

Walker 71

Chapter 71 - An Unexpected Fight

Lin Mu looked at the six darkly dressed individuals who were standing a hundred meters away from him. They noticed him at the same moment Lin Mu noticed them. They tensed up and then placed their hands on the hilts of the swords they were carrying.

It looked like the men were hiding something as they were trying to cover something behind them. Even Lin Mu became nervous upon seeing the men, as he could tell that something was definitely wrong.

"I thought the routes were already blocked. What do we do now first brother?" One of the darkly dressed men spoke.

"Dammit! those guys can't even do a single task correctly," Another man said.

"Silence! It's just a kid, we'll take him as well. Master will be fine with some extra goods, anyway." The man named the first brother grimly spoke.

The first person to react among the six was the man to the very right. He walked towards Lin Mu and then started running as he drew his sword from its sheath.

"Focus and brace yourself. Use your spirit sense there may be cultivators." Xukong spoke in a firm tone.

Lin Mu instinctively started chanting the calming heart sutra. His mind tranquilized and he could think clearly. The movement of the man approaching him slowed down by a notch and he could see the man's tracks.

As soon as the man got in the range of Lin Mu's spirit sense, he detected that the man was not a cultivator and was instead at the 9th stage of the body tempering realm. Felling assured Lin Mu drew his sword, set his hand straight, and entered a stance.

Lin Mu bent to the side in an effort to dodge the man's blade and barely scraped by.

"That was close." Lin Mu muttered.

"You're not gonna avoid the next one." The man spoke.

The man approached Lin Mu again and slashed at him, which he blocked with his short sword. Lin Mu then pushed back and deflected the sword.

"How?" The man exclaimed upon seeing Lin Mu's strength.

Lin Mu had an advantage over the man as he was already in the 10th stage of the body tempering realm, along with being a cultivator at the Mid-stage of the Qi refining realm.

The companions of the man noticed this and were just about to warn him when...

"AAARGH!!" the man shouted as he was stabbed through his heart.

Lin Mu took advantage of the moment when the man was shocked and stabbed through his heart. The man collapsed in the next moment, freeing Lin Mu's attention.

"Fourth brother! No!" Shouted the darkly dressed man who had spoken the first time.

"He's strong, we have to be careful. Fifth, sixth, pull his attention, third attack him from the back." First brother spoke.

"Second brother, wait for the right moment to strike. This boy is not simple." First brother spoke again.

The men named fifth and sixth advanced towards Lin Mu from the opposite side, while the man named third circled around Lin Mu. The remaining two men were glaring at Lin Mu, looking out for an opportunity.

Knowing that it will be difficult for him to go against three people at once, Lin Mu decided to split them up, beforehand. Lin Mu withdrew the hatchet from his ring and strengthened his arms with spirit qi.

Seeing that a hatchet had appeared in Lin Mu's hand out of thin, the three approaching men were a little stunned. Grasping this chance, Lin Mu hurled the hatchet at the man named as the sixth brother with all his strength.

A whirling sound could be heard as the hatchet spun through the air and then buried itself in the chest of the man. Unable to utter even a single word, the man crashed to the ground; his life or death unknown.

"RETREAT! He's a cultivator, he has a spatial treasure!" The second brother yelled.

"Quick." First brother spoke, as he tensed his jaw.

Now that the battle was tilting in his favor, Lin Mu did not want to slow down and let go of the lead. He instinctively chanted the severing heart sutra and targeted the two men, fifth and third brother.

The two men slowed down as their eyes turned dull. Lin Mu 'blinked' forward and appeared at the sides of the two men. Amplifying his short sword with spirit qi, Lin Mu slashed through the two men in a single smooth stroke.

The defenses of the two men could not resist the sharpness of a spirit weapon, thus they were split into halves.

Horrified and furious at the development, the remaining two men shouted and sprinted towards Lin Mu. Rage burned in their eyes, as they regretted underestimating Lin Mu.

The man named first brother reached Lin Mu in the next moment and struck him with his sword. Lin Mu sensed his cultivation and estimated it to be at the mid-stage of the Qi refining realm. Blocking the strike with a buckler, Lin Mu twisted to the side. Suddenly Lin Mu's spirit sense detected something coming at him from the back.

Unable to dodge the incoming object, Lin Mu 'Flickered' and then the object passed through his back. He saw the object and found it to be a small dagger that was dripping with a black liquid.

"Careful! He has some mysterious martial techniques." The second brother warned.

Lin Mu blinked to the back of the man named first brother and cut at it. Second brother noticed this and jumped forward to block it.

"Dammit." Lin Mu cursed.

Lin Mu stored the short sword in the ring and seamlessly withdrew the spear from it. Having lost the force from the short sword, second brother's sword went straight ahead, through which Lin Mu flickered and moved away.

Then, using his legs as a pivot, Lin Mu twirled and pierced the spear through second brother's jaw. The spear entered at the base of his jaw and went straight through the top of its skull.

"YOU!!!" First brother said with great rage in his voice.

Not bothering with the man's words, Lin Mu lunged at him. The man's eyes flared as he bit on his tongue and spit out some blood. Gesturing with his left hand, the man drew some pattern in the air. In the next moment, veins appeared on his face as his eyes turned red.

"He's using a sacrificial technique, you need to end it quickly." Xukong spoke with urgency.

Lin Mu blocked an attack with his short sword, which made him recoil in pain. The man's strength had nearly tripled as Lin Mu was barely able to dodge it.

'I won't be able to win against him in a straight fight, I have to find some other way.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu then chopped at the man's arm, which he blocked with his own sword. But at this moment Lin Mu used the skill 'Flicker' and the short sword passed through the man's sword. He then canceled the skill at the very last moment, making a deep cut appeared on the man's arm and shoulder, making him wince with pain.

Now, with his short sword stuck in the man's arm, Lin Mu was unable to withdraw it. Choosing to leave his sword behind, Lin Mu blinked to the back of the man.

Entering the stance for the Boulder collapsing fist, Lin Mu coiled his hand back. His breath melded with the stance, as the spirit qi formed a spiral in his hand. Putting all his bets on this final attack, Lin Mu executed it.

"Boulder Collapsing Fist!"

~whew~

A whistling sound could be heard as a jet of air shot forward, which made the man's clothes flutter and tear. Then, a sickening sound could be heard as Lin Mu's fist made contact with his back.

~Crack... floosh~

Lin Mu's fist broke through the man's back while turning his insides to mush. The fist then punctured through the chest and sprayed out the man's pulverized innards.

The now-dead man was stuck standing on the ground, with Lin Mu elbow deep in him.

Lin Mu then slowly withdrew his blood-drenched hand and sat down on the ground, breathless. Looking at what he had just done made him feel sick, but then the effects of the calming heart sutra resolved it for him.

"That was horrifying." Lin Mu spoke.

"You'll get used to it soon." Xukong spoke.

"At least you kept your wits. Good job defeating those men, I can certainly see the improvement." Xukong then spoke with a chuckle.

"It was all due to senior's guidance." Lin Mu politely replied.

Senior Xukong had been giving him pointers whenever he trained, which had helped him improve. Although senior Xukong himself had a completely different fighting style, he was still experienced enough to give pointers to him. Perhaps if he ever started giving lectures to the public, even immortals would attend to take benefit of it.

"Now won't you take a look at your spoils?" Xukong spoke

"Ah yes!" Lin Mu replied as he stood up.

The first thing Lin Mu did was to store the bodies inside the ring. After this, he went to the place where the six men were originally standing. There was a large rock placed at this location which seemed to be hiding something.

Lin Mu gazed at the rock and saw a small pool of blood near it. He looked behind it and saw something that shocked him.

"Gan Ma!?"

Chapter 72 - Conspiracy

Lin Mu would have never expected that the man he was looking for the past few weeks would turn up in front of him, dead. Indeed, the dead body that he found behind the rock was none other than Gan Ma, the leader of the hunter group, and also one of the only five cultivators in the town.

Lin Mu could not understand why he would turn up dead here. It was obvious that it was the six men that had killed Gan Ma and but the question was why?

Lin Mu looked around and did not notice any specific signs of struggle, which made him think that Gan Ma was killed rather quickly. He checked Gan Ma's body and found that the only wound he had was on his neck. Though weirdly, it was bandaged, and it seemed as if it was done after his death.

"Why would they bandage his neck after his death?" Lin Mu muttered.

"Check the other men, maybe you'll get some hints." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu nodded and withdrew every dead body that he had stored in the ring and checked them. Out of the six people, two were cultivators while the rest of them were in the 9th stage of the body tempering realm. One of the cultivators was at the mid-stage of the Qi refining realm, while the other was at the early stage of the qi refining realm.

In a small town like the Northern town, any cultivator was a big deal and commanded great respect. For two unknown cultivators to just appear randomly was extremely strange. Even the other four men that

were in the 9th stage of the body tempering realm could be considered to be at the top levels of strength in the town.

Lin Mu removed the cloth that was covering their faces and tried to identify them. He did not find any of them familiar, except for one person. It was the person named second brother that he found familiar. He could not place his finger on where exactly he saw that person, but knew that he must be influential.

Lin Mu also checked the bodies for other items and found many things on them. He took their swords and the thin chain mail armor that they were wearing under their clothes. He also found a set of throwing daggers on all of them. The total number of daggers was around 29.

Lin Mu then found a small vial that was filled with a black liquid that smelled sweet on the person called second brother.

"Careful, that's the Pulse cutting poison." Xukong sternly warned.

Lin Mu's eyes went wide as he hurriedly closed the small vial.

"That was close, but why does it smell so pleasant?" Lin Mu asked.

"So that people find it easy to drink, it's also sweet in taste. Though it does not have any effect unless it enters your body, either through a wound or your mouth." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu then remembered the small dagger that had nearly hit him before. That dagger seemed to be covered with a black liquid too. He went to the place where the dagger was lying and picked it up. He caught a whiff of the same sweet smell.

"It's covered in the pulse cutting poison. I was luckily saved by my spirit sense and skills." Lin Mu spoke.

"Indeed, having a spirit sense is a big advantage for you." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu then thought to the two cultivators and how they did not seem to be using spirit sense.

"Umm senior, why were the two men not using their spirit sense." Lin Mu questioned.

"Oh, that's simply because they couldn't use it. They were not at the stage where they could refine it." Xukong answered.

"But then how could I refine it? I was at the early stage of the Qi refining realm when I first started refining it." Lin Mu spoke with confusion on his face.

"Well, you are a rare case. Most Qi refining realm cultivators can't start refining their spirit sense until they reach the late stage of the qi refining realm, at the very least. They are either restricted by their cultivation technique or they just don't have the sufficient talent to do it on their own." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu nodded in acceptance and continued checking the bodies. He found another glass vial that was filled with some kind of translucent powder. He did not open the vial this time, as he had already learned his lesson and did not think he would be lucky every time.

"What is this senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"Hmm, this seems like Memory confounding powder. If someone inhales it, they will enter a confounded state and then lose their memories for up to an hour. The person affected by it will be incapacitated and will not respond to any stimulus, though it does not cause any physical harm other than that." Xukong replied.

'Could this have been used to kill Gan Ma?' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu had not found any signs of a struggle on Gan Ma, thus Lin Mu guessed that he did not resist much and was killed rather instantly. This hypothesis would work if the Memory Confounding powder was involved. The powder would incapacitate the victim while the killers would quickly slit their throat.

Now that Gan Ma was dead, Lin Mu wondered if he could consider senior Xukong's first test complete.

Senior Xukong seemed to have sensed Lin Mu's thoughts as he spoke in his mind. "You killed two cultivators, thus you can consider your first test complete, and anyway that man Gan Ma is already dead."

Lin Mu was about to store the bodies back into the ring when he saw a small piece of paper that had fallen to the side. It was stained with blood and was lying near the place where he had killed the first brother.

Lin Mu picked it up and opened it to read what was written inside.

"The town and the routes surrounding it will be blocked on account of a wandering spirit beast tonight.

Your orders are the same as before, capture the target but make sure that it does not lose too much blood. Master has specially told us to save the blood.

Once you are done with the task, deposit the target at the same location as before and return to your posts.

Though it should not happen, ensure that no one sees you. If someone does spot you, make sure that they don't live to tell the tale.

Three other teams are out doing the same tasks as you, so remember to tell the password before you talk to them. If they don't say the password kill them, you have my permission."

Lin Mu took a deep breath after reading the letter. He was shocked by the machinations that were happening.

"Seems like someone was targeting Gan Ma specifically. Is that the reason why he had disappeared from the town, these past weeks?" Lin Mu thought out loud.

"That's not all. According to the letter, there are three more teams out there. You need to be careful, Lin Mu." Xukong advised.

'Those fifteen mercenaries that disappeared from the campgrounds, could they too have been abducted by these men?' Xukong thought.

Lin Mu then walked back to the town and halted near the entrance after seeing some people there. He saw a couple of townsmen that were trying to enter the town but were currently being blocked by the guards.

"Halt! All entrances to the town and its roads are blocked. Where are you coming from?" The guards spoke to the townsmen.

"We were just returning from the fields." One of the townsmen replied.

"Why are the roads closed?" Another townsman asked.

The guards looked at the faces of the townsmen closely before answering.

"A warning was issued on account of a spirit beast. Someone spotted it wandering outside the forest." The guard spoke.

The townsmen looked visibly shocked and scared upon hearing the guard's words.

"We didn't know that, if we knew this we would have never gone out." The townsmen replied.

One of the guards gestured to the other and then nodded.

"Come with us, you need to show us your goods and let us examine them." The guard spoke.

The townsmen did not protest and went ahead with the guard's orders. The guards examined the satchels that they were carrying and then let them through after examining them.

Lin Mu was standing behind a tree in the darkness while watching all these events. After observing this, he was about to walk towards the entrance when senior Xukong spoke in his mind.

"Stop! Don't go there, something seems wrong. Go a little farther away and climb up the wall instead." Xukong ordered with a stern tone.

Lin Mu did not question senior Xukong's words and just obediently followed them. He walked a little distance from the entrance and found a suitable spot. He looked up at the tall wall and thought of a method to climb.

Lin Mu gauged the wall's height and estimated it to be a little more than ten meters. He then found a tree that was close to the wall and climbed it. The branch on which Lin Mu was standing was about halfway at the height of the wall, yet it was a little too far from it horizontally.

Lin Mu strengthened his legs and jumped towards the wall. While he was in mid-air, he extended his spirit sense and then used the second skill 'Blink' to teleport to the top of the wall. After reaching the top of the wall, he spied the other side and saw a guard following townsmen.

Lin Mu climbed down and followed the guard from afar. He suddenly saw a glint in the guard's hand and became alert.

Chapter 73 - The Conspiracy Unfolds

Lin Mu hid behind a wall and peeked out from the edge. He then saw the guard pull out a small metal contraption from his sleeves. Lin Mu could not see the contraption clearly except for the glint of light it reflected.

Lin Mu walked around the wall and used the alleyways to get close to the guard. The guard was pointing the contraption towards the townsmen and stalking behind them. The townsmen were completely unaware of the guard following behind them and were just conversing amongst themselves.

The townsmen soon reached the residential district and entered their houses. The guard saw this and waited for thirty minutes before leaving. Lin Mu took a breath of relief and went back to follow the guard.

The guard did not return to his post but instead went to a different location. He went towards the southern entrance which leads towards Wu Lim city and entered the guard's barracks there. Lin Mu could not enter the barracks without rousing suspicion, thus he just spied on it from the outside.

Lin Mu stood there for an hour and gave up after seeing that no one came out of it anymore. He then returned to his house to rest. Twenty minutes later, Lin Mu was sitting in his room while staring at the small piece of paper he had picked up.

He was observing it against the light of a lamp and discovered that there was a small symbol written on the bottom of the paper. Lin Mu had not seen it before, as the symbol was covered with a splotch of blood. He tried to decipher it and could only comprehend that the symbol looked like two cones intersecting.

'What could this mean?' Lin Mu thought.

"Rest for now. You'll probably find out something in the morning, such a conspiracy can't be hidden for long." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu nodded and lied down on the bed. A minute later, he appeared in the Sleepscape and started his daily practice. He had experienced the effects of the Thousand Armament Blade scripture today and felt that it was indeed a top-quality manual.

Even though he had barely learned a part of the manual, he still felt that he had improved a lot. Right now, in order to improve more, he needed the rest of the weapons that were mentioned in the manual. He had asked in the weapon shops in the town and got the same answer from all of them. They did not have those weapons as they were either unpopular or expensive.

If Lin Mu wanted those weapons, he would have to get them custom made or he would have to buy them from Wu Lim city. Lin Mu knew that even if he got them custom made, the weapons would probably not be of a good enough quality. Thus he had decided that he would head to the Wu Lim city sometime later to buy the weapons. But for now, he would just have to do with the weapons he had.

Lin Mu also had a few more reasons for which he wanted to visit the Wu Lim city. He wanted to see the cultivators that lived in the city and also to check out the shops that catered to the cultivators. He also wanted to experience the average life of a cultivator in the city, as he had no sample to compare it with here.

Senior Xukong had told him some stories of cultivators, how they were glorified and venerated, yet Lin Mu still wanted to see it for himself.

After a few hours of practicing the Thousand Armament Blade scripture, Lin Mu learned more Dao script from senior Xukong. In the end, he plucked the two ripe spirit apples hanging on the tree and fell asleep.

After his breakthrough to the Mid-stage of the Qi refining realm, the Sleepscape had undergone some development and the spirit apple tree now bore two apples instead of one every day. Lin Mu had also thought that he could also sell these spirit apples as a source of income. Though he could not do it in the town, as it would be too suspicious and no one would actually be able to afford it.

Lin Mu woke up in the morning to the sound of a commotion.

"What's going on so early?" Lin Mu groggily muttered.

Lin Mu walked out of his room and into the courtyard. He could already hear the gaggle of noises outside on the street. He opened the gate and peeked outside. He saw a large group of people arguing with a few guards in the middle of the street.

The people were all locals that lived in the neighborhood, and the guards were from the barracks at the eastern entrance. Lin Mu walked closed to listen to what was happening.

"We can't live in peace if you don't do something." A man standing at the front shouted.

"Yeah, what will we do if the beast enters the town somehow?" Another complained.

"Even the guards died and you're telling us to just stay calm." A woman protested.

The guard lifted his hands and gestured for the people to calm down as he spoke,

"People, please listen to me. We are doing all we can right now, but this is the town head's orders. All residents of the town are ordered to stay inside the residential district until further orders."

Lin Mu felt confused by the people's words, thus he tapped a person's shoulder to talk to them.

"What? Ah, Lin Mu, it's you! When did you return? I haven't seen you for months here." The man spoke.

The man Lin Mu had chosen to speak to was a neighbor that lived a few houses away from his own.

"I recently moved back here. Never mind that though, what's actually happening here?" Lin Mu replied.

"Oh, you didn't hear? There was another spirit beast attack." The man spoke.

"What do you mean another spirit beast attack?" Lin Mu asked.

"A few scouts had spotted a spirit beast wandering out of the forest, thus the captain of the guards had ordered the closure of the town yesterday. Apparently, the second vice-captain himself led a team of guards to drive the beast away, but they did not return yet. Then another team was sent out to find them, which only lead to them finding a few pools of blood and remains of bodies." The neighbor spoke.

'The vice-captain? Wait, was that person from yesterday the second vice-captain, maybe?' Lin Mu thought.

"So why are the people angry?" Lin Mu asked.

"Some townsmen never returned after yesterday, so they are scared. The guards are also not doing much and have just been told to give us some orders." The neighbor replied.

Lin Mu had an idea what happened, thus he nodded to his neighbor and walked away. The crowd too disappeared after the guards placated them.

Lin Mu wanted to verify if the person called second brother and the vice-captain were the same. He had seen the other vice-captain before, so knew that it wasn't that person. He went to the town center to check for it.

Lin Mu knew that as long as he greased the palm of a clerk, he should be able to get some information. It took him fifteen minutes to reach the town center, and upon reaching the town center he saw another crowd of people gathered around.

But this time these were not the residents of the town, but rather the mercenaries. The crowd was not making much noise and was just standing there looking at the town center with anger in their eyes.

Not wanting to bother the mercenaries, Lin Mu slipped into the building from the side. He saw the staffers working on their desks and the clerks running around doing their tasks and carrying rolls of papers.

Lin Mu chose a clerk that passed by him and called out to him. The clerk stopped and looked at him with an annoyed face. In response, Lin Mu instantly pulled out a silver coin from the pouch.

"Brother, may I have a moment of your time? I'll definitely make it worth your while." Lin Mu spoke.

Lin Mu could see the shine of greed in the clerk's eyes and knew that he had him in his palm.

"What would you like, brother?" The clerk spoke as he eyed the silver coin.

Lin Mu passed the silver coin to the clerk and patted his back to gesture him to go to a corner. The clerk obediently followed and guided Lin Mu to a different room. There were some other clerks in the room who were working on their own tasks and did not pay attention to the two of them.

"I would like some information about what's happening in the town." Lin Mu asked.

"What do you mean by that brother? Everyone knows what happened, it was a beast attack." The clerk replied.

"I... would like a few more details." Lin Mu spoke.

The clerk thought for a moment before speaking again.

"The truth is, we don't know what exactly happened." The clerk replied.

Chapter 74 - Vigil

Lin Mu felt strange about the clerk's words. He thought that he may be lying at first, but then looking at his face made him think differently. Though he thought he should listen to the complete story first.

"The report about the spirit beast was given by a mercenary to the second vice-captain. The second vice-captain thus issued the order to close the town and the routes leading to it. But later, when he didn't return, the other guards went to talk with the town head about the mercenary who gave the report. The town head told them that the mercenary who reported it disappeared too and they can't find him." The clerk explained.

"Is that why mercenaries are standing outside the town center?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yeah, they're angry that more of their mercenaries disappeared and the town head is not responding to their complaints." The clerk answered.

"And what does the second vice-captain look like? Because I don't think I've seen him before." Lin Mu asked his main question.

The clerk did not seem like he minded Lin Mu's question and just spoke honestly.

"Oh, let me just get the identity register. We have portraits of all the town's cultivators in it."

"I didn't know there was an identity register for cultivators." Lin Mu said curiously.

"Oh no, it's actually for all people that the town head considers important, there are other normal people in it too that are not cultivators." The clerk answered and then went away to get the register.

'This is news to me. I didn't know that there was something like this.' Lin Mu spoke inwardly.

"It is technically necessary. Every establishment needs to keep a record of important people." Xukong spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

"I guess the portrait will make it easier to identify the man than just by a vague description." Lin Mu spoke to himself.

The clerk soon returned with the register and showed it to Lin Mu. He flipped it to the page where it showed the second vice-captain's portrait. Lin Mu saw the portrait and instantly recognized the man. The person that tried to kill him yesterday was the vice-captain.

"Han Xu?" Lin Mu muttered the name written on the register.

"Yes, that's the vice-captain's name." the clerk responded.

Even after completing his main task, Lin Mu still felt curious about the situation, thus he decided to get more information.

"I also heard that some guards and townsmen disappeared."

The clerk did not straight away answer Lin Mu's query, but instead looked at his coin pouch. Lin Mu understood this and pulled out another silver coin before passing it to the clerk, who swiftly hid it in his sleeve.

"We have some contradicting statements about that. Some people say that they saw the townsmen enter the town safely, while the guards say that they never returned. As for the guards, we don't know what happened, but the current theory is that they saw the beast and went after it only to never return." The clerk spoke.

"That is strange." Lin Mu muttered.

Having got his share of information, Lin Mu was ready to leave. He gave another silver coin to the clerk and then left the building. Upon leaving, he saw that the mercenaries were still standing there and were not budging at all.

While leaving, Lin Mu felt a gaze at the back of his head and turned around but did not notice anyone specific. Pushing the thought to the back of his mind, he walked away. Half an hour later Lin Mu returned to his house.

As soon as he entered his room and closed the door, senior Xukong spoke in his mind.

"You were being followed. Though it seems they stopped before they entered the residential district."

"Was that the gaze I felt on me?" Lin Mu asked

"It seems like it, though they did not follow you all the way, they're wary of something." Xukong replied.

"Could it be related to the attacks? Because we know that three more teams of those men were out there and that the townsmen we saw yesterday disappeared as well." Lin Mu spoke.

"We'll have to wait and watch. Though I recommend that you focus on extending the range of your spirit sense as it will help you in sensing other people. The longer your range is, the easier it will be for you." Xukong advised.

"Yes, senior." Lin Mu accepted.

Before starting his practice, Lin Mu decided to cook some food. Half an hour later he had eaten his food and was ready to start his cultivation session. But suddenly he heard someone knocking at the gate.

Lin Mu walked out and opened the gate. Upon opening it, he found his neighbor standing outside the gate. It was the same neighbor he had talked to earlier in the morning.

"Did you need something, Xiao Lu?" Lin Mu asked.

Xiao Lu had been Lin Mu's neighbor for many years and was four years older than him. He used to live with his uncle, but he too died in the plague that happened last year. Since then, he had been living alone as well.

"How are you, Lin Mu? I heard you got your house seized from you some time ago." Xiao Lu spoke.

Lin Mu had been dreading this moment for a long time, but he knew that it would be coming sometime soon. The gossiping ladies of the neighborhood were never known for their secrecy.

They should have probably seen that the house was no longer sealed, but they did not see Lin Mu, so must have thought someone else bought it. Also, since Lin Mu had secluded himself in the house for a week since he got it, there weren't many chances where others could have seen him. But now that he revealed himself in the morning, the entire neighborhood must have seen him.

"Ah yes, I did, but I've already paid off the fine and got it back." Lin Mu spoke with a straight face.

Lin Mu did not want to talk with the man for long, as he wanted to return to his cultivation session.

"Oh, I was told to inform you that the people in the neighborhood have decided to keep a vigil at night." Xiao Lu spoke.

"But isn't that the guard's job?" Lin Mu replied.

"They don't trust the guards anymore, they think they are lying. Even now the guards have only been told to guard the entrance of the residential district and not the insides. Thus the neighborhood had decided to do it themselves." Xiao Lu answered.

"So they're not afraid anymore?" Lin Mu asked jokingly.

"They are, that's why we are making teams of four people that will keep a vigil at night. Everyone has to participate, thus I'm here to inform you." Xiao Lu answered.

Lin Mu did not want to do this as it would interfere with his cultivation, but he did not think he really had a choice. He also did not feel good rejecting the people he had grown up with.

"Just take it, I think you may be able to discover some things. You will have an excuse to wander in the night, also with the person following you today, I don't think they will leave you alone." Xukong spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

'Yes senior.' Lin Mu spoke inwardly.

"That's okay, but when will my turn be then?" Lin Mu asked.

"The day after tomorrow. You'll be teaming with me and two other people." Xiao Lu answered.

"Okay then." Lin Mu replied.

Xiao Lu nodded and went away. Lin Mu returned to his room and closed the door. Not wanting to waste any more time, he sat down to cultivate.

In Wu Lim city, at a large manor located near a lake.

A thin man was sitting at a desk and reading from a scroll. The man had a short beard and well-groomed hair. He was dressed like a scholar and had the bearing of a cultured person.

A woman was standing next to the desk with her head bowed. She was dressed in a long black-robbed that covered her body and hid her figure. Even her face was covered with a thin grey veil.

The thin man read the scroll for a few minutes before putting it away and then rubbed his forehead as if he was stressed. He let out a long sigh before speaking,

"Is that all you've found?"

"Yes, my lord. Though there are some more reports, but I didn't think they would be worth your time." The veiled woman spoke.

The thin man let out another sigh before speaking.

"You may as well tell me. This information was nearly useless as well."

"Some townsmen have disappeared from the Northern town and a new cultivator has appeared as well." the veiled woman spoke.

The thin man looked up at the woman with an annoyed look and spoke,

"And you only report this to me now?"

"But my lord, cultivators appear in other towns regularly, and also there are many mercenaries in Northern town right now. We don't know if they belong to some mercenary group." The veiled woman spoke with a pleading tone.

Chapter 75 - Meeting An Old Enemy

The thin man stroked his chin a couple of times before speaking again.

"How old did that cultivator look?" the thin man asked.

The veiled woman gulped before replying,

"He... he's young, probably sixteen or seventeen, but definitely younger than twenty."

An irritated expression appeared on the man's face as he replied with a louder tone.

"So you mean to say that our people could not differentiate between a cultivator belonging to a mercenary group and an itinerant cultivator? Do you think a cultivator of such a young age would join a mercenary company, or do you think it is a high-level cultivator that has returned to his youth?"

The veiled woman lowered her face even more and didn't speak.

"Do you think a cultivator that has enough talent to become a cultivator at that age would be without a backing? GO!! I want every single thing there is to know about that cultivator." The thin man yelled.

"Yes, my lord." The woman replied before disappearing.

The thin man sighed to himself before standing up and walking up to a shelf and opening a drawer. He then pulled out a jade slip and looked at it for a moment before keeping back into the drawer and closing it.

~sigh~ "It is not the time yet." The man muttered before walking to a window and staring outside.

"What are you planning father... "

Lin Mu was practicing the Thousand Armament Blade scripture in the Sleepscape. He had nearly completed the basics of the weapons he already had and now was progressing to the more advanced parts. Though right now, he felt as if he was being hindered. He understood that it was because of a lack of weapons and that he would have to get them soon or this may become a flaw in his technique.

The more he practiced, the more he understood how the techniques of different weapons fit together and complemented each other. He now grasped the flaws of different weapons and how to overcome them with the use of another weapon.

"You are doing well. The improvement is significant." Xukong praised.

Xukong had been seeing Lin Mu practicing diligently every day. He thought about how the boy was hardworking, even though his innate talent in cultivation was low. He had chosen not to tell this to Lin Mu as he wanted to see if he could overcome this limitation by himself.

Xukong had seen many experts over the millennia that he had lived. He had seen them rise, prosper, fall, and die. He had seen immensely talented and gifted people so much so that they were even venerated as the Heaven's ordained. But he had also seen those very people lose themselves to cultivation and then perish in the annals of time.

Countless people have tried to go against the heavens, yet few have survived it. Even the ones that survived it shortly disappeared, though people still had some evidence that showed that they were alive.

Xukong then remembered a memory from his past,

Countless white pillars could be seen floating in the endless void, along with some distortions spread around. At the depths of these pillars, a colossal being was currently resting. The being had a pale white body, eight legs, and ten golden yellow eyes that glowed with an imposing light.

This was none other than Xukong himself. Streaks of silvery grey lights could be seen floating around his body and the white pillars. These streaks of light would touch the white pillars and then be absorbed by them. One could even see the streaks traveling through the pillars and moving towards Xukong's body.

Fine threads arose from Xukong's body that connected to the giant white pillars. The light streaks would transfer from the white pillars to the fine threads, which would then carry it to Xukong's body.

With every Light streak that was absorbed, the distortions in the void slowly reduced. One could not tell how long it would take for each distortion to disappear, but time could not be measured in the void, thus making it more difficult. It could have been a second or a year, but the distortion finally disappeared.

Xukong stayed in the same position, unmoving for a long time, until he sensed some disturbance in the distance. His perception spread in the surroundings and suppressed all the distortions. Even though the void was always silent, a different kind of eerie silence descended because of the pressure imposed by Xukong.

"Hmm, this is quite unusual of you, Old monster," Xukong spoke.

In response to Xukong's words, the space in front of him started swirling and an ash grey throne appeared. The throne was empty, yet a presence could still be felt from it. A voice could then be heard echoing.

"Are you so bothered by my presence that I can't even visit you, Xukong?" The voice spoke.

"Oh, you know what you've done, old monster. You would never come here unless it was something important and your other slaves were unable to help you with it." Xukong replied with an annoyed voice.

"They're not my slaves, they have their own free will." The voice replied.

"What kind of free will is that, where you only have two choices? Their karma is chained and will be until you choose so." Xukong spoke.

"But this is what they've chosen. I've never interfered in their affairs." The voice replied.

~Tch~ "I don't even want to argue with you. Just tell me what you are here for." Xukong asked.

"I'm just here to tell you that I will be gone for a while, so take care of my 'Slaves' for a while, will you." The voice answered.

"Is there even any place where your influence doesn't extend to? You should be able to observe everything on your own, unless..." Xukong spoke and then trailed off before suddenly becoming agitated.

"NOO! What has happened? What did you do!!!" Xukong roared.

"I wish I could tell you, but there are other machinations underway." The voice spoke before fading away.

"STOP!" Xukong yelled, making countless threads appear.

The threads moved at a blinding speed and tried to stop the ash grey throne, but alas! The ash grey throne turned ethereal and then disappeared in a swirl of light.

"DAMMIT!! Nothing good will ever come out of this." Xukong protested.

Soon the silence returned to the void, and Xukong became immovable once again.

Xukong broke his trail of memories after hearing Lin Mu call out to him.

"Senior, it's time for your lessons about Dao Script." Lin Mu spoke.

"Ah yes, it is time," Xukong replied, before appearing in front of Lin Mu.

Xukong then taught Lin Mu for a few hours before it was time for Lin Mu to sleep.

"I should be able to start reading the lost immortal's memoirs soon." Lin Mu spoke.

"Well, you do have the basics down, so you should be ready in about a month," Xukong replied.

Lin Mu nodded in appreciation of senior Xukong's words before going towards the spirit apple tree and plucking today's ripened spirit apples. He then fell asleep and disappeared from the Sleepscape.

Lin Mu woke up in the morning and spent the rest of his day cultivating, as he wanted to be ready for tomorrow. It would be Lin Mu's turn to participate in the vigil tomorrow along with Xiao Lu. He was expecting to find some more clues at night time.

In these two days, he had not gone out and had just cultivated on his own. He already had enough beast meat to last him for a week, thus he was not worried about it that much.

Lin Mu was currently sitting down on his bed and was refining his spirit sense. He was successful in increasing the range of his spirit sense by an additional half-meter, but still wanted to extend it for as long as he could.

Though senior Xukong reminded him that he would have to ensure that he had replenished his entire store of spirit qi before leaving for the vigil. This meant that he won't be able to refine his spirit sense tomorrow, as every time he did that he would end up depleting nearly three-fourths of his qi stores.

Lin Mu had just finished replenishing his qi and had ended his cultivation session for the day, when he heard someone knocking at the gate of the courtyard. He opened his eyes and stood up to open the gate.

Lin Mu opened the gate only to find an unknown person standing at the gate.

"Come on, it's time for the vigil." The person said.

"Oh ok, where's Xiao Lu though?" Lin Mu asked.

"He's already gone ahead. You were late, so I was asked to come to get you." The person replied.

"Is that so?" Lin Mu spoke with a calm voice.

Lin Mu then locked the gate before leaving with the person. They walked for five minutes before reaching their destination. The spot they were at was an open square that was located at the center of the residential district.

Upon reaching there, he saw three people standing there. One of them was Xiao Lu, another person was a portly man whom Lin Mu had seen the day and the last person was none other than the person with whom Lin Mu had his first big conflict with, Yuan Tu.

Chapter 76 - Starting The Night-Time Vigil

Lin Mu had not expected to meet his old enemy Yuan Tu here. In the past, he would have never expected that a man he called uncle would wrong him. While Yuan Tu was not his actual blood uncle, he was once friends with his father. They were not close friends, but were friends indeed.

Lin Mu saw the look in Yuan Tu's eyes and understood that he was shocked to see him here too. Lin Mu then looked at his physical condition and saw that he had visibly thinned down. It seemed like he had not taken to prison well.

Lin Mu was also wondering when Yuan Tu got out of prison. He had expected for him to stay in the prison for a longer time than this. He definitely did not expect that someone would be willing to bail him out. He did not know what it would cost to bail him out, but knew that it must be a high amount.

Yuan Tu had not expected to see Lin Mu today at all. He knew that Lin Mu had no house to return to so, he should either be living at some inn or somewhere else. He would never have guessed that Lin Mu was actually able to pay the fine and get his house back.

Yuan Tu had gotten out of prison recently and had returned to live at his house in the neighborhood. A couple of days ago some people came to inform him that a vigil was going to be held in view of the

recent events that occurred. The people from the neighborhood had also asked him about his absence, but he just told him that he was visiting some family members in the eastern town.

Yuan Tu was frankly shocked upon hearing that some people had disappeared and a spirit beast had apparently attacked as well. Yuan Tu had seen a terrifying spirit beast before, a few years ago. An injured spirit beast had wandered out of the forest and had encountered some hunters.

Out of a team of ten hunters, only three survived. With Yuan Tu being one of them, along with Lin Mu's father. Ever since then Yuan Tu gave up on being a hunter and just worked in the orchards. It was also because of this that he was promoted to the position of a team leader in the orchards.

After the initial surprise faded from Yuan Tu's eyes, he scanned Lin Mu from top to bottom. He could see visible changes in the boy. He had somehow grown a little in the past month and was taller than before. He had also developed slight muscles, and even his face had a glow that was a stark difference from his previous dull look.

Yuan Tu could not help but wonder what the boy had gone through in the past few weeks. He was angry that while he had to suffer all this time; the boy was actually doing much better than before. The one saving grace he had while he was in the prison was that Lin Mu would still be suffering out there being homeless and broke.

But now that he had seen him again, he felt his rage reigniting. He felt like teaching him a lesson right then and there, but knew better to not act on it. He would bide his time and look for the right time. He just decided to not interact with him for now.

Yuan Tu forcefully suppressed his rage and avoided looking at him as it helped him divert his thoughts. He looked at the boy's expression and reached a tacit understanding. Lin Mu saw the look that Yuan Tu gave him and knew what he was thinking.

Seeing him avoid him just made it easier for him. Lin Mu was already a cultivator and was much stronger than before. He had nothing to fear from Yuan Tu. It didn't matter to him if Yuan Tu doesn't interact with him.

While this silent interaction was happening, Xiao Lu witnessed the entire thing and knew that something was off.

Xiao Lu knew that Yuan Tu and Lin Mu had a conflict, but he did not know the exact terms of it. He only knew that a week after Lin Mu's house was seized, Yuan Tu had disappeared as well. When he came back a couple of days ago, he just told everyone that he had gone to visit his family in eastern town for a bit.

Once Lin Mu reached near the three people, the portly man glanced at him and then spoke.

"Now that we're all here, it's time for us to start the vigil."

The portly man then pointed towards a wooden box that was kept near his feet and spoke,

"Every one of you please pick a gong from the box. If you encounter anything suspicious remember to run first and then alarm us all by ringing the gong. We don't want any untoward incidences." The portly man spoke with a serious tone.

Everyone nodded at the portly man's words and then went forward to pick a gong and a small mallet. Lin Mu was the last person to pick a gong up. He looked at the gong and found it to be made of copper. He tapped on it and felt it tremble.

After everyone picked up a gong, the portly man nodded while looking around.

"Okay then, now that everyone has a gong, you can choose a direction and go towards it. Comb out your area and then gather at this square after every hour." The portly man spoke.

Lin Mu chose to go to the northern direction where his house was located. He thought that if he was gonna do this, he may as well guard the area around his house. Senior Xukong also agreed with Lin Mu's choice.

"There's a higher chance that the person who was following you before would appear near your house. If you're lucky, you can encounter him there and get the information out of him." Xukong spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

While Lin Mu had chosen to go towards the north, the man who brought him went to the west, Xiao Lu went to the east, and Yuan Tu chose to go towards the south, clearly not wanting to see him and staying as far from him as possible.

The portly man did not go anywhere and chose to stay here and keep watch in the central area. This would also help him rally everyone and created a common communication point. Everyone soon split up and walked towards their chosen areas.

"Keep your spirit sense extended, so you can sense anything that happens," Xukong spoke to Lin Mu.

"Yes senior." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu first went towards the left-most street. He decided that he would go from the left to the right. He walked around and heard the silence of the night. The night was cold, but at least it was not snowing yet.

While the snow would not bother him that much, he could not tell the same about the other people. Lin Mu had seen that everyone was wearing thicker and warmer clothes, hence he had chosen to do the same. If he did not do that, he would only be rousing unnecessary attention from people.

He had just put on the leather armors he had gotten from the killers before. Putting on the multiple leather armors under his robes made it look as if he was wearing winter clothing. It would also help provide him some extra defense, just in case.

This was the first time that he was actually seeing his neighborhood like this. It was usually boisterous during the day with the people meeting each other and the ladies gossiping and arguing with each other. The children would run around playing with each other and laughing.

The silence of the night made him think about a lot of things he usually would not think of. While he had stayed alone in the hunting shack for a while now, this kind of silence still made him feel strange.

"It's as if the forest is more alive than this place." Lin Mu thought out loud.

Xukong heard Lin Mu's words and felt a little surprised.

'He can already sense it.' Xukong thought.

"You are right, Lin Mu," Xukong spoke.

"What do you mean, senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"What you are feeling right now is the lack of ambient spirit qi. The reason you feel that the forest is more alive is because it is filled with vitality. While this place does have more people, it still lacks the raw vitality and spirit qi." Xukong replied.

"This also why most of the cultivators choose to live in places rich in spirit qi. The cultivation sects are prosperous only because they are built on lands rich in spirit qi. This not only increases the progress of their disciples by multiple folds, it also helps temper their minds." Xukong added.

"Is this why you want me to start my journey soon, senior?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, it's part of the reason. Right now, since your cultivation is still low, it would not matter to you as much, but once it rises later, you will feel the difference in the environment. You will be uncomfortable in a place that's lacking in spirit qi." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu took senior Xukong's words seriously and cemented his resolve.

Wu Lim city,

Inside a large mansion situated beside a lake, a thin and scholarly man was relaxing on a lounge in a library.

The library was rather dark, with the only source of light being the lamp that was placed on a table. The thin and scholarly man had his feet up on a lounge and was reading a book. He had a calm look on his face and seemed to be engrossed in the content of the book.

A veiled woman appeared from the darkness and came to stand beside the man. She bowed her head and stood silently.

The thin and scholarly man let out a sigh and spoke without looking away from the book.

"You have something for me I hope?"

"Yes, my lord. It's about the new cultivator." The veiled woman replied.

Chapter 77 - The Slumbering District

The thin and scholarly man nodded and allowed the veiled woman to approach.

"Go ahead." The thin man said.

The veiled woman then produced a scroll in her hand, likely from a spatial treasure, and passed it to the thin man.

"I've taken the liberty to compile all the intelligence we've gathered, my lord. There are some parts you'll find rather, fascinating." The veiled woman spoke with a respectful tone.

The thin man opened the scroll and started reading it with his full concentration. At first, the man's expression seemed rather disinterested, but later it became more interested until finally, it reached the peak of elation.

"Hahaha!" The thin man laughed out loud.

"You've done well, very well. Seems like we have an interesting contender here." The thin man spoke with a joyous tone.

"How do we proceed, my lord? Do we bring him to you?" The veiled woman questioned.

"We know that his senses are sharp and he's been able to detect our people before. We also don't know who's backing him, but considering his strength and talent, I would say it's someone strong."

The man said and paused before continuing,

"Don't approach him for now and just observe him. Try to get a clue about his backer, if it's someone from our 'list', eliminate him. Otherwise, we may have a new pawn to play with." The thin man said.

"My lord, we still have one of our men watching him. He still has the old orders and is following them. He may end up making contact with the boy, which may end in conflict." The Woman added.

The thin man stroked his beard before speaking,

"Hmm, this does make it a little difficult. Try to send a message as soon as possible and if something does happen, try to avoid further conflict. We'll compensate him later."

"As you wish, my lord." The veiled woman respectfully spoke and turned around.

But just as she was about to leave, the thin man spoke up again.

"Just in case, assign one of our higher corps members to him."

The veiled woman seemed to be surprised, but it could not be seen from because of her veil.

"Are you sure my lord? All three of our higher corps members are currently assigned to long-term missions. If we recall any one of them, then all of their progress may go to waste." The veiled woman asked with an unnerved voice.

The veiled woman was rather shocked by her lord's words. She did not expect that her lord would place such a big importance on that cultivator who was still a teen. She knew how much every higher corps member was worth. Each and every one of them was a Core condensation realm cultivator and was trained in reconnaissance and assassination.

Even she herself, who was considered to be the closest person to her lord, couldn't compare in strength with the higher corps.

"Yes, if he is what I think, then it would certainly be worth it." The thin man answered with determination in his voice.

"Who should I assign then, my lord?" The woman asked.

"Assign the second member of the higher corps. His character would suit this mission." The thin man ordered.

"The second member of the higher corps is currently in the Black Dawn kingdom, my lord. I estimate it would take him ten days to reach the designated location." The veiled woman replied.

"It may take a little longer than that, as the current mission is rather sensitive and he will need to sever all ties before returning." The veiled woman added with a little hesitation.

"That's fine. Until he reaches there, you may personally oversee this assignment." The thin man spoke with a calm voice.

"It will be done as you say, my lord." The woman replied respectfully before leaving.

A few minutes later, after the woman was gone, the thin man stood up and withdrew a jade slip out of a spatial treasure. He held it in his hand and let it activate. The jade slip shone for a bit and then buzzed.

"I may have a new solution, elder brother." The thin man spoke.

Back at the Northern town,

Lin Mu was patrolling his neighborhood. So far he had not seen anything strange or unusual. He also had a doubt whether the townsmen who disappeared were taken by the darkly dressed men or someone else.

He had seen the guard follow the townsmen who had entered the town all the way to their houses. He had also seen the guard withdraw a strange contraption from his sleeve.

Because of the darkness, Lin Mu was not able to see what it was but could guess that it was something metallic, as it gave off a glint. He knew that it was not something a guard would carry and was specially made for an unknown reason. The guard was a definite suspect as he had disappeared later as well.

'Perhaps I should have focused on that guard from the start.' Lin Mu thought.

In the blink of an eye an hour went by and it was time for him to return back. He reached the square and saw that three people were already standing there. The only person who was missing was Xiao Lu.

The portly man approached Lin Mu and spoke.

"So did you find anything unusual?"

Lin Mu shook his head as he replied,

"No, everything seemed to be normal. All the houses are silent and everyone is sleeping. Except for a few stray dogs and cats, there's no one wandering out."

"That's good. Now we only have to wait for Xiao Lu to return and report." The portly man spoke.

Fifteen minutes passed by and there was no sign of Xiao Lu. The portly man seemed to be getting nervous now. Five more minutes passed and the portly man was just about to speak something when Lin Mu interrupted.

"Ah, there he comes." Lin Mu spoke.

The three men looked around but could not see anyone there.

"Where?" The three men asked in unison.

Lin Mu then understood their confusion. The men could not see as far as him in the darkness, no wonder they were confused. He then pointed at an alley and everyone followed his finger.

A few seconds after hearing the sounds of someone running, they could see the sprinting figure of Xiao Lu appearing from the alley with four dogs chasing him.

"HELP!!!" He shouted

The man who had brought Lin Mu went forward to help, but before he could even do anything the dogs stopped by themselves. They growled a little and then started yelping, in the next second they scampered away.

Xiao Lu did not see this happen as he was still in a state of panic. He stopped when he couldn't hear the sounds of the dogs behind him. He looked at the people in front of him and asked,

"What happened? Where did they go?"

The rest of the three people along with Lin Mu were confused by this development.

"That was strange, they weren't barking, only chasing." The man who had brought Lin Mu spoke.

The portly man nodded before turning to Xiao Lu.

"Why were they chasing you? Did you provoke them?" The portly man questioned.

Xiao Lu shook his head as he answered,

"No, not at all. They just randomly started chasing me when I was just about to return. I don't know why."

Lin Mu then realized something.

"Wait, you were shouting all this time right, why didn't the residents wake up? And where's the gong?" Lin Mu asked.

"I threw the gong at the dogs when they were chasing me. As for the residents, I didn't pay attention." Xiao Lu replied.

The portly man seemed to have realized something, and his face turned pale.

"Oh, no! Ring the alarm quick, I fear something bad is happening." The portly man exclaimed.

The other people hesitated and did not understand the portly man's nervousness, but Lin Mu started banging the gong without a second thought.

"ALARM! ALARM! WAKE UP, EVERYONE!" Lin Mu shouted.

Seeing Lin Mu shouting the other's started to do that as well.

Then, the thing that they were dreading all this while happened. Not a single resident woke up nor responded. The four men were starting to gauge the seriousness of the situation by now. It had been five minutes, yet there were no results.

'There's no use, they are probably under the effect of some kind of drug. Go and check out the houses yourself.' Xukong spoke in Lin Mu's mind.

"Let's go and check the houses ourselves." Lin Mu spoke authoritatively.

Strangely enough, no one questioned him right now and just went with the flow. Even Yuan Tu did not oppose him or show any aversion right now.

Lin Mu ran to the closest house and started banging on the door while shouting. But even then, no one responded. The other men tried the same thing, but to no avail.

"We need to break down the door and look inside." The portly man spoke.

Everyone tacitly nodded and agreed to the proposition. The men braced themselves to break the door and were just about to slam, when Lin Mu ripped the door off of its hinges with ease. The four men were left with the jaws hanging upon seeing this feat.

Lin Mu paid no attention to their shock and just rushed inside. He saw the pair of homeowners sleeping on their bed soundlessly. He went ahead and picked up the man that was sleeping and shook him hard.

The four men entered the room and saw Lin Mu shaking the sleeping the man hard.

"Why are they not waking up?"

Chapter 78 - Capturing The Spy

Lin Mu had shaken the poor man to his core, yet there was no physical response from him. The other people had also tried on their own and tested the man as well but got no response.

"It's no use, lets go try the other houses." Lin Mu spoke.

Lin Mu then went to the next house and broke down the door as well. He walked inside the house and found its sleeping residents. The others followed him inside and watched as he tried to wake them up.

Lin Mu had checked that actually they were alive and not dead. They just seemed to be highly unconscious and unresponsive, while their breathing still continued.

"Why is this happening?" Yuan Tu spoke out loud.

Everyone heard his words and reciprocated with him, as they all were wondering about the reason for this phenomenon.

"We need to keep on checking the houses, there are bound to be more people that are not affected by this." Lin Mu spoke.

"Yes, this can't just happen to the entire district. We are still awake so there should be more people." The portly man affirmed.

The party of five went from house to house checking on people. At first, they would just break in through the front door but later understood that this was ineffective, as the people who were unconscious would not respond either way. In the end, they just decided to make as much noise as possible to alert anyone that was unaffected.

They had wanted to inform the guards outside the district about this occurrence, but then decided against it as they thought that staying together was the right decision at this time. Who knows what would happen if they were alone, thus they did not want to take the risk.

It took them over two hours before they were even able to find a person that was unaffected by it. They were at a rather small house, which looked old. Its paint had faded away and the wooden frames of the windows and door seemed to be pretty weathered as well.

As before, they knocked on the door hard and shortly got a response.

"Who the hell is disturbing my sleep at this time?!!" A person shouted from inside the house.

"Wake up! We have a huge problem. We are the people who are doing the night vigil." The portly man spoke.

Some incomprehensible grumbles could be heard coming from behind the door. The door soon opened and an old man appeared from behind it. The old man seemed to be at least eighty years old and had a face full of wrinkles.

"What do you want?" The old man groaned.

"We are the night vigil team. We found that people in the district are unconscious and unresponsive." The portly man spoke.

"Yes, we checked many houses and tried to wake people, but no one is responding. We even tried shaking them physically but they still did not respond, you're the first person we found that responded." Lin Mu explained.

By now the old man had become woken enough to understand the current predicament. He asked for them to show them the unconscious people, which they gladly did. After seeing the proof with his own eyes, the old man understood the graveness of the situation.

"What do we do now then?" The old man asked.

Everyone turned to look at Lin Mu subconsciously. Due to him taking the approach head-on, everyone had unknowingly accepted him as the leader. Although his surprising strength may have played a part in it as well, there weren't many people in the town who could just rip off doors that easily.

"I recommend we go and inform the guards at this point. This is much bigger at this point and we don't know the implications of this. We are definitely gonna need a lot of people if we want to check every house." Lin Mu ordered.

Everyone nodded without thinking much and started following Lin Mu. Half an hour later they had left the residential district and were at its exit. The guards should have been patrolling around here but they were nowhere to be found.

"Where are the guards?" The men questioned together.

'There seems to be more to this than we thought.' Xukong spoke.

"I'm going to go look for them and you guys try to see if the residents here can wake up." Lin Mu ordered.

All the men nodded in response and went ahead to do their tasks. Lin Mu decided to directly go towards the guard barracks, that way if he encountered any guard on the way he'll inform them as well.

Lin Mu started running at his full speed after he was at a sufficient distance from the men. He didn't want to reveal more of his capabilities than he had already done today. The streets were eerily silent and not even stray animals could be seen. Lin Mu was halfway to the barracks when he sensed some disturbance.

Lin Mu's spirit sense was already extended and he was completely alert, thus he was able to detect the presence that was hiding in the shadows hiding. Lin Mu probed the place with his spirit sense and found the person that was hiding there.

"Get ready" Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu instinctively withdrew the throwing daggers from his ring and threw two of them at the location he had detected the person at. A muffled grunt and clinking of metal could be heard after that.

"Come out now, I know you are there." Lin Mu called out.

Slowly a person came out of the darkness and revealed himself to Lin Mu. The person was dressed in dark blue clothes and was wearing a featureless mask with only two holes for eyes. He had a thin sword hung on his waist and was six feet tall.

Lin Mu used his spirit sense to gauge the man's strength and discovered that he was a cultivator too. The man was at the Early stage of the Qi refining realm and didn't seem to have refined his spirit sense yet.

When Lin Mu's spirit sense probed the masked man cultivation, he seemed to have detected it as he flinched for a moment and became tense.

"He's dressed differently. Does he belong to the same group of people or not?" Lin Mu wondered.

"You can find that out soon enough. For now, you just need to get the information out of him, either by hook or by crook." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu then drew the short sword from its sheath and pointed it at the masked man before speaking,

"Who are you and why have you been following me?"

The Masked Man didn't speak but instead drew his own sword in response.

"So you're not going to take the easy route." Said Lin Mu with a sharp tone.

The man advanced first and slashed, which Lin Mu easily dodged by sidestepping and responded with an attack of his own.

~shing~

The masked man was able to block it but felt the weight of the strike on his blade. He instantly understood the difference between their strengths. He was already shocked when he felt a spirit sense probe on him but when he actually felt the force of Lin Mu's attack, his suspicions were confirmed.

The masked man was not one to give up easily though, he attacked again and missed. Lin Mu had an advantage in speed as well as strength. If he wanted to, he could have ended this fight instantly but he instead wanted to get the information out of the man first.

Both of them exchanged blows one after the other. While all of the masked man's attacks missed, it was not the same for Lin Mu. Most of his attacks were blocked but some had nicked the masked man. He had multiple smaller cuts on his body; some on his hands, some on his torso, and some on his legs.

After fighting for five minutes, Lin Mu decided that it was enough.

"That's it, surrender now or I'll end you right now. You know that you have no chance against me." Lin Mu sternly spoke.

The man did not heed Lin Mu's words and instead attacked again. Seeing that the man was uncooperative, Lin Mu decided to end it quickly.

He channeled wisps of spirit qi into his short sword and slashed at the masked man. The man tried to block it in turn but was unsuccessful as Lin Mu's blade just cut through his own sword effortlessly. The blade was just about to reach his neck when Lin Mu paused for a moment and punched with his other hand.

The strengthened fist landed on the masked man's face and knocked him down to the ground. Lin Mu had not used his entire strength as he did not want to kill the man right away.

Even if he wanted to kill the man, he would avoid attacking the face, as it would just end up crushing the man's skull and disfiguring him. Lin Mu would not be able to identify the man then and it would become difficult for him to further investigate.

After being knocked on the ground the man became disoriented and could not respond. Lin Mu then placed the point of his short sword at the masked man's neck.

"Surrender." Lin Mu ordered.

Finding himself unarmed and at the edge of death, the man finally gave up.

"Okay! I surrender."

Chapter 79 - The Spy's Perspective

Three hours ago in the residential district of the Northern town.

A man dressed in dark blue clothes and a featureless mask was hiding over the roof of a house and looking at a courtyard. He had been in that position for many hours now, but was still not bothered. He had stayed there all this time, unmoving and nearly invisible.

Eventually, he saw an average-looking man approach the courtyard and then knock on its gates. A minute later, he saw the door of the house inside the courtyard open. A Shorthaired boy around the age of fifteen walked out and opened the gate.

Both of them talked for a couple of minutes before walking away. The man was leading while the boy followed behind him.

Seeing that his target was moving, the masked man finally got a chance to stretch his tensed body. While it was normal for him to hide like this for an extended period of time, as it was part of his job, it still tired him out every time. He was a cultivator sure, but he was only at the early stage of the Qi refining realm and was not like the tireless core condensation experts who could work tirelessly for weeks.

The masked man followed the pair until they reached the square that was located in the center of the residential district. He then saw them talk amongst themselves about the night vigil. They talked for about five minutes before they separated again and went in different directions.

The masked man followed the boy towards the northern direction, which was the same way they originally came from. He saw the boy look a little lost in his thoughts while patrolling the streets. The expression on the boy's face actually reminded himself of his own situation many years ago.

He too was once lost in the world and didn't know what to do. That was until he met his lord, who gave him the opportunity to become a cultivator. For this grace that his lord had bestowed upon him, he had chosen to serve him till his death.

He would jump into the inferno of hell if his lord so asked him to do. He was his lord's blade, and such was his duty. He along with his fellow comrades all worked for the glory of his lord. They were all useless before; it was their fortune that they met their lord who had allowed them to become worthy.

Unknowingly more time passed, and an hour had gone by. The masked man had seen the boy mutter something to himself multiple times over the time period. He had found this a little strange, but had just attributed this to the boy's eccentricities. He did not know why he had been ordered by his lord to watch this boy, but knew that all he had to do was to follow his orders.

The masked man had observed the boy for over a week and had found out that the boy was much stronger than he looked. To him, if he was not informed beforehand, he would only think that the boy was an average Body Tempering realm expert. But beneath that facade of naivety, it hid a full-fledged Qi cultivator.

The masked man could not figure out how the boy became a cultivator at such a young age. Even for him who had above average talent, it took him over a decade to be able to become a cultivator. It was a little shocking for him to see such a young cultivator in a small town like this.

While there were Young cultivators like this in Wu Lim city as well, they all belonged to influential families and clans. For an orphan boy with an insignificant background like his, it should have been nearly impossible, but here he was existing and defying the odds.

The masked man snapped out of his thoughts upon seeing that the boy was returning to the square. A few minutes later they reached the square, and he saw the boy talk with the three men standing there. One of the men was missing, and they seemed to be waiting for him.

After a while they started getting impatient, only to hear the boy speak out loud. The missing man had returned, but not without a pack of stray dogs chasing him. It was at this time that things started going haywire.

The masked man saw that the chasing dogs were not barking. This was probably the most abnormal thing, as dogs always barked while chasing their prey. Yes prey, he had seen the look in the stray dog's eyes. They were fueled with blood lust and wanted to kill.

The masked man suddenly realized the reason for the silent but murderous dogs. They had been poisoned with Beast Inciting powder. The Beast Inciting powder was used to provoke beasts and create a rampage. It was outlawed in the Shuang Qian kingdom, and its possession was punishable by death.

The masked man could only think of a few people or organizations that could have access to it. The Beast Inciting powder was not only expensive but also difficult to create. To use them on normal animals such as these stray dogs was only a waste.

Then in the next moment, he saw something which he could not explain. The stray dogs halted before the five people and growled for a bit before yelping out as if they were scared by the most dangerous of predators.

He had never seen this before, as no beast affected by the beast inciting powder would ever flinch. They would mindlessly chase down their prey and tear them to shreds. The occurrence in front of him was simply unscientific.

Though this was not the end of the bizarre situation. The men soon talked amongst themselves and figured out the strangeness of the current scenario. Then the masked man heard something which made him realize that in all this mess, he had failed to recognize a huge thing.

While the stray dogs were barking and the man being chased was crying out for help, no one heard it. This was even more unusual than normal as all the residents of the town were rather anxious due to the recent string of disappearances and the spirit beast attacks.

They should have woken up rather easily, but even in all this hullabaloo, no one responded. The masked man then saw the men trying to alert the residents but to no avail. He even saw his 'target' the boy pull out a door from its hinges without any hesitation revealing a part of his strength.

Thirty more minutes passed by as the masked man saw the party of five people getting more and more anxious. They were searching for any resident that could be awakened. Even the masked man himself was worried because of this development.

The masked man knew that he would have to inform his lord about this phenomenon. It was not easy to incapacitate so many people without leaving a witness, thus he knew that someone big was behind this act. His lord had many plans and liked to know everything that happened around, hence this was definitely something that he needed to inform his lord about.

The masked man could not see what happened inside the house but could guess, and after hearing the conversation of the men he confirmed it. The people inside were alive but unconscious. Not just that house, but every house that the party of five men visited.

The masked man knew about some substances and techniques that could be used to put someone in a deep sleep like this, but not on an extensive scale such as this. Doing it at such a large scale would require a large retinue of people, and to do it covertly would require even more immense influence and power.

The masked man had thought that every person in the district was affected except for the five men, but he was soon proved wrong when they found another person. This person was an old man with a wrinkled face.

The masked man was a little surprised by this, but soon discovered the reason. That old man was a warrior. While it may not be apparent to most people, he had grown up seeing warriors fight and had even joined an organization that vetted out people through combat. He was able to sense the faint aura of a warrior on the old man.

As the man was very old, the aura had faded away yet even now he had the disposition of a warrior; his gait was still there when he walked without any support. The masked man guessed that the old man was at the tenth stage of the body tempering realm at the very least. He judged that the old man must have fought in the war that happened a long time ago and was now disabled and weak.

Because there was no other reason why there would not be a record of a tenth stage body tempering expert, as they were rather rare. Even the masked man himself was only at the eight stage of the body tempering realm. He knew how difficult it was to progress after that.

But now that he knew that whatever that was affecting the residents did not affect people of that level, he could narrow down the suspects. He still didn't know why the five people of the night vigil were not affected though.

After informing the old man, the party decided to go and inform the guards, but even that seemed to be unsuccessful as all the guards were absent. The masked man narrowed his brows and started to get a little nervous himself.

He then saw his target separating himself from the party and going in the other direction. The masked man shifted in the shadows and continued stalking his target, completely unknown to the fact that he was soon about to be caught.

Chapter 80 - Old Warehouse

Lin Mu did not move his short sword from the neck of the masked man, even after he declared his surrender. He did not want the man to surprise him after letting his guard down.

Lin Mu instead scanned every inch of the man's body for any hidden weapons or dangerous items. He had seen the darkly dressed men use poisons, thus he wanted to be extremely sure of his safety. After scanning the man with his spirit sense, Lin Mu found a few weapons hidden on his body.

This included four daggers, one each hidden at the ankles and wrists along with a set of metal needles which seemed to be steeped in some kind of black liquid; most likely to be poison. Lin Mu took away all of these weapons from the masked man before allowing him to sit up.

"Now speak, who are you from, and why have you been following me?" Lin Mu questioned with a stern tone.

The masked man seemed to hesitate a bit before speaking,

"I am but my lord's tool and I was ordered by him to observe you."

Lin Mu narrowed his eyes upon hearing the masked man's words. It was a little surprising to him that it was actually someone else that was pulling the strings from the behind. He then thought of the similarities between the men who had tried to kill him before and this man.

"Are you part of the same group of people that killed Gan Ma?" Lin Mu questioned.

The masked man tilted his head slightly upon hearing Lin Mu's words, as if he was confused.

'Isn't Gan Ma the second hunter who became a cultivator?' The masked man thought before speaking,

"Gan Ma's dead?" The masked man asked.

Lin Mu closely observed the masked man and could tell the genuine confusion in the man's voice.

"You didn't know that, but know who he is?" Lin Mu asked.

"We know who he is but according to our intelligence he has been missing for nearly a month now." The masked man answered.

"We? So you are with those men." Lin Mu uttered before straightening his blade.

Seeing that his target had assumed something wrongly, the masked man put up his hands in protest.

"No, we are not who you think. Though if you allow me to contact my lord, I can find it out for you." The masked man replied.

Lin Mu felt a little surprised at the masked man's words, but did not accept them right away. There were a few more questions he wanted the answers to.

"Are your people behind what's happening in the district right now?" Lin Mu questioned with a grave expression.

"No, we're not, but I can tell you that we wouldn't do something like this. Even my lord would like to find out more about this and why this happened. But let me tell you this: that whoever has done this is very influential and has a lot of resources." The masked man spoke.

"Why do you say that?" Lin Mu asked.

"Whatever substance that is being used to induce the sleep into the district's residents, it is definitely expensive and difficult to get." The masked man answered.

Lin Mu did not believe the masked man at first, but then he heard senior Xukong talk.

"He's probably telling the truth. A substance that can incapacitate so many people at once is definitely hard to come by in a lower-level world like this." Xukong spoke.

The masked man saw that Lin Mu's expression had turned dull for a moment. He didn't understand why, but after that, the boy nodded to himself and spoke.

"Okay then, for now, I'll accept your answer, but I won't trust you completely." Lin Mu said.

The masked man thought to himself for a bit before speaking,

"I have a little more information that may be helpful to you."

"Go ahead" Lin Mu replied.

"The dogs that were chasing that man, I know why they were not barking." The masked man answered.

"And why's that?" Lin Mu asked.

"They were affected by a poison called as the Beast Inciting powder." The masked man answered.

"It was probably an inferior version of that poison, seeing that it was able to affect normal animals," Xukong informed Lin Mu.

"You know what it is, senior?" Lin Mu curiously asked.

"Yes, it's a rather infamous poison and is known in most of the worlds. It does not directly harm the beasts, rather it just sends them into a mindless rage. If a normal animal is poisoned by it though, then they will just explode." Xukong explained.

"Is this poison something that's easily available?" Lin Mu asked out loud.

To the masked man, it seemed as if the boy was asking him, but Lin Mu was actually asking both senior Xukong and the masked man.

"Any qualified alchemist should be able to make an inferior version, even for a lower-level world like this. Though I can't tell about the restrictions that would occur in its acquisition." Xukong answered.

"No, it is outlawed in the Shuang Qian kingdom as it can cause the beasts to rampage which can result in a beast wave. It is also very expensive and few people can acquire it, especially in this region." The masked man answered.

"Why would someone use an expensive substance like it on mere stray dogs?" Lin Mu muttered.

Suddenly a thought clicked in Lin Mu's mind as he formed an idea. The masked man saw the change of expression on Lin Mu's face and grasped that something was wrong.

"Oh no! The place where Xiao Lu came from, there's probably something there." Lin Mu exclaimed.

"You can't leave the masked man here though," Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu understood senior Xukong's words and knew that he would either have to make a choice between killing the masked man or to let him go.

It was as if the masked man read Lin Mu's mind and instantly spoke,

"I'll come with you. Don't misunderstand me, but if something wrong is happening here, I have to report it to my lord."

Lin Mu stared at the masked man for a few seconds before he lifted his short sword from his neck.

"I'll trust you for now, but if you do anything suspicious, know that I'll kill you in the next moment." Lin Mu spoke with a grim tone.

Lin Mu had not exposed all of his capabilities, thus was confident in being able to kill the masked man anytime that he wanted. With his two skills of Flicker and Blink, it would be a piece of cake.

The masked man gently nodded and then stood up, intending to follow Lin Mu.

Both of them then started running towards the residential district. With their full speed, they reached the residential district in five minutes. The masked man was having a hard time keeping up with Lin Mu, even after strengthening his legs with spirit qi.

'With speed and spirit sense like this, the boy is rather talented. I can't even estimate his cultivation, is he perhaps in the peak stage of the Qi refining realm?' The masked man thought to himself.

The masked man had only seen such speed and spirit sense in his senior comrades. He had also experienced spirit sense before, thus was able to tell when Lin Mu's spirit sense probed him. It was also because of this he was shocked, as according to the knowledge he had, spirit sense could only be refined when a cultivator reached the Peak stage of the Qi refining realm.

What he didn't know was that Lin Mu's speed was not just because of his qi cultivation but also because of his Tenth stage of body tempering realm vitality. Him being able to refine spirit sense could also be attributed to his unique situation, in which he actually did not have a cultivation technique at all but was rather using an auxiliary cultivation technique unique to him.

People of a lower-level world like this would never be able to comprehend this, as they simply did not have the information or the capabilities. Even if someone told them that it was possible, they would just deny it.

After reaching the square located at the center of the residential district, Lin Mu turned towards the Eastern direction and started running towards it. He kept an eye out for anything abnormal that stood out and also focused his senses.

A minute later they reached the end of the street and started looking around for any clues that may have been left behind.

"Xiao Lu should have most likely encountered the stray dogs here." Lin Mu spoke while looking at the mud prints on the ground.

The mud prints were of the stray dogs and were faintly visible in the darkness. He followed them and found out that they lead to an old warehouse. The warehouse was used by the local residents to store their surplus crops, but ever since the reduction in population from last year's plague, its use had become less.

Lin Mu noticed a small hole at the base of a wall that was big enough for a dog to pass through. There were paw prints coming out of the hole. Lin Mu found the side door of the warehouse and broke through it with ease.

The masked man followed behind Lin Mu tensely. Even he was feeling the grimness of the situation. Lin Mu looked at the relatively empty warehouse that had a few crates, wooden boxes, and sacks lying around.

Lin Mu suddenly squinted his nose as he smelt something,

"Blood" Both Lin Mu and the masked man spoke out in unison.