

Walker 511

Chapter 511 - Jiao Fang's Secret

In Jiao Fang's residence, what Lin Mu saw could only be described as a treasure trove. There were literally mountains of gold coins and gems lying around along with spirit tools and what looked like pill bottles.

Had it not been for the basic formation that isolated the spirit Qi fluctuations coming from outside and inside the residence, the residence would have been nothing less than a bright beacon, shining in the middle of the night.

Even Lin Mu, who had a substantial amount of wealth currently was astounded on seeing all this.

"How...." Was the only word that came out of his mouth.

"Ahh~ Home sweet home," Jiao Fang said as he tossed the badge he had been wearing the entire time into one of the piles of treasure.

He then went to a bed which looked to be made out of solid jade and had a mattress made out of what could only be the finest of silk spun by an Arctic Frost Silkworm. Even the bed itself was a spirit tool that could help one in cultivation and would help one restore their mental condition when they slept in it.

While lying on the bed, Jiao Fang took out the page from his sleeve and opened it. Lin Mu took this opportunity to take a look at what was written on the page. He stood right behind the bed and leaned out slightly from the floor.

"Let's see... where is the next clue to the inheritance..." Jiao Fang said as he read the page.

Lin Mu saw it too, but couldn't find anything special in it. The page described some cultivation experiences of a cultivator by the name of Yulong. Lin Mu reckoned that this was the person who had made that book.

Jiao Fang read the page multiple times before nodding his head in understanding. Lin Mu on the other hand, was completely in the dark about what this all was. He was as confused as a fish in the sky and could only wait for Jiao Fang to say something.

But the man didn't do anything and simply folded the page, putting it back into his sleeve before closing his eyes.

"Is he... sleeping?" Lin Mu questioned.

~snore~

"Oh yeah, he's sleeping alright..." Lin Mu confirmed.

"This man is really carefree, isn't he?" Xukong said.

"Indeed senior. All this treasure and barely any security. It's as if he's not scared of this getting stolen at all." Lin Mu replied.

"Though if you think of it this way... he's hiding the things by not hiding anything at all. If he put up additional security, there is bound to be someone that notices this. Not to mention if he started to act as if he had treasure and behaved like that it would become suspicious too.

But being as he is now, there is a very minute chance that anyone would even doubt him. No one would think that an inner court disciple would have enough treasures to make even the sect master jealous." Xukong said.

"That's true. There is no way all of this was earned by him." Lin Mu said.

"He was talking about some inheritance, wasn't he? When he looked at that page." Xukong added.

"Oh yeah, but we didn't find anything particular on the page." Lin Mu spoke, feeling a bit confused.

"Hmm... perhaps that's because we don't know the full context behind it. That page may be a small piece in a large puzzle. If we only look at it alone, it would be hard for us to understand the reality." Xukong said.

"You mean to say all of this is that inheritance that Jiao Fang was talking about and that it is not the entirety of it?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes." Xukong replied simply.

"Hmm... if it is like that... then where did he get the source of the inheritance. Not to mention why hasn't he used it at all?" Lin Mu said as he glanced at the alchemical pills and spirit stones that ranged from low grade to high grade.

"We can't come to a conclusion like this. You will need to observe him more." Xukong said.

Lin Mu went silent for a bit after hearing senior Xukong's words and nodded his head.

"Or... we can just ask him." Lin Mu suggested.

"Oh? You want to confront him?" Xukong asked.

"Yes, seeing his actions and how he's been doing things; perhaps we can come to a certain kind of an arrangement." Lin Mu replied.

"Alright... but be careful. We don't know if he is also being controlled by Gu Yao or not. Perhaps all of this is part of his scheme too, or something like that." Xukong advised.

"I'll keep that in mind, senior. Don't worry." Lin Mu said, as he nodded his head.

Lin Mu did not wake up Jiao Fang here, as he wanted to prepare a bit. He wanted to see what made the man tick and what made him act.

Thus, he took a better look around the residence and checked all the items that were in there. It was a bit hard for Lin Mu to check things due to almost stumbling on some random treasure, but he got the gist of it after a few more minutes.

Lin Mu scanned the entire residence with his spirit sense and realized that there were perhaps over ten million gold coins in the residence all piled up in small hills. There were also tens of thousands of precious gems that would make nearly any cultivator in this world jealous too.

But these were not the things that would give Lin Mu more information about Jiao Fang. What Lin Mu wanted were documents and records; letters even. He spent about an hour searching around the residence before he was able to find something worth his effort.

The thing he had found was a diary whose cover pages were made out of a thin sheet of wood that was covered in leather. The diary did not have any title written on its cover and only had inner pages that were densely filled with handwritten notes.

Chapter 512 - A Diary

Lin Mu flipped open the cover and read the first entry.

'Day 1, third of October.

We have left the sect for the expedition. I managed to get a place in this by giving the excuse of not having done my yearly quota of missions. Usually, they would not give a mission like this to an outer court disciple like me but I was compensating for multiple yearly missions with this single one.

My main aim was to get to the Deep Moon Ravine, which getting to otherwise would have been very difficult. Now with the added protection of my fellow disciples, I would be able to go much further. And... I'll have them act as my shields too.

This is the first time I am going this far from the sect, but I feel only excited. One of the senior disciples that are traveling with me is more experienced and has been to the Deep Moon Ravine before. Under his guidance, we should swiftly reach the location within fifty days.'

Having read the entry Lin Mu was intrigued but could not tell if the person described in this diary was Jiao Fang or not. While the entry mentioned the day and month, it did not mention the year, which confused him even more.

'And this 'Day 1' too... why would someone put an entry like this?' Lin Mu wondered.

He felt a bit curious about the location mentioned in the diary, 'the Deep Moon Ravine' and recalled some information about it.

"Hmm... isn't the Deep Moon Ravine one of the many ravines located at the border of the Eastern Ming Dynasty?" Lin Mu recalled.

The Deep Moon Ravine was a relatively dangerous place because of the flying beasts that inhabited it. The area was steep, with a gushing river flowing at the bottom of it. Anyone that missed a step would fall, never to return again.

Still... the beasts that lived there were mostly Qi refining realm beasts that were in the early stages with a few at the late stage. A team of outer court disciples should still be able to handle them as long as nothing went wrong.

Having thought for a bit, Lin Mu flipped the page and read the next entry.

'Day 2, fourth of October.

We have left the territory of the sect and I am still amazed that the sect really is so large. Had it not been for the senior brother taking us through the shortest route, it would have taken us another extra day to cross this.

We continued traveling and encountered a few beasts, most of which we drew away while some that we ended up fighting. The senior brother told us to avoid as much conflict as we could and only act when it was needed.

If we did not, then we would only harm ourselves and waste the time.'

The entry was short and Lin Mu did not get anything substantial from this. He kept on reading and went from page to page. Most of the things were mundane and it was just the daily events that had been describe in this.

Whoever this person in the diary was, he was able to travel for over twenty nine days before he encountered trouble.

'Day 29, eighth of November.

We greatly messed up and now we are quite likely to die. There is a pair of Scale backed Storks following us for the past twenty four hours. These are both at the core condensation stage and we accidentally invited their ire when we ended up destroying a few eggs while fighting other beasts.

We didn't know that beasts like these would build their nest here, and now we can't do much other than to escape.'

Lin Mu knew about these Scale-backed stork. They had long sharp beaks that they would use to pierce their foes, killing them. They liked to eat the intestines of their prey by pecking them out with their long beaks. Overall, they were terrifying for a Qi refining realm cultivator.

Three more entries in the diary were similar, the person and his team kept on getting chase for three days.

'Day 33, eleventh of November.

I can't believe it! Today we were almost killed by those two Scale Backed Storks, but then another cultivator swooped in and killed those beasts in one slash. We thought this was our luck, but then when we saw the man's cultivation base we were shocked.

The man was a Nascent Soul realm cultivator! He did not tell us his name and just said that he was a wandering cultivator. We were grateful that he save us and did not question why he hid his name from us. It was the obvious thing to do for a wandering cultivator, especially when they met a group of sect cultivators.'

Lin Mu furrowed his brows upon reading about this unknown Nascent Soul realm cultivator but did not come to any conclusions and kept reading.

'Day 34, twelfth of November.

The Nascent Soul realm cultivator is still with us at our camp and our senior managed to somehow convince the man to allow us to follow him. The man was also heading to the Deep Moon ravine and this would only make things easier for us.

I can't believe our luck would only improve this day.'

Lin Mu read over a few more entities over which the contents only became more and more interesting.

'Day 40, eighteenth of November.

We were able to cover most of the path rather quickly due to the nascent soul realm cultivator clearing out beasts and dangers. We were now almost at the Deep Moon Ravine and would probably get there tomorrow morning.

The cultivator is also going to depart from us tomorrow and gonna head to his own path. But then at night, I saw him do something strange. He had woken up and walked to the tent of one of my female companions.

I thought that he was heading to 'interact' with her but instead of that he drugged her with some kind of a powder before carrying her out.'

Chapter 513 - Fortune And Guilt

Finally, Lin Mu understood that this nascent Soul realm cultivator had some nefarious motives behind his actions. There was no way a nascent soul realm cultivator would randomly assist some random outer court Qi refining realm cultivators like this.

Lin Mu kept on reading, wanting to find out more.

'I knew if I alarmed my companions at that time, the Nascent Soul realm cultivator might just kill us all.

But I did not want to give up on my female companion either. Thus I followed behind the man. Though strangely the man did not fly even though he could and simply waked from the edges of the ravine.

He walked steadily and had the female companion of mine on his back the entire time. They went past winding paths across the ravine and I too followed behind. During the entire time, I was sure that I would be found out, but somehow I wasn't. The man didn't even use his spirit sense to check the area around him, as if he was fully confident of himself.

Though I was cautious as well and stayed a couple of hundred meters behind just in case.

Hours passed by before the man finally reached the location he was intending to go to this entire time. It was a small cave that was carved out at the side of the ravine and was hidden from the view of anyone who passed by.

If one did not take the path that I had taken, I doubted anyone would notice the small cave snuggled between ravine walls. The man entered the cave, and I stopped far from it. I was sure that if entered the cave, I would definitely die.

I waited there for about an hour before I heard screams. The scream belonged to the Nascent Soul realm man and he was sent flying out of the cave. I could see that the bottom half of his body was missing and blood was spilling out of everywhere.

The man's torso fell down into the ravine, never to be seen again. I waited there for hours in anxiety but my curiosity eventually won and I went to the cave, my each step trembling. Peering into the dark cave, I could not see anything.

Thankfully, I knew some basic fire techniques and was able to ignite a fire to illuminate the area. Inside the cave, I saw ruins of what could only have been a cultivator's abode. There were formations around it that were now destroyed and also the bottom half of the Nascent Soul realm cultivator from before.

It was evident that he had been bisected at this location and had in turn destroyed the formation as well. I reckoned that he was trying to unravel the formations that were located here and made a mistake that led to his death.

I looked around for my female companion and was able to find her. Alas! She was not alive. All that was left of her was a pool of blood with chunks of flesh floating in it. I guessed that the Nascent Soul realm cultivator was using her to open the formations somehow.

It took me a while to get hold of myself, but I eventually managed to calm down my throbbing heart. The fear took more time to get rid of, but it eventually passed. With all that done, I decided to explore the ruins.

In there I found a lot of things including treasures. I now knew that I had become incredibly lucky, but at the expense of my female companion and the nascent soul realm cultivator. I was no fool and decided to take full advantage of this opportunity that the heavens had bestowed upon me.

Not only were there treasures but there were also a lot of cultivation techniques and books here. After reading those books did I realize that the most precious things in this abode were actually the books.

The book mentioned of more treasures hidden in many places all over the continent. But not all of their clues were in that book. Whoever was the owner of this abode, he didn't want to pass on his legacy that easily.

He wanted to make sure that his inheritor had the determination and drive that he deemed worth. The books didn't even mention the cultivation base of the person who this abode belonged to, but seeing all these treasure and the formations that were able to kill a nascent soul realm cultivator, I estimated it to be an Adult stage nascent Soul realm cultivator at the very least.

I also discovered that the nascent Soul realm cultivator who had died was not the first person to find this place. There were plenty of fragments of skeletons that I had missed initially due to my fear.

I collected whatever treasures there were into the five spatial storage rings I found there and hid them in my clothes. Then I made it seem like I had been injured by tearing my clothes and left the cave, returning to my companions.

They were anxious and looking for us this entire time and were scared since we had now been gone for nearly three days. Our senior brother had nearly called the mission off because of this and wanted to report to the sect.

Had it not been for the distance between the ravine and the sect, he would have already called them with the communication jade slip. They were surprised upon seeing me and questioned my disappearance.

I could only attribute this all to the Nascent Soul realm cultivator. They were placated for the time being, but I knew the senior brother had suspected something. I was sleepless that night but finally made a decision.

Using one poison I got from the cave, I spiked the food that we were going to eat that morning. My companions slept unaware of this and finally died by the next afternoon. I still remember their expressions as they died and it will forever stay carved in my memories.'

Reading the entire thing, Lin Mu could only think of this as a classic case of paranoia over fortune.

Chapter 514 - Yulong And The Inheritance

~Sigh~

"Such is the world of cultivation..." Lin Mu muttered to himself, unable to really put Fang Jiao at fault.

If it was him in the same position and he did not have the mysterious ring, he probably would have done the same thing.

"You will see far too many similar things in the future. The fortunate encounters are there for those that want to risk it and sacrifice for it. Those who hesitate will fall and never come out on top." Xukong spoke.

~huh~

"I understand senior." Lin Mu said.

"Good, now you should continue reading the thing to see what else he experienced," Xukong replied.

Lin Mu nodded his head and flipped the page. The rest of the entries were not as detailed as before and were kept brief. Lin Mu reckoned that this was probably due to the altered mental state of Jiao Fang and his guilt.

After having killed his companions, he returned to his sect but not before hiding the five spatial storage rings full of treasures some place safe. At the sect, he reported the death of his companions and fabricated a story of how they were killed by the Scale Backed storks.

The sect didn't have a hard time believing something like this as disciple dying in difficult missions like these was not that uncommon. Besides, all of them were outer court disciples who were not as much worth to the sect.

If the sect wanted, they could have ten times as many outer court disciples as they had right now recruited within a couple of days. It was their own choice that they didn't want that many people so as to not lower the quality of disciples too much.

Still, there was some scrutiny that Jiao Fang had to undergo to verify the things. Thankfully, the sect was leaning on the fact that what Jiao Fang was telling was the truth and thus they didn't question him that much.

Jiao Fang also did not act unnaturally and stayed within the sect for about a year. His cultivation base also did not improve, and he just did some menial missions to get by. When another year passed and the incident was completely over, Jiao Fang finally decided to act.

He took back the treasure and slowly started to grow his cultivation base so as to stay away from prying eyes of suspicion. Over the years, he would explore the other locations mentioned in the books and gain more clues.

Each location that he went to was an inheritance site and Jiao Fang was able to overcome them due to the help of the now-dead nascent Soul realm cultivator. Apparently, he had already prepared all the things that would be needed to overcome the different sites and had actually scouted them out beforehand.

It was evident that the man had been preparing all this for a few years now, perhaps even decades; only for him to die due to a mistake.

With the tools having been handed to him on a silver platter, Jiao Fang was able to gain the inheritance from three more locations before he came upon the final inheritance ground. This inheritance ground was said to be bigger than all of the previous ones combined and was hidden in a secret location.

The coordinates of that location were split into multiple books made by different authors and only when they were combined would a person be able to find the final clue.

But after another decade of search, Jiao Fang discovered that this was another test by the owner of the inheritance which revealed his identity and the final clue would be revealed after getting the final clue which was hidden in the book called Yulong's Mnemonics.

"So the expert that this all belonged to... he's Yulong." Lin Mu muttered as he tried to recall about this man.

There wasn't much information about this man except that he was an elder of the Zither Wind sect in the past and was at the Pseudo Dao Shell realm. This man had disappeared about thirty years ago and is said to have already died.

"He's from the zither wind sect, huh... then perhaps the location of the inheritance ground is also there?" Lin Mu guessed.

Lin Mu read more and finally finished the entire diary. Having read it, Lin Mu was able to place a time frame on all the things that had happened.

"So Jiao Fang found that cave over twenty five years ago and Yulong had died five years earlier to that. Not a long span of difference though." Lin Mu stated.

Lin Mu thought for a few minutes, and a few ideas appeared in his mind. On how to deal with Jiao Fang.

"You're going to blackmail him, aren't you?" Xukong guessed.

"Yes... it seems to be the simplest way. But it's not my first choice. I'll first ask him to cooperate and if he still does not listen, then I can threaten him with this. That way he will be reluctant to reveal my identity to others as well." Lin Mu said.

"Alright, plan well. Besides, it's not like he can truly hurt you now with your strength vastly surpassing his." Xukong said.

"Hmm... that's true. But it is also the point that makes me doubt him. If he had all these treasures, why did he not use them properly? I mean they should have been enough to push him to the nascent soul realm quite easily." Lin Mu replied.

"Seeing his character from the diary, I'd say it's because of his fear and cautiousness. He is a man who would patiently wait for a century to reap the profit." Xukong answered.

"Keeping the suspicion off him, huh... I don't know if I'd be able to wait this long if I was in his position." Lin Mu said.

Taking another look at the carefree expression of the sleeping Jiao Fang, Lin Mu decided to wait for the morning. Once Jiao Fang left the residential area, his plan would begin.

Phasing out of the house, Lin Mu went to make some preparations.

Chapter 515 - A Spot For Negotiation

Lin Mu took a look around the area and plotted out what he wanted to do. Overall, there weren't many things he needed to set up. Just a single isolating formation that lasted long enough so that others would not tread on that area.

And Lin Mu knew the perfect place to set it up as well. In the time Lin Mu had observed Jiao Fang, he had learned of a place that he liked to frequent. In fact, he went there at least thrice in a day.

Lin Mu turned to the east and went to an area where a small lake was located. There were trees around the area and a calm atmosphere was spread. Jiao Fang would come here regularly to cultivate and read things.

Lin Mu reckoned that it was the best place to interact with him as well. While this area was not completely hidden and was visited by a few other disciples as well, Lin Mu didn't need that long of a time.

Even ten minutes should be enough for him to talk with Jiao Fang, Lin Mu guessed. Having scoped out the area, Lin Mu took out a few things that would help him set up the formation.

Overall, it was a simple formation, and he already had all the things he needed to set it up. It didn't have high requirements and only needed a bunch of spirit stones and a formation plate.

Lin Mu had plenty of spirit stones and as for the formation plate, he could reuse the old one that he had. He walked to a few spots and buried the spirit stones while drawing some runes in the air with his spirit sense.

After that was done and a perimeter was made, Lin Mu went to the center and buried more spirit stones before making more runes. He then linked them all with the formation plate and the isolating formation.

Since the formation was inherently harmless, it wouldn't interact with the other formations that were set up around the sect, plus the people would not detect it as easily either.

"Hmm... this should be enough. Now to only wait for him." Lin Mu said as he went back to Jiao Fang's residence and went to sit on the roof.

He laid down on his back and looked up at the stars in the sky.

"Hmm... even here the stars are the same. Though the distance has greatly changed..." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

While looking at these stars, Lin Mu felt as if he had seen an illusion for a moment. It showed him countless spheres that had different colors everywhere, but the moment he blinked his eyes, they disappeared.

"Strange..." Lin Mu said as he shook his head.

"Did something happen?" Xukong questioned.

"No... not really. I saw something but I think it's just because I'm a bit tired, at least mentally." Lin Mu replied.

"Take some rest, then. Wait till Jiao Fang wakes up." Xukong suggested.

"Yeah, I think I'll do that." Lin Mu said before closing his eyes.

While his eyes were closed, he was not asleep. His spirit sense would still spread around every few minutes, keeping an eye on things. It was midnight currently, thus Lin Mu had plenty of rest by the time morning came.

~creek~

Lin Mu opened his eyes as he sensed the door of the residence open, Jiao Fang had woken up. He used his spirit sense and observed that Jiao Fang was heading to the lake as he had expected.

"Let's move," Lin Mu said as he blinked away.

At the lake, Jiao Fang had just found his regular place to sit, which was a large flat rock. There was a tree to the side providing him shade, and the cool wind blew in from the front where the lake was. Overall, it was a good place to meditate.

Lin Mu was now out in the real world and not in the ground. He walked calmly while his spirit sense checked the area. Once he was sure that there was no one there, he took out the formation plate and activated the isolating formation.

~hum~

A low humming sound was heard as the formation plate glowed faintly and the isolating formation activated. Traces of spirit Qi fluctuations could be sensed, but these kinds of fluctuation were commonplace here in the Tri cauldron peony sect, where cultivators were everywhere.

Thus there was little chance for anyone to suspect that something was happening or that a formation had been secretly activated. Once this was in place, Lin Mu approached Jiao Fang openly.

The man was sitting cross legged on the rock while his hands were clasped together in a rather unique manner, with his thumbs spread apart and middle fingers touching. Lin Mu had seen this before and knew that it was the signature cultivation method of the Tri Cauldron peony sect, 'The Triple Cauldron refinement technique.'

Jiao Fang of course noticed someone approach him and opened his eyes. Lin Mu noticed how the man had not used his spirit sense despite having it and wondered if this was intentional or if he was just not habituated to using it.

But considering the age and experience of man, he was leaning towards the former.

"Oh? Brother Wu Lian?" Jiao Fang said upon spotting Lin Mu, who was approaching from the path that was lined with small pebbles.

Lin Mu gave the man a little smile before speaking, "greetings brother Jiao Fang."

"Greetings! Greeting! To what do I owe this pleasure today? Don't tell me you want to cash out on the favor so early? Hahah!" Jiao Fang joked.

"Well... I guess you could kinda say that." Lin Mu replied.

Jiao Fang's smile stiffened as he had not expected this answer. But he didn't break his expression for long, and quickly assumed his jovial attitude.

"Of course! Pray, do tell me what I can do for you? Inner court disciple Jiao Fang at your service~" The man said with a relatively wide smile.

Chapter 516 - Violent Negotiation

Lin Mu gazed at the man and his mannerisms. He had expected him to react a bit differently than this, but reckoned that this was the persona that man had adapted.

"Well, you see... I have certain tasks I need to do that can be considered risky. And thus I want your help with them." Lin Mu stated.

"What kind of tasks do you mean, brother? Is it hunting for beasts?" Jiao Fang asked.

"Not exactly... what I need is... for you to distract the guards while I get close to the vaults." Lin Mu revealed with a straight face.

Jiao Fang's face stiffened for a moment before he broke out in laughter.

"Ahahaha! Brother Wu Lian surely knows how to joke. You got, now do tell me what is it that you truly need." Jiao Fang replied.

"I already stated what I wanted." Lin Mu said.

Jiao Fang's smile now went away as he assumed a more calm expression.

"Brother Wu Lian must know that certain words should not be uttered in the sect, and these are the very words. Doing so would result in some harsh punishments by the sect. I'm sure you do not want that, do you?" Jiao Fang replied.

"No, this is exactly what I want. And I want you to help with this." Lin Mu spoke in a straight tone.

The corner of Jiao Fang's mouth twitched, but he did not falter.

"Say, I do consider this... but what reason should I have to accept something that clearly goes against the rules of the sect and would invite the ire of the disciplinary department?" Jiao Fang questioned.

"Because, a certain someone knocked out the guards, broke into the third Treasure pavilion and stole the page of a certain book by the name of Yulong's Mnemonics." Lin Mu answered, much to the shock of Jiao Fang.

"Ahahah! Brother Wu Lian's jokes are getting much better. Why would I do something so vile as this?" Jiao Fang asked while secretly clenching his fist.

Lin Mu did not respond straight away but instead pulled out a diary from his spatial storage ring, before holding it out on display.

"I'd guess to find the next clue to the inheritance of Yulong." Lin Mu replied.

The moment Lin Mu finished his sentence, he sensed a wave of spirit Qi emanating from Jiao Fang's body. This was his spirit sense, and it moved around in a circular manner.

'Oh? His spirit sense is rather long for a Qi refining realm cultivator... no wait, it's not...' Lin Mu thought as he then saw the man's aura rising.

Fang Jiao's expression turned cold as he suddenly shot towards Lin Mu, his fist stretched out at the front.

"So you really were hiding your cultivation base," Lin Mu said as he felt Jiao Fang's spirit Qi fluctuations which clearly put him at the peak stage of the core condensation realm.

The man in front of him was already eligible to become an elder, yet had been hiding his cultivation base.

"DIE!" Jiao Fang said in a fierce tone.

Lin Mu though, did not flinch at his attack and merely tilted his head, easily dodging the punch. Then in one swift motion, he sent out a palm to Jiao Fang's side.

~shua~

The wind generated from the palm strike made Jiao Fang's robes flutter and the man barely managed to retreat at the last movement. Flipping in the air, he moved back a few meters before stopping to take a look at the man in front of him.

There were no spirit Qi fluctuations coming from him and even that palm strike that he had used was made with just his physical strength. But even then Jiao Fang could tell that if it hit him, his ribs would be shattered.

His decades of experience had honed his instincts well enough that he could estimate the danger of an enemy. Over the years he had gone through one perilous situation after the other and had become used to them.

But the man in front of him was still feeling like an enigma to him.

"Who are you?" Jiao Fang asked, now realizing that the man in front of him was probably not who he was presenting himself to be.

"It's not really of your concern now. As long as you listen to my conditions, we may be able to work this out without violence." Lin Mu said, putting his hands behind his back casually.

~humph~

"Then just die. No one can live after finding out my secrets!" Jiao Fang said as his eyes turned bloodshot.

He flipped his palm and a long halberd appeared in his hand. Just from its appearance and the craftsmanship, Lin Mu could tell that it was no normal weapon and was probably a high grade spirit tool.

~Sigh~

"Then so be it... I'll just beat some sense into you," Lin Mu said, much to the anger of Jiao Fang.

"HAAA!" Jiao Fang yelled as he lunged towards Lin Mu, his halberd haled up high.

The halberd tore through the air as its sharp blade descended upon Lin Mu.

~whoosh~

The sheer amount of spirit Qi being channeled through the halberd was sending out gales of wind which made ripples on the surface of the lake.

But then...

~clang~

The sound of metal hitting something hard could be heard as Jiao Fang's eyes went wide. His high grade halberd, which was probably one of the strongest weapons in the sect, had been stopped.

Lin Mu calmly watched the man as he stopped the blade of the halberd mid-strike. But the thing that had shocked Jiao Fang was not it getting blocked, but rather how it had been blocked.

Lin Mu's bare hand was clasped around the blade of the halberd, not letting it move even a centimeter. If one looked closely, a faint brown glow could be seen on his hand with the patterns of scales on it.

~shing~

The sound of metal grinding could be heard as Lin Mu deflected the halberd, knocking it out of Jiao Fang's hand.

"You...."

Chapter 517 - Beaten Jiao Fang

Jiao Fang had definitely not expected that his day would be like this today. Not only was his secret found out by someone and he was forced to reveal his true strength, but the person who had found this out was much stronger than him even though his cultivation base seemed to be much less.

He looked at Lin Mu who was casually standing there, as if he had not just tossed a High grade spirit weapon halberd like it was a toy. Even a Nascent Soul realm cultivator or a Dao Shell realm cultivator would find something like this hard to do.

Lin Mu looked at Jiao Fang, who was obviously shocked and decided to speak.

"So will you now be willing to listen, or should we continue and I break a few things?" Lin Mu stated.

Jiao Fang gritted his teeth and took a fighting stance again, which only made Lin Mu roll his eyes.

"I won't go easy this time..." Lin Mu muttered before pulling his hand back and clenching his fist.

It was unusual to Jiao Fang as Lin Mu had neither form nor technique in this. Yet, he couldn't feel but feel anxious for some reason.

~whoosh~

Then suddenly Jiao Fang felt a powerful aura emanating from Lin Mu. But this aura was not due to spirit Qi but rather vital energy.

'No... vital energy isn't this dense...' Jiao Fang thought.

This was true, as what Lin Mu was displaying was no vital energy but rather vital essence. This vital energy started to condense in his arm and the aura peaked.

~Fuwa~

Then Lin Mu punched towards Jiao Fang. The speed of this punch looked slow, but it was fast at the same time. Jiao Fang was too late to realize that the punch was simply leaving behind afterimages due to which it appeared to be slow.

Though the thing was, the punch didn't directly hit him. In fact, there was a distance of over three meters between him and Lin Mu. But even then, the punch was strong enough to knock the air out of him.

Lin Mu's punch created a jet of air that tore through most of Jiao Fang's defenses as if they were paper. The few defensive measures he was using, including defensive Qi skill and talismans, were ineffective as they were used to defend against Qi attacks. But what Lin Mu had just used was nothing but simple air, which the measure would not respond against as they were not programmed for that.

Once this jet of air hit Jiao Fang, he felt as if his chest would be crushed and it made him forcibly exhale air before he vomited out his stomach's contents. He had not eaten anything and thus all that came out was the stomach acid.

Then he was sent flying backward and collided against the tree that he was once sitting beside.

~thud~

A loud thud could be heard as the tree shook hard, its dry leaves falling to the ground and the small animals that lived on it like the squirrels and bird scampered away.

Jiao Fang's clothes had been torn and a black-blue bruise was visible on his chest. It took him a minute before he was able to come to his sense as he had passed out due to the impact beforehand.

But even then it was hard for him to move, and he felt desperate.

'Where is he!?' Jiao Fang thought, still unable to speak, his ribs protesting with pain.

He barely lifted his head and turned his eyes to see Lin Mu calmly leaning against the flat rock where he was used to sitting. The man had not attacked him again, even though he fully had the ability to. In fact, in that state Jiao Fang was so helpless that even a child would have been able to kill him.

"W-w... w-why?" Jiao Fang spoke after a minute more.

This single word took a lot of effort for him, as even breathing was painful to him.

"Oh? What did you say?" Lin Mu asked with raised brows.

"-why... did... you... not... kill... me?" Jiao Fang asked, speaking each word after an agonizing breath.

"Oh, like is said I want to cooperate with you. Do what I ask and everything will be fine." Lin Mu replied.

Jiao Fang was now truly confused. He couldn't tell if his pain was greater or his confusion. He had a hard time believing the man in front of him, but the facts were all there. If Lin Mu truly wanted to kill him, he had plenty of options.

Originally Jiao Fang had thought that Lin Mu was someone who was after the treasures that he had accumulated, but now he couldn't help but think over his offer again.

"Re-really?" Jiao Fang asked again.

~Sigh~

"This will take a long time for us to figure out if you speak on like this." Lin Mu said before taking out a vial from his spatial storage ring.

"Take this," Lin Mu said, extending the vial in his hand towards the injured Jiao Fang.

"It will heal your injuries." Lin Mu added.

Jiao Fang looked at it in hesitation but then reckoned that it should not be any problem. Lin Mu already had plenty of options to kill him, but he had taken none. It would take much less for him to kill him rather than using some poisoned pill, which would be more expensive.

Jiao Fang extended his trembling hand and took the vial from Lin Mu. He held the vial to his mouth before pulling off the cap with his teeth. His other hand was numb from the impact and he was barely able to move it currently.

As soon as the vial was open, Jiao Fang could smell the medicinal aroma from the pill and realized what pill it was. After all, he was a disciple of the Tri cauldron peony sect.

'Pneuma Healing Pill? A mid grade one at that?' Jiao Fang recognized.

Chapter 518 - Renegotiating

Jiao Fang had known about this pill even if he had actually not seen it ever before. A Pneuma Healing pill was a healing pill that was used to heal internal injuries like the ones he had right now.

While it was just a mid rank pill, it was still rare. But it was not because of the difficulty of refinement, but rather because the ingredients needed to refine that pill were now all either extremely rare or in the control of a few sects.

Even the Tri Cauldron peony sect did not have the herbs that were required to refine the Pneuma Restoration pill. Still, it was not like the rarity of the pill was a problem for people, since there were plenty of other pills that could show the same effect and they were more economical too.

Lin Mu giving Jiao Fang a Pneuma Restoration Pill made him learn about a few things. The first thing that Lin Mu was definitely not from the sect; second that whichever power or sect Lin Mu belonged to, it was much stronger than the Tri Cauldron Peony sect, as only they would have rare herbs needed for the pill growing in their fields.

Jiao Fang started at the ring for about a minute before gritting his teeth for a moment and then eating it. The pill touched his tongue and rapidly started to melt. Once it was fully converted to liquid, Jiao Fang quickly swallowed it and got to healing himself.

He managed to sit in a meditative posture and guided the medicinal efficacy of the pill to heal his injuries. While he was doing this, Lin Mu had spread his spirit sense around the area ND was observing everything.

His main concern now was that another person may come here and witness this. Lin Mu didn't know how long the isolation formation would work for and if a random person would enter it despite the existence of the formation.

It took Jiao Fang about thirty minutes before he was able to take a breath of relief, literally. Even the bruise that was on his chest started to slowly fade away. Keeping his eyes closed, Jiao Fang pulled out another small pill bottle and ate two more pills.

These were some other healing pills that he was used to carrying with himself. Though this was the first time he was actually using them while he was inside the sect.

Till now an hour had passed and the isolating formation had long since lost its effect. A few people had walked in as well, and they had confused expressions on their faces. But it didn't last long as they saw everything to be normal.

A couple of them even passed by where Lin Mu and Jiao Fang were and looked at them curiously. After all, Lin Mu relatively handsome for the women, and Jiao Fang was eye-catching due to his torn clothes.

At first, they had thought that perhaps some conflict may have occurred between the two men. Private duels were often prohibited in the sect and the disciples that had disagreements with each other would either solve it amongst themselves or let it fall onto the backs of the Discipline hall.

But seeing both of the men sitting cross legged and cultivating calmly, they reckoned that it must have just been an accident or a friendly spar. Seeing this, the two people went away and Lin Mu stared at their backs.

"Hmm... looks like the isolation formation worked just as I had expected. Thankfully, it lasted long enough that I was able to get Jiao Fang healed. If Jiao Fang was still in pain and struggling, perhaps one of the disciples may have become suspicious." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Just as Lin Mu opened his eyes, Jiao Fang did too. This time his eyes had a better look in them, and he no longer struggled to move.

"Do you feel better now?" Lin Mu questioned the man.

"Yes...." Jiao Fang replied in a low voice.

"Are you ready to cooperate and talk?" Lin Mu asked further.

"Yes..." Jiao Fang nodded his head.

"Good, then we shall talk. Though not here. Let us go back to your residence. This place is not suitable for a conversation such as that." Lin Mu replied.

"Alright." Jiao Fang said before staring up.

Both of them went back to Jiao Fang's residence and locked the doors behind their backs. Jiao Fang lightly waved his hands and the door of the residence locked up automatically.

~huu~

Jiao Fang took a deep breath as he sat down on his bed.

"Now tell me what is it that you exactly want." Jiao Fang said.

"Basically, what I want you to do is the same that you did for the guards of the third treasure pavilion. But this time the targets would be the guards that guard the vaults of the main peak." Lin Mu said.

"I believe you should be able to come up with a method on your own, to execute something like this. I've read the diary and know that it won't be your first time at a task like this." Lin Mu stated.

Jiao Fang went silent for a few minutes before speaking.

"I... I'll be able to do something. But whatever you want to do, it will have to be quick." Jiao Fang said.

"That will be fine. Mainly I want someone to delay the guards from noticing us. Or if that does not work, I just want the right opportunity to be able to observe the vault's formations when they are opened or closed." Lin Mu explained.

"Hmm... I should be able to do the first thing for two of the vaults, but for the final vault, this would not be possible as there are no guards on it. If you want to observe the formations though, it should be possible.

All we would need for it is the key of the vault which should be in the hands of the sect patriarch." Jiao Fang explained.

Chapter 519 - A Key To A Key

After hearing the last sentence of the man, Lin Mu couldn't help but raise his brows.

"Steal from the sect patriarch? Won't that be extremely dangerous?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes. But not if you do it the way I tell you." Jiao Fang replied.

"You got some more information on this?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Indeed. Over the years I spent in the sect, I learned a few things, since I often needed to do things that were not exactly according to the rules. I did this all for the inheritance, of course.

It was also during one of these things that I learned of the key that the sect patriarch had. Since the patriarch often needs to attend to the matters of the sect that are of utmost importance, he cannot personally go to the vault when things are needed.

Because of this, he would place his key at a designated location where the high elders of the sect have access to it. As long as they have the permission of the sect patriarch, they would be able to enter this place and take the key.

But this only lasts for one use after which the key would stop working." Jiao Fang explained.

"Is this how you got the part of the key to the treasure pavilion too?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Not exactly. The treasure pavilion has items that are of way less important than the vaults. Thus they have multiple keys that are the medallions. These medallions are often split into multiple parts so that no single person can access them on their own.

I just had to find someone who had a piece of that medallion and take it from them." Jiao Fang replied.

It was now that Lin MU realized what must have happened with Jiao Fang on the day he met him.

"You don't mean that the day I saw you for the first time, you had just fought someone for that piece of the medallion?" Lin Mu questioned.

"You won't be wrong. It was just some junior elder who was carrying the medallion." Jiao Fang answered.

"But wouldn't that bring problems? Killing an elder must be problematic, especially since you live in the sect itself." Lin Mu asked.

"It would have been like this a couple of years ago. But recently I don't know what happened to the sect, but the higher ups of the sect have changed greatly. It's almost as if they don't care what happens to their people.

It was only when Alchemist Bilao said he was going to break through to the nascent soul realm, that they all got busy showing their concern. Even if I had killed the junior elder, the sect won't find it out for a few months at the very least.

Even then there is a chance it would take longer as the mission the junior elder was going on was a long term one and he would have been gone for at least a couple of months even if he completed it early.

Still fighting that man took out a lot from me and that was the reason for my appearance that day." Jiao Fang replied.

Lin Mu nodded at the man and understood that he was someone who set up various masks to hide his true self. The man in front of Lin Mu was fickle and devious. Had it not been for Lin Mu's overwhelming display of strength, it was likely the man would have still been scheming against him.

"So, do you not care for the sect? And do you not have loyalty to it?" Lin Mu finally asked the question that had been bugging him for a while.

"Not really. Ever since I got the inheritance, I didn't really care for the sect as it is now a mere stepping stone for me. Once I get all parts of the inheritance, it won't be hard for me to control the entire sect on my own." Jiao Fang said with fires of ambition burning in his mind.

Lin Mu almost wanted to tell him how ironic this was, as there was already someone that was controlling the sect behind everyone's back. And not only this, but they were also controlling a ton of more sects, either directly or indirectly.

"So where is this place where the patriarch puts the key to the vault?" Lin Mu questioned.

Jiao Fang pulled out a map of the sect from his spatial storage ring and spread it on the table. Lin Mu could see a lot of markings that were made on the map and guessed that these were the places of importance according to Jiao Fang.

"The key is located in an inconspicuous location just south of the elder residences. The location in question is a small shrine that is seldom visited by anyone, including the other elders of the sect. Only the patriarch and the elders who have been given permission to go there." Jiao Fang explained.

"Hmm... so this is the location. But what about the security? There should be some, right?" Lin Mu questioned.

"There is indeed. There are formation arrays that only recognize the sect elders and they are also active 24/7 unlike the other identity formations of the sect which only scan every few hours." Jiao Fang answered.

"Getting into this shrine will be hard then. I'll have to unravel the formations." Lin Mu muttered.

"I already have this part solved." Jiao Fang said before he took out the piece of medallion from his spatial storage ring.

"This medallion piece already has the identity of the elder that it belonged to. You should be able to get into the shrine without much trouble." Jiao Fang said.

"But won't the sect find out that one of their elder's borrowed this? How would that be possible if they were never in the sect?" Lin Mu asked for clarity.

"You won't have to worry about that if you are only going to stay here a short time. The patriarch would only check the shrine next month after Alchemist Bilao's tribulation is over." Jiao Fang stated.

Chapter 520 - A Shrine And Bilao

Lin Mu's eyes lit up as he liked this plan. For the first time, he had a concrete plan that would work.

"Alright then, I'll do this and get the key first." Lin Mu said.

"Yup. And by then I'll get the diversion of the other two vaults ready. It will take me a bit to check around and get to you." Jiao Fang spoke in a serious tone.

He then took out a jade slip from his spatial storage ring and held it out for Lin Mu.

"Here, register this in your communication jade slip so we can talk in the sect." Jiao Fang said.

Lin Mu gladly obliged and registered the Qi signature of Jiao Fang in his own communication jade slip.

"I'll leave for the shrine now." Lin Mu said.

"You need to be careful then, and hide well. Even if some disciples see you and it is accidentally reported you may get found out and the patriarch may come to check up on the shrine before time." Jiao Fang said.

"You don't need to be concerned about that, I got a plan." Lin Mu said before he left the residence and closed the door behind him.

Jiao Fang waited a few seconds before taking a peek outside, but was then shocked.

"Huh? Where the hell did he disappear to?" Jiao Fang said, feeling bewildered.

~Sigh~

Sighing to himself, Jiao Fang realized the man was way beyond his understanding and it was better if he did not ask too much. That was also the reason why he had not asked Lin Mu how he had found out about his secret.

Deep in his heart, he was afraid that Lin Mu may kill him to hide his own secrets. Thus, he considered this option to be the better one.

"I should get to my part too... perhaps I make some gains too..." Jiao Fang muttered to himself before leaving the residence as well.

Lin Mu didn't tell Jiao Fang that he did not care about being able to hide at all. His skills that were conferred by the ring were strong enough to take him through this all with barely any problems.

He had left the residence by blinking away and then sinking to the ground. From there he quickly made his way up the sect, right to where the residences of the elders were. These residences were bigger than those from the Herb Peak or the Pill peak and looked to be better maintained.

"That should be the path," Lin Mu muttered as he saw a small path that went to the depths of a few trees.

Going along with it, he soon came upon the shrine that they were talking about. Looking at the shrine, Lin Mu saw a few tablets kept inside it.

"Oh, so it's an ancestral shrine for the people of the sect." Lin Mu spoke.

"It should be the shrine for people who have lived in the sect for many generations. Many disciples get married within the sect and have their children, who eventually grow up and have their own children.

Such families don't have any homes in the secular world and thus end up making ancestral shrines in the sect itself." Xukong explained.

"Ah, no wonder Jiao Fang said barely anyone comes here. If they don't have any ancestors here, they would have no use visiting the shrine. But then, if the sect patriarch visits this place and uses it to keep the key, he must be linked to it or something." Lin Mu replied.

"Could be... but it's none of our concern," Xukong said.

"That's true. Let's just hurry up and take the key." Lin Mu said as he approached the shrine.

He held the medallion in his hand and it interacted a bit with the formations of the shrine before allowing him to enter. If one were to see this scene, they would think that the formation was malfunctioning as it had activated without anyone being there.

After all, unless they used their spirit sense to check the ground, they would never realize that Lin Mu had been hidden there all along.

Once the formation let him in, Lin Mu rose up to the floor of the shrine and saw a box kept at the back.

"That should be it..." Lin Mu muttered as he opened it.

"There we go," Lin Mu said as his eyes lit upon seeing the key to the vault inside.

This key was in the form of a formation plate and was made out of metal, along with a few precious gems. It was evidently of a much higher quality than the formation plate that Lin Mu had used to set up the illusory formation before.

Quickly putting the key into his ring, Lin Mu blinked out of the shrine and went away from the area.

'May as well check out the area.' Lin Mu thought and he went to the location of the first vault.

This vault was located where the core disciples lived and was guarded by a couple of them as well. Lin Mu took a simple glance and could tell these formations would also take time to break.

He then went to the next vault, which was located deeper within the large compound where the elders of the main peak lived. Lin Mu was causally taking a look around the residences when he spotted someone he recognized.

"Alchemist Bilao... so this is where he has been residing." Lin Mu murmured.

He was currently around a luxurious residence that was surrounded by a lot of disciples. They were evidently guarding it and would turn away anyone that got close to it.

"Do not approach the residence, Alchemist Bilao is deep in preparation." One of the guard disciples warned another disciple who had gotten close.

That disciple took heed of the words and quickly went in a different direction.

Lin Mu though had no such problem, and he easily sneaked into the residence.

'Wonder what a person who is close to a heavenly tribulation feels like?' Lin Mu thought.