

Walker 171

Chapter 171 - The Journey Back

Even while cultivating Lin Mu could only focus on it because he was chanting the severing heart sutra, which was suppressing his thoughts and emotions. Perhaps without it, he would have never had the will to cultivate and would have only kept on thinking about senior Xukong's words.

The morning soon came and the team of twenty people began their journey back to the camp. Their journey this time was rather uneventful, and the only difference that they observed was that the number of beasts in the area had increased again.

'Hmm, seems like the effect of the great slumber beast's roar has finally worn off. At least we won't have to unnecessarily fight the beasts when we get closer to camp.' Lin Mu thought to himself during the journey.

Ten hours later they had reached the camp and were greeted by the rest of their companions. Looking at them, Lin Mu could tell that everything was normal while they were gone and nothing untoward had happened. It was evening now and all of them decided that they would be returning to the Northern town tomorrow morning.

The people who had stayed back at the camp wanted to know what they had found out at the culprits' cave, but Hei Bao had suggested that they wait till reaching the town before informing the rest. He didn't want them to lose their morale or worse, become agitated.

They could not afford to make any mistakes now, and the situation had become even more serious. While the members of the Hei Corps were fine with this decision and were willing to obey the orders, it was not the same for the mercenaries.

It took the combined effort of Teng Xiaolian and his team in order to placate the mercenaries. Even Teng Xiaolian was in agreement with Hei Bao and knew that it could be devastating for the mercenaries to hear that their comrades were being sacrificed for their blood.

During the night, Lin Mu and Hei Bao went to check up on Hei Yingjie's condition but did not find much difference. He was still unconscious and when Lin Mu observed him using his spirit sense, he could see that his internal injuries were the same as well.

"It's as if his recovery has halted." Lin Mu spoke.

"It does seem like that, but we can't be sure. Once we get to the town, I'll get a physician to take a look at him. The lord should send a good physician from the Wu Lim city at the first message." Hei Bao replied.

"Yes, that would be good." Lin Mu spoke in a straight tone and stayed silent.

His expression was rather cold as well, and Hei Bao was feeling strange upon looking at Lin Mu like this. But he did not question him as he did not want to bother him and he too had a lot of things that needed to be dealt with for now.

Hei Bao walked out of the tent and came to stand in front of his subordinates.

"We shall leave tomorrow morning, some of you shall carry Hei Yingjie and stay in the center of the party. The rest should guard and keep an eye out for any dangers. We don't want any more misfortunes." Hei Bao ordered.

"Yes, captain." The members of Hei Corps replied in unison.

Hei Bao then went and informed Teng Xiaolian about their departure tomorrow as well. Lin Mu too walked out of the tent and looked at the people that were sitting around the bonfires.

~Sigh~

"What is right... What is wrong... I hope time will show me..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu returned to the tent and decided to sleep for now. He did not enter Sleepscape either and just went into a deep sleep. He felt like he had heard too many things to deal with and simply wanted to get a rest for the journey tomorrow.

It would after all take them three more days to reach the northern town if they were lucky, as this time many of the people were injured and could not continue on at the same pace as before. The biggest thing of all, they had to take care of Hei Yingjie who was still injured.

At the first light of dawn, the entire camp was awake and ready to go. The tents had been rolled up and stored away for the journey. Hei Yingjie was being carried in a makeshift stretcher that was made by attaching some branches and bedrolls.

Lin Mu too had woken up early and was similarly ready, although he was still feeling a little tired mentally.

The entourage of eighty people began their journey and continued on for three days. During their journey, they encountered beasts multiple times but were easily able to deal with them. Lin Mu didn't leave this chance behind as well and fought too.

He wanted to take every chance there was at getting some training in. Not only that, but he was also practicing the Thousand armament blade scripture and was using the two slim swords that he had got from Hei Wan. Lin Mu could observe that he was improving at a much greater speed by directly fighting beasts than he did while in the Sleepscape.

Another thing that Lin Mu did was to store the corpse of every beast that they encountered. Teng Xiaolian and Hei Bao had an agreement that they would be selling the beast corpses to the mayor in order to compensate the mercenaries.

It would have been an impossibility for them to carry the corpses by themselves, thus Hei Bao had asked Lin Mu for assistance. Lin Mu was fine with it, on the condition that they would give him some of the meat from the beasts.

They did not deny him that and were rather just happy that they were gonna get some compensation at least. Back at the camp as well, Lin Mu had stored the remainder of the steel back wolf corpses in his ring. They had already eaten nearly half of the meat anyway, and the rest was for Lin Mu to take.

Hei Yingjie's condition did not improve during the journey either.

Three days passed by and on the afternoon of the fourth day they had finally reached the Northern town.

"Finally..." Lin Mu muttered in an exhausted tone.

Chapter 172 - More Trouble

The large group quickly separated after reaching the town, with the mercenaries going to their camp at the western entrance and the members of the Hei Corps going to two places. A majority of them went to the Town center while a small number of them went to the safe house instead.

Lin Mu first dropped off the beast corpses in a warehouse for the mercenaries. Hei Bao had shown them this warehouse and had told the mercenaries to use it for the time being.

"We will prepare the corpses and give you your share brother Lin Mu." Hong Luo spoke in a grateful tone.

"It's fine. But what are you going to do with the corpses now? Are you going to take them to Wu Lim city?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, we will be seeding a caravan that will be transporting the beast corpses to the northern town. This is a rather large amount so we should be fine for a while." Hong Luo answered and took a pause.

"Besides, we need to contact our companions in the other parts as well. If what we learned about the culprits is true, then we need to know what's happening to the other mercenaries as well. We had already sent a messenger to the headquarters, but Leader Teng has decided to head there personally." Hong Luo continued.

"How long would it take for him to reach the headquarters? It's in Xiangwei city, right?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, the headquarters of most of the mercenary companies are in that city. Leader Teng is going to rush there, so he should be there in about four days at the very least. He's also going to inform the other companies as well and gather some information from them as well." Hong Luo answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu muttered while nodding.

He then turned around and left the warehouse. His next destination was the town center. He was told to come there after dropping off the beast corpses and meet up with Hei Wan. Fifteen minutes later, he reached there and stood in front of the large building.

Lin Mu could see the rest of the guards standing around along with the reinforcements of the Hei corps. He took a look around before walking in through the entrance of the town center. This time he was not stopped by the guards as they recognized him and had already been informed of his status.

Lin Mu went up directly to the third floor, where the town head's office was. He opened the door and found Hei Bao sitting there along with Hei Wan. Hei Wen was reading a letter and had a pile of scrolls kept to the side on the desk.

Even though her face was covered with the Veil, Lin Mu could still sense the fatigue that she had. He could tell that she had been working hard for a while and was possibly quite tired. He came to the desk and pulled the chair to take a seat.

Lin Mu did not interrupt her and simply waited along with Hei Bao, who soon poured him a cup of tea from the teapot that was kept on a warmer at the side. Lin Mu took a sip from the cup and closed his eyes to wait.

Five minutes passed by and Hei Wan finally put down the letter she was reading from.

"Seems like our troubles are only getting worse. First Hei Yingjie and now this." Hei Wan spoke in a frustrated tone.

~Sigh~

"What's the new problem now?" Hei Bao asked, while Lin Mu listened intently as well.

"Some of the disciples of the Tri cauldron peony sect have arrived in the region. They have been stirring up trouble as well." Hei Wan answered.

Hei Bao narrowed his eyes upon hearing Hei Wan's words and thought to himself for a bit.

"Why are they here and what kind of trouble are they causing?" Hei Bao questioned.

"We don't know the exact reason for their arrival, but they are apparently going to be staying in Wu Lim City for a while. My best guess is that they have been appointed posts here. As for trouble, it's the usual things that they've done before." Hei Wan spoke and rubbed her forehead.

Lin Mu had listened to her words and was wondering what kind of trouble was usual for the disciples of the Tri cauldron Peony sect. From what he had known most disciples of the cultivation sects were aloof and did not bother with commoners.

"They've caused trouble before?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, the disciples of the Tri cauldron peony sect like to throw their status and power around. They will take things forcefully and some of them even take women. Most people can't handle them, or rather they can't. Even the mayor ignores their misdemeanors as long as his business is not affected. Especially after the plague last year, he had to go into a debt with the Tri cauldron peony sect.

That is also the reason why they have been assigned here, I think. So that the sect can have their disciples watching over the mayor at all times." Hei Wan explained.

It was rather surprising to Lin Mu that the behavior of the disciples of a cultivation sect was so vile.

"This is rather common and you will see it a lot in the future. It is like I said before, only the will of the strong is obeyed in this world." Xukong suddenly spoke.

Lin Mu was lost in thought after hearing this and was actually able to clear some of his doubts from before. He now understood Senior Xukong's words that he had said in the culprits' cave better and knew that he was right.

'If I want to do anything, I need to be stronger... much stronger.' Lin Mu thought with determination.

Unknown to him, when he thought that, his eyes had glowed for a brief instant, and not only that but the two people that were sitting with him, Hei Wan and Hei Bao too felt a sense of danger. Their eyes went wide, and they became alert.

Chapter 173 - A Wooden Plate?

Hei Bao and Hei Wan were already tense from the assassination attempt and were expecting another attack, and this is what they thought it was. But even after a couple of seconds, nothing happened, and that feeling faded away.

Hei Bao looked at Hei Wan with eyes filled with confusion. It was as if he was asking what had just happened. Hei Wan did not speak and simply shook her head in response, showing that she did not know either.

Hei Wan then looked at Lin Mu and spoke.

"Also, I investigated more about the things that you had given me from the town head office. It is confirmed that the Town head and the Vice-captain of the town's guards were involved in the matter. Whoever the culprits are, they were paying them off, apparently.

Another interesting thing we found was the first mercenary you had found in the abandoned warehouse."

Lin Mu looked up at Hei Wan upon hearing her speak.

"What about that mercenary?" Lin Mu asked.

"You found the beast inciting powder on that mercenary, right? Well, we were able to find one of his companions. One of the mercenaries finally recognized him and gave us some information. Apparently, the beast inciting powder was found by him in the northern forest." Hei Wan replied.

"It was found in the forest? How is that possible?" Lin Mu further questioned.

"The mercenary who recognized him said that they were together when they found it. The vial was lying on the ground, nestled in some grass. Luckily, while the two mercenaries did find it, they were not stupid enough to open and check a vial filled with an unknown substance, or we would have had a much bigger disaster on our hands.

They thus stored it and wanted to get it appraised later on. And guess what, that was not the only thing they found with the vial. They also found a rather special Item." Hei Wan answered and then opened the drawer of the desk.

Out from the drawer, she pulled out a wooden plate that had some metallic parts fixed in it. The plate was flat and was seven-sided. The metal plates protruded from the plate and formed a rather unique pattern on it. The over all size of the plate was slightly less than that of a palm.

The pattern was composed of a bird's wing, a tiger's claw and a serpent's tail. The three parts crossed and formed a triangle, at the center of which was an eye. The eye was in the form of a plus and seemed as if was formed by two eyes intersecting at a perpendicular angle.

Lin Mu looked at the plate closely and found it to be very peculiar. Hei Bao too looked at it with great interest.

"This is rather different? What material is this, I don't think I've ever seen it before?" Hei Bao questioned.

He touched the plate and tried to get a feel of its wooden and metallic parts. The wooden parts were light brown, but the pattern on its grain seemed to be rather dense. The metallic parts were black colored and were made from a metal that Hei Bao had not seen before.

"I don't know what the materials are either. I don't think I've seen this kind of craftsmanship before either. And this patter of a wing, claw, and tail; I do not know what it means either. Overall, this thing is a mystery." Hei Wan explained.

Lin Mu and Hei Bao heard her words and started to think about the plate.

"How would something like this turn up in the forest? First, the beast inciting powder, and now this?" Hei Bao wondered.

"Whatever it may be, but we know that whoever originally had the beast inciting powder also owns this plate. Perhaps, it is related to the culprits as well, we don't know. I have already sent a sketch of this plate along with a report to the lord.

With his knowledge and expertise, maybe he can find it for us." Hei Wan answered.

Lin Mu too wanted to see what kind of thing this plate was, thus he went ahead and touched it. But as soon as his fingers touched the surface of the plate, the mysterious ring on his hand lightly hummed.

Lin Mu's eyes went wide as he hurriedly pulled his hand back. Hei Bao and Hei Wan noticed the strange behaviors of Lin Mu and wondered what that was about.

"Are you okay?" Hei Bao questioned.

"Yes... I'm fine." Lin Mu casually tried to brush off his strange behaviors.

The two didn't mind this and went back to discuss a few other matters. Hei Wan unrolled a few more letters and continued her discussion about other matters with Hei Bao. But while this was happening, Lin Mu was having a different conversation of his own in his mind.

"Senior, that plate... I could feel it. There is space inside that plate." Lin Mu spoke.

"I know, I felt that too. There were spatial fluctuations from the plate, albeit faint ones." Xukong replied.

"Is that a spatial storage treasure, perhaps?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, it is indeed a spatial treasure. But it is not a normal spatial storage treasure, but rather one that's used to store beasts." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu had heard about beast storage treasures before and knew that they were rather rare and unknown. They could be used to store tamed beasts and were very useful, as they could pretty much double the fighting strength of a cultivator.

"But senior is there even anyone that can make a treasure like this in this world?" Lin Mu questioned, feeling uneasy.

"There should be some that are able to make a low tier beast storage treasure, but not one like this. This is no normal beast storage treasure. Do you see those three markings of the feather, tiger claw, and serpent tail? Those denote the rank of the treasure." Xukong spoke and took a pause.

"A wing is for beast storage treasures that can store common fierce beasts that are in the body tempering realm. Such a kind of beast storage treasure should be relatively common in this world. At least as common as spatial treasures can be.

The Tiger claw denotes that it can store spirit beasts that are in the qi refining realm and above." Xukong spoke and trailed off.

Lin Mu could not bear the suspense and questioned again,

"What does the serpent tail denote then?"

Chapter 174 - Beast Storage Treasure

Lin Mu was eagerly waiting for senior Xukong's answer, but it still didn't come. He wondered why he had suddenly gone silent and was getting uneasy.

"Senior?" Lin Mu called out.

"Senior Xukong?" He called out again.

"Senior..."

Just as he was about to call him for the third time, senior Xukong finally spoke again.

"It should be fine now," Xukong spoke.

"Huh? What should be fine now?" Lin Mu questioned.

"I just had to check the world's restrictions before I could speak further. It would do no good if you were not able to hear or understand it even if I said it." Xukong answered.

"So what does the serpent tail denote?" Lin Mu questioned, having understood Xukong's rationale.

"The serpent tail denotes that the beast storage treasure can store beasts that are above the Immortal ascension realm." Xukong finally revealed.

Lin Mu had his guesses about what the serpent tail would have meant, but after hearing it and confirming it from Senior Xukong's own mouth, he still felt shocked.

"But, how would a beast storage treasure that could store such an immensely strong beast even be found in this world?" Lin Mu asked.

"Remember when the beast inciting powder had an effect on those stray dogs and they were able to sense the ward that was placed on you, even though they should have been absolutely incapable of doing so.

That was when I doubted whether it was normal beast inciting powder or not. But now that we've seen this Beast storage treasure, I can say for sure that both of those items are not from this world." Xukong explained.

"Is it possible that they are unrelated, perhaps? I mean, how would something like this even appear here?" Lin Mu asked with a confused tone.

"The beast inciting powder is likely a higher grade one, which is used as a weapon. The powder is made so that they not only make beasts attack others randomly, but the powder also sharpens and enhances the senses of the beasts, making them more deadly. While it could be possible that it was made in this world, but that has a negligible chance of happening.

Another thing is the markings on the beast storage treasure. Those three markings are the standard markings that are used across the myriad of worlds and realms. But the people of this world should definitely not know of that. This is an additional reason why I can say for sure that both of the items are from another higher level world." Xukong elaborated.

After hearing Senior Xukong's explanations, Lin Mu felt a bit better and understood well, but then his curiosity made him wonder about more things related to it.

"Senior, can I... use this beast storage treasure?" Lin Mu questioned with a slightly expectant tone.

"Sadly, no. It would indeed have been an excellent addition to your strength, but this beast storage treasure is damaged. The formation array on it has been broken, thus it cannot store the beasts any more. Although it still has a spatial storage in it right now. It is rather unstable and will collapse in a short period of time." Xukong answered.

"How would the beast storage treasure break, though? It didn't look damaged from the outside, at least. Where are the formations array of it?" Lin Mu questioned further.

"The formation arrays are too high leveled for you to be able to sense them. But from the faint spatial fluctuations, you sensed I was able to tell their condition. As for why it broke, there is only one reason for it. The beast that was kept in the beast storage treasure broke through its confines and escaped it." Xukong answered.

"Wait senior, doesn't that mean that the beast that had escaped the beast storage treasure is now roaming in the area?" Lin Mu asked with a shocked tone.

"Yes, that is quite likely. But the thing is, we don't know if it's one beasts or more." Xukong replied.

"More beasts?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Yes, a beast storage treasure can store more than one beast depending on its grade and the cultivator's strength. It can either store a single beast at the very peak of its maximum capacity, which would be dependent on the cultivation base of the cultivator.

A cultivator can only tame and store beasts of a cultivation base that is equal to or less than theirs. This means that, for example, a cultivated at the Immortal Ascension realm can store one beast that is at the same stage as him in a beast storage treasure that has a tiger claw marking on it.

If he were to store a beast of, say, one realm lower than him that is at the Dao treading realm, he would be able to store two such beasts of the Dao treading realm. For the Dao shell realm, it would be four beasts and so on and so forth.

This number only doubles as the realms go lower." Xukong fully explained.

Lin Mu was absolutely astounded by this information and had another realization.

'The beast storage treasure has three markings, with the highest one being that of the serpent tail. Then this means... No!' Lin Mu Inferred.

"Senior, then isn't it possible that there are more than one beast of high cultivations reaming around?" Lin Mu questioned with a slightly fearful tone.

"No, luckily it's not the case this time, don't worry. If there were more than one spirit beasts of even Dao Shell realm stored in the treasure and were then released by it, then there would have been a massive commotion. The strength of such beasts would have been too much for a world such as this.

Another thing we need to factor in is the strength of the cultivator itself. If if the cultivator did have a beast storage treasure with three markings, if he did not have a high enough cultivation base of himself, he would not be able to tame and store stronger beasts.

Besides, I already have an idea of what beast was stored in the beast storage treasure." Xukong answered in a calm tone.

"Huh, what beast is it?"

Chapter 175 - The Escaped Beast

"We've seen the beast before, it's none other than the Great slumber bear." Xukong Finally answered.

"That... does seem likely now that I think about it." Lin Mu replied.

"Indeed, it would work since a Great slumber bear cannot be found in a low leveled world like this. Also, the three markings on the beast storage treasure prove that it's from a higher level world, it would make sense that the beast came from there.

Though this gives rise to another question, whether the beast was brought by the same person that brought the Invader, or perhaps it was the invader that is behind this." Xukong said in an unsure tone.

Lin Mu pondered on it for a bit and found it to be too much of a coincidence for it to not be related.

"We will just have to wait and see, I guess. The clues should turn up soon." Lin Mu stated.

Suddenly Lin Mu remembered another thing.

"Senior, should I... tell them about the beast storage treasure?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Hmm, you can tell them that it's a beast storage treasure, but I don't think they will believe you if you tell them its rank. I think it's better that you just tell them that its one and not its capabilities." Xukong suggested.

"Yes senior, I'll do that." Lin Mu replied respectfully before opening his eyes.

During the entire conversation that Lin Mu had with senior Xukong, fifteen minutes had passed. Upon opening his eyes, he saw that Hei Wan and Hei Bao were still talking, but the topics they were talking about were unknown to Lin Mu.

Lin Mu did not speak up abruptly but rather chose to wait for them to finish their conversation as the current topic of their conversation was a little interesting to Lin Mu.

"The celebratory tournament went well, apparently. A lot of hidden talents and black horses were discovered during that." Hei Wan spoke.

"Oh, are there any that we knew of?" Hei Bao asked.

"Just the usual ones from the top sects. All the others were a surprise to us. But that was expected too, our network is not that strong beyond the upper three countries of the Northern lands." Hei Wan replied in a dismissive tone.

"Who won it this time? I mean, which top sect won it? The sky precepts sect, the rainbow pill sect, or the Centennial sword sect?" Hei Bao questioned in an interested tone.

"Surprisingly, it was not a disciple from any of the three top sects." Hei Wan spoke, but was then interrupted by a shocked Hei Bao.

"What! How is that possible? There's no way any of the top three sects would let go of a chance such as this to raise their prestige. They always like to flourish their strength." Hei Bao spoke.

"Yes, I was surprised by that too. Even the lord had not expected such an outcome. For some reason, all of the disciples of the top three sects chose to not fight in the finals. The one who won in the end was a disciple from the fourth ranked top sect, Unity wind sect." Hei Wan replied.

Hei Bao was lost in thought after hearing about this and wondered what could have caused them to do such a thing.

While Hei Bao was thinking this, Lin Mu was curious about the top sects. This was the first time he was actually hearing the names of any of the top sects. In the past, they were so beyond him that he had never bothered to know more about them. But now that he had heard, he wanted to know more.

But just as he was about to speak, he was interrupted by senior Xukong.

"Are you forgetting that they are still mistaken that you are a disciple of a sect? If you ask them about the name straight away, they will be suspicious." Xukong advised.

"Ah yes! You're right senior." Lin Mu replied in a grateful tone.

He thought about how to frame the question for a moment before asking, "Umm, what were the rankings of the other sects in the competition?"

Hei Wan and Hei Bao turned to look at Lin Mu who had just spoken. All this while when they were talking, they had forgotten that there even was a third person in the room with them; they were that engrossed in their work. Both of them felt a little awkward about forgetting Lin Mu.

Hei Wan forcefully suppressed her embarrassment, which was easy since her face was hidden behind a veil, anyway.

"The rankings were as follows, the Unity wind sect came first, Ivory sable sect came second, Sky precepts sect came third, Centennial sword sect came fourth, Rainbow pill sect came fifth, Cloud mountain sect came sixth, and the eighth position was taken by Starry jasper court.

As for the seventh, ninth and tenth positions, they were taken by cultivators that did not belong to the sects. The seventh position was taken by a lieutenant from the vermilion legion, while the ninth position was taken by a prince of the Eastern Ming dynasty.

We do not know who took the tenth position though; they were a nameless cultivator, and they left soon after the competition. They did not even take their prize." Hei Wan explained.

While Lin Mu was not able to find out about all of the top ten sects, he was still fine with being able to find out about seven of the top ten sects. Before this, he had never heard of any of them. Though still out of the ten winners, he recognized one name.

"The vermilion legion, huh?" Lin Mu muttered with a little surprise.

"Oh, what the problem?" Hei Bao asked after seeing the hint of surprise in Lin Mu's voice.

"Nothing, it's just that I didn't expect to hear that name." Lin Mu replied.

"Whys that?" Hei Bao questioned, and even Hei Wan looked on in curiosity.

"I thought the vermilion legion never moved from the frontier. Isn't a lieutenant a very high position in the vermilion legion?" Lin Mu replied.

Chapter 176 - Rise In His Image

Xukong was also a little surprised upon hearing that Lin Mu actually knew about one of the winners. He had fully executed for him to be in the blind about such things.

"That is indeed true, the vermilion legion never moves from the frontier, but there are a few exceptions. One of them being the summons from the Emperor of the Great Zhou Empire. Some people from the Vermilion legion were invited by the emperor for the Grand Festival. As a request, the emperors asked for them to give a demonstration of strength in order to show the sects that they were no less from them either." Hei Wan answered.

Lin Mu had heard about the festival from the mouth of Teng Xiaolian and his team before, so knew that there was one organized in celebration for the crown prince reaching the core formation realm. But it was still interesting for him to know more about the details of such.

Seeing that Lin Mu was satisfied with the answer, Hei Wan was about to open another scroll to discuss the next matter when Lin Mu spoke up.

"I have something to say." Lin Mu spoke.

"Oh, please do tell." Hei Wan replied.

"I thought over it and I think I have an idea of what this wooden plate is." Lin Mu replied while pointing to the wooden plate on the desk.

"You know?!" Hei Bao explained.

Hei Wan was equally not expecting this, but did not react as such and kept her composure.

"So what is it?" Hei Wan questioned in a calm voice.

"From what I can tell, it's a... Beast storage treasure." Lin Mu answered.

Hei Wan and Hei Bao went silent after hearing this and took a few seconds to digest this information. But once that was done, a mixture of emotions appeared in their eyes.

"How do you know this?" Hei Wan asked in a nervous tone.

"I can feel the spatial fluctuation coming from it. They were faint at first thus I was not able to grasp them, but after a while, I was able to determine what it was." Lin Mu replied.

~Gulp~

Hei Bao gulped in astonishment and started to think about all implications of this information. He knew that Spatial storage treasures were incredibly rare and only a few people owned them, but Beast storage treasures were a rarity amongst the spatial storage treasure.

Every single one of the beast storage treasures was known to most informed and influential people, and he knew for sure that none of them would be so carelessly be abandoned. Their value was far too high, and it wouldn't be uncommon for a cultivation sect to start a small war in order to get their hands on one.

If his apprehension were true and this was indeed lost or worse stolen from a cultivation sect, it could potentially spell a disaster for them. He turned to look at Hei Wan and could see a similar apprehension in her eyes.

"Leader, the beast storage treasure..." Hei Bao spoke and was interrupted.

"But the Beast storage treasure is currently damaged, and the formation arrays within it would soon dissipate. It can't store any beasts in it currently." Lin Mu continued.

Hei Bao's face visibly relaxed as he let out a breath of relief.

~Phew~

"You should have started with that, you nearly scared us out of our wits." Hei Bao complained.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I should have framed it better." Lin Mu apologized.

"It's fine, there was no harm done. But now this revelation puts forth more questions." Hei Wan replied.

Hei Bao too nodded in acknowledgment.

"That is true. We still need to find out and verify, who is the owner of this beast storage treasure. We do not want to be caught off guard if someone comes looking for it and suspects that we broke it." Hei Bao spoke.

"I guess, I'll have to leave that up to you people. I believe you will be more capable of investigating that." Lin Mu said in a calm tone, trying to pretend as if he didn't know that the Hei corps would not be going on a blind goose chase.

Although Lin Mu knew that he would be wasting the time of the Hei Corps in hiding the full truth, it was still better than exposing his own reality and lifting their misunderstanding. It was that very misunderstanding that was proving to be quite advantageous to him right now.

Lin Mu definitely did not want to do anything that would compromise his current status quo.

"Of course, we will do that brother Lin Mu. You can leave that to us." Hei Wan answered with confidence.

Lin Mu nodded in acceptance and then thought about what he should do next.

"What should I do for the time being? I mean, we've seen the culprits hideout and know that they are hiding the prisoners somewhere near the town, but when would we be doing more?" Lin Mu questioned after thinking for a bit.

Hei Wan was a little impressed by Lin Mu's detailed question because she thought that he was worried about the investigation and wanted to fully help them. But in reality, Lin Mu wanted nothing more than to know a time period so that he could go cultivate peacefully till then.

He did not want any more interruptions and wanted to finally begin learning the nameless technique created by the lost immortal. After knowing that he had less than a year to reach the peak stage of the body tempering realm as well as leering the technique of the lost immortal, Lin Mu was impatient.

This impatience was seen in Lin Mu's eyes and was once again mistaken by Hei Wan as an eagerness to help.

'Lin Mu is indeed an exceptional and righteous youngster. His future is very promising, I need to talk with the lord about investing more into him, perhaps.' Hei Wan thought.

Unknown to Lin Mu, his image in the eyes of Hei Wan was raised once again.

Chapter 177 - Respite

Hei Wan composed herself again and thought for a bit before speaking, "You need not worry, brother Lin Mu. We will inform you when the time comes, but considering the current situation, I think we will need to stay in the town for a while. At least until Hei Yingjie recovers."

"Yes, unless Hei Yingjie recovers, we will be in danger. Considering the efficiency with which the culprits were able to transport and hide the prisoners, I wouldn't be shocked if they have a core condensation realm expert of their own helping them. If by any chance we were to have a conflict, it would be absolutely necessary that we have a core contesting realm expert on our side." Hei Bao said, "Without one, it would just be a lost battle, even if we have many more qi refining realm experts."

"Alright then, I'll take my leave then." Lin Mu replied and then stood up.

"Oh, and if you need anything you can ask Hei Ping. He is still assigned to guard duty near your house, so you should be able to inform him. And any news that we send will be given through him as well... unless it is too sensitive, then one of us will come to inform you." Hei Wan added.

Lin Mu simply nodded before leaving the office and heading down the building. Once he was out of the town center, the guards that were standing there bid him farewell with respect in their eyes. Lin Mu felt a little strange upon seeing this change, but did not think much of it.

A little while later he was at his house and had decided to get a much well deserved bath. For the past week, he had not had the chance to take one, and heavens knew that he had gone through a lot in this time. Lin Mu thus heat up some water and took a comfortable bath.

Once he was done with it, he randomly chose one of the sets of clothes from the hundreds he had bought and went to the kitchen, for he needed to cook the beast meat. Lin Mu's current focus was to reach the peak stage of the body tempering realm, and there was no easier way than to consume beast meat for that.

Lin Mu quickly finished his meal and sat down to chant the calming heart sutra to assimilate the vital energy that was being released in his stomach. It didn't take much long for him to assimilate all of the vital energy from the meat, but he did not see any difference in his body.

Unlike back when he had eaten the meat of the core condensation realm alpha steel back wolf, Lin Mu did not have any major progress in his body tempering realm cultivation. But he had already known of this and did not lose hope.

He then started chanting the severing heart sutra and started refining the spirit qi wisps within his dantian into liquefied spirit qi. Once afternoon arrived, he ate his lunch and assimilated the vital energy again.

The same thing was repeated in the evening at dinner time and he finally stopped when it was midnight. During his entire cultivation session of today, Lin Mu had refined two more drops of liquid spirit qi.

~Huu~

"That was a bit more tiring than I thought. At least I get to sleep now." Lin Mu spoke to himself.

He then took out the soft white bolster to use as a pillow and laid his head upon it while lying down. It didn't take Lin Mu much time from closing his eyes to fall asleep. Soon he appeared in the Sleepscape and was standing in front of the spirit apple tree.

Lin Mu looked at it and saw nearly fifteen ripened spirit apples on it. He went ahead and plucked them before storing them in his ring. He took a look inside the ring and saw that his stockpile of spirit apples had reached a little more than a hundred now.

"Oh, I... kind of forgot about them. I should eat them while I train, I guess. It should provide me with additional spirit qi. Even though it would not be much, but it should still help me a little bit." Lin Mu thought out loud.

He then sat down below the sprite apple tree and withdrew the wooden slip within which the lost immortal's legacy was contained. Lin Mu opened it and got to reading it. Although he had already read it before, he still wanted to take another look before formally starting to practice it.

Lin Mu slowly read it, ensuring that he understood every small character before beginning. He already knew the complexities of the Dao script and thus knew how important it was to know every aspect of a character before reading it, as its meaning could change depending on its position in the text.

There were even times when the same character meant different things depending on the context, thus he did not want to make a mistake and hurt himself with that.

~Phew~

"Now let's begin..." Lin Mu said before putting the wooden slip away.

He closed his eyes and recalled the nameless technique in his mind. He then followed the methods that were prescribed in the technique and moved the spirit qi according to that. The spirit qi was following a strange path that he had not known about.

Although Lin Mu had leered about his meridian circuit on his own, he had not known that he could have circulated it in that manner as well. While there were many steps in the nameless technique, Lin Mu was only starting up and was thus at the very beginning of the first step.

This step involved guiding the spirit qi to the meridians in the stomach and bathing the tissues of it with the spirit qi in a certain pattern. Lin Mu had to ensure that only a specific amount of spirit qi flowed to the stomach at once and at the right place.

He had read the warnings and knew that if he increased the volume of spirit qi by too much or too less, the entire effort would be wasted in the best case or he would harm himself in the worst.

Chapter 178 - No Respite

Lin Mu sat there for hours following the technique, yet could feel no difference, except for his spirit qi being consumed. He only stopped when it had been nearly empty and only had about a hundred wisps left along with of course the liquid spirit qi drops.

~Sigh~

"This is much more difficult than I thought." Lin Mu muttered.

~Pop~

"Well, cultivation techniques usually take a while to learn and for auxiliary ones like this one, the time frame is even vast. It's a technique that has never been cultivated, thus we can not put an estimate on it." Xukong said, after suddenly appearing in front of Lin Mu.

Ever since Lin Mu had progressed in his cultivation, Xukong had been able to freely appear and disappear from the Sleepscape as long as he himself was there. Xukong did not tell Lin Mu this, but he himself was starting to enjoy his time there.

While he was beyond habituated to cultivating in seclusion in the void, having a break like this felt refreshing to him and he even felt a slight improvement in his cultivation speed.

"I will have to wait and see then. Hopefully, I learn it before the Great Slumber bear awakens from its sleep." Lin Mu replied.

He then stood up and withdrew a long spear from the ring. Lin Mu had practiced a sufficient amount with the two slim swords and now wanted to try out the other weapons. His next choice of weapon was the spear, as it had the farthest reach for him.

Lin Mu started his practice with the spear and followed the stances and maneuvers mentioned in the Thousand armament blade scripture. He practiced until he felt mentally tired and then stopped. Lin Mu noticed that he had tired much faster than before.

"Huh, is it due to my depleted spirit qi?" Lin Mu questioned himself.

"Well, it could be that. Perhaps you need a certain amount of spirit qi in order to maintain your connection with the garden of karma. If that is true, then having a low amount of spirit qi may be reducing your capability to practice further here. Though this is all that I could deduce, we still don't know how exactly a Garden of Karma works." Xukong replied from behind Lin Mu.

Lin Mu nodded and spoke, "Hmm, I see. Well then, time to sleep again."

Lin Mu then willed it and his body disappeared from the Sleepscape, and he entered deep sleep. Waking up in the morning, the first thing Lin Mu did was to clutch his stomach.

~Groan~

"Aargh!" He screamed in pain.

"Wha...t... is... this... pain...?!" Lin Mu uttered between breaths.

He could barely breathe right now and was slumped up against his bed. Lin Mu was unable to think clearly right now and did not know what was happening to him. He did not even hear senior Xukong who was calling out to him.

Lin Mu stayed like that for about a minute before he was able to get used to the pain.

'Why is this happening? This is worse than the time when I ate that purple spirit fruit or even when I used the boulder collapsing fist at its full potential.' Lin Mu thought.

But just as Lin Mu was thinking this, it suddenly hit him.

'It's the effect of the technique! Did I make a mistake? No, if it was like that then I would have known it then and there, this is something different.' Lin Mu realized.

"It...s ...ger..." Lin Mu suddenly heard a faint voice in the back of his head.

It didn't take him long to realize that it was Senior Xukong that was calling out to him. He attempted to chant the calming heart sutra to be able to hear better, but the pain was making it incredibly difficult.

To Lin Mu, it felt as if his guts were being twisted into a mush. With great effort, he was able to focus enough to chant the calming heart sutra. With the activation of the effects of the calming heart sutra, Lin Mu was finally able to hear senior Xukong's words.

"It's hunger!! Eattt!!!" Xukong shouted out in Lin Mu's mind.

It actually was not just Lin Mu that was having a problem in hearing Xukong, but rather Xukong too was having a hard time trying to communicate with Lin Mu. The mental connection that they had was fading in and out, making it nearly impossible for him to talk.

Xukong was very shocked by this, as the last time this had happened was back when Lin Mu had gone through the awakening of one of the nine divine heart sutras or when he was having an epiphany.

'What kind of technique is this that its even able to disturb my link with Lin Mu? For it to be able to do that, is it on the same level as the nine divine heart sutras, or is this something different?' Xukong thought to himself with confusion.

Lin Mu heard Senior Xukong's words in his mind, loud and clear, making him stumble to get something to eat. In his delirium caused by the pain, he had nearly forgotten that he could just summon the food that was stored in his ring.

Lin Mu instinctively pulled out some of the cooked meat that was left in the ring. He started eating and quickly finished it in mere seconds. The food stored was barely enough for a few bites.

"NOT ENOUGH! I NEED MORE!" He spoke in a hoarse voice.

A faint wisp of vital energy was released from the roast meat that he had just eaten and it was absorbed from his stomach. Still, it did not even come close to providing him relief. It was the same as throwing a cup of water into a wildfire.

Lin Mu then withdrew the spirit apples that he had stockpiled in the ring and swallowed an entire apple in three bites. He had thought that these would show some effect, but alas, the spirit apples had no vital energy in them.

"MOREEEEE!" Lin Mu yelled again.

Pushing all semblance of sanity away, Lin Mu withdrew a beast carcass that he had stored in the ring and started tearing into it.

Chapter 179 - Strange Changes

In a house in the northern town, a gruesome scene could be seen. There was blood splattered all around in a room and the scent of the same was spreading around. The pungent and slightly disgusting smell of the mixture of flesh and blood would assault one's sense if they entered the room.

At the center of the room was what could only be called as a remnant carcass of a beast of some kind, having only its bones left behind with small pieces of flesh on it. Even the bones seemed to have bite marks on them, and at some places seemed to have been shattered and cracked.

At the side of this carcass was a person who seemed to have been drenched in blood. His face, hair, and clothes were stained in blood and his eyes seemed to be bloodshot as well. This person was none other than Lin Mu.

He was taking deep and tired breaths, making it seem as if he had gone through a great battle, but such was not the reality. For it was none other than Lin Mu who had eaten the beast carcass in such a gruesome manner, no different from any other predator beast.

If such a corpse was found out in the forest or the wild, no one would bat an eye. But when such a corpse was found in a house with a person drenched in blood no less, people would be shocked and astonished, to say the least. And no doubt would call the person that was drenched in blood insane.

~Huu~

~Huu~

~Huu~

~Huu~

~Huu~

"That... is... too... much..." Lin Mu muttered between his breaths.

Lin Mu could not help but turn up his head to look at his handiwork that was in front of him. Even he himself could not bring himself to believe what had just happened and what he had done. Still, that very thing in front of him and the blood on his body was proof that he had done it.

Lin Mu could no longer hold back and laid down on the ground in fatigue, not having any energy to function well.

'What in heaven's name was that?' Lin Mu questioned himself.

"It seems like the lost immortal's technique is far more dangerous than we thought. I had not expected for there to be such a severe side effect. I don't know how you should proceed from this." Xukong suddenly spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

Lin Mu did not respond but rather just stayed there on the ground contemplating about his situation. There were now far too many things that he needed to consider. Firstly, the effect of the lost immortal's technique had made him disappointed and frankly a bit scared.

No normal human would like to eat raw flesh like he just did, and this thought made him nauseous and would have nearly made him vomit, if it were not for the fact that there was surprisingly nothing in his stomach.

Lin Mu realized that and touched his stomach. If it were normal his stomach should have been bulging out. Even if he was used to having a large appetite and eating a lot of food, his stomach would still bulge for a while before going back to being flat.

But right now it had not even been five minutes, and he had eaten the entirety of a beast except for the bones, which was nearly twice his own weight. There was no way that this should have been possible, yet here he was having witnessed it.

Wanting to know more, Lin Mu extended his spirit sense and checked his own body. He directly observed his insides and found no change in them, at least from what he knew about his body and what he had seen before. His organs seemed to look the same as before to him, and he could find no fault with them.

"This nameless technique, I can't comprehend its effect. It's supposed to stop hunger, right? So why is it giving me a hunger that makes me want to die?!" Lin Mu questioned himself in frustration.

"Hmm, try checking the vital energy in your body, I... can't feel it," Xukong spoke.

"Huh? What senior? But it seems to be normal to me." Lin Mu replied before chanting the calming heart sutra and sensing the vital energy within his body.

That was when he discovered a difference. While he still had his vital energy that was saturated in his skin, flesh, blood and bones, he could not sense their faint fluctuations. It was as if they had been sealed into his body, and not even an iota of it was leaking out of his body.

Normally vital energy in a person's or a beast's body creates faint waves that are naturally emitted by their body. While this results in a loss of vital energy, this is fairly negligible and has no overall effect on the creature involved.

But for some reason, the vital energy in Lin Mu's body was being fully contained within. Usually, when Lin Mu sensed his vital energy, it would be pulsating, as if it were resonating with his heartbeats, but right now, it was not.

Instead, it was calmly flowing in a loop. Such a peculiarity made Lin Mu curious and wonder why it was happening. Wanting to rest something out, he flexed his fist to see how the vital energy would react. Usually, by doing this, his vital energy should have gotten agitated, but no such thing was happening.

An idea appeared in Lin Mu's mind and he punched out at the air. While no effect could be seen with the naked eyes, Lin Mu could tell that the punch he had just thrown had the same power as before in it. The change in the vital energy had caused no change in his strength itself.

"What is the cause of this?" Lin Mu wondered.

"Whatever it may be, at least it is not harmful. Hmm, let me think for a while; I'll try to find something in my bloodline memories and see if I have any information about your peculiar condition." Xukong replied.

"Alright, senior thank you for your help." Lin Mu replied in a grateful tone.

Lin Mu turned his head from side to side and looked at the mess that was his room right now.

~Groan~

Chapter 180 - Strange Changes-II

"Damn, this will take a while to clean. Those bedsheets and my clothes are as good as useless now." Lin Mu muttered to himself in frustration.

~Sniff~

~Sniff~

Finally, Lin Mu could feel the stench assault his nose.

'I need to take a bath too now.' Lin Mu thought.

He then laid there for another hour, after which he could finally feel the strange fatigue fading away. He then stood up and stretched.

~Pop~ ~Pop~ ~Pop~

Popping and cracking sounds were heard as Lin Mu stretched. The stiffness in his joints was being relieved with each moment. Lin Mu clenched and unclenched his fist, finding that the movements seem to be slightly better.

Lin Mu did not think much of it and started cleaning up the mess in his room. After he was done with it, he gathered up the bedsheets and his clothes in a ball to be thrown away. Finally, he went to and took a bath to clean himself of the blood and bits of flesh.

Lin Mu didn't even bother heating the water and took the bath with ice-cold water, not wanting to bear the disgusting feeling anymore. Thankfully, his body tempering realm cultivation was very high, allowing him to bear the cold without shivering or with his teeth chattering.

Steam could be seen rising from his body after he was done with his bath due to the difference between his body temperature and the surrounding temperature. It was still snowing right now, and the snowflakes would melt away as soon as they touched his bare body.

Lin Mu quickly switched to a new and clean set of clothes before checking out the area around his house. He knew he had yelled out in pain and was wondering if it was loud enough to escape the confines of his house. He had expected for at least Hei Ping to have heard it as he was standing outside his house.

Fortunately, it seemed like he had not yelled out as loud as he had thought. No one else seemed to have heard him or they would have definitely been wondering what was happening in there and the guards would have been gathered outside his house by now.

~Phew~

"At least I escaped that. It would have been far too bothersome and difficult to explain to them what had happened." Lin Mu muttered to himself as he took a breath of relief.

Lin Mu decided to return to his house to continue his cultivation. He did check his dantian and saw that he only had half of his spirit qi for now, as only that much was replenished while he had slept. He thus sat down cross-legged and chanted the severing heart sutra to replenish his spirit qi.

Two hours later, the snow had stopped falling and even the sun had come out from behind the clouds as they had finally scattered away. Lin Mu opened his eyes as he could feel his stomach rumble with hunger.

"What!? I ate an entire spirit beast earlier, how am I still hungry?" Lin Mu exclaimed with astonishment.

~Sigh~

'This just keeps on getting more confusing.' Lin Mu thought before standing up and going towards the kitchen.

He quickly cooked some beast meat and ate it. But unlike before, this time his stomach was bulging like it should have been.

"It seems like, your earlier hunger and this is different. The previous one seemed to be completely due to the lost immortal's technique, and this one seems to be the normal one that your body feels." Xukong spoke inferred.

Lin Mu could feel the vital energy being absorbed by his body and could feel the concentration of it increasing by a minute amount, unlike before when it had stayed the same.

"Hmm, you are right senior. This time I can feel an increase in the vital energy within my body as well." Lin Mu replied.

He quickly assimilated the vital energy and just as he finished, an idea popped up in his mind. He went to the kitchen and set up some meat to cook and then went to his backyard and started taking out wood from his ring before lighting it on fire.

Lin Mu prepared some meat to cook on that fire as well. Xukong noticed what he was doing and felt a little confused.

"What are doing?" Xukong questioned.

"I'm guessing that, since practicing the lost immortal's technique had that effect, I may as well prepare a large amount of cooked meat beforehand. At least I would not have to eat raw meat again, and even if it does not happen, I can still eat it later." Lin Mu explained.

"That is... actually smart." Xukong praised.

Lin Mu nodded and watched over the cooking meat. After it was done, he stored it in his ring for easy access. He had cooked the meat of two entire steel back wolves and estimated that it should be enough considering the amount he had eaten before.

It had taken him about two more hours to cook it, and he quickly returned to his room to cultivate. The room still had a faint scent of the blood, but it was no longer strong enough to bother Lin Mu.

Soon he was engrossed in his cultivation and the time started passing by quickly.

While Lin Mu was busy cultivating something else was happening in Wu Lim city.

In a large manor that was situated beside a small lake, a man was sitting in a room that looked like an office. There were multiple bookshelves to the sides and a large desk at the other end of the room. A scholarly-looking man was sitting at the desk who seemed to have an erudite aura.

The man was reading a letter and had a calm expression on his face. The contents of the letter seemed to be interesting to him, and a peculiar sketch was drawn on the letter. The most unique part being the three patterns of a wing, a tiger claw and a serpent tail in a triangular formation present on it.

Just as the scholarly man was about to reach the end of the letter, the door of the office opened and a middle-aged man dressed in luxurious clothes walked in. The man walked up to the desk where the scholarly man was sitting and cleared his throat.

~Ahem~

The scholarly man put down the letter and seemed to be caught a little off guard. He looked up at the man standing in front of him and forcibly composed himself before speaking.

"What are you doing here, father?"

~Chuckle~

"Does a father need a reason to come visit his son? Tell me am I wrong, Wu Hei?"