anything worth noting?"

"Report to Your Majesty. The Ghost Chef Wang Ding has been quiet all month. He has been staying in the quarter that Your Majesty has prepared, making food and taking walks... other than that, there's nothing special." The eunuch reported back with his head bowed low.

Ji Chengxue nodded his head. As for this Ghost Chef, he has been filled with rage toward him... If it weren't for him spreading the news, how could the Imperial City be drawn into such a crisis. But then again, this was an established Battle-Saint they were talking about. It would simply cost too much to settle him for once and for all.

"Continue with the surveillance. Also, help me make preparations for tomorrow, this monarch is taking a trip out of the palace." Ji Chengxue instructed.

That eunuch instantly lifted up his head. His face was filled with astonishment.

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In the morning, when the sun had already leaped over the horizon.

Bu Fang opened his tired eyes and suddenly stretched them wide. He propped himself up from the bed, with his face still relaxed but also dazed.

"Huh? What happened last night? It seems like... something happened last night. Oh yeah... I drank quite a bit. Everything seems hazy to me," Bu Fang muttered to himself, then patted his frozen face. He crawled out of bed and washed up.

He walked into the kitchen and began his daily cutting and carving exercises.

He had two cups of Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew last night and felt incredibly dizzy afterwards. As to what happened later, he only remembered snippets. It seemed like last night Whitey stripped someone again and made him streak. He couldn't, however, remember who it was exactly.

Since he couldn't remember, he didn't care to recall the details. Bu Fang twirled the knife in his hands, placed it back onto the knife rack, and began cooking Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs.

The shutters of the door were pushed open and with it, the coldness of winter blew in. The Spring Festival had already passed for more than a month, and the temperature was getting gradually warmer.

Opening the doors to his store, Bu Fang placed the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs in front of Blacky. He rubbed the latter's silky smooth, immaculate fur, and stood up.

But before he had the chance to return to the store, the sounds of footsteps echoed from the alleyway...

Bu Fang was a bit perplexed and turned around only to see a large crowd making its way through.

In the front of the crowd were thirteen unrestrained burly bricks. Oh, there was a middle-aged pale face amidst those fellows.

Behind the thirteen hefty men were the muscular three Ouyang Barbarians, as well as a bunch of people Bu Fang didn't recognize. These folks all had strong levels of energy.

Bu Fang's eyes were sharp and he detected Fatty Jin and his crew behind the crowd... They were presently in a state of bewilderment.

It was so early in the morning... Why did so many powerful warriors show up? Could one not have a peaceful breakfast first?

Chapter 202: Whether You Buy It or Not, The Wine Will Always Be Here

In the face of the burly fellows with incredibly powerful levels of true energy, Fatty Jin and his crew became aggrieved young ladies who got squeezed to the back. Since they weren't matched in strength, they didn't dare to risk it, which meant they had to suffer the bitterness in silence.

Bu Fang was slightly taken back. This group of people... got here early, could it be they came for the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew? Even though he vaguely remembered announcing last night that it was first come, first served, this crowd still gathered way too early.

"Owner Bu, morning! Can we purchase wine now?"

Ouyang Zhen scratched his head, with his eyes sparkling as he peered at Bu Fang. In the clash of the Battle-Saints last night, the Three Ouyang Barbarians did not dare to make a peep. In order to obtain this delicious wine, they had arrived much earlier today with intentions to stealthily purchase the wine before the seventh grade Battle-Saints could notice.

"Hey... did I give you permission to buy it first?" The Thirteen Bandits turned their gazes to the Three Ouyang Barbarians at the same time. These folks were all at the peak of sixth grade Battle-Emperor, certainly not someone with whom the Three Ouyang Barbarians could compete. Simply their imposing manners suppressed the three of them entirely.

Infuriating! However, the Three Ouyang Barbarians had to swallow such insult and humiliation silently, since they were truly inferior in strength.

"Owner Bu, I am Hu Yifeng, of Mozhou. Last night I had the fortune of smelling the fragrance of a fine wine brewed by Owner Bu, after which I suffered a sleepless night. I've arrived here this morning with my brothers to purchase the wine, hoping that Owner Bu will allow it." Hu Yifeng, otherwise known as the elder of the Thirteen Bandits of Mozhou, smiled at Bu Fang.

Of the Thirteen Bandits of Mozhou, the eldest Hu Yifeng was the only learned and refined gentleman of the lot, whereas the twelve others were burly bricks. In truth, it was a wondrous sight.

Bu Fang flicked a glance toward them and nodded slightly as he walked toward the store. As he walked, he announced: "Form a queue, purchase the wine in an orderly fashion."

Form a queue? Thirteen Bandits of Mozhou were perplexed. Did one need to stand in a line to purchase things?

They were bandits, and therefore were accustomed to robbing and looting. The concept of queueing was quite unfamiliar to their minds, explaining why they were genuinely confused when Bu Fang instructed them to line up.

"Form a queue quickly, according to ranks of seniority among us brothers." Hu Yifeng wrinkled his brows as he commanded. He arrived at the entrance first, took a stride and stepped into the store.

Behind him were the second master, the third master... and so on.

As Bu Fang returned to the store, the voice of the system rang in his head.

"Price evaluation of the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew complete. The final selling price: five hundred crystals a cup."

Bu Fang's stride froze in the air. He sharply took in a chilled breath. Five hundred crystals for a cup...Oh damn! That is freaking expensive!

"But I like it..." The corners of Bu Fang's lips curled. He resumed his steps and walked into the kitchen.

Hu Yifeng entered the store, and suddenly felt as if a mysterious wave of energy enveloped him. Such wave of energy caused his eyes to sparkle.

The energy waves of the path-understanding tree could boost one's cultivation training... It was extremely helpful to achieving breakthroughs!

Hu Yifeng's eyes turned, and his gaze landed on the sapling sitting in a yellowish flower pot in a corner of the store.

This sapling was expanding in terms of scale, already nearly as tall as an average person. Its branches had sprouted out, with its fresh green leaves stirring. Waves of rich spirit energy, mingled with unusual path-understanding waves, emanated from it.

"The Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree has really lived up to its name. If I can take possession of this precious tree and undergo cultivation training every day, reaching a breakthrough to seventh grade Battle-Saint would only be a matter of time!" A trace of greed flashed across Hu Yifeng's eyes. At that moment, his natural instincts as a bandit surfaced and tickled his heart. However, recalling the terrifying robotic puppet from Bu Fang's store last night... Hu Yifeng decided otherwise.

That robotic puppet was an existence that could even defeat a seventh grade Battle-Saint. He himself was merely at the peak of sixth grade battle emperor, and therefore was simply not a match. There was no point in seeking for humiliation and getting stripped for nothing.

Bu Fang walked out of the kitchen with a white jade wine jar in his arms and an expressionless face.

He placed a few blue and white ceramic cups. He picked up a bamboo tube, placed the white jade wine jar on the table, and lightly tapped it, successfully diverting Hu Yifeng's attention away from the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree and back onto himself.

"This is the wine you wanted to purchase. It's called the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew," Bu Fang stated calmly.

After the announcement, Bu Fang lifted the lid of the white jade wine jar. In that very instant, a rich, intoxicating wine fragrance blasted through. The wine aroma was reckless and unrestrained, it

drifted out immediately and engulfed the entirety of the small alleyway. In fact, it showed signs of continuing to spread outwards.

Merely sniffing the wine fragrance caused the Three Ouyang Barbarians' mouths to water. This scent was undoubtedly enticing.

Hu Yifeng's eyes lit up and cast a burning gaze at the white jade wine jar. Those in his profession were naturally wine lovers. Alcohol could help boost one's courage, and hence what couldn't be missing from their lives... was liquor.

"Fine wine! Fine wine! This aroma... is indescribable!" Hu Yifeng was full of praises. His entire face trembled.

As for such compliments, Bu Fang was naturally happy to receive them. After all, this wine cost him an immense amount of energy, and so the end product would obviously be spectacular.

"The menu is behind you, and so is the price of the wine. Take a look," Bu Fang said.

"No need! Owner Bu, I'd like to buy this jar of wine!" Hu Yifeng waved his hands heartily and declared boldly.

Yet, Bu Fang continued to wear his poker-face, and flicked a cool glance at him before replying: "You can't afford it."

"Huh? I can't afford it?" Hu Yifeng was taken back, and then chuckled exuberantly: "Owner Bu, there's no need to look down on me. Even though I am not swimming in money, I can still easily bear the expense of a jar of wine."

Even though the fragrance of the wine was incredibly rich, at the end of the day it was still just wine. How pricey could it be. Regarding this matter, Hu Yifeng did not bother giving it a second thought.

"The menu is behind you, why don't you take a look at it before you speak." Bu Fang didn't care to offer further explanations.

Hu Yifeng knitted his brows into a frown, and displeasure filled his heart. It was just a jar of wine, why the hold-up?

HOowever, Hu Yifeng still acknowledged Bu Fang's words and twisted his head to study the menu.

Hu Yifeng's eyes instantly shrank as he started reading from the top. This menu... was truly frightening. This was a menu? Damn it, even elixirs didn't go at such a high price!

Wine... where was the wine? Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine... no, not this one. Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, this was it!

Hu Yifeng swept his eyes across the menu and finally located the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew. However, after seeing the price of the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, Hu Yifeng's dismissive gaze froze. His pupils gradually widened, and his face was as if he had seen a ghost.

"Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, five hundred crystals a cup."

A cup, five hundred crystals... crystals... crystals...

"This is... robbery!" Hu Yifeng's lips quavered. "Is this how you operate your business? You sell at five hundred crystals a cup, this is pure extortion!"

The Thirteen Bandits of Mozhou being extorted... Now this was quite the irony.

Bu Fang flicked a glance at him and nodded his head solemnly before saying: "A cup of wine is five hundred crystals. The price is fair. We cheat neither the old nor the young."

It was as if an invisible arrow pierced through Hu Yifeng's heart, painning him tremendously. Fair pricing... don't toy with me just because I am not highly educated.

"Knock if off, Owner Bu, let's stick to good business practices." Hu Yifeng's complexion was clouded by a sense of distaste. This price... was simply too exorbitant.

Mozhou was a poor, destitute region. As bandits, they did not earn that much. Sometimes they had no gains for a whole month...

Purchasing a cup of wine with five hundred crystals was a definite loss!

Bu Fang fingered the bamboo tube and tapped it on the white jade wine jar. He took out a cup, extending the bamboo tube into the wine and scooping out a tube full of light cyan colored wine nectar.

Splloosh splash. The sound of wine nectar trickling rang in the air. The wine fragrance became richer still and the spirit energy mixed with the aroma wrapped around Hu Yifeng's heart like arms of silk.

Bu Fang poured the light cyan colored wine nectar into the wine cup. A mist of spirit energy hovered above the cup and three cloud-shaped moires materialized. All of that was too beautiful to be fully absorbed.

"Whether you buy it or not, the wine will always be here," Bu Fang cast a glance at Hu Yifeng and said soberly.

Gulp. The strong wine aroma caused Hu Yifeng's throat to quiver. In that moment, his addiction to wine took over him.

You win! Hu Yifeng was incensed... this was plain case of temptation and robbery. However, he found himself unable to overcome the enticement of the light cyan wine nectar.

"I'm freaking buying it! Damn it!" Hu Yifeng clenched his fist and with the wave of his hand, a huge bag of crystals landed on the table. This was all of his money. His heart was dripping with blood.

Bu Fang arched his brows, merrily grabbed these crystals, and stored them into the system's dimensional storage.

"This wine is yours, please savor it attentively. Maybe you'll be hit with a surprise." Bu Fang remarked.

Chapter 203: All Down With One Cup

Hu Yifeng carefully picked up the tiny blue and white porcelain wine cup with two fingers, afraid to spill even one drop of the wine nectar. Every drop counted as crystals!

His heart was bleeding blood, but it didn't stop his mouth from smacking and watering. He sniffed the rich wine fragrance, unable to hold himself back.

The light cyan colored wine nectar rested in the delicate blue and white porcelain cup. The nectar appeared slightly thick, emitting a faint glow. A wisp of smoke floated on top of the wine cup. Its rich wine aroma spurted out like a tiny snake and up his nose. It opened up every pore in his body.

Merely smelling the fragrance of the wine nectar sent shivers down Hu Yifeng's spine. A smear of drunkenness appeared over his eyes.

Pursing his lips, he took a small sip. The light cyan colored wine nectar flew into his mouth and in that very moment a flame-like burning sensation caused him to screw up his face in shock. It felt as if his tongue was on fire.

The scorching sting came and went. Once the wine nectar was down the throat, it became as cold as ice. It nearly froze Hu Yifeng to death. However, the penetrating coolness was pleasant in its own way, causing Hu Yifeng's eyes to bulge.

With the wine nectar down his stomach, three explosions immediately followed. Wine burps came out one after another, beyond his control, and filled the surrounding with wine fragrance.

"Good... good wine!" Hu Yifeng's gentle, refined demeanor was washed with drunkenness. The wine had an alarmingly amount of strength. After the three explosions, the wine rushed right up to his head, almost blasting him out of consciousness!

"Amalgamation of fire and ice, oh yes indeed! This wine... is a delicacy that is simply out of this world!" Hu Yifeng bellowed.

Lifting up his head, he emptied the cup with one swallow. Once again, that burning sensation in the mouth, but then chillness down the throat, which satisfied him from head to toe.

Bang!!

With one cup of wine down the stomach, the floating wine mist hovering above the blue and white porcelain cup had dissipated. However, the remains of a light wave of spirit energy was still within the mix. Hu Yifeng's face flushed red, with his eyes shooting out sparkles. As he huffed air out of his nose, spirit energy continuously poured out.

Hu Yifeng was lightheaded and dizzy. Everything before his eyes had become blurry. He squinted his eyes, but blaring Path-Understanding Notes rang in his ears. The sound was akin to thunder piercing the ears, as if it all broke out right in his head.

The second and third master of the Thirteen Bandits stood not far from Hu Yifeng. As they witnessed the staggering Hu Yifeng, their pupils shrank.

"Brother!" The second master stepped forward and caught the falling Hu Yifeng.

The second master was bewildered when he grabbed hold of Hu Yifeng, after which a rich waft of wine fragrance hit his face... is the elder brother drunk?

What the hell... down with one cup?

The second master and third master exchanged glances and detected the puzzling look in each others' eyes. Their brother did not have a poor tolerance for liquor. A case of him passing out with one cup was simply unthinkable prior to this.

"What did you do to our dear brother!" The second master, still in disbelief, starred daggers at Bu Fang. It must be the brat before his eyes who tampered with the wine nectar. How else could his brother be knocked out cold after one cup?!

Bu Fang twisted his head and with his deadpan face looked back at the scowling, burly fellow, before remarking coolly: "As you can see, this chap... is down with one cup."

The third master stood up in a fury. "You're a liar. We know how well our brother can handle his liquor. You lad... don't even think about hoodwinking us. Spill, what did you do to our brother!"

"As I have said before, he is drunk. If you don't believe that, drink a cup yourself," Bu Fang said evenly.

The third master was taken back for a moment, but immediately began hollering: "Then hit me with a cup fast!"

"Five hundred crystals per cup. If you don't believe me, look at the menu behind you." Bu Fang thought it would be better to be clear on the price ahead of time.

"What? Five hundred crystals?! Why don't you just go ahead and rob me right here?!" The third master almost bit his tongue in shock when he heard Bu Fang's words. Five hundred crystals for a cup of wine... has he gone crazy over his desire for crystals?

"If you're not ordering, then leave the store. You know the consequences if you try to cause trouble." Bu Fang remained unperturbed.

The third master clenched his fist, peered at his drunken brother lying within the second master's arms. Seeing his flushed face and incessant spewing out of rich, intoxicating wine fragrance, the third master's heart hardened.

"Five hundred crystals... damn it! Brothers, lend me some crystals to expose the true colors of this lying, cheating, black-hearted owner!"

The third master gritted his teeth and turned to borrow crystals from his brothers. The second master shoved his crystals to the third master without a word.

The rest also handed up their crystals, albeit a little hesitant.

They were not Hu Yifeng, which meant they did not have a lot of crystals on them. However... scraped together, the twelve brothers were able to pool five hundred crystals easily.

With a "bam", the third master slammed the crystals on the table. Bu Fang then poured a cup of wine for him.

Having carefully inspected this magnificent cup of wine, he couldn't contain his urges and drained the cup with one swallow.

This was his habit when it came to wine drinking. He differed from the learned, refined nature of people like Hu Yifeng. Instead, he was merely a burly brick, and doing shots was the common way to go.

But this wine was no common wine...

Bu Fang even stared in astonishment at the third master, who had drained it in one shot, before blinking his eyes.

Having drunk the wine with one swallow, the third master's face became instantly distorted. The amalgamation of fire and ice burst forth on top of the explosion from the three moires. Such rupture of sensations had the third master completely hooked. In short, he was on cloud nine.

Sure enough, the third master's face also flushed red. He pointed to Bu Fang as his eyes rolled, but he toppled over and hit the floor before taking out a single step, descending into a deep sleep.

Another case of down with one cup...

The rest of the Thirteen Bandits were shocked out of their wits. This wine really could make one pass out after one cup... damn it, that was truly enticing. They couldn't wait to jump at it and give it a try.

But not after long, they scurried out in dejection having learned of the skyrocketing price.

The seventh master couldn't decide what to do. When he stepped into the store earlier, he was still clouded with a lingering fear. It was in this very place... that he was stripped mercilessly and then had to sprint back to the inn stark-naked. It was a complete disgrace to his reputation. He was back in the same spot, now with a completely different state of mind.

Evidently, he did not have any crystals left. He had lent all of his to the third master. His pocket was completely empty at this point.

"My apologies, this store does not allow anyone to leave it on the tab. So please leave if you do not have any crystals." Bu Fang was simply ruthless.

The seventh master ground his teeth in anger, as fumes of rage rose from his body. He only wanted to drink a cup of wine. Why was this so difficult?

Whitey's plump figure could be faintly seen inside the kitchen. The seventh master's heart sank. His mind replayed the all too memorable scenes from before, and so he instantly chose to exit the store without a second thought... Making trouble in the store? What a joke... He did not want to relive the streaking.

And so, the Thirteen Bandits came in a formidable flood, but left carrying two weaklings, who were knocked out cold after one cup of wine, back to the inn. This was infuriating... some of them didn't even get to taste the wine.

The Thirteen Bandits carried their two brothers and walked out of the alleyway, only to bump right into Ni Yan and a sleepy Ye Ziling.

"Such a strong wine scent, are they drunk?" Ni Yan twitched her nose and murmured.

Afterwards, she pulled Ye Ziling before Bu Fang's store.

However, there was a long line in front of the store.

The rich wine fragrance that drifted out of it made Ni Yan's heart itch.

Ye Ziling was unaffected though, since she hadn't developed any concepts about alcohol yet.

"This Owner Bu is quite intriguing. Last time when I visited the store I complained that his wine wasn't good enough. This time he had already issued a new wine. Could it be that he wants to compete with the "Dragon's Breath"?" Ni Yan felt exhilarated. This was the first time she came across a wine that could possibly be compared to the old drunkard's Dragon's Breath.

The two didn't try skipping the line, and instead honestly stood behind Fatty Jin and his crew.

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In front of the Gate of Peaceful Tranquility of the Imperial City, two figures slowly sauntered out. Ji Chengxue was dressed in a brocade robe, with a jade crown on his head. A smile hung on the corners of his mouth as he walked out of the palace.

Besides him, there was a eunuch also wrapped in a brocade robe. He was the long absent, aged Lian Fu.

"Uncle Lian, let's go to Owner Bu's store, or else we'll miss the fine wine." Ji Chengxue beamed.

Lian Fu pinched his orchid-shaped fingers, nodded his head, and cleared his throat before saying: "Your Majesty, your wish is my command."

Chapter 204: Your Cup of Wine, Free of Charge

Ouyang Xiaoyi skipped down the road and entered the small alleyway in shock, gaping at the long queue lined up ahead.

In the queue, she saw a couple of familiar faces. Some were regular customers of the store, others were unknown strangers...

"No wonder I didn't hear your snores this morning. Turns out you guys sneaked here, to the smelly boss' store, for a booze!" Ouyang Xiaoyi immediately recognized three familiar, thickset figures once she stepped into the store. Who else could they be but her three idiot brothers.

The three barbarians of Ouyang twisted their heads to look at Ouyang Xiaoyi. Their faces scrunched up, as traces of utmost grief crept over their complexions.

Ouyang Xiaoyi was instantly startled. Brothers... can you stop terrorizing people in broad daylight?

"Owner Bu's wine... costs an arm and a leg." The elder, Ouyang Zhen, pouted his lips, extremely upset. The three brothers couldn't afford even one cup of wine with all of the crystals on them. It was simply... damning.

Who would have thought that Bu Fang's newly brewed wine was not only exorbitant, but also sold in terms of cups!

How much was there in a cup... it wasn't even enough to fill the slits between one's teeth.

"Xiaoyi, my dear sister, could you lend your brother some crystals?" Ouyang Wu moved closer to Ouyang Xiaoyi brazenly, causing the latter to heighten her vigilance.

Ouyang Xiaoyi opened her eyes wide and peered at the menu in bemusement. She ran her eyes down the menu and discovered the newly added dish at the bottom...

"Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, five hundred crystals per cup."

Ouyang Xiaoyi was dumbfounded, five hundred crystals... a cup? This... must be a mistake of the smelly boss? What kind of wine could be worth five hundred crystals a cup? The Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine wasn't even one tenth the price of this new item.

No wonder her three brothers had to borrow crystals from her...

"My dear sister, Xiaoyi, this wine is too enticing. If your brother doesn't get a taste, he won't be able to sleep tonight. I'd feel weak all over even when I walked..." Ouyang Di put on a long face. He looked in pain.

Three hefty, burly fellows pouring out their woes to a little loli. With their snots and tears, certainly made an entertaining scene.

Ouyang Xiaoyi patted the faces of her three brothers, took out crystals from her sachet, and handed them to her brothers. As the gem of the Ouyang family, she was never short of crystals.

"Thanks, little sister!" Ouyang Zhen was wild with joy as he received the crystals. On top of what the three of them had, they finally pooled five hundred crystals, enough to buy a cup of wine.

As Bu Fang's bamboo tube scooped, the sound of flowing wine nectar reverberated through the entire store. Such wine fragrance gradually diffused, intoxicating the three Ouyang barbarians.

"Here, your Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew." Bu Fang carefully passed the blue and white porcelain cup to Ouyang Zhen, who received it with the utmost caution. Such behavior came off as both attentive and comical.

Ouyang Zhen held the wine cup, on which Ouyang Wu and Ouyang Di glued their eager eyes.

The three of them convened by a corner and deliberated: "There is only one cup of this wine. The three of us each takes one sip. Nobody is allowed extra!"

Ouyang Wu and Ouyang Di promptly nodded.

Ouyang Zhen instantly narrowed his eyes, lifted up the cup, and took a small sip. He drank precisely a third of the wine.

After a taste, he fell utterly into a state of inescapable intoxication.

Ouyang Wu received the wine cup from his hands, deeply inhaled the wine aroma, and also took a sip. An exploding wine aroma burst forth within his mouth, causing his hairs to stand on their ends.

Lastly, Ouyang Di got hold of the wine up, and tipped into his mouth whatever was left in the cup...

The scene of three burly fellows meticulously divvying up one small cup of wine was, needless to say, pitiable. The sight became all the more bleak and desolate at this moment in time.

Nevertheless, after drinking up this cup of wine, the complexions of all three underwent dramatic transformations. Their pupils widened, and the true energy within their bodies was actually fluctuating.

They didn't pass out after one cup, since the three of them shared a cup. That's why they weren't completely drunk, but only tipsy.

After devoted training, the cultivation levels of the three Ouyang barbarians had just recently, around the Spring Festival, made a breakthrough to fifth level Battle-King. Now, with this cup of wine down the stomach, they felt the true energy within their bodies circulating at full speed, as if the true energy was boiling inside.

With flushed complexions, the three walked out of the store, and directly sat down cross-legged in the small alleyway to undergo cultivation.

They could hear the indistinct whispers of Path-Understanding Notes flowing through their ears. Going along with the Path-Understanding Notes, they seemed to feel the many questions arising from cultivation training were readily and easily solved.

The queuing crowds gazed in astonishment at the cross-legged three brothers sat upon the ice-cold bricks of the small alleyway.

The energy on their bodies was fluctuating, and continued to build up. It looked as if... they had consumed elixirs.

The eyes of many people instantly sparked. A cup of wine... surely couldn't induce one to reach breakthroughs?

Was it really true? A cup of wine had the effects of elixirs?

Ni Yan's eyes shone even brighter. The fire in her heart burnt more fervently.

Not only Ni Yan, but many others had discerned the effects of this wine... Everyone was instantly amazed. It could help one reach breakthroughs? This wine was truly badass.

However, as these people stepped into the store and witnessed the exorbitant price, long faces were put on. The colors on their faces were drained into ashen tones.

Most people simply couldn't afford it, or did not bring this many crystals. There were also people who rummaged up and down, finally getting together five hundred crystals, and bought a cup.

Sure enough, everyone passed out after one cup.

Those sprawled on the floor were subsequently taken home by their acquaintances.

Fatty Jin and his lot were not there for the wine, but for the food instead. It was, however, pretty obvious that Bu Fang did not appear to have time to cook their dishes. They were not impatient, and instead sat there in good spirits, fascinated at the rare sight of wine selling.

Bu Fang gazed at the half drained white jade wine jar, and scrunched his brows into a slight frown. He lifted up his head and announced to the crowd: "Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, only five cups left for sale today."

Five cups? Ni Yan blanched. She never thought that this wine was not only sold by the cup, but also freaking limited in quantity!

But so be it, if was her turn anyway.

The corners of Ni Yan's mouth curled as she stepped before Bu Fang. Her red lips formed a playful grin as she asked: "Owner Bu, how did you think of brewing such good wine?"

Bu Fang peered at Ni Yan's breathtakingly beautiful face, one lovely enough to cause the downfall of cities and countries, and knitted his brows into a slight frown. He did not answer her question, but instead took in a deep breath as he eyed the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew in the jade white wine jar.

"Your cup of wine, free of charge." Bu Fang scooped up a cup of wine and handed the blue and white porcelain cup to Ni Yan.

Ni Yan, Ouyang Xiaoyi, and also Ye Ziling who stood behind Ni Yan, were all taken back. Everyone was rather dumbfounded.

What did it mean? What was the meaning of this?!

Owner Bu... you shouldn't forgo your principles just because this lady was attractive!

"Why is it free?" Ni Yan took the wine cup Bu Fang offered her without reservation. Her red lips glistened mesmerizingly as they curled, with her eyes narrowed into slits.

She knew Bu Fang wasn't the type tempted by a beautiful face. If he gave her a drink for free... she'd be damned if he wasn't up to something.

"You've drunk 'Dragon's Breath', right? Then, give this cup of wine a good taste. Afterwards, give an assessment of which is better, the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew or Dragon's Breath," Bu Fang studied Ni Yan solemnly and said soberly.

Wine match? Ni Yan froze. She never guessed that Bu Fang treated her to wine for the purpose of a wine match... and also that the target of comparison was "Dragon's Breath". Could it be that her innocuous comment last time about how the Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine couldn't compare with Dragon's Breath stuck with Owner Bu?

Owner Bu shouldn't be so bored as to care about such trivialities... Maybe, the making of Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew was merely a coincidence.

Ni Yan thought assertively in her head.

But... Bu Fang really did make the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew just for the sake of competing with Dragon's Breath. If Ni Yan learned of Bu Fang's true intentions, she definitely wouldn't know whether it was more appropriate to laugh or cry.

With Bu Fang's comment, Ni Yan's heart was all the more curious. It seemed like Owner Bu was very much confident in this wine.

Her jade-like, long pale fingers clasped the blue and white porcelain cup. Her nose edged closer to the cup and sniffed gently. A waft of wine fragrance drifted up her nose, absolutely enchanting.

Her baby pink tongue licked her rosy lips, both beguiling and seductive. She lifted up the wine cup and took a small sip.

Chapter 205: A Breakthrough by Wine Drinking, How Incredible

"Master Ah Wu, time to get up. Let's go find Bu Fang."

The sound of knocking echoed in the inn. Wu Yunbai, dressed in a white robe, held a hand behind her back as she knocked.

After a lengthy flurry inside the room, Master Ah Wu finally walked out, nodding to Wu Yunbai and smiling timidly.

"Miss, up so early this morning." Master Ah Wu remarked.

"Early my ass. It is already late in the morning. Come on, let's go find Bu Fang." Wu Yunbai rolled her eyes at Master Ah Wu and led the way to the inn's door.

The two left the inn, squinted their eyes to detect the right direction, and walked toward the location of Fang Fang's Little Store. Since they'd already enquired the inn clerks, they didn't get lost on their way.

The two walked for a while and arrived at the remote alleyway. According to the inn clerk, Fang Fang's Little Store was located within this small alleyway.

The two of them were filled with curiosity, as the alleyway was not as quiet or secluded as they expected. Instead, it was bustling with noise and excitement, and an uninterrupted flow of people walked out of the small alleyway, carrying drunk bodies that emanated a rich wine aroma.

From afar, two figures strolled forth, one of which had a handsome and youthful complexion, a gentle smile, and emitted an overbearing pressuring aura.

The elder next to the youth had a fair complexion, but look quite odd. His torso twisted as he walked, his thumb and middle finger pinched together to form orchid-shaped fingers.

This peculiar combination caused Wu Yunbai to wrinkle her brows. Her face became grave.

It was because she could clearly detect that the cultivation level of this sissy elder next to the youth... was very high. At least stronger than that of Master Ah Wu judging by his subconscious emanation of pressure.

"Nowadays, the Imperial City is muddled with all sorts of people. Battle-Saint warriors... can be seen everywhere." Wu Yunbai murmured, and then stopped paying attention as she took Master Ah Wu along to enter the alleyway first.

"Uncle Lian, do you happen to know... those two people?" Ji Chengxue glanced at the back of Wu Yunbai, and softly asked Lian Fu, who stood besides him.

Lian Fu pinched his orchid-shaped fingers and lightly waved them as he responded: "It's apparent that they don't belong to our Light Wind Empire. I would not know."

"Then it should be Battle-Saints from other places... Is their target the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree as well? This... item is actually this alluring?" Ji Chengxue muttered.

"Oh gosh, my majesty, the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree is a treasure that can assist seventh level Battle-Saints reach eighth level War-God. Nevermind other Battle-Saints, even your old servant, I, cannot contain myself." Lian Fu flicked his orchid-shaped hands and remarked.

Ji Chengxue nodded his head. Being able to help seventh level Battle-Saints reach eighth level War-God, the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree was naturally priceless. However, back when the seed was still in the palace, they had used countless methods and planted it for a long time but still failed to make it germinate. Why was it that it successfully and rapidly grew once falling into Owner Bu's hands.

A possible explanation was that Bu Fang had some kind of special soil that could grow this treasured seed.

Or perhaps this Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree was destined not to belong in the palace.

"Come on, let's go take a look at Owner Bu's new wine. About that... this sovereign is extremely excited." Ji Chengxue laughed and walked forward with big strides.

...

The light cyan wine nectar flew in Ni Yan's baby red lips, through her jade-like white teeth, and into her mouth.

A flame-like burning sensation burst forth in her mouth, adding a layer of red flush on her pale face. Her delicate tongue licked her lips as she let out a breath. As the wine nectar glided down her throat, a sudden iceberg-like shock froze her entire body... The momentary transition from heat to cold made her face blush, and she couldn't help but emit a moan.

As the third explosion burst in her stomach, the sensation caused Ni Yan to lift up her head. Her hair streamed loose, teeth bit into her lips, and eyes blurred with drowsiness.

"Good wine!"

With another sip, the wine rushed to her head, where she felt a numbing throb. Besides her ears were whispers of peculiar Path-Understanding Notes.

Path-Understanding Notes? Ni Yan entered a focused state of mind, concentrating on the stirs of this path-understanding sensation.

Having gulped down the last of the wine nectar from the blue and white porcelain cup, Ni Yan felt a sense of paralyzing comfort.

Ye Ziling, who stood behind and carefully scrutinized Ni Yan, caught her in her arms and asked worriedly: "Sister Ni Yan... are you ok?"

"Dragon's Breath, sealed at the bottom of an ice mountain, supposedly stunning all beneath heaven once excavated... hahaha! You old drunkard, see how pleased you are with yourself. But Owner Bu's wine here... tastes better than your Dragon's Breath! Better than... your Dragon's Breath!"

Ni Yan's flushed face broke into a chortle, with her fair, long arms waving wildly in the air.

Ye Ziling felt rather awkward. She had no idea what Ni Yan was saying... but a drunk Ni Yan was stripped of her goddess-like image. Eh, to be more accurate, she never truly upheld that reputation.

Ye Zilin was lost over Ni Yan's words, but Bu Fang certainly made sense of it. He heard Ni Yan's evaluation of the two wines in her drunken state. Without a doubt, given Ni Yan's assessment, the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew clearly emerged victorious.

"Congratulations to the host for completing the temporary task: the 'Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew' you created yourself has surpassed the 'Dragon's Breath'. The task rewards will be granted now..."

The solemn voice of the system rang in Bu Fang's head. Beyond all questions, his Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew has outshone the Dragon's Breath, meaning he had completed the temporary task.

Bu Fang let out a light breath, much like he was just relieved of a great burden. The completion of this assignment made him feel rather rejoiced inside.

Ye Ziling supported Ni Yan, who suddenly shook in her arms and flicked open her eyes. A sense of panic-stricken fright appeared in her eyes, her pretty brows knitted into a frown. With a wave of energy, Ye Ziling was pushed away.

Ni Yan stood erect and fell into a deep meditation.

Boom Boom Boom!!

This fluctuating waves of muffled sound reverberated in the air.

Those in the queue were instantly alarmed and gazed toward the three Ouyang barbarians, who sat cross-legged on the ice cold bricks of the small alleyway.

The levels of energy on the three brothers rapidly rose. On top of their heads emerged small funnels of spirit energy vortexes, enabling spirit energy to rush into their bodies and transform into true energy.

With a ring alike bursting open a stratum, the energy of the three brothers of three Ouyang barbarians immediately elevated by a large degree. In that instant, they reached the peak of fifth level Battle-King...

The bystanders in the crowd became all the more terrified at this scene, since before this the three brothers were merely at the initial stages of fifth level Battle-King. In fact, their levels of energy were even rather unstable. Yet, after sharing this cup of Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew, the three brothers actually simultaneously reached the peak of fifth level Battle-King.

Was this a joke? What would that make of breakthroughs in cultivation, if it was no different from eating food or drinking water?

Those in the crowd took in a chilled breath, since they knew that the three brothers' breakthroughs were inseparable from the Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew.

Those who drank it previously had not reached breakthroughs. Seeing that they passed out after one cup, none had the chance to regulate the rich spirit energy contained in the wine nectar. However, they should be able to experience breakthroughs soon enough.

This wine nectar was truly capable of assisting people reach breakthroughs!

At that, those left in the crowd felt heated with anticipation within. If it could help reach a breakthrough, five hundred crystals... was not a bad deal!

The remaining four cups of wine were sold without a struggle. Once the fourth cup was sold, Bu Fang instantly sealed the jade white wine jar. Only half a jar of wine nectar was left.

There were a total of three jars of this Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew. Bu Fang did not plan on brewing this spirit wine again in the future. Not only because the process was complex, but also because the ingredients needed were precious and rare.

Plus, the brewing of this spirit wine required way too much energy.

Three jars of Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew... were enough. Once it was all sold, it would be plainly out of stock.

The three Ouyang barbarians had completed their breakthroughs. The drunken drowsiness had vanished from their faces. The three stepped into the store to thank Bu Fang, only to discover that the bystanders' gazes had not fallen on them.

Instead, they were looking at the breathtakingly beautiful woman sitting there cross-legged.

The woman's long hair fluttered with the breeze of true energy. Amidst the fluctuation of her true energy, there were signs that she may reach a breakthrough.

This woman, the three Ouyang barbarians recalled... was a seventh level Battle-Saint.

Chapter 206: Where Was the Lotus? The Lotus You Promised?

On the streets of the Imperial City, street vendors were peddling their goods, hollering at flows of pedestrians.

A bald young monk dressed in a black linen garment carried a portion of steaming buns, stuffing the meat bun into his mouth as he walked.

The white meat buns emanated hot steam, yet the young monk was unaffected. He picked one up with one hand and gave it a good ol' bite, causing sauce to splatter everywhere. The aroma of the meat buns pervaded the air.

Not long after, the portion of buns was quickly devoured as he walked on.

He carelessly threw the empty food container onto the road and wiped his greasy mouth with his linen garment. Then, the young monk tugged off the gourd hanging from his waist and poured wine into his mouth. There was a satisfied look on his face.

"There's wine and there's meat... now that is the life!" The young monk grinned broadly, and walked toward Fang Fang's Little Store with large strides.

Suddenly, his steps froze as he cast a solemn gaze toward the small alleyway. This was because he could feel ferocious forces of true energy gushing from the direction of the store. He took another swig of wine, with his face as grave as ever.

"Which absentminded seventh grade Battle-Saint is putting on such a great pageantry of cultivation training in the Imperial City?" The young monk burst out into laughter.

There were countless seventh grade Battle-Saints in the Imperial City nowadays. Consequently, every Battle-Saint had their hands tied, afraid to do anything too flashy. This was a critical period, as there may be a lot to lose by sticking out one's neck.

"Whatever, who cares if he has the cultivation of a Battle-Saint. My objective is just to gather some information, hehe, and to get a look at the legendary Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree at the same time." The young monk chuckled, lightly tapped his bald head, and stepped forward.

...

Bu Fang carried the white jade wine jar into the kitchen, hid it well, and walked out again.

He caught sight of a few familiar shadows just as he was leaving the kitchen. Bu Fang studied the figures and instantly froze.

Wu Yunbai saw Bu Fang and her eyes sparkled. Sure enough it was him, they were in the right place!

However, Wu Yunbai did not move imprudently, as she saw the cross-legged seventh grade Battle-Saint seemingly about to reach a breakthrough. A Battle-Saint's breakthrough... now this was no joke.

Creak Creak, the sound of footsteps echoed once again.

Two shadows appeared by the entrance, standing right behind Wu Yunbai.

Ji Chengxue's pupils shrank as he peered at Ni Yan, who sat in the center of the store. He felt grim inside. Was this woman about to achieve a breakthrough? Breaking through at such a sensitive timing...

Lian Fu was filled with emotions as he glanced at the store. Ever since accompanying the late emperor here last time, he had never set foot into the store again. Suddenly hit with the cozy atmosphere, he couldn't help but recall old memories. He pinched his orchid-shaped fingers and sniveled.

Ni Yan's breakthrough did not last too long. Though the forces of energy on her body were rising, they stopped short at breaking into the echelon of eighth grade War-God from the peak of seventh grade Battle-Saint. The true energy within her gradually receded, and Ni Yan opened her eyes helplessly.

After drinking a cup of wine, the sounds of Path-Understanding Notes buzzed by her ears, enabling her to nearly reach a revelation. Yet it was truly onerous to arrive at such state, thus Ni Yan merely improved by one level on her cultivation as a seventh grade Battle-Saint. To reach the echelon of eighth grade War-God was too difficult.

The true energy that filled up the store dissipated. Ni Yan stood up and stretched, revealing her perfect body shape that attracted many pairs of eyes.

"Too bad, Owner Bu, your wine is quite something... but it was still an inch away from helping me reach a breakthrough. Just this last layer is as impenetrable as a natural barrier." Ni Yan's voice carried a trace of glumness, but it was fine. She didn't feel too dejected.

Though the breakthrough was unsuccessful, her cultivation level still witnessed an improvement.

"Owner Bu, long time no see, how have you fared lately? Has business been booming?" Ji Chengxue laughed as he walked through the door and brought his hands into a greeting gesture.

Bu Fang cast Ji Chengxue a surprised look. How was this busybody free to visit his store today?

Wasn't this guy off being the emperor?

"Business has been good," Bu Fang replied calmly.

Wu Yunbai cast an irritated look at the young man who had interrupted her encounter with Bu Fang, even though by the tone of their voices it sounded like they were old acquaintances.

"Owner Bu's restaurant is floating with the aroma of food as always..." Ji Chengxue exclaimed.

Suddenly, the tone of his voice changed into a chuckle: "Owner Bu, last night the wine you brewed stirred quite a commotion. The wine fragrance enveloped half of the Imperial City. It certainly

shocked everyone. I have no idea what kind of wine you brewed. Is it possible... to give this young master a taste?"

Bu Fang peered at Ji Chengxue, but shook his head, and said: "You're too late. Today's Frost Blaze Path-Understanding Brew has been sold out. No more will be for sale, you'll just have to order something else."

Sold out? Ji Chengxue blanched, then rubbed his chin and nodded his head. Bu Fang's store was bound to be different from the others, even in terms of sale modes. It has been a while since he last had a drink in Bu Fang's store, to the point he had almost forgotten Bu Fang's style.

"Haha, the fault lies with this young master. Then, could Owner Bu give me an order of... the Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine, and a Red Braised Meat. Owner Bu's Red Braised Meat is the best among the entire Imperial City."

Bu Fang nodded, then turned back to head into the kitchen, ready to start cooking. But a sound behind him caught his attention, causing him to twist his head.

Wu Yunbai walked closer to Bu Fang and knitted her brows into a frown, saying: "Bu Fang, I don't suppose you've forgotten all about me?"

Bu Fang looked at Wu Yunbai with a deadpan face, curled the corners of his lips, and responded: "I have not forgotten, just didn't expect you to actually show up."

"You still owe me the lotus, of course I'd come... this is a matter of whether I can reach the breakthrough!" Wu Yunbai said seriously.

Huh? Bu Fang turned pale, the lotus...

Reminded of the lotus, Bu Fang instantly batted his eyes, cast them at Wu Yunbai, but kept silent.

Bu Fang's expression drained the colors from Wu Yunbai's face, could it be... that this guy had already spoiled the lotus? It was a seventh grade spirit herb... how could it just go to waste like that!

Snapped, Wu Yunbai lifted her long pale finger and shakily pointed it at Bu Fang: "You... you didn't spoil the lotus, did you?"

"I wouldn't say spoil, just that it has been used." Bu Fang coolly replied, calm and undaunted.

Seeing Wu Yunbai inadvertently struck up some other memories in Bu Fang. It had been a month, so why hasn't that serpent-man visited yet? If that serpent-men wanted to live, he definitely needed to seek for the Elixir Cuisine from his store.

Could it be that they encountered some unexpected obstacles on the journey here?

Typically speaking, they should have arrived by now. That they haven't appeared yet signified they probably got into some trouble.

Bu Fang sighed silently.

"How could you use the lotus... What about my breakthrough? What did you do with the lotus? Tell me now!" Wu Yunbai was livid. Here she was, having finally arrived at the Imperial City, yet this brat had already used up the lotus.

"For wine brewing. Nothing is left." Bu Fang answered.

Wine brewing? The lotus could be used to brew wine? Wait! Wu Yunbai suddenly remembered something, and glared at Bu Fang with her large eyes.

The so-called wine mentioned by this guy... could it be the wine with an aroma that engulfed half of the Imperial City last night?

Seventh grade spirit herb used for wine brewing... Dear brother, can we not be so extravagant?

There was a stabbing pain in Wu Yunbai's heart, a heartache that almost stopped her breath.

"Then where's the wine... Give me a taste. Maybe... there's still some leftover herb effect." Wu Yunbai put on a long face and said with the last of her hopes.

"Oh... that wine has been sold out today, so please come back again tomorrow."

Bu Fang glanced at Wu Yunbai gravely and replied. That sober complexion came off as extremely infuriating, giving Wu Yunbai the urge to kick his face...

Outside, the echoes of footsteps rang in the air. Silhouettes of figures appeared one after one.

The gushes of energy emanated from a seventh level Battle-Saint just then had attracted the attention of many Battle-Saints in the Imperial City. These Battle-Saints all poured into the little store to keep the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree from being snatched.

Chapter 207: Owner Bu... Do You Know This Serpent-Woman?

The wine... there definitely weren't any left today. The gaze that Wu Yunbai cast toward Bu Fang was filled with grief. Still, it was useless, no matter how distressed she was.

"There are plenty of other gourmet delicacies in the store. You can give those a try. If you want to order anything... just tell this lassie."

Bu Fang calmly patted Ouyang Xiaoyi's head, advertised his dishes, and then turned around to head back into the kitchen.

Ji Chengxue walked around in familiarity and found a spot near the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree. A fresh sense of spirit energy drifted in the surrounding, alongside a touch of mystifying energy waves.

Ji Chengxue held his hands behind his back and carefully inspected the path-understanding tree with glistening eyes.

Outside of the store, intrusive glances and forces of energy hidden in the dark had withdrawn. The Battle-Saints had clearly detected that the incident this time was unrelated to the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree, and hence left one after another. The path-understanding tree had yet to ripen and bear fruit, so they didn't want to get involved at this point.

Wu Yunbai ordered a few dishes. Even though the prices of these dishes were hard to swallow, as a mysterious young villa master who instilled fear in the Celestial Arcanum Sect, she was not short of crystals. Since she couldn't obtain the lotus from Bu Fang, she vented out a stomach full of anger on the food instead.

Ni Yan left with Ye Ziling. Ni Yan was in a hurry to head back to the inn and consolidate her recently strengthened cultivation, whereas Ye Ziling merely tagged along with Ni Yan.

The store became quite deserted at this point. The queue was gone and the three Ouyang barbarians scuttled away merrily. Having made some gains, they were eager to pass on the wonderful news to their father.

The rich aroma of food quickly drifted out of the kitchen. Such familiar scent broke off Ji Chengxue's gaze at the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree and stirred his emotions.

"Owner Bu's cooking skills have improved. The fragrance of his dishes is all the more alluring." Ji Chengxue took in a deep breath and sighed.

Lian Fu pinched his orchid-shaped fingers and sat on the side, still immersed in nostalgia. This store... once contained the late emperor's energy. Even though it was long gone, Lian Fu still couldn't help but feel certain illusions and dive in a sea of blues.

Evoked of memories from the past by these familiar sights, he pinched his orchid-shaped fingers and sniffled quietly.

Ji Chengxue peered at him helplessly.

The rich scent of meat fragrance rapidly spread in the air. Ouyang Xiaoyi energetically carried the Red Braised Meat to Ji Chengxue's spot and placed it in front of him.

Bu Fang also walked out of the kitchen, carrying a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine.

Ji Chengxue's eyes sparkled and couldn't refrain from licking his lips. It has been a long time since he last drank Owner Bu's wine and ate his dishes. He had such a craving.

"So fragrant."

Ji Chengxue edged his nose near the Red Braised Meat and inhaled, looking completely intoxicated as he remarked.

Bu Fang's Red Braised Meat was extremely aromatic, even attracting the attention of Wu Yunbai, who angrily sat afar.

He picked up a piece of glossy, flushed Red Braised Meat that steamed with heat and fragrance and placed it into his mouth. As he chewed, he could sense the tangy friction between his teeth and the tender meat, making him feel elated inside.

A piece of meat down his stomach and a swig of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine, he felt jubilated all over.

Bu Fang noticed the satisfied expression on Ji Chengxue, curled the corners of his mouth, and turned to head back to the kitchen.

The bald long monk stepped into the alleyway with a smile on his face. As he charged toward the store, a big black dog lying by the entrance hit his eyes.

The young monk's eyes glistened and he licked his lips.

"What a chubby dog. It must be very tasty."

The catnapping Blacky suddenly felt shivers down its spine, as if it detected an ill-willed gaze fall upon it. It opened its doggy eyes and caught sight of the greedy ogle of a... monk.

What the... what was up with this look? The black dog glared its eyes. This was the first time someone dared to gaze at this lord dog as if it was a delicacy... Was the bald donkey seeking death?

The young monk patted his baldy head, and the muscles on his face lumped into a smile.

"Red Braised Dog Meat? Should be pretty good... It is hard to come by such a fat dog in the Imperial City. But never mind, let me finish off that old fox, Zhao Musheng's assignment, first."

The young monk smacked his mouth. What a pity. He glanced at Blacky with a trace of regret and walked into the store shaking his head.

Blacky was dumbfounded. This bald donkey... was up to no good? What was up with your regretful expression?

Blacky rolled its doggy eyes and lay back down to resume its nap.

"Meat... meat fragrance!"

Having stepped into the store, the young monk's eyes glistened even brighter. It looked as if an egg was mounted with sparkling diamonds...

There was wine... there was meat, this store was not bad!

The young monk's gaze rested on Ji Chengxue at a distance, who was just about to stuff a piece of juicy, aromatic Red Braised Meat into his mouth. Then, he shifted his glance toward Wu Yunbai, who had bitten into an oily, glossy Golden Shumai... He couldn't help but swallow a mouthful of saliva.

The fragrance that pervaded within the store stimulated his appetite. The portion of bun that gave him a full stomach was immediately forgotten.

This was the location where that old fox Zhao Musheng had a task for him?

The young monk couldn't refrain from chuckling.

"What would you like to order? The menu is behind you. You can tell me the dishes once you've done deciding." Ouyang Xiaoyi explained skillfully to the odd monk who had just entered the store.

The young monk was taken back and twisted his head. Seeing the exorbitant dishes on the menu, the corners of his mouths instantly twitched.

"Please give this humble monk an order of the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs, and also a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine," the young monk said to Ouyang Xiaoyi carefully.

Ouyang Xiaoyi was stunned. Since when could monks start drinking wine and eating meat without any reservation? What was the deal with this guy ordering wine and meat with such a straight face?

"The Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs and Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine?" Ouyang Xiaoyi responded with a question.

"Yes, dear benefactor, once the wine and meat had passed through the intestines, us votaries should not be subjected to the judgment of the common society. Eat whatever we want, and drink whatever we please, as long as the buddha lives in our hearts." The young monk pushed his palms together, coming off as extremely sincere.

"Alright, please wait momentarily." Ouyang Xiaoyi was dazed.

"Dear benefactor, this humble monk has another tiny request, which is seeing Owner Bu, of this restaurant." The young monk grinned. His complexion showed nothing but gentleness.

"You want to meet the smelly boss? Can you wait for a bit... He isn't available now." Ouyang Xiaoyi frowned. She still felt like there was something peculiar about this monk before her eyes.

The young monk was not in a rush, and found a seat for himself.

Ouyang Xiaoyi walked to the window of the kitchen, and relayed the order of the young monk to Bu Fang.

"This Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs and Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine was ordered by a monk..." Ouyang Xiaoyi said with an odd tone, "and he said he wanted to see you."

"See me?" Bu Fang was startled, and then he put a dish at the window. Ouyang Xiaoyi carried it away and placed it down in front of Wu Yunbai.

These two ordered a lot of dishes, buried their faces with food, and couldn't even stop.

They had never expected that Bu Fang's dishes actually tasted this good.

As Bu Fang walked out of the kitchen, he carried a richly aromatic Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs in one hand, a jar of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine in another, and stopped by the young monk.

The young monk squinted his eyes. Seeing Bu Fang, he brought his palms together as his nose twitched...

"Your Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs and Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine. Please enjoy," Bu Fang said calmly, and then glanced at this monk with a composed manner.

The young monk stood up, his face formed a smile: "I have heard much about the great Owner Bu. This humble monk, Shang De, has a longstanding admiration for Fang Fang's Little Store. I've come to pay my visit today."

Bu Fang did not respond him, and continued looking at him with a deadpan face.

The young monk Shang De snickered, stroked his bald head, and gave it a light tap.

"Owner Bu's cooking skill is indeed impressive. This aroma has fully intoxicated this humble monk. However, this young monk came with a purpose today, and has some questions for Owner Bu."

"Go ahead," Bu Fang responded coolly.

The young monk's face became grave. With his palms pressed together, he bowed lightly toward Bu Fang.

"Us votaries have benevolent, merciful hearts. This humble monk came across a young serpent-woman on the streets of the Imperial City. As it goes, to rescue one person from death is better than building a seven-storied pagoda for the god. This humble monk came to her aid, but she quickly lost consciousness since she was heavily wounded. This humble monk felt rather helpless. However, the serpent-woman shouted out Owner Bu's name before she fainted. And so this humble monk came here to inquire, whether Owner Bu knows... this serpent-woman?"

Chapter 208: King Yu of the Imperial Mausoleum

The young monk Shang De pressed his palms together. His complexion was filled with gentleness and traces of smile. All the muscles on his face squeezed into a beaming grin as he looked directly at Bu Fang. Yet, his gaze was as sharp as the blade of a sword that emitted a blinding glare.

Serpent-woman? Bu Fang was startled, but kept his cool under the young monk's fierce glance as he curled his lips.

"Yes, I do know." Bu Fang calmly replied, remaining at ease without any apparently change to his composure.

He was wondering why those serpent-men haven't visited him yet. It turned out they did indeed run into trouble on the way. But then again, that wasn't a surprise at all... the Imperial City nowadays was in the eye of the storm. Just last night, a group of top-notch warriors crowded by his store.

Serpent-men were already an exotic breed. For them to encounter the unexpected when stepping into the human realm... was easily anticipated.

But what exactly did this monk want to express?

Bu Fang's gave the young monk Shang De a questioning glance, "And then, do you need me to do something?"

The young monk felt pleased at first when Bu Fang confirmed his inquiry, but was now stupefied by Bu Fang's question. He had no idea how to respond to this remark, since it was that old fox, Zhao Musheng, who captured the serpent-men.

"If you can't help them out, then bring them here." Bu Fang flickered a glance at the bald head, then turned around to head back to the kitchen.

He had agreed, back in the Illusory Spirit Swamp, that as long as they came to his store, he would lend a helping hand. However, this did not mean Bu Fang felt obligated to track them down if they got into trouble on the way here.

The young monk rubbed his head and broke into a grin. Alright, this owner has got quite a personality! But he couldn't answer this question, so he'd leave the head splitting puzzle to Zhao Musheng.

The young bald monk returned to his seat and gazed toward the Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs on the table. The tangerine-red Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs emitted hot steams and a rich meaty aroma. It reinvigorated his appetite. Nevermind the portion of meat bun he ate on the way here, his stomach was rumbling with hunger once more.

He picked up his chopsticks, lightly tapped them on the table, and snatched up a piece of tangerine-red Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs. The rib's meat was rather tender. One could feel its springiness once the chopsticks landed on it.

Having licked his lips, the young monk first glided his tongue over the rib's sauce. The sweet and sour taste of the sauce instantly made his eyes sparkle.

Stuffing an entire piece of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs into his mouth, the young monk felt his eyes light up. The intense meaty fragrance burst forth, and the tender, juicy meat tapped at the inner walls of his mouth.

"So... so delicious!" The young monk continued to chew. His eyes protruded as he let out an odd laugh. This rib... was so damn tasty!

Gulp, the piece of rib was swallowed. The young monk smacked his lips, as the entire mouthful of meaty aroma left him intoxicated.

As a carnivorous monk, his obsession with meat was one unfathomable to the common person. He ate all sorts of meat. One of the biggest reasons was because he once lived alone in a boundless, desolate desert that was devoid of plants or spirit fruits. It only had endless supplies of a furry spirit beast.

To survive and keep himself alive, he ate the beasts' flesh raw and drank their blood. The flavor of that spirit beasts' meat was seriously not worthy of any compliments...

Ever since he returned, the young monk Shang De developed an addiction to meat, and swore to try all gourmet meat dishes in this world.

He poured himself a cup of Ice Heart Jade Urn Wine. The clear, spring-water-like wine nectar emanated a rich wine aroma, tingling the young monk's nostrils.

With a slurp, the wine nectar was down his throat, in perfect combination with the meaty aroma. The young monk couldn't help but lightly yelp in delight.

From afar... Ouyang Xiaoyi fixated her big eyes on this bald monk drinking wine and eating meat without reservation. She felt like her foundational knowledge about monks had completely collapsed.

"Isn't it recorded in the books that monks don't drink wine or eat meat?" Ouyang Xiaoyi twitched her mouth.

How was this young monk Shang De, with his greasy mouth, anything like the conventional monks recorded in the books... these writings were all lies.

The young monk kicked up his foot and placed his leg on a stool. His foot jerked up and down as he placed another piece of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs in his mouth. The young monk seemed to have discerned Ouyang Xiaoyi's gaze, and nodded at her with a beaming smile.

Ouyang Xiaoyi humphed and turned her gaze away.

Ji Chengxue had finished his meal and laid down his chopsticks. He was filled with joy. It had been a while since he last tasted Owner Bu's gourmet delicacies. Today, he finally ate to his heart's content.

"Uncle Lian, let's go," Ji Chengxue said to Lian Fu, who sat besides him and had just finished an order of Egg-Fried Rice.

Lian Fu curled his orchid-shaped fingers, and lightly consented. He stood up but felt reluctant to leave. This store was filled with memories.

As the emperor, it was unsuitable to leave the palace for too long. Ji Chengxue stopped by today to get a sense of the Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree coveted by numerous Battle-Saints. And, on top of that, to try Owner Bu's new wine. Though it was a shame he didn't get a chance to taste it, it was still satisfying to be reminded of Owner Bu's spectacular cooking.

The two of them left, whereas Wu Yunbai and Master Ah Wu continued on. They had ordered many dishes and were fully immersed in this feasting journey.

...

Imperial Mausoleum of the Imperial City. Tiny pieces of snowflakes softly drifted down. A cold breeze brushed past, touching upon all in the surrounding. The leaves emitted crumpling sounds as they rubbed against each other.

The imperial mausoleum was located on top of a steep mountain, at a high altitude. With the light snow, the temperature there was still a lot colder than the Imperial City, which was regaining its warmth as spring season arrived.

From a thatched house made of twitch-grass, a man dressed in a modest linen garment slowly sauntered out.

The man had a broom in his hands, and stepped unhurriedly into the gloomy but dignified imperial mausoleum, within which were erected numerous gravestones. He swept away the fallen leaves that had landed on the tombstones with his broom.

The crinkling noise from sweeping reverberated within the deadly still imperial mausoleum, adding to it an ominous echo.

"Tsk tsk... the once awe-inspiring King Yu of a generation, badly defeated in the battle over the throne, and now finds himself in this deplorable, wretched state. Has the glory of yesteryears been washed away into tepid streams of water? Oh how pitiable, how lamentable."

The tranquil imperial mausoleum suddenly rang with laughter, and crispy taps of footsteps followed suit.

The man with a broom in his hands instantly froze. He held his body erect and narrowed his eyes at the sniggering man. His gaze was deadly, as if made of gray ashes, and his face was deadpan.

Zhao Ruge was dressed in a white robe and held his hands behind his back. Besides him were a couple of guards wrapped in black robes, with faces concealed that couldn't be easily discerned. The

levels of energy on these guards were terrifyingly strong, and had already suppressed the guards of the imperial mausoleum.

Zhao Ruge strolled around the entrance of the imperial mausoleum with large strides. As an outsider, he didn't dare step into the imperial mausoleum of the imperial household.

He had absolutely no idea what might be the consequence of trespassing onto the imperial mausoleum.

Ji Chengyu studied Zhao Ruge for a bit, then lowered his head and resumed sweeping off dead leaves from the tombstones. His movements were sluggish, much like those of an enervated elder. The once bold, spirited demeanor of King Yu was nowhere to be found.

"Your highness King Yu, surely you don't want to be stuck in this imperial mausoleum for the rest of your life? Think about Ji Chengxue sitting upon the throne right now. Are you not filled with unreconcilable anger?" Zhao Ruge's gaze stared daggers as he continued: "Why should you, King Yu, guard the imperial mausoleum like some watch dog, while he, Ji Chengxue, sits comfortably on the throne? Why him?"

Ji Chengyu's eyes turned, his ashen pupils revealed a trace of wan smiles, "Zhao Ruge, what have I got left to fight against Ji Chengxue at this point? Everything has been settled already. Father chose him, that makes me... a sore loser from head to foot."

"A loser? That's not the King Yu in my mind." Zhao Ruge snickered.

Ji Chengyu shook his head, ignored Zhao Ruge, and turned to another tombstone. It was the tombstone of Emperor Changfeng, one that was awfully plain and unlike anything one would expect of an emperor's gravestone. Unadorned, it came off as rather shabby.

Ji Chengyu hang his head lower, kept his face obscured, and continued languidly sweeping at the fallen leaves.

"Ji Chengyu, I, Zhao Ruge, came here today just to tell you that you aren't without a chance to turn the tides. As of now, Lian Fu is in the Imperial City, which gives you a window to extricate yourself. if you don't want to leave, I have nothing more to say. But if you feel the slightest unwillingness to take your defeat lying down, then I, Zhao Ruge, and my father... Zhao Musheng, will provide you with all the resources you need!"

Zhao Ruge then asked: "What will be your choice?"

A winter breeze brushed by and blew at the snow floating in the air. Snowflakes landed on Zhao Ruge's face, but were instantly melted by his body temperature, and turned into droplets of water.

His gaze fixated on the shadow within the imperial mausoleum. He believed that Ji Chengyu wouldn't just give up like that.

Sure enough, the silhouette of a figure slowly walked out with a broom still in his hands. His eyes were still clouded by a deadly gray hue, but this time a stroke of hope burned amidst the deadly ashes.

"Zhao Musheng? That old fox... is truly vexing."

Ji Chengyu lifted the broom onto his shoulder, and tug apart the velvet hair tie on his head. A headful of hair instantly sprang out and hang loose.

Zhao Ruge peered at him while the corners of his mouth curled.

...

In the dead of night, two crescent moons intertwined as they hang high above in the sky.

In a courtyard within the Imperial City, Zhao Musheng stood with his hands behind his back. His gaze was gentle yet distant, and the energy on his body slightly fluctuated, as if they were streams of moving water.

Suddenly, a figure covered with the stench of alcohol appeared within the courtyard. One could even occasionally hear burps.

Zhao Musheng knitted his brows into a frown and turned toward this shadow.

"Shang De, you were drinking again. Votaries shouldn't drink alcohol to begin with, but now you've gone from bad to worse."

"Hehe, Head Elder, Shang De knows you understand why votaries shouldn't consume wine. But once the wine and meat had passed through the intestines, this monk only seeks indulgence!" Shang De said to Zhao Musheng with his flushed face and alcohol breath.

"Alright, I don't care how much liquor you drink, as long it doesn't hold things up." Zhao Musheng frowned and sighed as he responded.

If this were any other monk from the Mahayana Island before him, he would've slapped the wits out of him already. But as for Shang De... sigh.

"Head Elder, I have the intelligence you ordered me to gather. That Owner Bu... admits that he knows these serpent-men." Shang De's eyes were drowsy and he could barely stand up straight without toppling over.

He leaned against a tree, and remarked: "That Owner Bu said... 'so what if I know them', what should we do?"

The muscles on Zhao Musheng's face squeezed into a light smile, "So what if I know them? Things are much easier as long as he does know them... Bu Fang, ah Bu Fang, this old fellow would like to see whether you'll fold your hands and watch them die... hahaha!"

Chapter 209: Dragon Blood Rice and Donburi

On the streets of the Imperial City, in a quiet alleyway.

A gentle beam of light flashed in the pitch dark alleyway. By the entrance of Fang Fang's Little Store, Blacky lay quietly on his stomach, breathing evenly in a deep sleep.

The shutters of the store were firmly shut. From the kitchen came the crispy, melodious sounds of knife chopping against a board.

Bu Fang's slender fingers were soaked by splatters of water. With knife in hand, he diced up the carrot on the chopping board with a steady rhythm. The knife moved at an amazing speed, almost dazzling one's eyes. Bu Fang carried forth in an orderly manner, without any changes to his composure. It was evident that, for him, this was not yet an impressive speed.

Finally, the last of the carrots had been chopped up. Then, Bu Fang twirled the knife in his fingers, after which the knife began to twirl like a windmill.

Afterwards, Bu Fang flung the kitchen knife, sticking it back into the knife holder.

Bu Fang stretched his body and yawned with his parted lips. Whenever he had time, he would practice his cutting and carving techniques. As someone who aspired to become a chef at the highest level of the food chain, the God of Cooking in the Fantasy World, he couldn't slack off. He must treat his training seriously to perfect a chef's essential techniques.

Having wiped off the water spots on his hand, a glint of excitement flashed across Bu Fang's cool eyes. His state of mind connected with and entered the system.

"The temporary task is completed. Your reward has been issued. The prize of this assignment is Dragon Blood Rice, and a ten percent advancement in true energy cultivation level... well done."

Bu Fang smacked his lips and felt a jolt of joy inside. The progress on his cultivation had not been slow. If anything, the speed of his breakthroughs was as fast as wind in comparison to the others undergoing cultivation.

For Bu Fang, his focus on cultivation was not the combat capacity associated with it. For him, the purpose of cultivation breakthroughs was to develop a stabler true energy, thereby enabling him to provide for the true energy dishes he cooked.

Even though he was a fifth grade Battle-King at this point, much of his true energy was consumed during the cooking process. The current supply of his true energy was near exhaustion, and this was certainly bad news for him.

On top of that, it was difficult to use the Golden Dragon Bone Knife for too long given his present cultivation level...

Just imagining how the Golden Dragon Bone Knife would degrade, half way, into a black lump knife due to true energy depletion the next time he hunts for ingredients... was too embarrassing.

The rewards of the system had already been released, adding a smile to Bu Fang's lips. Following the system's instructions, he bent down, opened the lower kitchen cabinet, and took out a ceramic pot.

To Bu Fang's surprise, this pot was quite heavy. The Dragon Blood Rice could be found inside.

Placing the pot on the table, Bu Fang unscrewed the lid of the ceramic pot. What gushed out was a slightly pungent scent of rice fragrance. The smell of the ingredient was not bad, and instead gave one the urge to inhale deeply.

Bu Fang's eyes glistened as he observed the plump grains of rice within the ceramic pot.

The rice presented a vermillion shade. At first glance, it evoked a dark and gloomy sensation. After a while, though, one would discern a bewitching hue of blood red radiating from the rice.

"So this is the Dragon Blood Rice? Seems like it's worth the fuss..." Bu Fang pursed his lips, picked up a grain of rice with two fingers, and leaned closer to study it.

"The Dragon Blood Rice is watered by the blood of a seventh grade spirit beast, the Viper Dragon. It absorbs the vitality and blood essence of the Viper Dragon, and is harvested into rice under harsh environments. Its grains of rice are plump, exude a dark red tint, and are rich with vitality energy and spirit energy. To sum, it is an exceptional, rare ingredient." The system reported with a solemn voice.

Having heard this, Bu Fang was taken back. He couldn't help but feel it was a pity that this Dragon Blood Rice was irrigated by the blood of Viper Dragon instead of a True Dragon. That distinction made a huge difference to the rank of the ingredient.

However, Bu Fang did not fret over this, since the System at this point only provided seventh level ingredients at best. Retrospectively, it may be due to the fact that his capabilities were limited. Once he achieved another breakthrough in cultivation, he could perhaps obtain ingredients of higher quality.

Bu Fang rubbed his chin as he gazed at this pot of Dragon Blood Rice. The system had yet to provide the latest recipe for the Dragon Blood Rice. Hence, Bu Fang would have to rely on himself to experiment with the cooking of this Dragon Blood Rice.

He grabbed a fistful of Dragon Blood Rice. Pitter-patter, grains of rice slipped through the cracks of his fingers and sprinkled into the ceramic jar.

Sensing the surge of spirit energy and vitality energy that passed through his palm, Bu Fang curled his lips. A plan was in place.

There were many ways to cook with rice. For example, Egg-Fried Rice was a very basic level gourmet cuisine using rice. As for his Egg-Fried Rice, it was simultaneously simple and difficult. For the typical chef, this was definitely a rudimentary dish and could be picked up in a few days. However, to truly master it was rather tough.

Bu Fang had no intentions of cooking Egg-Fried Rice with the Dragon Blood Rice. Certainly not because Egg-Fried Rice was an inferior dish, but because Bu Fang could not find... an egg worthy of this Dragon Blood Rice.

In the making of Egg-Fried Rice, the importance of rice was undeniable. However, the demand for quality egg was also non-negligible.

He emptied half of jar of the Dragon Blood Rice into a ceramic bowl, then poured in the spirit energy-infused Heaven Alps Spring Water to wash the rice.

After a while of rinsing, the water was dyed into a shade of red. Every grain of the Dragon Blood Rice sparkled with a glossy plumpness.

Then, the water used for rice cleansing was poured into the flower pot that held a burgeoning Five Stripes Path-Understanding Tree—it was due for a good dose of nourishment.

Bu Fang returned to the kitchen, poured the Dragon Blood Rice into a steamer, placed it into a metal pot on the burner, and began the cooking.

While waiting for it to cook, Bu Fang began preparing the other dishes and took out a fatty piece of Wandering Dragon Cow Meat. A wisp of smoke twirled around his hand as he summoned the

Dragon Bone Kitchen Knife. His hand whirled and instantly diced up the Wandering Dragon Cow Meat.

The fire was turned on, wok heated, and cooking oil added. With a sprinkle of seasoning, everything was sautéed, releasing a gush of penetrating scent.

Now, Bu Fang placed the Wandering Dragon Cow Meat into the wok and immediately released a surge of true energy that enveloped the metal wok. Then, the stir-fry commenced. Flames burned high and splashes of oil splattered everywhere as Bu Fang jiggled the wok.

The sound of ladle clashing against the metal wok reverberated within the entire store.

Not after long, a rich meaty aroma drifted out and pervaded the air of the little store.

A mixture of cornstarch and water was poured into the wok, and the rosy, glossy Wandering Dragon Cow Meat instantly quavered with a gurgle. Rich, fragrant juice bubbled in the wok.

The lid was placed. It was time for the Wandering Dragon Cow Meat to be braised.

During the waiting time, Bu Fang found himself a circular plate and took out a white radish. With a twirl of the Dragon Bone Kitchen Knife, a delicate flower-shaped radish was completed.

For Bu Fang now, carving out a flower was a piece of cake.

Having placed the flower on the circular plate, Bu Fang approached the steamer that had already begun emitting a rich rice aroma.

Lifting up the lid of the steamer, hot steams sprang up, causing both the rich vitality energy and fragrance to drift outwards.

Bu Fang took in a deep breath and felt slightly intoxicated. The aroma of the rice contained a hint of refreshing sweetness, shooting a pleasant sensation of coolness through one's body.

A large spoonful of well-cooked Dragon Blood Rice was scooped onto the center of the circular plate. The rosy, glossy Dragon Blood Rice occupied half a circle, and stimulated one's taste buds and appetite with its concentrated yet invigorating scent.

Finished with the steamer, Bu Fang returned to the wok. Gurgling sounds and meaty aroma incessantly emitted from the wok.

The stove was turned off, and the wok unlidded. Suddenly, hot steams gushed out and burst forth like a bomb of aroma.

Within the wok, thickening sauce dripped out of bursting bubbles. The sparkling, fragrant Wandering Dragon Cow Meat was covered with shimmering sauce.

Bu Fang skillfully juggled the wok again and scooped out the Wandering Dragon Cow Meat with a spoon. He slowly poured the Wandering Dragon Cow Meat next to the fragrant Dragon Blood Rice. The mixture of both scents was so alluring that one would be instantly hooked.

A spoonful of thickening sauce was poured onto the Dragon Blood Rice and Wandering Dragon Cow Meat. It trickled down and emitted hot steams.

Under the light, the thickening sauce almost beamed with a lustrous glow. The Wandering Dragon Cow Meat sitting amidst the sauce quivered due to the hot steams. The sauce seeped through the pockets of air between the Dragon Blood Rice, loosening up the grains of rice and unleashing the intense aroma it contained.

Bu Fang snapped his fingers and curled his lips. This simultaneously simple and difficult dish was finally completed.

"Dragon Blood Meat Donburi, accomplished."

Chapter 210: Get There Early, Or Else There Will Be A Queue

The imperial palace of the Imperial City, the main halls.

Ji Chengxue was dressed in his imperial robe, hands held behind his back, eyes squinting, and he carried a merry smile as he strode down the halls.

He was in a good mood, since he had finally tasted Owner Bu's dishes after all this wait. With his stomach satisfied, his state of mind was naturally uplifted. In fact, it felt like he floated in the air as he walked.

The numerous eunuchs within the halls, witnessing Ji Chengxue's giddy, certainly incessant paces, couldn't help but cover the smiles on their lips.

Now that Ji Chengxue was the Emperor, he had generally retained a stern composure and dignified majesty before others ever since his inauguration. Yet, his behavior today was a rare scene, easily amusing the eunuchs, who scrambled to conceal their smiles.

Ji Chengxue suddenly felt as if the air around him changed as he took a few more steps. With his brows arched, he glanced around to find blushing, simpering eunuchs covering their mouths. He was slightly taken back and realized that his prior actions may have triggered the eunuchs' laughter.

A faint hint of awkwardness crept across his face. With a light cough, Ji Chengxue regained an austere complexion and said gravely: "What are you giggling about, haven't you seen this sovereign's after meal exercises?"

Having heard that, the eunuchs hung their heads even lower as chuckles escaped their lips.

Ji Chengxue couldn't help but crack up himself. He really was in a good mood tonight.

Having arrived in front of the throne, Ji Chengxue lightly tossed up the ends of his imperial robe and sat down comfortably.

Suddenly, a shadow flew through the main halls at the speed of lightening and appeared on his knees before Ji Chengxue. This startled Ji Chengxue quite a bit, causing him to emit a light cough.

"Reporting, your majesty. A change of events at the imperial mausoleum. Ji Chengyu has been taken and is nowhere to be found."

The messenger kneeling upon the main halls reported this incident solemnly.

What?!

Any trace of jubilation on Ji Chengxue's face was wiped clean. Ji Chengyu was demoted to the imperial mausoleum by Emperor Changfeng himself. Surely he didn't dare to escape without authorization? But his cultivation should have been sealed, he couldn't possibly have the capability of fleeing?

At this point, Lian Fu also emerged within the main halls, pinching his middle finger and thumb together, twisting waist, and a somber expression.

"I leave for a few days, and King Yu ends up being seized? Could it be a premeditated act of crime?" Lian Fu frowned as he remarked.

Ji Chengxue's brows have been knitted into knotted rope. Agitation stirred inside of him. Ji Chengxue's identity was very sensitive, but the unusual circumstances within the Imperial City induced him to bring in Lian Fu. He certainly did not expect things to take such a turn.

"Leaving the imperial mausoleum means blatantly defying the late emperor's orders. One would think King Yu has already lost the urge to rebel, but no, he finds in himself the guts to run away. If I ever see King Yu again, I will bring him to justice in honor of the late emperor!" Lian Fu swung his sleeves, pinching his fingers together. His shrill voice carried traces of wrath.

Ji Chengxue sighed. Could it be that King Yu wanted to make a victorious comeback by escaping the imperial mausoleum? He was still weighed down by the seal Emperor Changfeng placed on him under the spirited dragon array. No even a typical seventh grade Battle-Saint could break that seal, let alone... a commoner without cultivation like him?

"I originally spared your life for the sake of father. Hopefully you won't make foolish decisions..." Ji Chengxue closed his fingers into a fist, and his gaze hardened as he muttered quietly.

...

Bu Fang carried a circular plate out of the kitchen and placed this dish on the table. After washing his hands, he sat down in eager anticipation.

The circular plate was quite large, within which was the Donburi made out of Dragon Blood Rice.

The Dragon Blood Meat Donburi was made of Dragon Blood Rice and the tenderloins of a seventh grade spirit beast, the Wandering Dragon Cow. Just these ingredients themselves were enough to garner much attention.

Searing hot steams poured out, concentrated with coats of unfading aroma from the well-cooked meat and rice.

Bu Fang picked up a blue and white ceramic spoon and scooped up a spoonful of Dragon Blood Rice. The grains of rice were plump and full, appearing as moisten due to the rising hot steams. The red toned rice was certainly eye-catching. Even though the Dragon Blood Rice was nurtured by dragon blood, it was free from any raw, unpleasant odor and instead emitted the delicate scent of cooked white rice.

The refreshing fragrance felt like a stream of milk flowing through the heart, adding a faint sweetness that burst within.

Having sent the spoonful of Dragon Blood Rice into his mouth, Bu Fang arched his brows. As he chewed lightly, the grains of Dragon Blood Rice sprang apart and bounced between his teeth and tongue.

The Dragon Blood Rice was firmer in texture relative to the ordinary rice, adding more chewiness to its consistency. Bouncing within the walls of the mouth, it gave one an exceptional sensation.

Once sent into the mouth, its rich spirit essence instantly burst forth, surging out of Bu Fang's mouth and washing over his entire body.

Even though this spirit essence couldn't compare with that of the Blood Crown Black Swamp Boa, it was still quite decent.

Then, he scooped up a spoon of the sauce made of the Wandering Dragon Cow meat and poured it into his mouth. The simmering sauce mixed with the Dragon Blood Rice in his mouth. Plump, chewy Wandering Dragon Cow meat also swam on his tongue, sending shivers down Bu Fang's spines.

Bu Fang's mouth quivered as it blew out incredibly hot steams.

But the scorching sensation was part of the fun in eating this Donburi. The sweltering feeling was simply irresistible. As the rich fragrance effused within one's mouth, that cross between wanting to, but not daring to swallow it down, was... out of this world!

Bu Fang was immersed in this sensation of walking on air. Needless to say, it was like a wonderful, joyful misery. Finally swallowing the Dragon Blood Rice soaked with steaming sauce, Bu Fang felt a satisfaction that opened up every pore on his body.

"Yes!" Bu Fang let out a hot breath. A delightful sense of relief always followed once one gulped down a spoonful of steaming Donburi.

He licked his lips and discovered that his tongue was slightly numb from the burning sensation.

"Actually, the Wandering Dragon Cow meat sauce would taste even better with a pinch of chili pepper." Bu Fang mumbled with the ceramic spoon in his mouth as he mulled over this idea.

However, Bu Fang was never the biggest fan of chili peppers. Most of his dishes did not fall into the spicy category, though peppers actually made for very good seasonings.

"Guess we'll just make adjustments based on the customers' preferences from now on." Bu Fang curled his lips. He was stocked with chili peppers, since the Abyssal Chilli Sauce was still kept in the system's storage space.

No longer giving this a thought, Bu Fang began to concentrate on enjoying the Dragon Blood Meat Donburi. He was immersed in great pleasure, and covered his mouth from time to time as he breathed out hot air.

It truly looked like an amalgamation of joy and misery. But before gourmet delicacies, he really couldn't contain himself.

Once he had finished the entire plate of Donburi, beads of sweat covered his entire forehead.

Bu Fang patted his bulging stomach and sprawled over a chair, feeling so lazy he didn't want to move a bit.

After resting for a long time, he finally stood up, cleaned the table, and returned to the kitchen. This could count as a new dish. Bu Fang personally enjoyed it a great deal.

Dragon Blood Meat Donburi, both nourishing and delicious.

Having tidied away everything, Bu Fang stretched himself and yawned. He went upstairs to take a steaming hot shower, then lay on the bed and shut his eyes.

Having ate and drank to one's heart's content, it was time for a nap to recharge the body.

Early in the morning, the sun had crawled out. It exuded brilliant beams of light, enveloping the earth with its gentle radiance.

Fang Fang's Little Store, located in the alleyway, had also opened for business. The shutters had been removed, revealing a sleepy-eyed Bu Fang.

His elongated fingers clutched a ceramic plate, within which there was an aromatic Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs.

Bu Fang patted Blacky's head after placing the plate of Sweet 'n' Sour Ribs before him. He yawned and took out a chair, enjoying the cooling breeze waft by as he sat down.

On the streets of the Imperial City, street vendors had already opened business for the morning market.

A troop of figures wrapped in black clothing carried a sedan-chair and stopped by the entrance to the alleyway.

A shadow arrived before the sedan-chair. This figure had a black piece of cloth covering his face and was dressed in a black warrior's robe. Clearly, he wanted to keep his identity a secret...

However, the shiny head and the multiple scars on it... were quite revealing. Bu Fang would have recognized him in a split second.

The young monk drew back the curtain on the sedan-chair, and lifted out a figure with one hand.

"God damn you, Zhao Musheng. You deprive this monk of a good sleep and make him perform such basic, incompetent duties this early in the morning." The young monk cursed as he took a few steps and swung the figure in his hand onto the floor. He flicked a glimpse at that silhouette, stamped on the long snake tail, and said with his body bent downwards: "Listen good Serpent-man, if you want to rescue your companions then go find Owner Bu. Don't say this monk didn't give you a fair tip..."

Ah Ni, who struggled in agony on the floor, glared at this bald man with a face full of anger.

"Get there early, or else there will be a queue..." The young monk rubbed his head and burst out into laughters. Then, he turned to leave with the sedan-chair bearers, leaving behind the serpent-men Ah Ni, who gnashed his teeth in anger.