

The Quest 29

Chapter 29: The Stove

The innkeeper went upstairs and soon returned, politely inviting Mo Hua to come up.

Mo Hua saw Young Master An, who was enjoying drinks with several lavishly dressed young men. The table was adorned with various colorful, juicy spiritual fruits, with maids fanning the air, creating a gentle breeze scented with fragrance, and singers performing songs that echoed around the beams.

The room was cool and comfortable, a stark contrast to the summer heat. Screens in the room were carved with ice-element array patterns used for cooling and ventilation.

Mo Hua, who had been enduring the harsh summer heat to run his street stall for a living, felt a pang of emotion.

Here were all Qi-cultivation stage cultivators, living in the same city of Tongxian, yet it seemed like they were living in two different worlds.

"Mo Hua, it really is you!" exclaimed Young Master An happily, gesturing, "Come, join us for a drink."

Young Master An's face was flushed from drinking, but he was young and was probably drinking fruit wine, which wouldn't harm his health too much.

Mo Hua, however, was not in the mood for drinking and directly said, "Young Master An, I need your help with something."

"Oh," Young Master An sobered up a bit and waved the other young men away, "You guys go on, I have something to deal with."

Then, the innkeeper led Mo Hua and Young Master An to a quiet private room where Mo Hua got straight to the point, "Young Master An, I need a favor from you."

Young Master An, still a bit tipsy, slapped his chest and said, "As long as I can help, just say it!"

Mo Hua looked around the opulent private room and asked, "This Spirit Meal Tower, it's owned by your family, right?"

Proudly, Young Master An responded, "Yes!"

"Do your cooks use a traditional stove, or do cultivators power it with their spiritual energy?"

Confused, Young Master An thought for a moment, clueless, then shouted, "Innkeeper!"

Soon, the innkeeper entered and Young Master An pointed to him, telling Mo Hua, "Ask him."

Mo Hua repeated his earlier question to the innkeeper.

The innkeeper answered, "Originally, we did use cultivators' spiritual energy, but that method could damage the cultivators' lungs and heart, and it was also unstable. So, the owner decided against it and last year had an artifact smith specially forge a stove. An array master also crafted some array patterns, and since then, we have been using this stove."

Curious, Mo Hua asked, "Is the cost of a stove higher than hiring a cultivator?"

The innkeeper honestly replied, "In the long term, the stove is better. Hiring a cultivator might be more economical in the short term, and you can negotiate down the price. Sometimes, when times are tough, half a spirit stone can hire a Qi-cultivation stage independent cultivator."

Mo Hua felt somewhat bitter.

Even as a cultivator, one couldn't escape being exploited.

"Can I see the stove?" Mo Hua inquired.

The innkeeper hesitated, looking at Young Master An, unable to decide on his own since the kitchen was normally off-limits to outsiders.

Young Master An, now more sober, asked, "Is it not possible to show others?"

The innkeeper explained, "The recipes are secret, but the stove isn't. Many Spirit Meal Towers have them, and those who don't simply don't want to spend the spirit stones to make one. It's not a secret."

"Then let's have a look. I haven't even seen that stove myself," Young Master An said.

"Alright, I'll take you two gentlemen there," the innkeeper, relieved that Young Master An was coming along, which meant any trouble wouldn't be solely his responsibility.

He led Mo Hua and Young Master An to the kitchen, pointing to a huge stove about the height of two men, "This is the stove. When spirit stones are placed inside, the array patterns inside the stove convert them into fire energy, which then spreads to every cooking station, allowing the cultivators to cook their ingredients."

"The stove is connected to each cooking station by array patterns, and each station also has a specific array pattern etched into it to control the intensity of the fire..."

Mo Hua was fascinated, having never seen artifact crafting and array patterns used in such a way.

Young Master An was also captivated, his usual focus on eating never extending to how the food was actually made.

As the innkeeper proudly explained the workings of the stove, Mo Hua examined it thoroughly, peering into every nook and cranny, even the gaps between the stove sections.

Seeing Mo Hua's intense interest, as if he wanted to dismantle the stove to see inside,

the innkeeper couldn't help asking, "Is there something specific you'd like to know, Young Master Mo?"

Mo Hua inquired, "Innkeeper, do you know which array patterns are engraved inside the stove?"

The innkeeper hesitated but then thought better of it, realizing that just knowing the array patterns wouldn't help much without the skill to draw them.

"The internal array pattern of this stove isn't complex; it's just a Magma Array with five array lines. However, the placement of the Magma Array is critical; it must be drawn at the bottom of the stove to ensure even heat distribution. There's also an opening on the outside for placing spirit stones, which allows the spiritual energy of the stones to seep into the Magma Array, activating the array's fire power..." the innkeeper explained everything in detail.

"Oh, oh," Mo Hua nodded repeatedly.

After a long discussion and having his questions thoroughly answered, Mo Hua sincerely thanked the innkeeper and then prepared to leave.

Young Master An held onto Mo Hua, "Don't rush off; let me treat you to some good food."

Mo Hua had other matters to attend to and declined.

"Are you not giving me face?" Young Master An was a bit upset.

Mo Hua complimented Young Master An, praising his generosity, and then quietly told him, "Next time your tutor assigns array formation homework, I'll help you draw it for free."

Overjoyed, Young Master An eagerly nodded, "Mmm."

He didn't care about spirit stones; he cared about face. Having Mo Hua offer to draw arrays for him for free was a boost to his pride.

The innkeeper watched Mo Hua's departing figure and asked Young Master An, "Young Master, what is Mo Hua's status?"

"He's a fellow sect brother of mine, and he's excellent at drawing arrays, even better than me. To be honest, he's helped me with all my array homework!"

Young Master An was even a bit smug.

The innkeeper, expressionless, thought to himself, "There's really nothing to be proud of in that..."

"You can go back to your duties; I'm off to drink," Young Master An said, turning to leave but suddenly stopped in shock, gripping the innkeeper's sleeve, his eyes wide.

The innkeeper was a bit nervous, "Young, Young Master..."

Young Master An lowered his voice, "This matter, you must never let my father know!"

"This matter?"

"That someone else does my homework for me. You must never let my father know!"

The innkeeper's mouth twitched, "Alright, alright..."

Relieved, Young Master An patted his chest, "That was close; good thing I'm clever, or I would have been exposed." He then made the innkeeper swear not to tell his father, and only then did he feel assured and went upstairs.

The innkeeper, feeling helpless, thought, "Can the An Family's fortunes really be maintained by this unreliable young master..."

His thoughts then drifted back to Mo Hua.

It seemed he wasn't some wealthy noble's child, just a regular cultivator's kid. Why was he so interested in the stove?

The innkeeper took a few steps, then recalled Young Master An's words and suddenly stopped, "Good at drawing arrays? He wouldn't be planning to replicate the stove's array, would he?"

"Young Master An is at the third level of Qi cultivation, and that Mo kid is his fellow sect brother, which means he's also at most at the third level of Qi cultivation. How could someone at that level have the spiritual sense needed to draw arrays?"

Shaking his head, the innkeeper decided to find a place to have some tea.

