

Sect Master 341

Chapter 341

In Meng Zhang's heart, he quietly absorbed the lesson from this experience. Although the Grand Evolving Fortune could calculate the desired outcome and bring opportunities, it also carried significant risks. There is nothing in the world that only goes in one direction; to gain certain opportunities, one must bear equal risks. When enjoying good times, one should be prepared for adversity, as it may be followed by blessings.

After several attempts, Meng Zhang gained a deeper understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the Grand Evolving Fortune. He felt that Great Wind City was not a place to stay for long and it would be best to leave as soon as possible. However, just as the day was breaking, a cultivator from the Gu Yue Family arrived at the warehouse, disrupting Meng Zhang's plans.

This cultivator was sent by Gu Yue Youlan, bearing a message that her aunt, the renowned Gold Core Daoist Master, Gu Yue Huaidie Daoist Master, wanted to meet Meng Zhang. Her summons left no room for Meng Zhang to refuse. He had to leave everything behind, giving a few instructions to his disciples, and followed the Gu Yue Family cultivator, departing from the warehouse.

The two of them boarded a First Rank flying vessel and headed straight to the southern part of the city. After flying a considerable distance, the vessel finally stopped at the entrance of a secluded small courtyard. Gu Yue Youlan had been waiting there and rushed to greet Meng Zhang.

"Sect Master Meng, I apologize for disturbing you so early," she said.

"Sect Master Meng, I returned home yesterday and coincidentally, my aunt came out of seclusion. I told her about you and the story of Taiyi Sect, and she was very interested. She specifically instructed me to bring you here so she could meet you," Gu Yue Youlan explained.

"Being summoned by Heart Butterfly Daoist Master is an honor for me. There's no such thing as disturbing," Meng Zhang replied politely.

Gu Yue Youlan didn't continue to be overly polite and led Meng Zhang into the courtyard, near a small pond where a woman with a veil covering her face, tall and graceful, had been waiting.

"Sect Master Meng, this is my aunt, Heart Butterfly Daoist Master," Gu Yue Youlan introduced.

"Youngster Meng Zhang, greetings to Heart Butterfly Daoist Master," Meng Zhang respectfully bowed.

"No need for so much formality, Meng Zhang. The seniors from Taiyi Sect once gave guidance to this Daoist Master, so in a way, you are not a stranger. It's not impolite for this Daoist Master to call you 'youngster,'" Gu Yue Huaidie said, showing a friendly and approachable demeanor, contrary to what Meng Zhang had imagined.

Her attitude was very kind, without any airs of a Gold Core Daoist Master, instead, she resembled an elder in the family. Gu Yue Huaidie and Meng Zhang exchanged a few pleasantries and quickly engaged in casual conversation. Gu Yue Youlan, who was standing nearby, clearly enjoyed the affection and attention from Gu Yue Huaidie and joined in the conversation as well.

At Gu Yue Huaidie's suggestion, Meng Zhang and Gu Yue Youlan quickly became as close as siblings. Gu Yue Huaidie expressed her fondness for the seniors of Taiyi Sect and reminisced about some past events.

After the destruction of the renowned cultivation sect, Taiyi Sect, on the Middle-Earth Continent, the surviving members relocated the sect to the outskirts of the Grand Crossing Mountain Range. About three hundred years ago, shortly after reaching the Foundation Building stage, Gu Yue Huaidie went on a journey and arrived near the Grand Crossing Mountain Range. There, she befriended Taiyi Sect cultivators and received their assistance. Gu Yue Huaidie's tone conveyed her yearning and admiration for Taiyi Sect at that time, even though it had already declined and become a Gold Core sect established by survivors. In her eyes, it was still immensely prestigious and powerful.

During her stay in the Grand Crossing Mountain Range, Gu Yue Huaidie developed profound friendships with some Taiyi Sect cultivators and received guidance from Taiyi Sect seniors. However, after leaving the Grand Crossing Mountain Range, she never had the opportunity to return, and it was only later that she received news of Taiyi Sect's annihilation during the calamity.

After the calamity, the Grand Crossing Mountain Range became infested with monsters, making it too dangerous for even Gold Core Daoist Masters to enter easily. Eventually, several major cultivation sects joined forces to quell the disaster and designated the Grand Crossing Mountain Range as a forbidden zone.

The survivors of Taiyi Sect fled northward and settled in the Endless Sea of Sand. If it hadn't been for Gu Yue Youlan's encounter with Meng Zhang, Gu Yue Huaidie wouldn't have known about the many hardships Taiyi Sect had endured over the years.

Gu Yue Huaidie felt regretful that after Taiyi Sect moved to the Endless Sea of Sand, they had never contacted her. If they had, based on their past relationship, she would have done everything in her power to help Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang appreciated Gu Yue Huaidie's kindness, even though Taiyi Sect had fallen and its cultivators were somewhat proud, having once been a mighty sect. Former friends were now Gold Core Daoist Masters, while he himself had become a dependent of the Flying Swan Sect. Meng Zhang speculated that even if those Taiyi Sect cultivators heard about Gu Yue Huaidie's situation, they might find it difficult to visit her.

Of course, it was just Meng Zhang's guess, and he couldn't be certain of the truth. Meeting this junior, Gu Yue Huaidie was delighted and asked, "Nephew, I heard that you've been searching for Foundation Building Pills and their ingredients. How is it going?"

Meng Zhang couldn't reveal that he had obtained the Foundation Building Pills from Ye Feifan, so he could only smile and shake his head. Gu Yue Huaidie paused for a moment and continued, "The spiritual herbs cultivated in our family's medicinal garden are prioritized for our family's alchemists, so it's not easy to supply them to you. The distribution of Foundation Building Pills in the family also follows certain rules, and I can't go against them."

However, she didn't want him to leave empty-handed after this rare encounter with an old friend's descendant. Gu Yue Huaidie generously said, "Nevertheless, I won't let you leave with nothing. From my share of the Foundation Building Pills, I'll set one aside for you. You can have it for 20,000 low-grade spirit stones."

Meng Zhang was extremely grateful and showed his appreciation to Gu Yue Huaidie. Though 20,000 low-grade spirit stones seemed like a lot, it far exceeded the basic price for a Foundation Building Pill. However, since Foundation Building Pills were not easily obtainable, being able to purchase one with spirit stones was an incredible opportunity.

In a good mood today, Gu Yue Huaidie decided to be even more generous and asked if there was anything else Meng Zhang needed in Great Wind City. He didn't hesitate and mentioned two difficult things he required. First, he sought suitable water-system spiritual items to nourish the spiritual shells in the sect. The second was the purchase of some spiritual herbs, without revealing his intention to refine Lesser Foundation Building Pills.

Gu Yue Huaidie called for a family steward, and with little effort, she fulfilled Meng Zhang's requests.

Chapter 342: Returning home with a valuable haul

For Meng Zhang, what seemed incredibly difficult was merely a casual request for Gu Yue Huaidie. After bidding farewell to Gu Yue Huaidie, a steward from the Gu Yue Family contacted him proactively.

The steward from the Gu Yue Family brought out a spiritual object called "Clear Spring Cold Jade" from the family's warehouse. When this water-system spiritual object is placed in ordinary spring water, it infuses the water with vitality and enhances its life force, benefiting all aquatic creatures living in it.

Meng Zhang acquired this rare spiritual object at a friendly price, thanks to his friendship with Gu Yue Huaidie. The Gu Yue Family had a profound heritage with numerous spiritual medicine gardens, some of which had a history spanning hundreds of years, containing a vast array of precious spiritual herbs.

Families like the Gu Yue Family had their own systems to ensure the continuous growth of spiritual herbs in their gardens, never allowing them to go extinct. After each harvest, they promptly replanted the herbs. While the ingredients for making the Lesser Foundation Building Pill were not particularly rare for a Gold Core family like Gu Yue Family, selling a small quantity to Meng Zhang was not a big deal.

Of course, cultivating the specific herbs required for the Lesser Foundation Building Pill demanded special techniques, which the Taiyi Sect was currently developing.

With Gu Yue Huaidie's consent, the steward generously bought many spiritual herbs from Meng Zhang at a friendly price. Despite some difficulties, Meng Zhang successfully achieved his primary goal for coming to Great Wind City.

He sold all sorts of spiritual materials brought on the flying boat to the Gu Yue Family. After purchasing the water-system spiritual object and spiritual herbs, he still had plenty of spiritual stones left. Meng Zhang generously went on a shopping spree in Great Wind City, acquiring various cultivation supplies, especially buying numerous unique automatons from the Clever Machine Sect.

Originally, the Clever Machine Sect's Second Rank automatons had several restrictions on external sales. However, with the Gu Yue Family acting as an intermediary, Meng Zhang managed to purchase quite a few.

All the spiritual stones were spent, but in return, he obtained many useful items. Before leaving, Meng Zhang had intended to bid farewell to Gu Yue Huaidie and Gu Yue Youlan, but he was informed that they had already set out on a journey.

Meng Zhang had no choice but to start his journey directly and leave Great Wind City on the flying boat.

Unaware of it at the time of his departure from Great Wind City, Gu Yue Huaidie and Gu Yue Youlan were discussing him in a secret room within the Gu Yue Family. "Youlan, is Meng Zhang the person you foresaw?" asked Gu Yue Youlan.

Gu Yue Huaidie shook her head. "I can't be sure; he is shrouded in mist, making it difficult to see through."

"But Aunt, you are the family's Diviner, knowledgeable about the changes and calculations of all things in the world. How can you not see through a mere Foundation Building cultivator?" Gu Yue Youlan was greatly surprised.

"It's not that surprising. There are many individuals whom even Diviners cannot see through."

"Youlan, once you master the art of divination and become a true Diviner, you'll understand that Diviners are not as all-powerful as outsiders imagine."

Upon hearing Gu Yue Huaidie's words, Gu Yue Youlan's expression turned somewhat melancholic. Long ago, Gu Yue Huaidie had said that she had a talent for divination and personally taught her, hoping she would become the next generation's Diviner for the family.

But after so many years, Gu Yue Youlan has been unable to make progress in the art of divination. Now, she even begins to doubt whether she is truly suitable for practicing divination.

Seeing Gu Yue Youlan's expression, Gu Yue Huaidie, who understands her well, comforts her, saying, "Mastering the art of divination cannot be rushed. Many times, it requires opportunities. When the right moment comes, you will naturally make progress."

Worried that Gu Yue Youlan might dwell on the matter, Gu Yue Huaidie changes the topic proactively. "Regardless of whether Meng Zhang is the person I foresaw or not, establishing a good relationship with him is not a bad thing. Back then, I also received many favors from the Taiyi Sect. Unfortunately, Taiyi Sect's affairs are too complex, and even if I wanted to help, I couldn't get involved. Over the years, I haven't inquired about Taiyi Sect to avoid attracting trouble and to avoid letting down the benefactors of the past. Meng Zhang's fortuitous encounter brought him to our Gu Yue Family's domain, and I simply lent him a little help."

Listening to her aunt's words, Gu Yue Youlan understands her good intentions. The Gu Yue Family has always secretly maintained the tradition of divination. Over the years, the Gu Yue Family has had almost no shortage of Diviners.

While the Lu Family is recognized as the first and most powerful family in Great Wind City, in reality, the Gu Yue Family's heritage surpasses that of the Lu Family and holds many hidden cards. Since the establishment of Great Wind City, the Gu Yue Family has inherited its traditions for

hundreds of years, enduring numerous trials and tribulations in the Cultivation World. They have encountered many crises but managed to turn misfortune into fortune and overcome difficulties safely, thanks to the united efforts of the family cultivators, especially with the guidance of the Diviners.

As the current generation's Diviner of the Gu Yue Family, Gu Yue Huaidie holds a special status and considerable authority within the family. Whether Meng Zhang's encounter with her is a good or bad thing, he has no idea.

Meng Zhang is unaware that Gu Yue Huaidie and Gu Yue Youlan are discussing him behind his back. He also has no clue that the seemingly casual encounters with Gu Yue Youlan are not as straightforward as they seem.

Having successfully completed his mission, Meng Zhang returns home on the flying boat, with a full load of treasures.

The journey back is smooth sailing. He faces no unexpected incidents, whether within the territory of Great Wind City or later within the Flying Swan Sect's domain.

He encounters a few patrolling cultivators along the way, but they do not cause any trouble. In Great Wind City's territory, the attitude towards various merchants is naturally good, and they are not bothered without reason.

Within the Flying Swan Sect's domain, Taiyi Sect carries some weight, and with Meng Zhang reporting his identity as the Taiyi Sect's Sect Master, he can come and go freely, albeit with some constraints.

Upon returning to Taiyi Sect without any hitches, Meng Zhang places most of the purchased items into the sect's treasury. He transfers some battle puppets to the War Hall, where they can serve as practice targets for the sect's cultivators during regular times and be used directly on the battlefield during conflicts.

Meng Zhang also provides a monthly allocation of spiritual stones to the War Hall specifically for powering these battle puppets.

The sect's treasury also contains various automatons that disciples can exchange for with their merits.

During this trip, Meng Zhang also purchased a large number of devices such as the Lightning Repeater and Thunderous Blunderbuss, which he distributes to various oases to aid the common folk living there.

As Taiyi Sect is currently severely understaffed, it's challenging to provide adequate protection to every oasis. With the addition of these devices, the ordinary people in the oases will have some degree of resistance against low-level monsters and marauding low-level cultivators.

Due to the limited amount of spiritual stones carried on this trip, Meng Zhang plans to continue purchasing a large number of automatons from the Clever Machine Sect once the sect accumulates enough spiritual stones.

Before the Forest Spring Watch massacre, rumors of a disturbance in the Demon Wind Gobi's demonic beasts had already spread from the Flying Swan Sect. At first, Meng Zhang thought it might be a ploy by the Flying Swan Sect to divert the attention of Daoist Master Roaring Blaze and Guang Zhi Daoist Master. However, when news arrived that three Gold Core Daoist Masters, including Fei Tian Daoist Master, were trapped in Demon Wind Gobi, a special warning was issued to all cultivation forces within the Endless Sea of Sand. The warning stated that the demonic beasts in Demon Wind Gobi were restless and preparing for a massive invasion.

Upon receiving this warning, all cultivation forces in the Endless Sea of Sand became vigilant and started preparing for a battle with the demonic beasts. The invasion had been impending for four or five years, yet it had not materialized. Some forces began to slack off, thinking that time was on their side.

Meng Zhang, however, did not dare to let his guard down. If even the prestigious Flying Swan Sect received a specific warning, the impending invasion of demonic beasts would undoubtedly be significant. Once the battle started, it would be a bloody one.

The current calm was merely the tranquility before the storm. Meng Zhang was doing his utmost to strengthen Taiyi Sect's combat capabilities before the invasion.

If the cultivators were tied down by the demonic beasts, the ordinary people in various oases would have to rely on various mechanisms and puppets to defend their homes. Therefore, Meng Zhang entrusted all the spirit medicines brought back from Great Wind City to Shi Changqing. Most of the ingredients required to refine the Lesser Foundation Building Pill had been gathered, and the primary medicine was currently being cultivated. Shi Changqing had learned the special methods for handling spirit medicines from the Twin Success Valley records provided by Meng Zhang.

According to Shi Changqing's estimate, it would take about ten more years before he could begin alchemy.

The water-system spiritual object, Clear Spring Cold Jade, was handed over by Meng Zhang to Hu Jing, the Hall Master of the Beast Controlling Hall. With the help of the Deep Earth Spirit General, she constructed a small lake within the Taiyi Sect's mountain gate. Then, she placed Clear Spring Cold Jade into it and slowly stimulated the spiritual object's power. Once the lake water was influenced by the spiritual object's power and showed some effect, the remaining spirit clams were placed into it.

Hu Jing was busy with this task for half a year before the spirit clams slowly regained vitality and started to grow again. Over time, they would multiply and their population would increase. After some time, when their spiritual pearls were harvested, they would become valuable spiritual objects.

During his trip to Great Wind City, Meng Zhang did not obtain the spirit medicine for refining the Foundation Building Pill, but he did acquire two finished Foundation Building Pills. He double-checked them personally and also had Second Rank Alchemist Shi Changqing inspect them together. Once he confirmed there were no issues, he added them to the inventory of the sect's treasury for disciples to exchange.

Meng Zhang set a reasonable exchange price of ten thousand virtue merits for each Foundation Building Pill. One virtue merit in Taiyi Sect was approximately equivalent to a low-grade spirit stone in the market. Of course, due to the more extensive functions of sect virtue merits, they could

be exchanged for rare spiritual objects, magic tools, elixirs, and even access to the Hidden Scripture Pavilion's scriptures or guidance from the sect's elders.

Thus, after many years of development and improvement, the virtue merit system established by Meng Zhang had finally shown some success within Taiyi Sect, becoming the true valuable asset even more precious than spirit stones.

Additionally, Meng Zhang imposed restrictions on the internal disciples' exchange of Foundation Building Pills and other strategic resources like the Lesser Foundation Building Pills. Only disciples who had completed the Refining Qi stage and passed the assessment of the elders outside the sect were qualified to exchange for these pills. Any attempt to hoard or sell them outside was strictly prohibited. Perhaps in the future, when the sect grew stronger and resources became more abundant, these restrictions might be eased. But for now, Meng Zhang kept a tight grip on the distribution of Foundation Building Pills.

The acquisition of the two Foundation Building Pills had been no easy feat, and the process couldn't be replicated. They had to be put to their best use. Five months after storing the Foundation Building Pills in the sect's treasury, Tian Li, the Hall Master of the Refining Hall, applied to Meng Zhang for the exchange of a Foundation Building Pill. Tian Li had reached the Refining Qi stage quite some time ago, and he intended to use the pill's medicinal power to break through to the Foundation Building stage.

As the Hall Master of the Refining Hall, Tian Li had made significant contributions to the sect and accumulated a considerable amount of virtue merits. Especially before his uncle, Tian Zhen, left the sect, he transferred all of his accumulated virtue merits to Tian Li. Tian Zhen, as a General Affairs Elder, had accumulated a lot of virtue merits during his years of service to the sect without many expenses. Hence, Tian Li easily exchanged for the Foundation Building Pill and began his closed-door cultivation to break through to the Foundation Building stage.

After another half a year, under Hu Jing's meticulous care, all the spirit clams had fully recovered. Hu Jing delegated the task of taking care of the spirit clams to disciples of the Beast Controlling Hall and exchanged a Foundation Building Pill for herself. She then began her closed-door cultivation to break through the Foundation Building stage. As the most skilled practitioner of beast-controlling techniques in the sect, Hu Jing had nurtured a large number of spiritual beasts for the sect. Many of the sect's Crimson Feather Eagles were raised by her, and she also exploited resources using the Beast Controlling Jars. Her efforts this time had revived many precious spirit clams.

As the Hall Master of the Beast Controlling Hall, Hu Jing had also cultivated several First Rank Beast Controlling Masters. These achievements earned her a large number of virtue merits. Before her closed-door cultivation, she handed over all the affairs of the Beast Controlling Hall to these Beast Controlling Masters, who managed everything efficiently. The two Foundation Building Pills were exchanged quickly before they even had a chance to warm up in Meng Zhang's hands. He hoped that these two pills would be worth the investment and help the sect gain two more Foundation Building stage cultivators.

After returning from Great Wind City, Meng Zhang devoted most of his energy to his own cultivation. With his talent, there were no bottlenecks in the Foundation Building stage for him. After entering the mid-Foundation Building stage, his cultivation base surged forward without any obstacles.

Several Foundation Building stage cultivators of Taiyi Sect usually dispersed to various Second Rank spirit veins for cultivation to reduce the consumption of these veins. They also took responsibility for managing the oases where these spirit veins were located.

Furthermore, apart from Meng Zhang, as the Sect Master, several Foundation Building stage cultivators took turns to protect the fixed route from Singing Sand City to Flying Swan City.

Seeing the benefits brought by this route, Qiaoshou Sect also expressed interest in joining. Meng Zhang saw an opportunity in this and facilitated a collaboration between the two sects. They established flying boat landing points at crucial locations in both sects' territories, creating a comprehensive transportation network using a large number of First Rank flying boats and a few Second Rank ones. With this transportation network, the territories of both sects were effectively connected. Especially considering the vastness of Taiyi Sect's territory, the network not only facilitated personnel movement and resource circulation but also strengthened the sect's control over its domain.

With the participation of Qiaoshou Sect, the frequency of flying boats traveling from Singing Sand City to Flying Swan City increased. If the timing were right and there were no concerns about Flying Swan Sect's intentions, Meng Zhang would have considered opening a route to Great Wind City. The Endless Sea of Sand was too barren, and only by establishing external connections could the sect access abundant resources and wealth.

Chapter 344: Abduction

Above the boundless desert, An Xiaoran and two junior sisters each rode a wooden kite, gliding close to the ground from the sky. These simple mechanisms were lightweight and easy to use, making them popular transportation tools among many disciples of the Taiyi Sect. The main warehouse of the sect had already restocked the wooden kites twice, but they were still running out quickly due to the demand from disciples.

With only a small amount of spirit stones consumed, the wooden kites allowed Cultivators in the Refining Qi stage to experience the thrill of soaring in the sky. This place was a territory near the Qiaoshou Sect, which had originally belonged to the Golden Blade Sect and bordered the Demon Wind Gobi. Fearing a large number of demons might rush out from the Demon Wind Gobi, the Qiaoshou Sect had stationed a powerful force in that territory, establishing a tight defense line.

To be cautious, the Taiyi Sect also strengthened its patrols in this direction. Almost every day, several teams of patrolling disciples would pass through here to check for any abnormalities. In these years, no large groups of demons had surged out from the Demon Wind Gobi. Although the Flying Swan Sect had issued warnings several times, many Cultivators treated it as a mere wolf story and paid little attention.

Instead, there were occasional appearances of demons within Taiyi Sect's territory and its surrounding areas. The Endless Sea of Sand might be barren, but demons had never completely disappeared; their numbers were just scarce. In fact, demons possessed robust vitality, even better adapted to this environment than humans. The reason the Human Clan could survive here was all thanks to the protection of the Cultivators.

Recently, there had been no movements from the Demon Wind Gobi, but there were reports of demon attacks near various oases. Though the numbers of these demons were not many, their strength was mediocre. Meng Zhang had inquired about it and learned that wild demon numbers had increased significantly in the territories of Earthfire Sect, Qiaoshou Sect, Land Walk Sect, and others, and they occasionally raided human settlements. Despite investigations, the reason behind the sudden rise in demon numbers remained unclear.

Though the increase in demon numbers was inexplicable, they were still within manageable limits. Moreover, their appearances provided valuable combat opportunities for disciples and a chance to obtain precious cultivation resources from the demons' materials. Therefore, various sects, including Taiyi Sect, sent their disciples to hunt down these demons extensively.

An Xiaoran was one of Sect Master Meng Zhang's disciples, and she hadn't been under his tutelage for long. However, she had already reached the Refining Qi fifth stage in her cultivation base. She, along with her two junior sisters, formed a patrol team, and she served as its leader. During these days, the patrol team not only excelled in completing their assigned tasks but also had the good fortune of encountering a few low-level demons on patrol.

Despite being a girl, An Xiaoran showed no fear of bloodshed. Leading her two junior sisters, she skillfully slayed the demons and dealt with their corpses, earning them a small fortune. The recent battle had left the three girls thrilled and still excited.

Riding on the wooden kites, they chatted non-stop. An Xiaoran proudly said, "Though wooden kites can fly, they are still lifeless objects. Once we gather enough merit points, let's exchange them for a Crimson Feathered Eagle. Riding a living Crimson Feathered Eagle will be much better than a stiff wooden kite."

Her words received enthusiastic agreement from her two junior sisters. Just then, two figures descended rapidly from the high sky.

Three female disciples from the Taiyi Sect, riding wooden kites, had not even reacted when they were all captured. The Foundation Building stage cultivators disregarded their identities and launched a surprise attack. The three Refining Qi stage disciples couldn't even resist, let alone react. One of them, An Xiaoran, was captured by one of the assailants, while the other two female disciples fell powerless to the ground.

The two masked individuals had white masks covering their faces, concealing their true identities. One of them threw a letter on the ground. "Deliver this letter to your Sect Master," they said, "Tell him that if he wants his disciples back, he better follow the instructions in the letter."

The masked individuals then flew away into the sky, disappearing quickly. Shortly after their departure, the two Taiyi Sect female disciples regained their mobility. The abduction of the Second Disciple of the Sect Master was not a minor issue, far beyond what they could handle. One of the female disciples took out a communication talisman and immediately sent a message.

Before long, numerous Taiyi Sect disciples arrived, riding wooden kites, immortal cranes, and Crimson Feathered Eagles, rushing to the scene. After listening to the account of the two female disciples, everyone realized how challenging the situation was. They continued to send distress signals, requesting reinforcements from their allies.

The individual who abducted An Xiaoran was a Foundation Building stage cultivator, something they couldn't handle. After about half an hour, Taiyi Sect's reinforcements had yet to arrive, but Qiaoshou Sect's experts were the first to appear. Ever since the warning from the Flying Swan Sect, Qiaoshou Sect's Foundation Building stage cultivators had been taking turns guarding the territory bordering the Demon Wind Gobi. It happened to be Jin Qiao'er's turn to be stationed there.

Receiving the news of the incident from Taiyi Sect, she hurried over. As the only Foundation Building stage cultivator present, she naturally took charge. After receiving the letter from one of the female disciples, she did not hastily open it. Instead, she carefully inquired about the events that had occurred. Leaving a few people behind, she dispersed the rest.

Facing a Foundation Building stage cultivator, a group of Refining Qi stage cultivators couldn't offer much help and would only distract her. Qiaoshou Sect and Taiyi Sect were close allies, and Jin Qiao'er had received favors from Meng Zhang before. When something like this happened, she took it upon herself to step forward.

However, the two captors who took An Xiaoran left no trace behind and disappeared without a trace. Jin Qiao'er searched the area diligently but found nothing. By the time she finished her last search, Taiyi Sect's Sect Master Meng Zhang had also arrived.

Meng Zhang's expression was dark. As soon as he received the news, he rushed to the scene. It had been many years since he last saw Jin Qiao'er, and she had grown into a young woman. Especially after reaching the Foundation Building stage, all her youthful immaturity had vanished, leaving behind a mature and composed female cultivator.

With the situation urgent, Jin Qiao'er didn't have time for pleasantries. She immediately explained the events to Meng Zhang and handed him the letter. There were no clues in the letter, just an ordinary one that could be easily found among mortals. The contents of the letter demanded that Meng Zhang bring thirty thousand lower-grade spirit stones and go alone to a valley near the Firewell Market three days later. Once he arrived, he was to exchange the spirit stones for An Xiaoran. If Meng Zhang refused to comply, he would be collecting An Xiaoran's corpse.

After reading the letter, Meng Zhang sneered repeatedly. He didn't hide anything from Jin Qiao'er and showed her the content of the letter as well.

Chapter 345: Interception

After reading the letter, Jin Qiao'er looked at Meng Zhang with a worried expression. An Xiaoran was a valued disciple to Meng Zhang, so he naturally couldn't turn a blind eye to the situation. The other party had kidnapped An Xiaoran to extort spiritual stones, and they had chosen their target wisely. Although thirty thousand low-grade spiritual stones might seem like a considerable amount, it paled in comparison to An Xiaoran's safety.

Jin Qiao'er's concern wasn't solely about An Xiaoran's abduction; it extended to Meng Zhang as well. As the Taiyi Sect Master, Meng Zhang had experienced numerous battles and made many enemies in the interest of the sect's development. Jin Qiao'er worried that this time, the real target wasn't An Xiaoran or the spiritual stones but Meng Zhang himself.

If Meng Zhang were to go alone to the designated location as the enemy had suggested, he might fall into a trap and be ambushed. Jin Qiao'er expressed her concerns to Meng Zhang, but he didn't

take it seriously, reassuring her not to worry. With Meng Zhang's personality, he wouldn't allow others to manipulate him. The more someone wanted him to do something, the more he resisted.

On this occasion, Meng Zhang didn't fly over on his own but instead used a First Rank flying ship, a special one called the "Zhuifeng Boat." This purchase was to enhance the mobility of the sect's cultivators, and Meng Zhang had acquired five of these boats recently. Upon receiving news of An Xiaoran's kidnapping, he rushed over in one of these ships, testing its maximum speed along the way.

Meng Zhang was satisfied with the test results as even an ordinary Foundation Building stage cultivator at their full burst of speed couldn't catch up to the Zhuifeng Boat. The only downside was that the boat consumed spiritual stones quite rapidly, especially during high-speed flights.

Meng Zhang tried to persuade Jin Qiao'er not to be anxious and decided to find a quiet place to contemplate the situation. He returned to the ship's cabin and asked the disciples piloting the boat to leave temporarily, staying alone in the confined space.

Over the years, Meng Zhang had made significant progress in cultivating his inner energy by studying scriptures and comprehending the Taoist teachings. He quickly calmed his mind and entered a state of focused meditation.

Summoning the calculation tally stored within him, Meng Zhang immediately began performing the "Grand Evolving Fortune" technique. However, to his surprise, calculating the seemingly insignificant two Foundation Building stage cultivators proved to be quite challenging. He almost exhausted his accumulated calculation tally before arriving at the desired result.

The reason for this difficulty was that the enemies were far from ordinary Foundation Building stage cultivators; they were much more formidable. After concluding his calculations, Meng Zhang took a brief rest and left the cabin. He informed Jin Qiao'er that he had figured out the identity of the cultivators behind An Xiaoran's abduction.

Initially, Meng Zhang had planned to rescue An Xiaoran alone. Still, for extra security, he decided to bring Jin Qiao'er along. Naturally, she readily agreed to join the mission. The two of them boarded the Zhuifeng Boat, and just as it took off into the sky, Yang Xueyi arrived, riding a Red Feathered Eagle, and joined them.

Having an additional person meant more strength. After Meng Zhang called out to her, Yang Xueyi stowed away her mount and joined them on the flying ship. With the disciples at the helm following Meng Zhang's directions, the flying ship set off on its journey.

During the flight, Meng Zhang recounted the entire situation to Yang Xueyi.

Yang Xueyi was furious. How dare someone dare to kidnap a disciple of the Taiyi Sect and extort spiritual stones from Sect Master Meng Zhang? It was simply outrageous. This kind of behavior could not be allowed to continue, as it would spell disaster for the Taiyi Sect's future.

Yang Xueyi's viewpoint received approval from Meng Zhang. Of course, based on the results of his calculations, it was evident that the enemy's motives went beyond a mere desire for spiritual stones.

After flying for more than two hours, they landed near a small mountain. Meng Zhang, Yang Xueyi, and Jin Qiao'er jumped off the flying ship, while the disciple piloting the ship followed Meng Zhang's command to move it away. They quickly used the Earth Escape Spell to hide underground.

Yang Xueyi had personally witnessed Meng Zhang's remarkable calculating abilities. Though she didn't know he was a Diviner, she had complete faith in his accurate judgment.

Jin Qiao'er, who had not seen Meng Zhang's mystical abilities, was a bit puzzled. She wondered if hiding here would indeed make the enemy show up with An Xiaoran.

However, seeing that Yang Xueyi didn't waste time on unnecessary talk, Jin Qiao'er suppressed her curiosity and followed Meng Zhang's lead.

After waiting for about half an hour, two masked individuals descended to the mountaintop as planned, where they were supposed to meet their accomplice.

Meng Zhang was the first to notice the two people appearing. He quickly determined that they were both at the Foundation Building initial stage. Even without the help of Jin Qiao'er and Yang Xueyi, Meng Zhang could handle them alone. However, the main concern was not defeating them but ensuring An Xiaoran's safe rescue.

Meng Zhang secretly communicated with Jin Qiao'er and Yang Xueyi, and the three of them stealthily approached their targets from underground.

The masked individuals put An Xiaoran on the ground and sat down, waiting for their accomplice to arrive.

Before long, one of them said, "They are coming." Two Foundation Building stage cultivators were flying toward their location from the distance.

The appearance of their accomplice distracted the masked individuals slightly, creating a small opening that Meng Zhang and the others immediately seized upon.

The three of them leaped from underground and pounced on the two masked individuals.

Meng Zhang's attack was ruthless, showing no mercy. A sharp black and white sword aura shot out from his fingertips, directly slashing at one of the masked individuals.

The Twin Forms Towards Heaven Sword, a small Divine Ability, once again displayed its might in Meng Zhang's hands, achieving great success.

The sudden ambush caught the masked individuals completely off guard. The one hit by Meng Zhang's attack had no time to react. The sword aura struck his back, and a series of colorful light shields appeared around him, triggered by the protective magic tool on his body. However, these shields were as fragile as eggshells and provided little protection.

Taking advantage of the brief delay caused by the sword aura, the wounded masked individual twisted his body desperately, narrowly avoiding a direct hit but still getting his arm severed by the attack. Blood spurted, and he rolled to the side to evade Meng Zhang's pursuit.

Meng Zhang was about to press on and finish off the enemy when the other masked individual shouted loudly, "Sect Master Meng, I implore you to show mercy."

Chapter 346: Taking

When Meng Zhang launched a surprise attack on one of the masked individuals, Jin Qiao'er and Yang Xueyi acted simultaneously as well. Jin Qiao'er's palms danced in the air, forcing the other

masked person into a miserable state. Not only were their protective magic tools shattered in the process, but their mask was also cracked, revealing half of their face.

Yang Xueyi utilized the Azure Cloud Silk, gently rolling it out to bring An Xiaoran, who was lying on the ground, closer to herself.

Meng Zhang was about to strike the masked person with the severed arm when he heard a somewhat familiar voice. Despite his continued actions, he refrained from delivering the finishing blow, choosing to capture the opponent first.

A true qi-formed whip flew from his hand, firmly entangling the masked person with the severed arm.

At that moment, Meng Zhang finally had a chance to look at the other masked individual. With his excellent memory, even though half of their face was concealed, he immediately recognized them. Wasn't this Grey Mouse?

Years ago, when Meng Zhang hired cultivators from the black market for a mission, he first encountered Jue Ying, Grey Mouse, and Black Horse. Later, after becoming friends with Jue Ying, he learned from him that Grey Mouse and Black Horse had close ties to the black market and could be considered its members.

Seeing them here, involved in the kidnapping of An Xiaoran, could it be that the black market had turned against him? But Meng Zhang had no enmity with the black market; on the contrary, they had a relatively close working relationship. What reasons led the black market to treat him as an enemy?

Though puzzled, Meng Zhang remained composed without any visible expression. Not even recognizing Grey Mouse would deter him, as he joined the battle to help Jin Qiao'er capture the masked man.

When they first met, Grey Mouse was merely a Refining Qi stage cultivator. Many years had passed, and now he had made significant progress, reaching the Foundation Building stage.

Unfortunately for Grey Mouse, while he had made considerable strides, Meng Zhang's progress was even greater. With Meng Zhang's mid-Foundation Building cultivation base and the support of Jin Qiao'er, Grey Mouse, who was already struggling, found it even more challenging to resist.

In the sky, two cultivators were flying towards the scene and noticed the ongoing battle. They immediately accelerated, intending to come to their companion's aid.

Yang Xueyi shielded An Xiaoran behind her, quickly forming hand seals to cast her spells. The clouds in the sky dispersed, transforming into water arrows that rained down on the two rapidly approaching cultivators.

The two cultivators casually brushed away the water arrows, their speed hardly affected as they continued their swift approach.

Suddenly, the ground trembled, and the earth rapidly bulged upward. Several earthen dragons emerged from the ground, swirling in the air to form a circle.

The advanced spell, Chaotic Dance of Earth Dragons, was quite challenging for many mid-Foundation Building cultivators to cast, but Yang Xueyi executed it effortlessly, displaying its formidable power.

The two reinforcement cultivators were finally halted by this onslaught of earth dragons. Although they managed to disperse the dragons after a brief moment, by then, Meng Zhang's side had already concluded the fight. Teaming up with Jin Qiao'er, they successfully captured Grey Mouse before the reinforcements arrived.

With two hostages in hand, Meng Zhang felt more confident. The two cultivators who came to aid their companion had no choice but to temporarily hover in the air, no longer pressing forward.

Meng Zhang glanced at them; they made no effort to conceal their identities, wearing distinctive wolf-head and bald-eagle masks that were commonly seen on their casual days.

Meng Zhang recognized the origins of the masked individuals, and they were acquaintances. Both of them were Lone Wolf and Bald Eagle, people from the black market. "Seems like the black market has really turned against me," Meng Zhang thought.

Since the black market showed no regard for their past relationship, Meng Zhang no longer needed to consider Luo Ye and Jue Ying's feelings.

"Long time no see, the circumstances of our reunion are truly unexpected," Meng Zhang said with an icy tone. Over the years, Lone Wolf and Bald Eagle had made significant progress in their cultivation base, advancing from early Foundation Building to mid Foundation Building. Even though they were both at mid Foundation Building stage, Meng Zhang posed an exceptional threat to them.

In fact, even Yang Xueyi and Jin Qiao'er, who were both at the early Foundation Building stage, were not opponents to be taken lightly in their eyes. The spells Yang Xueyi just displayed were beyond the abilities of typical early Foundation Building cultivators.

Lone Wolf wore a wolf-head mask, while Bald Eagle had his signature mask. Due to the masks, Meng Zhang couldn't see their expressions, but he imagined they weren't happy.

Considering they had crossed paths with the black market so many times, Meng Zhang had never paid attention to their true identities. Curious, he activated his Deception Breaking Eye to take a closer look.

Being caught by Meng Zhang in this situation was awkward for both Lone Wolf and Bald Eagle. Due to their past relationship with Luo Ye, their relationship with the black market had been quite good. Furthermore, as Taiyi Sect grew in influence, Meng Zhang's importance to the black market increased as well. It would be difficult to explain how their kidnapping of Meng Zhang's direct disciple resulted in them being captured on the spot.

The masks Lone Wolf and Bald Eagle wore were obviously of high quality, blocking much of the power of Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye. He could only see two somewhat blurry faces, not much more.

At this moment, Yang Xueyi removed the restrictions on An Xiaoran's body and began carefully examining whether there were any other hidden mechanisms on him.

Grey Mouse and the other masked individual captured by Meng Zhang were thrown within reach at his feet. Meng Zhang lightly kicked them; Grey Mouse seemed unaffected, but the masked man with the severed arm couldn't help but let out a painful groan.

Lone Wolf and Bald Eagle exchanged glances, realizing they couldn't remain silent any longer.

"Sect Master Meng, this is all a misunderstanding, we had no ill intentions..."

"Enough, don't treat me like a three-year-old," Meng Zhang interrupted Lone Wolf.

"Explain everything immediately, or don't expect me to spare you any mercy."

As Meng Zhang spoke, he made a throat-slitting gesture toward Grey Mouse and the other masked individual.

In his mind, Lone Wolf cursed White Dove, the mastermind behind this plan. All this trouble for the promise of some benefits from Shangguan Longyan, just to plot against Meng Zhang. Now it had all backfired, and they were the ones caught.

Grey Mouse and his accomplices proved to be incompetent. Even though they were both Foundation Building cultivators, they were easily captured by Meng Zhang. It was an embarrassing blow to the black market's reputation.

Despite Grey Mouse's failures, Lone Wolf and Bald Eagle couldn't ignore the situation. The black market was powerful, with numerous cultivators, but they weren't at a stage where they could casually abandon mid Foundation Building cultivators.

Chapter 347: Failing to Reach an Agreement

"Sect Master Meng, I implore you to show mercy and spare lives. Please don't harm anyone easily," Lone Wolf said amiably to Meng Zhang.

"You have already taken action, yet you still want me to show mercy? Do you really think I'm so easily molded?" Meng Zhang sneered.

"Sect Master Meng, this situation wasn't my intention. I can promise that such a thing won't happen again in the future."

"Sect Master Meng, as longtime friends, you should know and understand our capabilities. I believe you don't want to make enemies of us."

Though currently at a disadvantage, Lone Wolf tried to maintain a firm tone.

"Enough talk. If you don't give me a satisfactory explanation for this matter, don't blame me for being impolite."

No matter how influential the black market was, Meng Zhang wouldn't back down at this moment.

Moreover, since the black market operated covertly, it must have its own reasons. If the black market had no reservations, it wouldn't be the black market anymore.

Regardless of the black market's power, they were not the masters of the Endless Sea of Sand. Even if things escalated and they had a full-on confrontation, Meng Zhang wouldn't necessarily fear them.

The current Taiyi Sect was no longer one to be bullied.

Meng Zhang had already made up his mind. Even if it meant risking an all-out war with the black market, he was determined to clear up today's incident.

Lone Wolf was surprised by Meng Zhang's unwavering attitude. In his memory, Meng Zhang was not such a rigid person. He forgot that Meng Zhang was no longer the Refining Qi stage cultivator he had known initially. The present Meng Zhang was a prominent figure in the entire Endless Sea of Sand.

Times had changed, and the current Taiyi Sect had been through multiple bloody battles, forging the confidence to stand up to the black market.

With their disciples being kidnapped, both Meng Zhang and the entire Taiyi Sect needed an explanation.

Lone Wolf fell silent, unsure of what to do next.

If they resorted to violence, they couldn't be sure of victory, and if the black market chose to be ruthless, their lives would be at stake.

The audacious Bald Eagle grew impatient, seeing no progress in the negotiations between Lone Wolf and Meng Zhang. He spoke provocatively, "All this talk is useless. How can we resolve this without a fight?"

Bald Eagle signaled at Meng Zhang with a taunting gesture. "Kid, I've had enough of you. Who are you trying to impress with your arrogance? Come here and let this old man assess you."

Before Meng Zhang could speak, Yang Xueyi at the side shouted, "How dare you show such disrespect to the Sect Master!"

Before Bald Eagle could react, Yang Xueyi's prepared Five Elements technique surged towards him like a tidal wave.

With Yang Xueyi taking action, Meng Zhang and Jin Qiao'er naturally followed suit. Meng Zhang confronted Lone Wolf, while Jin Qiao'er assisted Yang Xueyi in battling Bald Eagle.

After thoroughly examining them, An Xiaoran, who had been captured, had already regained freedom.

Several Foundation Building stage cultivators clashed in the sky, and the clever An Xiaoran seized the opportunity to throw the two captives to the ground.

Being powerless and captured made An Xiaoran feel a mixture of shame and anger. She activated the True Qi she had cultivated diligently for many years, and tiny sparks floated in front of her. With a gentle wave of her hand, these sparks fell onto the bodies of the two captives.

The aroma of roasting meat filled the air, even though both captives were Foundation Building stage cultivators with strong willpower and resistance. However, they couldn't help but scream in agony when their bodies were being burned alive.

An Xiaoran was quite precise in her actions. Although it seemed like she was mercilessly barbecuing her opponents, it only caused superficial injuries that wouldn't endanger their lives.

Lone Wolf, who was currently engaged in a battle with Meng Zhang in the sky, became furious when he saw An Xiaoran torturing their comrades. Unlike the reclusive Bald Eagle, Lone Wolf was more of a team player and cared for his companions. He couldn't just stand by and watch them suffer.

"You dare!" Lone Wolf shouted angrily and prepared to fly towards An Xiaoran.

"Your opponent is me," Meng Zhang also shouted.

If Lone Wolf managed to break free and attack An Xiaoran, it would be a great blow to Meng Zhang's reputation.

Holding the Golden Crow Lantern in his hand, Meng Zhang activated his Solar True Qi, and Solar True Flame burst out from the lantern, directly aiming for Lone Wolf.

Cultivators like Lone Wolf, who originated from the black market, had experienced numerous battles and hardships before they could advance to the Foundation Building stage. Even after reaching this stage, they had faced countless battles big and small.

With his rich combat experience, Lone Wolf immediately noticed the extraordinary nature of the Golden Crow Lantern and the Solar True Flame.

"Golden Crow Lantern, Solar True Flame!" Lone Wolf exclaimed. He had no time to deal with An Xiaoran as he had to handle Meng Zhang first.

Lone Wolf once again found himself in a bitter struggle with Meng Zhang. Meanwhile, An Xiaoran continued her torment of the captives, unimpeded by anyone, and showcasing her terrifying skills, turning her captives' lives into a living nightmare.

In the midst of the intense battle in the sky, another Foundation Building stage cultivator swiftly flew towards the scene. It was Shocking Thunder Spirit General. Upon receiving news of the Sect Master's disciples encountering trouble, he rushed to the location where it happened but found nothing.

Coincidentally, the Windchase Boat that Meng Zhang had sent back passed by the area at that time. From the disciple piloting the boat, Shocking Thunder Spirit General learned the location of Meng Zhang and the others and immediately headed there despite the disciple's advice to wait.

With a naturally warlike temperament, Shocking Thunder Spirit General got excited when he saw the intense battle and rushed straight into the fray. He didn't join Meng Zhang and Lone Wolf's group but targeted Bald Eagle, who was currently clashing with Yang Xueyi and Jin Qiao'er.

Electric lights flickered, and thunder roared. Shocking Thunder Spirit General's appearance was imposing and formidable.

"I've always despised bird people the most in my life."

Even the usually arrogant Bald Eagle felt a hint of fear when facing Shocking Thunder Spirit General's imposing presence. Although he was arrogant, he wasn't a fool. It was clear that the enemy had the upper hand, and they had no chance of winning. There was no point in staying any longer, and there might be another chance in the future.

Bald Eagle signaled to Lone Wolf and then leaped into the sky, escaping to the heights.

Shocking Thunder Spirit General roared, "Birdman, you won't get away!" and chased after him relentlessly.

Lone Wolf sighed inwardly, knowing it was a lost cause. He disengaged from the fight with Meng Zhang and turned to flee the battlefield.

As Shocking Thunder Spirit General pursued Bald Eagle and Meng Zhang chased after Lone Wolf, they quickly distanced themselves from the scene. Yang Xueyi and Jin Qiao'er, whose Cultivation Base was one level lower, couldn't catch up to them and could only return temporarily and wait for the outcome of Meng Zhang and Lone Wolf's pursuit.

Chapter 348: Passing on

Whether it's Lone Wolf or Bald Eagle, during their escape, they have repeatedly stopped to fight the pursuers. Lone Wolf fared better, as when facing Meng Zhang, he was at a disadvantage but didn't suffer any injuries.

On the other hand, Bald Eagle had it tough. Every time he clashed with Shocking Thunder Spirit General, due to the evident difference in strength, he had to endure some difficulties.

What's even more unfair was that, as someone who always prided himself on his speed, Bald Eagle had finally encountered a formidable opponent.

As expected, Shocking Thunder Spirit General lived up to his name, truly as shocking and swift as thunder. He chased Bald Eagle relentlessly, leaving him with almost no escape route.

Fortunately, at a crucial moment, Lone Wolf came to Bald Eagle's side. Together, they supported each other and fought while retreating, barely managing to survive.

Meng Zhang and Shocking Thunder Spirit General pursued them all the way to the vicinity of Firewell Market, but they stopped when they entered Earthfire Sect's territory.

Upon returning to their original positions and meeting Yang Xueyi and the others, Meng Zhang took the captives back to Taiyi Sect. He immediately ordered the disciples to strengthen their guard to prevent any retaliation from the black market. Simultaneously, he subjected Grey Mouse and the others to interrogation and torture.

The two were interrogated separately, and after a cruel torment, especially under Meng Zhang's threats of soul-searching if they didn't confess, they eventually yielded.

It turned out that White Dove, at Shangguan Longyan's behest, was investigating the reasons behind the conflict between Taiyi Sect and Qiaoshou Sect against Forest Spring Watch.

During the matter's course, only Meng Zhang and Aunt Jin personally negotiated with Fei Hongzi, and no one else from the sect was involved.

Even after the annihilation of Forest Spring Watch, they did not publicize the details of the events.

Despite the black market's numerous methods and extensive information network, they had spent a lot of time and effort without gaining any results.

Originally, Lone Wolf advised White Dove to quit while ahead and give up on this matter. However, instead of heeding the advice, White Dove's temper flared up.

Determined to investigate this matter thoroughly, even if it meant completely breaking ties with Taiyi Sect, White Dove devised a plan. He sent Grey Mouse and the others to kidnap Meng Zhang's disciple, An Xiaoran, using the excuse of extorting spiritual stones, and lured Meng Zhang into their ambush.

They planned to use An Xiaoran as leverage to force Meng Zhang to disclose the events of the past. If Meng Zhang insisted on keeping it a secret, they would use the combined efforts of the group to subdue him and compel him to reveal everything.

Little did White Dove know that Meng Zhang was an incredibly rare Diviner in the Cultivation World.

Of course, almost all Diviners deliberately kept their identities secret and wouldn't easily reveal their abilities.

Meng Zhang didn't follow White Dove's arrangements but directly used the Grand Evolving Fortune, calculating the route Grey Mouse and the others planned to take with An Xiaoran.

Meng Zhang employed a direct and forceful approach, turning all of White Dove's plans into a joke and even capturing two Foundation Building stage cultivators from the black market. These black market cultivators, especially esteemed members like Grey Mouse, seemed to have practiced a secret technique to conceal their thoughts, making it challenging for Meng Zhang to read their minds even with his innate Divine Ability, Mind Reading.

Even after enduring the torture, the two individuals were in poor condition, and Meng Zhang could only extract fragments of information from them. Nevertheless, he managed to finally get them to talk.

After repeated interrogations and cross-referencing their testimonies, Meng Zhang confirmed that they were not lying, and what they said was likely the truth.

Meng Zhang was genuinely surprised. Shangguan Longyan, the Sect Master of Earthfire Sect, was unexpectedly so sensitive and wanted to obtain this information from his own sect. The annihilation of Forest Spring Watch had happened years ago and was already a thing of the past. Why was Shangguan Longyan so keen on pursuing the details of the sect's destruction?

Suddenly, Meng Zhang thought of Guang ZhiDaoist Master, Forest Spring Watch's main backer, who had been coincidentally transferred by Fei TianDaoist Master before the incident. Additionally, Daoist Master Roaring Blaze of Earthfire Sect had accompanied them. Was it possible that Shangguan Longyan suspected something had happened to Daoist Master Roaring Blaze?

However, Fei TianDaoist Master had sworn a ghost oath to ensure Guang ZhiDaoist Master and Daoist Master Roaring Blaze's safety. While cultivators believed in the effectiveness of ghost oaths, it didn't mean they were foolproof.

As a transmigrator, Meng Zhang's thoughts were more versatile than the natives. He believed that ghost oaths must have some loopholes, but his level of understanding and insight was not enough to ascertain them.

The idea that Guang ZhiDaoist Master and Daoist Master Roaring Blaze might have met with trouble while Flying Swan Sect continued to act as if they were trapped in Demon Wind Gobi and organizing a rescue operation left Meng Zhang feeling disheartened. He sensed that Flying Swan

Sect had its own hidden agenda, deliberately keeping Guang Zhi Daoist Master and Daoist Master Roaring Blaze's fate concealed.

Meng Zhang decided to pretend ignorance about this matter to avoid disrupting Flying Swan Sect's plans. This time, the black market's plot against him might have fooled others, but it definitely wouldn't go unnoticed by Flying Swan Sect.

To be honest, Grey Mouse and the other two were like a hot potato for Meng Zhang. He couldn't kill them, yet he couldn't release them either. Killing them would provoke a blood feud with the black market, an adversary not easily dealt with. Moreover, Luo Ye and Jue Ying were closely tied to the black market, and he didn't want them caught in the middle.

However, if he let them go, Meng Zhang wouldn't be able to justify his actions to himself, let alone to his disciples. Releasing individuals who had kidnapped his own disciple so easily would tarnish the reputation of Taiyi Sect and his own position as the Sect Master.

Knowing that Shangguan Longyan's investigation involved Flying Swan Sect, Meng Zhang certainly wouldn't be foolish enough to handle this matter himself. He first informed Aunt Jin of the situation, asking her to be cautious about the black market. Then, he personally went to Flying Swan Sect to request an audience with Sect Master Fei Hongzi.

After their last plan, Fei Hongzi had left a channel through which Meng Zhang could directly meet him, and it didn't take much effort for Meng Zhang to see him.

Aside from his speculations, Meng Zhang laid out all the details of the situation to Fei Hongzi in a straightforward manner. Fei Hongzi listened without interrupting much, only asking a few crucial questions.

After hearing Meng Zhang's account, Fei Hongzi fell into silence for a while before finally saying, "You did well by promptly informing me of this matter."

Chapter 349: Compensation

Next, Fei Hongzi told Meng Zhang not to worry about this matter as he would handle everything and ensure a satisfactory response for Meng Zhang. Relieved, Meng Zhang returned to Taiyi Sect.

About half a month later, the envoy from the black market, Lone Wolf, arrived at Taiyi Sect accompanied by an envoy from the Flying Swan Sect to seek an audience with Meng Zhang. With a Flying Swan Sect envoy present, the meeting was relatively peaceful.

Lone Wolf immediately apologized to Meng Zhang, acknowledging that the black market had made a big mistake due to the recklessness of the person in charge. He admitted that what they did to Meng Zhang, their old friend from the black market, was completely wrong. The person directly responsible, White Dove, had been relieved of their position and sent elsewhere.

Lone Wolf hoped that Meng Zhang could return the grey mouse and his companion to them, and in return, the black market would compensate Taiyi Sect. Lone Wolf handed Meng Zhang a list of various treasures collected by the black market, including elixirs, spiritual objects, magic tools, and talismans. From the list, Meng Zhang could choose three items as compensation from the black market.

Furthermore, both Meng Zhang and all the elders of Taiyi Sect would enjoy special VIP treatment in the black market in the future.

Meng Zhang did not negotiate with Lone Wolf, as these conditions were already agreed upon between the black market and the Flying Swan Sect, and he could not change them. Meng Zhang was impressed by the black market's ability to make the Flying Swan Sect yield. Since an agreement had been reached between the black market and the Flying Swan Sect, it would be meaningless for Taiyi Sect to persist further.

Given the situation, Meng Zhang naturally wanted to gain as much benefit as possible. He accepted the list without rushing to make his selections. Instead, he allowed grey mouse and his companion, who had been imprisoned by Taiyi Sect, to be returned to Lone Wolf. With a Flying Swan Sect envoy vouching for him, Meng Zhang was not afraid that Lone Wolf would break his word.

When the badly injured grey mouse and his companion were brought before Lone Wolf, his face revealed an uncontrollable anger. After a careful examination confirmed that their injuries were not life-threatening, his expression improved slightly.

After reaching an agreement, Lone Wolf left Taiyi Sect with the Flying Swan Sect envoy. Almost simultaneously, the Sect Master of Earthfire Sect, Shangguan Longyan, was assassinated by a mysterious person and died on the spot at Firewell Market.

Shangguan Longyan's death sent shockwaves through both Earthfire Sect and Firewell Market. The hotheaded elders of Earthfire Sect nearly turned Firewell Market upside down in their quest to find the culprit, causing chaos.

Both the Shang Family, who suffered losses, and the offended customers were discontented with Earthfire Sect's actions. Unfortunately, Earthfire Sect, which had just lost its Sect Master, acted like a raging bull, recklessly suppressing any dissenting voices.

During this time, no one dared to provoke the crazed disciples of Earthfire Sect. Even Land Walk Sect, which had always been at odds with Earthfire Sect, decided to keep silent.

The chaos in Firewell Market and its surrounding areas lasted for a considerable period. Finally, when enraged Earthfire Sect disciples lost their rationality and clashed with Flying Swan Building, the Flying Swan Sect sent envoys to sternly reprimand Earthfire Sect, subduing them.

While the members of Earthfire Sect were known for their fiery temperaments, they weren't true lunatics. Even if they were, they wouldn't dare to confront Flying Swan Sect directly.

After Flying Swan Sect intervened, Firewell Market and the surrounding areas gradually returned to calm. With the death of Shangguan Longyan, at least on the surface, Earthfire Sect stopped paying attention to the dealings between Taiyi Sect, Qiaoshou Sect, and Flying Swan Sect. The identity of Shangguan Longyan's assassin was revealed - it turned out to be the infamous rogue cultivator known as "Mad Dog Wanderer" from the Endless Sea of Sand.

Mad Dog Wanderer had been wreaking havoc in the Endless Sea of Sand for over a hundred years, committing numerous heinous acts and causing countless blood debts. He killed both cultivators and mortals without a second thought, and even exterminated several cultivation forces. His vengeful nature meant that anyone who offended him would face his insane retaliation, even the affiliated families of Flying Swan Sect.

Flying Swan Sect had previously sent cultivators to hunt him down, but he turned the tables and killed those sent to pursue him before vanishing without a trace, eluding their sight completely. Despite being cursed by his enemies, Mad Dog Wanderer embraced the title and called himself by that name. Among the most ruthless and cunning wanted criminals in the Endless Sea of Sand, Mad Dog Wanderer stood out. Flying Swan Sect had offered a high reward for his capture for years, but he remained elusive due to his profound cultivation base and mysterious movements.

It was said that many years ago, Shangguan Longyan and Mad Dog Wanderer had clashed over a spiritual medicine, resulting in deep enmity between them. Unexpectedly, Mad Dog Wanderer harbored such a grudge, and after many years, he sought revenge and assassinated Shangguan Longyan in secret.

Upon learning the identity of the culprit behind their Sect Master's assassination, the elders of Earthfire Sect went into a frenzy to capture him. At Taiyi Sect, after discussing with some of the elders, Meng Zhang chose three treasures as compensation.

The first was a specially crafted Second Rank flying shuttle called the Wind Driving Shuttle. Though smaller in size compared to regular Second Rank flying shuttles, its greatest advantage was its incredible speed. When traveling at full speed, even many cultivators in the late stage of Foundation Building would find it difficult to catch up.

The second item was three spirit beast pills refined by Beast King Mountain. When consumed by a cultivator's spirit beast, these pills would significantly enhance their strength, unlocking their innate potential.

The third item was three Soul-nurturing pills, which were miraculous elixirs for nurturing the soul. Though not as potent as Jade Soul Fluid, they could still repair injuries to the soul.

These three treasures were extremely rare and hard to come by in the Endless Sea of Sand, and even in the Jiuqu League, they would be difficult to purchase with spiritual stones.

Meng Zhang had initially thought that the black market had a vast collection of Divine Abilities, and the list might include Foundation Building Pills or the medicinal herbs required to produce them. However, anything related to Foundation Building Pills was kept secret by the black market and not listed on the inventory.

Upon receiving Meng Zhang's message, the black market quickly sent the three items. Meng Zhang stored the Wind Driving Shuttle carefully, as it was a life-saving tool for cultivators. He distributed one spirit beast pill each to his spirit pets, Zhui Dian (Chasing Lightning) and Liu Li (Colored Glaze), and placed the remaining pill in the sect's treasure storage.

As for the three Soul-nurturing pills, Shocking Thunder Spirit General placed them in the Taiyi Sect's main spiritual vein at the old mountain gate, allowing the slumbering Guardian Spirit General to absorb their essence.

Chapter 350: 11 Losses

A fist-sized little bird, swift as lightning, swooped down from the sky and landed right in front of Meng Zhang. A green-colored cat, resembling Liu Li (Colored Glaze) sculpture, dashed out from

the side and pounced on the bird. The bird was incredibly fast, effortlessly evading the cat's attack, but instead of flying away, it deliberately taunted the cat.

The cat, having experienced many such playful encounters before, got angry and meowed relentlessly, relentlessly chasing the bird. Usually, seeing two spirit pets chasing and playing would lighten Meng Zhang's mood even if he was feeling down. However, today, he remained emotionally low and unable to recover.

Just a few days ago, Hall Master Tian Li, who had been in seclusion for the Foundation Building period, and Hall Master Hu Jing from the Beast Controlling Hall, both came out of seclusion. They each obtained a Foundation Building Pill and attempted to break through to the Foundation Building period, but the results were one success and one failure.

Despite Hu Jing being younger and having a lower Cultivation Base than Tian Li on ordinary days, she succeeded in reaching the Foundation Building period, while Tian Li failed.

Hu Jing's success was undoubtedly a cause for celebration. She had good relationships with many people in the sect, and they came to congratulate her. Meng Zhang was even considering promoting Hu Jing to an elder in a few days, given her significant contributions to the sect and her successful Foundation Building.

On the other hand, Tian Li's Foundation Building failure was a surprise to everyone. In their minds, Tian Li, being the most outstanding tool refiner in the sect, was always mature and methodical in his actions. They expected him to have a high chance of success during his seclusion with the assistance of the Foundation Building Pill. However, unexpectedly, he still failed.

This failure had a profound impact on Tian Li. His whole demeanor changed drastically, as if he had transformed into an old man in his seventies. He appeared dispirited, lacking vitality.

After coming out of seclusion, Tian Li voluntarily resigned from the position of Hall Master. Though Meng Zhang approved of his decision, he still had a lengthy conversation with Tian Li. Considering Tian Li's age, there might still be an opportunity for him to attempt Foundation Building again. Even though the sect no longer had Foundation Building Pills, Taiyi Sect could still obtain some spiritual items that could aid Foundation Building with some cost.

Meng Zhang's comfort and encouragement didn't seem to make a significant impact on Tian Li. He verbally agreed, but whether he truly internalized the words remained uncertain.

There was nothing more Meng Zhang could do about this situation. If Tian Li couldn't overcome the mental hurdle, no one could help him. Even if he were given another chance and another Foundation Building Pill, with his current mindset, failure would still be inevitable.

Taiyi Sect was now vast, and Meng Zhang had many things to worry about. He couldn't dedicate all his time and energy solely to Tian Li.

After Tian Li stepped down as Hall Master, Meng Zhang conducted a thorough assessment and selected a disciple named Li Dianqi as the new Hall Master of the Refiner Hall. Li Dianqi also had low-high spiritual roots and possessed the attributes of both gold and fire. He practiced a more challenging technique called the "Crimson Flame Purple Gold Technique," not the "Golden Fusion Art."

"The Crimson Flame Purple Gold Technique" was not originally a tradition of Taiyi Sect; rather, it was an inheritance manual that Meng Zhang obtained from a cultivator of the Purple Gold Sect's cave.

In all aspects, "The Crimson Flame Purple Gold Technique" surpassed the "Golden Fusion Art." Of course, it also came with greater difficulty in cultivation. Despite Li Dianqi's mediocre spiritual root aptitude, he had excellent comprehension. After practicing "The Crimson Flame Purple Gold Technique," his Cultivation Base progressed significantly. At just over 30 years old, he already possessed a Cultivation Base at the Refining Qi stage and was already a First Rank tool refiner, second only to Tian Li in the sect's refining skills.

In fact, the Refiner Hall of Taiyi Sect had developed remarkably well. They could now craft most First Rank magic tools, which could satisfy the needs of the disciples. With Hu Jing's successful Foundation Building, she became the sixth cultivator in the Foundation Building stage of Taiyi Sect, greatly enhancing the sect's power.

Since Hu Jing's Foundation Building was a success, Meng Zhang decided not to handle it discreetly. After Hu Jing fully stabilized her Cultivation Base, Meng Zhang held a grand Foundation Building dharma meeting for her. He sent out invitations and hosted a banquet for the guests.

The Foundation Building dharma meeting held at Taiyi Sect's mountain gate was large-scale, and almost all Taiyi Sect disciples who could make it back attended. Not only did allied sects like Qiaoshou Sect and affiliated sects like Shi Family send representatives to join, but even Land Walk Sect, which had little prior interaction with Taiyi Sect, sent one of their Foundation Building elders to offer congratulations.

Many merchants from Singing Sand City who conducted business also came bearing generous gifts to offer their congratulations. Even some renowned loose cultivators were invited to the event.

As the governing body of Singing Sand City, Taiyi Sect hosted three days of continuous feasts in the market to entertain various cultivators who couldn't attend the Foundation Building dharma meeting at Taiyi Sect. Even the lowest-ranked cultivators among the loose cultivators could indulge themselves at these feasts.

Taiyi Sect had spared no expense for this event. At the very least, they provided an abundant supply of spirit grains. Additionally, there were spiritual delicacies made from the blood and meat of some demonic beasts, along with a portion of spirit wine.

As for the arrangements at Taiyi Sect's mountain gate, it was naturally on an even grander scale. Over the years, the sect's kitchen had developed a strong ability to produce all kinds of spiritual food and brew spirit wines.

Taiyi Sect had a vast territory with many spirit veins, and they had opened numerous spirit fields. The best spirit fields were transformed into specialized medicinal gardens for growing various spiritual herbs. Though these gardens were still relatively young and the spiritual herbs inside were not yet fully mature, they would gradually grow in quantity and quality over time, becoming one of the sect's significant assets.

A large portion of the spirit fields was used to grow spirit grains. Taiyi Sect not only achieved self-sufficiency in spirit grains but also had a surplus to sell externally. However, as the sect became

stronger, they reduced the external sales of spirit grains and instead used secret techniques to brew various types of spirit wine.

The least productive spirit fields were used to grow special forage for feeding some of the domesticated edible demonic beasts. In fact, Taiyi Sect's Beast Controlling Hall was quite powerful. Not only did they raise rideable demonic beasts like the Crimson Feathered Eagle, but they also cultivated some combat-capable demonic beasts for the disciples to keep as spirit pets. In recent years, with the sect's improving conditions, the Beast Controlling Hall collaborated with the Agricultural Hall and achieved remarkable results in the low-level demonic beast husbandry industry.