

## The Quest 219

### Chapter 219: New Year's Gifts

A few days before the New Year, Mo Hua visited Mr. Zhuang early in the morning, bringing some New Year's gifts, all personally prepared by Liu Ruhua.

Mr. Zhuang didn't need spiritual stones or tools.

After thinking for a long time, Liu Ruhua didn't know what to give, so she could only follow the usual practice and make more delicious food to show her sincerity.

Liu Ruhua started preparing ten days in advance, busy until now to finish everything.

There were different parts and flavors of meat from various demonic beasts like cattle, sheep, pigs, and dogs, colorful cakes made from different grains, and wines brewed from osmanthus, peach blossoms, and wild fruits from the mountains.

Even Mr. Zhuang, who was used to eating such delicacies, couldn't help but be a little surprised.

"So much, how can I finish all this?"

Then he started tasting each one with great interest, occasionally frowning and asking, "What kind of meat is this? I've never tasted it before..." Sometimes he would nod and praise, "This tastes good."

Mo Hua sat beside him, chatting with Mr. Zhuang.

He told Mr. Zhuang which demonic beasts the meat came from, what spices were used, how long it was cooked on high or low heat.

Or he asked small questions about arrays, occasionally chatting about interesting things in the city.

Many of these stories were told to him by An Xiaofu.

An Xiaofu was now the little manager at Fushan Pavilion, dealing with customers every day, chatting and gossiping with people, listening to a bellyful of stories, which he would then embellish and tell to Mo Hua when he had time.

Mo Hua found them interesting and told them to Mr. Zhuang, who listened with great interest while drinking and eating.

After talking for a long time, Mo Hua saw that the bamboo room was serene and quiet but inevitably lonely, so he asked, "Sir, will you go out to see the New Year festivities? It's very lively outside."

Mr. Zhuang seemed to stay in Sit and Forget Abode all the time, either resting in the bamboo room, watching the water from the bridge, or sitting in the courtyard, looking at the mountains, the breeze, the morning sun, and the evening glow.

Mo Hua had never seen Mr. Zhuang go out.

Mr. Zhuang smiled, "It's quiet here, I don't like noise."

"Oh." Mo Hua nodded, "Then am I disturbing you by talking to you?"

Mr. Zhuang shook his head, "It's too quiet, it can be boring. Talking with you is quite nice."

Mo Hua felt relieved.

A breeze swept through the room, the bamboo forest outside rustled, and flowers and grasses swayed.

Mo Hua and Mr. Zhuang chatted for a long time, their clear and deep voices mingling, drifting into the mountains with the wind.

Until he noticed that Mr. Zhuang looked a bit tired, perhaps from eating too much and feeling sleepy, Mo Hua stood up and said goodbye:

"I won't disturb your rest. My mother made some New Year cakes, sweet, soft, and sticky. I'll bring you some in a few days."

Mr. Zhuang smiled, "Go ahead."

Mo Hua said goodbye to Mr. Zhuang and then found Elder Gui to give him some New Year's gifts as well.

Mo Hua knew Elder Gui's preferences.

Although Elder Gui looked old, he didn't like soft and sticky foods; he preferred crispy things and those that made a sound when eaten.

So Mo Hua brought crispy snacks and a few boxes of pine nuts in original, five-spice, and spicy flavors.

Elder Gui put everything into his sleeve and took out a chessboard, looking at Mo Hua.

Seeing it was still early, Mo Hua nodded, "Let's play!"

The breeze stirred, leaves fell, and the sound of chess pieces hitting the board echoed in the courtyard.

The two poor chess players spent half a day playing Five Elements Chess.

In the evening, Da Hu and the others invited Mo Hua to watch a demonic beast play.

They were the performers, along with Da Ping and Da Zhu from the Artifact Crafting Shop.

The swords and rattan armors used in the play were readily available, and the props for disguising as demonic beasts were borrowed. Da Hu and the others joined for fun and to earn some tips.

Originally, Da Hu and Da Ping were playing the demon hunters because they were demon hunters.

The demonic beasts were played by Da Zhu and a few disciples from the Artifact Crafting Shop, but the Da Hu brothers felt Da Zhu and the others acted too stiffly, like fools, so they played the demonic beasts themselves.

The demonic beasts in Dahei Mountain were very ferocious; acting stiffly wouldn't do.

So in the end, the three Da Hu brothers played the demonic beasts, and Da Zhu, the artifact refiner, played the demon hunter.

Their performance was quite decent.

Mo Hua stood by, applauding and tipping them.

The onlookers also joined the fun, taking out some fragments of spirit stones as encouragement.

After the performance, Da Hu and the others took Mo Hua to find some good food and fun places, strolling and playing.

Da Hu was already at the seventh level of Qi refining, considered late-stage in Qi refining.

Mo Hua humbly asked, "What should I pay attention to when breaking through to the late stage of Qi refining?"

He was now at the sixth level of Qi refining. The next step would be the seventh level, the late stage of Qi refining.

Although his cultivation method was different from Da Hu's, he could still listen to his advice for reference.

Da Hu scratched his head, "Just cultivate normally, then you'll need some spiritual items. I used setting sun grass and molten fire stones, along with some pills, to break through."

"Is it that simple?"

"Not every breakthrough is successful. I was lucky. Otherwise, I would have had to try several times." Da Hu said.

Twin Hu added, "I failed once. Otherwise, I'd be in the late stage of Qi refining too."

"What do you do if you fail?"

"Continue cultivating, save up spirit stones, buy spiritual items and pills, and try breaking through again."

Twin Hu said nonchalantly, "As long as a cultivator is alive, they keep doing this, unless you accept your fate, or you're too poor to afford spirit stones, or you have a family and heavy burdens."

Mo Hua nodded, "It sounds simple, but it's not easy to persist for a lifetime."

Little Hu said worriedly, "The main problem is that some spiritual items are too expensive. It's hard for independent cultivators to buy them, and some are not available. Breaking through once consumes everything. If you fail, you have to buy another set."

Da Ping and Da Zhu nodded in agreement, "Exactly! How can independent cultivators have so many spirit stones and connections to buy those spiritual items?"

Everyone started to worry.

Mo Hua also worried but suddenly remembered that his cultivation method, the Heavenly Proliferation Technique, didn't require many spiritual items or spirit stones, so he secretly sighed with relief.

The bottleneck of the Heavenly Proliferation Technique lay in the sea of consciousness and arrays, not in spiritual items.

He chose this method precisely because of this point.

Mo Hua secretly congratulated himself on his foresight.

But then he thought, although the Heavenly Proliferation Technique's breakthrough didn't require spiritual items, it did require solving riddle arrays.

Riddle arrays were profound and complex, obscure and ever-changing, not easy to solve.

The Dao has its balance; it wouldn't let you take shortcuts.

He wondered what kind of riddle array awaited in his sea of consciousness this time...

Mo Hua silently calculated:

"I'm already at the sixth level of Qi refining. It shouldn't be long before I reach the peak of the sixth level. Then I can try breaking through and see what kind of riddle array awaits."